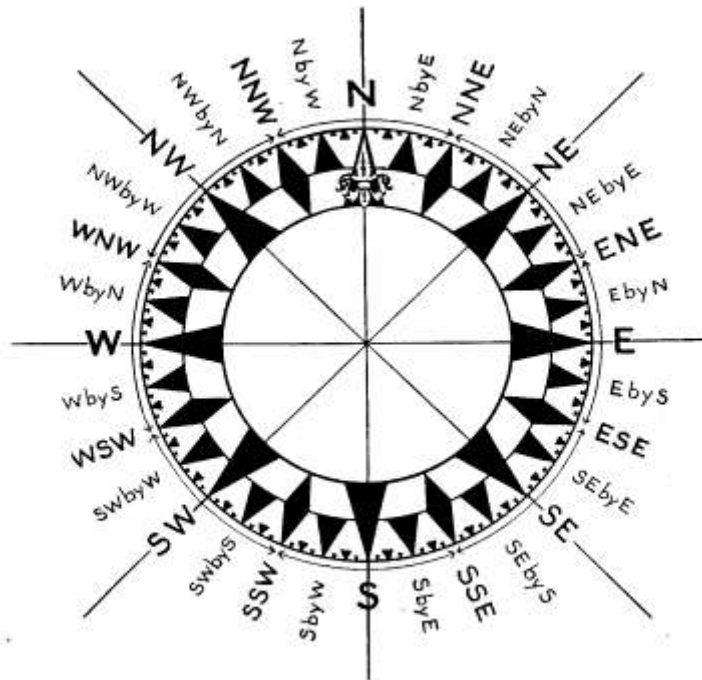




MAY 2008

ISSUE 54



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Editor's Note

Something different in this edition, a story from Anne Withey, this is sure to bring back memories.

Our next Newsletter will be late as we are going on holiday.

At the May meeting Anne Withey surprised us all with some beautiful bags that she made using the template of the cardboard life boats. These bags were sold at the meeting and the proceeds donated to the SA Vindicatrix Branch. Thank-you Anne for your generosity and ingenuity.

Next Meeting Sunday 27th July 2008

Mick & Jill Surfied

Skipper's Log

WE ARE NEARLY THROUGH THE FIRST PART OF 2008.

THE PRE-ANZAC DAY CELEBRATIONS GAVE US "LIGHTS ON THE WATER AGAIN" WHICH WAS VERY SUCCESSFUL. I ESCORTED PREMIER RANN WHEN HE ARRIVED AND FOUND HIM TO BE VERY INTERESTED IN THE WHOLE AFFAIR. I INTRODUCED HIM TO OUR OFFICIAL VINDICATRIX PHOTOGRAPHER, MICK SURFIELD.

THE ANZAC DAY MARCH WAS SUPPORTED BY THE TRUE FAITHFULS, THERE WERE A COUPLE WHO WERE SICK AND WANTED TO BE THERE BUT COULDN'T AND THEN THERE WERE THOSE WHO HAD SOMETHING ELSE ON.

WE HAD A GOOD DAY AND A FUN LUNCH AT THE CATHEDRAL HOTEL. THE ATMOSPHERE IS VERY GOOD THERE ON ANZAC DAY EACH YEAR AND WE CAN ALWAYS LOOK FORWARD TO A COUPLE OF PRESENTATIONS FROM THE PIPES AND DRUMS. FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO DONT MAKE THIS DAY A DATE IN THEIR CALENDER YOU ARE MISSING OUT BIG TIME.
IT IS ONLY ONE DAY A YEAR!

THE JULY MEETING AT THE SEAFARERS MISSION WILL BE SUNDAY 27TH JULY, WHICH IS ALSO OUR AGM. ANYONE WANT TO BE THE SKIPPER???

OUR SEPTEMBER MEETING ON THE 28TH SEPTEMBER WILL BE SHORT SO THAT ONCE AGAIN WE CAN LOOK FORWARD TO SPRING AND HAVE LUNCH TOGETHER ON THE DOLPHIN EXPLORER AFTER THE MEETING. ANNE WILL HAVE THE DETAILS.

I WOULD LIKE TO SAY MICK AND JILL SURFIELD DO A WONDERFUL JOB ORGANISING THE NEWSLETTER, BUT ONCE AGAIN WE DO NEED MORE INPUT. YOU ALL HAVE A STORY TO TELL, NOT JUST MEMBERS BUT THEIR PARTNERS ALSO. IF WE DONT GET MORE MATERIAL THE NEWSLETTER WILL ONLY BE PRINTED A COUPLE OF TIMES A YEAR AND THAT WILL BE A GREAT SHAME, SO PLEASE THINK ABOUT IT. WE ALL LEAD BUSY LIVES BUT ONE DAY COULD BE PUT ASIDE SURELY TO PUT PEN TO PAPER AND WRITE ABOUT AN EVENT IN YOUR WONDERFUL LIFE.

(I CAN ALWAYS BE CONTACTED ON 8523 1655)

CHEERS AND HERES TOO MANY MORE HOURS IN EACH OTHER'S COMPANY.

TONY.

From the Almoner's desk

Two good news reports. I am very pleased to say that Vindi Lady Betty Wheeldon is progressing well after sustaining injuries in a car accident and we hope to see Betty at our next meeting.

It has been a long journey for shipmate Vern Evans and he is now doing well with good reports from his medical team. Our very best wishes and thoughts are always with Vern and Eunice.

Just a couple of thoughts from me

Did you know the last accurate weather forecast was when God told Noah it was going to rain?

You don't stop laughing because you grow old - you grow old because stop laughing.

Cheers for now, keep well.

Anne Withey

The Vindicatrix SA Annual Dinner 2008.

"Regarding the annual dinner we have had to cancel the Buffalo booking due to lack of interest. Following the July meeting (AGM) we will be booking a table(s) at the Port Dock for lunch. No set meal, just pay as you go, and those of you with the Entertainment Book will see there is a voucher for the Port Dock which could be used. Please let me know if you will be attending so we can get our numbers in early. This will be a good opportunity for a get together as we won't be doing the annual dinner this year."

Anne Iles

Anzac Eve and Anzac Day March



The Light on the Water Tribute was dedicated to the 645 crew who were lost on the HMAS Sydney. Our Skipper was asked to escort the Premier Mike Rann on his arrival at the Port Dock.

There were so many boats, it was a marathon effort by the volunteers, (three Vindi Boys included) to light all the candles ready for launching.

The moment was recorded by a quick thinking editor.

Below are some of the 14 Vindi Boy's who marched. Derick Johnston once again made the effort in his trusty gopher.



FIRST EVER AUSTRALIAN MERCHANT NAVY DAY

After three years of intensive lobbying and the gathering of many thousands of signatures on petitions submitted to the Federal Government, September 3 has been officially declared Merchant Navy Day.

Vindi boys, partners and families are invited to join other former and serving merchant seamen in a special commemorative March from the Seafarers Centre Port Adelaide at 11 am that day.

Formal dress with medals will be appropriate for veterans marching.

Over the next three months more information about the March will be posted on vindicatrixboy.com/ and in local media.

With its rich maritime history, it is fitting that Port Adelaide will celebrate Australia's first Merchant Navy Day on Wednesday September 3 in nautical style with a March along the waterfront.

All local families with links to the sea are being invited to join the special Merchant Navy March leaving the Seafarers Centre at 11 am that day to commemorate all seafarers who have served in war and peace.

Serving and former merchant seamen, their families and representatives from other maritime groups including the Maritime Union of Australia will head the March.

The March will conclude with a special commemoration at the superb Navigator memorial to Lost Seafarers by local sculptor Karen Genoff.

Karen has many fine works of art in public locations around Australia.

In granite, lyten steel, breakwater rocks and timber, the Navigator memorial stands outside the old Ports building.

It was unveiled in 1992 for the SA Department of Marine and Harbours Port Adelaide.

This sculpture is to be incorporated in a new waterfront Seafarers Memorial for Port Adelaide

Karen Genoff is working with the Land Management Corporation in the removal, transport and placement of this sculpture at a waterfront site to be selected

Port Adelaide MHR Mark Butler MP has been working on the memorial project with a Port Adelaide Seafarers Memorial Community Committee.

It includes representatives from the City of Port Adelaide Enfield, Merchant Navy Association SA, Vindicatrix Association SA, the Port Centre Co-ordination Group, the South Australian Maritime Museum, Maritime Union of Australia, Port Adelaide Visitor Information Centre, National Trust Port Adelaide and Port Adelaide Historical Society.

As the Federal Minister for Veterans Affairs, the Hon Alan Griffin MP, has said the unsung stories of Australian and Allied merchant mariners, particularly during World War II, are a unique part of Australia's wartime and maritime heritage.

The declaration of Merchant Navy Day by the Governor General is Australia's contribution to an international campaign.

The United Kingdom and Canada also commemorate Merchant Navy Day on September 3.

Merchant Navy Day provides due recognition of the service of the merchant navy in securing the Australian homeland and our region in times of war and emergency.

John Williams

After having their 11th child, an Irish couple decided that was enough, as they couldn't afford a larger bed. So the husband went to his doctor and told him that he and his wife didn't want to have any more children. The doctor told him there was a procedure called a vasectomy that would fix the problem but it was expensive. A less costly alternative was to go home, get a large fire cracker, light it, put it in a beer can, then hold the can up to his ear and count to ten.

The husband said to the doctor, 'B'Jaysus, I may not be the smartest guy in the world, but I don't see how putting a firework in a beer can next to my ear is going to help me with my problem'.

'Trust me, it will do the job', said the doctor. So the man went home, lit a cracker and put it in a beer can. He held the can up to his ear and began to count '1,2,3,4,5' at which point he paused, placed the beer can between his legs so he could continue counting on his other hand.

HONEYMOONING...AND ALL AT SEA

Saturday, January 17th 1959 dawned with the realisation it was my wedding day. Weather wise it was a typical winter's day, very cold with snow and frost making conditions treacherous. The wedding date was more or less decided by a letter from the Australian emigration department, stating we had reservations booked aboard the P & O *SS Strathaird*, departing on Friday 23rd January from Tilbury docks, Essex. It had taken over a year for all our paperwork and formalities for our acceptance for emigration to be completed. Our wedding was the ideal opportunity to see family and friends before leaving England and now there were just a few days remaining before that big adventure together.

Our special day went well, apart from a couple of minor hitches. My bridegroom was late arriving at the church, due to a skidding mishap in the car on icy roads. Also, when it came to the age old tradition of carrying me over the threshold, he failed to pick me up...he claimed it was due to all the glasses of alcoholic ginger wine pressed upon him by his new mother-in-law at the reception....she wouldn't...would she!

A few days prior, my local vicar had passed away rather suddenly, so the ceremony was conducted by another vicar from another parish, who also had to do battle with the icy road conditions. (I noted he managed to arrive on time). He was a tall, kindly elderly gentleman, who happened to be recovering from an accident that had left him just a wee bit dodderly on his feet. Despite this, he made our service very special, he delivered a beautiful private sermon on marriage and with a twinkle in his eye, was the first to kiss the bride while we were signing the register in the vestry.

For me there was one tinge of sadness to the whole day. I did not enter St Swithin church on the arm of my father. Just six weeks earlier, he had passed away at home after a short illness. My brother did the honours and gave me away. My heartfelt tribute to my beloved father was to lay my beautiful bouquet on his resting place, in our peaceful village churchyard.

Our honeymoon was delayed really. I hardly saw my dashing new husband over the next few days. Dashing was the operative word, for he was commuting some 14 miles per day by bicycle between his village and mine, seeing to all the packing and crating and dispatching our few worldly goods by British Rail to Tilbury docks. The overriding factor being, his village had the railway station and mine didn't. The borrowed bicycle was a down-grade following the sale of his beloved red Berkley sports car.

Farewells are painful affairs, ours were no different. The only funny spot on the morning of departure was when my new mother-in-law embraced me, wished me well and then in all seriousness said 'You will look after Keith's bowels won't you'? I hadn't realized I had taken that job on as well. We still treasure the memory of that dear lady, standing at her gateway, waving us goodbye, with a large white handkerchief as our train steamed slowly by on the way to London.

Reaching London, we took a taxi to Tilbury. On arrival at the docks we boarded *SS Strathaird* and were helped with our luggage and escorted by a courteous Indian steward to our cabin numbered 749 on H deck, which was situated below the waterline, so no open portholes for us. We had a two bunk cabin to ourselves. The cabin had a washbasin, a small wardrobe and a bunk- side cabinet. We unpacked and took stock of our surroundings. So this was to be our new home for the next few weeks.

Suddenly, I was overcome by an intense feeling of homesickness. Technically we were on Terra Nova...and Terra Firma...England was just a gangplank away. This awful feeling lasted about two hours, and in that time I managed to keep it to myself and by the time we ventured topside for a very welcome afternoon tea, I had got over it. Of course, logic tells me it was most probably the build up of all we had been through in the past few months and the finality of actually leaving all things familiar, and in my case ones only yard-stick in life.

We quickly became acquainted with our adjacent cabin travelers, who were from Scotland and had small children in tow. At 7pm dinner was served, and according to my diary we dined on Dubarry Cream Soup, Plaice with Tartare sauce, Apple & Plum tart with custard, followed by coffee. It was the same story right throughout our four weeks voyage, varied and tasty meals every day and I collected the beautifully illustrated menus.

At 8.30pm we made our way to the top deck (sports deck) and watched the tugs pull us away, an unforgettable scene, with myriad lights twinkling offshore and the moon tracing silver patterns on the water. We lingered at the rail until the shore was no longer visible and our tangible land link broken. So ended our first day, we were now full of happy anticipation for four weeks honeymoon. A footnote in my diary quotes Keith was delighted to be able to purchase Players cigarettes on board. A pack of 20 cost one shilling and threepence.

The following day, my ex-seafaring husband was up early strolling out on top deck, no doubt ecstatic at having a rolling deck beneath his feet once more. Our genial Indian cabin steward Rebello, a man of many years sea going service, brought us a tray of tea, two oranges and an information sheet of the days' events. This came to be the format to start the day. Breakfast was 8.30am then we explored the ship and attended the all important lifeboat drill. Thus each daily routine included morning tea, followed by lunch. Afternoon tea was available and dinner at 8pm. We were summoned to meals by a crew member 'doing the rounds' playing a five bar xylophone, a sound we grew to know well.

All too soon we were crossing the Bay of Biscay. I found I was apt to lurch from bulkhead to bulkhead trying to keep my feet. This was a challenge, as any previous experience I had of such things was confined to the short ferry ride across the Solent to the Isle of Wight. Casually I asked 'Isn't it a little rough'? Just as casually my husband replied, 'No, this is like a millpond, not rough at all'. Apparently he was an old hand with the Bay in all its moods. But I was most interested to note some crew members were plying mops and buckets, cleaning up the decks with the zeal of Nelsons sailors. At meal times, there were quite a few empty places at the dining tables. I'm pleased to report I didn't let the side down and I continued to eat my way across the Bay in style.

My downfall came on the third morning out. I awoke with a heavy head cold that definitely threatened to travel south of the border onto my chest. At 6.30am Rebello brought our tea, fruit and news-sheet, and instantly summed up my situation. He returned in a flash with an extra blanket and a glass of 100% proof Navy Rum. I was swaddled up to my ears in blankets and fed frequent tots of Rum. To say I sweated it out is an understatement. Keith went topside for his meals I didn't put a toe out of my bunk for food. Rebello occasionally appeared with a tray of tempting snacks, and gratefully I submitted to all the attention. Next morning I tottered out of my bunk slightly blotto and utterly convinced I had undergone a miracle cure. It was without doubt the best treatment I've ever received for that particular malady.

We were delighted to find an invitation slipped under the cabin door, to attend the Captains cocktail party at 7.30pm-8.30pm. Our names were announced as we entered. We shook hands with Captain Lethridge and silver trays with glasses of sherry and gin and orange were proffered. We mingled and talked with officers and fellow passengers. It was a formal and unexpected touch for us, being £10.00 passengers.

We made friends with some crew members, in particular the Indian crew who worked hard. If they weren't serving at tables they polished brasswork, or were hanging precariously over the side of the ship painting. One had a lucrative hobby in what spare time he could muster. He made miniature wooden lifebelts, painted in the patriotic colours of red, white and blue, with *SS Strathaird* emblazoned on them together with each port of call and the appropriate dates. We bought two of them and they remain a treasured memento.

On the fourth day we saw Cape St Vincent, we were heading for the Straits of Gibraltar. Sleek, acrobatic porpoise were playfully accompanying us and several destroyers were travelling in the opposite direction, presumably on their way to England. The evening darkness brought the twinkling lights of Tangier tantalizingly closer and the sea breeze was much warmer. We passed the Rock of Gibraltar in the early hours and missed seeing it. We cruised for another two days with just the occasional view of the mountainous North African coastline. We sailed fairly close in to the island of Gozo with its flat roofed houses, Mosques, obelisks and green and granite cliffs with caves dotted at the waters edge. The long sandy beaches were seemingly deserted. Fortunately we enjoyed a wonderful close up view of Malta and Valletta harbour with a background of sandstone buildings and the blue Mediterranean Sea. It made up for the disappointment of missing out on seeing Gibraltar. It was inspiring to have a glimpse of this island, awarded the George Cross for gallantry under bombardment during the Second World War and to remember the service personnel who helped defend and keep her people going through those awful times.

We were now relishing our time at sea. We danced the nights away, not easy on the occasional tilting deck. In these carefree pursuits, we were joined by jolly English Pursers, who threw themselves wholeheartedly into our entertainment. Music was provided with a portable gramophone playing the latest records. They managed to conjure up tasty suppers for us in the early hours and left the hapless Indian stewards to clear the debris up afterwards. One Purser in particular was a bit of a character, he frequently used the phrase 'God bless my soul' in a plummy BBC accent, naturally we nicknamed him God bless my soul. These colourful gentlemen brightened many evenings of our long voyage and we remember them with affection. God bless 'em wherever they are.

As we approached Port Said we were advised to securely lock all cabin doors. An Egyptian pilot came aboard from a small launch and we made our way into Port Said just as the sun was setting in all its blazing glory. I was thrilled to bits to see that spectacle, it added to the mystique of my first foreign port of call. Customs came aboard next morning, with those formalities dispensed with, the Bum boats closed in. What a laugh, there must have been dozens of them, all choc-a-bloc with leather goods, woodwork items, baskets, hats, sandals, suitcases, you name it, they carried it. It was a wonder someone didn't fall in the water as they jostled each other for positions. Finally the bargaining began they deftly threw up

ropes with baskets tied on the end containing goods, shouting the prices in perfect Scottish accents. 'Hey McGregor' they shouted, it seemed that was their favourite name. We spent hours enjoying the fun and buying a few items and finally watched them leave, still calling out in their acquired Scottish accents.

Fresh water was pumped aboard as dock workers volubly argued non stop with each other, it was a wonder any work got done at all. One seedy character with an official pass on his lapel, took Keith aside and offered him a selection of 'Swiss' watches, all were fastened to the inside of his long coat. He most probably offered dirty postcards as well. His initial ploy of remembering Keith on board a tanker passing through the Suez Canal some years before was we felt, typical of this cartoon like spiv. If you may be wondering...no we didn't fall for the spiel or indeed buy a watch.

We sailed from Port Said early next morning and awaited our turn to pass through the Suez Canal, slowly following in the wake of the Italian ship *Fair Sea*, with her complement of migrant passengers aboard. To starboard were pleasant irrigated pastures, which were in total contrast to the portside of rolling miles of desert sand as far as the eye could see. Workers were constantly dredging sand from the canal itself. It was fascinating to take in the contrast and it was a journey we both enjoyed immensely. The whole experience was especially interesting for a green-horn like me. The following day the crew changed from winter uniform to summer whites, and very smart they looked too. It was a sure sign we were entering warmer climes. The Navigation Officer announced it was 94° on the bridge and that we had covered some 393 miles in one day.

As honeymoons go, ours was a little crowded and with several hundred people on board we came in for some light hearted teasing if we were absent for any of the scrumptious meals or afternoon teas. But there were many romantic evenings when the two of us strolled the deck alone, savouring the tranquility, the balmy tropical air the silver moonlight and glimpsing the phosphorescence resembling sparkling emeralds tossed upon the sea. At those intimate moments, thoughts of our future in Australia seemed all too distant. Other nights were indeed crowded, as with official consent we carried our bedding topside to sleep in cooler conditions. Our fellow companions also only too pleased to vacate the stifling air of below the waterline cabins. The only drawback to this arrangement was surrendering our positions at dawn when the deck crew started work.

We cruised across the Arabian Sea to reach Aden. We took a ferry ride ashore and it was a culture shock for me to see crippled children begging on the streets in dust and dirt. Apart from accomplishing some cheap shopping, it was not a place I remember with much pleasure. As the days passed, we settled into friendships on board. We played table tennis by the hour with Jerry and Norma. Jerry a likeable, fair haired dynamo, came from Ireland and had fallen for Norma, a gentle, pretty, Scots lass. Jerry was a surprise package, a talented fellow who graced the ships concert stage, playing the piano and trumpet and doing great imitations of famous people and making us laugh in the process. It wasn't hard to imagine his mother in Ireland missing her gregarious son. We got to know fellow traveller 'Big John' all 6' 4" of him, he was from Middlesex and came on board with a couple of quid in his pocket and a Matchless four stroke motorbike. He already had a job lined up on a property in Victoria that ran cattle. He shared a six berth cabin with other lads in the bowels (there's that word again) of the ship. Like us, he had no family or sponsor in Australia, but was a free spirit and looking forward to a challenge.

There was of course the inevitable gossip about people slipping into intriguing love affairs, as people so easily do in the suspended reality of shipboard life. After all, there is the past disappearing behind as rapidly as the ships wake, and the future is somewhere over the horizon ahead that the ship never seems to reach. So we tactful observers understood.

An unusual event occurred on Sunday the 8th February. It appears two Polish stowaways were discovered on board the 27,000ton ship *Iberia*, England bound from Australia. We rendezvoused in mid Indian Ocean and they were transferred in the early hours of the morning to our ship. It was quite a sight with *Iberia* lit up from stem to stern. I suppose they were confined in the brig en-route to Australia as we didn't see them again.

Being in the vast Indian Ocean, we often watched with incredulity, scores of flying fish skimming the waves for incredible distances. There were days too, when seemingly we had the ocean to ourselves, not a ship in sight to counter the loneliness. Then came the morning we sailed close into the Laccadive island of Minicoy. For me, it was the desert island tucked away in my imagination. A blue lagoon lapping white sands, fringed with swaying palm trees. Natives were out fishing and were close enough to stand up in their small boats to wave to us. Our camera worked overtime capturing this island paradise and the magic of it all.

Columbo in Ceylon was our next port of call. It cost 4/6 for a ferry ride ashore and the pavements fairly sizzled in the heat. The first thing we saw was a snake charmer with a bag of wriggling snakes (made me feel a little jittery) playing a flute to a swaying Cobra. It was fascinating to see the snake respond. The streets were thronged with beggars and the Buddhist priests clad in saffron robes, sandals and shaved heads. The pavements were splashed with betel nut juice, the

locals constantly chewing on the nuts which stained their teeth red. We took a nightmare taxi ride further out into the country-side of tea plantations. Exotic flowers and shrubs abounded, so very striking from the delicate, dew sprinkled, rain kissed plants of misty England. We removed our shoes to visit a Buddhist temple, with its frangipani strewn offerings to Buddha; we paid the wily shoe-minder waiting outside to receive them back again. Yet another heart stopping taxi ride back to our ship, with the drivers hand on the horn all the way, scattering people and livestock with gay abandon as we went. Keith took particular notice of the speedometer; 75mph in a 35mph zone.

Clocks and watches were yet again advanced a further 30 minutes as we continued sailing across the Indian Ocean. The social calendar aboard was catering for everyone. One afternoon we watched a hilarious cricket match being played between officers and passengers, fantastic to watch in the confined area available. The crossing of the equator was marked with the usual raucous ceremonial antics of King Neptune and his motley crew. All brave 'first timers' endured the procedure and were presented with their crossing the line certificates. It was all good fun and very much part of sea going tradition.

On the 17th February we underwent yet another interview with Australian officials and a cursory medical check. Freemantle was to be our first Australian port of call, and it was a gentle reminder that our final destination was not too far away.

The Cocos Islands loomed up through misty rain, so our views were restricted of this group of islands administered by Australia. We stood for hours on the designated day at the ships rail, waiting for our first glimpse of the Western Australian coastline, a gripping moment after all the plans, hopes and dreams of the past twelve months or so. Some of our passengers disembarked on that hot, clear skied morning of 18th February and we wished them well. It was mid afternoon when we set foot on Australian soil and we strolled around the city taking in the sights and making the most of our time ashore. Our ears were becoming accustomed to the Aussie accent, and we found people friendly and helpful. At 9pm the pubs closed so we made our way back to *SS Strathaird*. Departure time was 11pm and we were at the deck rail watching all the activity. People were lingering saying farewell, and coloured paper streamers were cascading from wharf to deck, a fragile emotional link, together with shouted messages and general fun and laughter. Gradually we pulled away, severing our tie with Fremantle and heading out into the waters of the Great Australian Bight.

Crossing the Bight was noticeably much rougher, by now we certainly had our sea legs, so coped well. We bypassed Adelaide en-route to Melbourne. Making the most of those last few days, we enjoyed Gala dinners, fancy dress parades, quiz nights, bingo nights, table tennis tournaments or just relaxing in deck chairs or drinking rum and coca cola in a quiet corner of the saloon bar. We wished it could all go on forever.

February 23rd dawned as we sailed into Port Melbourne. Our pal 'Big John' was informed by emigration officials his prospective employment had fallen through, due to his employer falling seriously ill. Officialdom was most helpful and arranged for him to visit the man in hospital in Melbourne. Keith and I had no relatives or sponsor, so it was organized for us to be taken to a transit hostel in the Exhibition buildings, Carlton, for future processing. John was assigned to the hostel with us. Our friend Jerry was going on to Sydney. Norma had relatives in Melbourne and was disembarking with us. We never did find out if they ended up together. So it was, we parted with our friends of the past month, feeling exactly like ships that pass in the night. We bade farewell to our special crew members, to Rebello who served us pleasantly and who enjoyed his own tot of rum below decks.

I recall the feeling of happiness for our wonderful four weeks honeymoon that cost us not much more than £10.00 each to travel halfway around the world. It was an experience rich, in love, friendship and learning. Those four weeks lulled us into an odd state of security. I admit to feeling reluctant to leave *SS Strathaird*, our safety net, our temporary sea home, whose brass service plaques on the bulkheads told of her unstinting service and travels in many situations over many years. My memory is crystal clear of stepping on the gangplank, suitcase in hand, looking down at the wharfies standing on the dockside observing the arrival of another shipload of Pommies, their expressions were eloquent.

So it was, we walked down that gangplank, to step on Terra Firma Australis for the second time, with mixed feelings, wondering what the future held in store, with £80.00 in our pockets, our few wedding gifts, Keith's tool bag, my sewing machine, and loads of naivety that always marches hand in hand with the learning process. Our honeymoon was over, but we were young, fit, adaptable and ready to face everything together by combining our love, strength and optimism. We were determined to make the best of our new life 'Down Under'.

We often wonder how our fellow traveler's fared in their quest for new beginnings in Australia. Our friend 'Big John', who had the uncertain start to his life here, remained our cherished friend, a friendship that spanned three states and over 43 years until his death in 2001. It is with pride I record my love and thanks to an ex Vindi Boy. I don't regret entrusting my heart and future to a Merchant Navy man who opened up my world from the winding country lanes of

Warwickshire, to the high seas, other cultures and another world and on to a happy life in Australia.

Now, if my choice had been a landlubber, my honeymoon would most probably have been a week spent in...Bournemouth...Brighton...Bognor Regis...

Anne Withey 2002

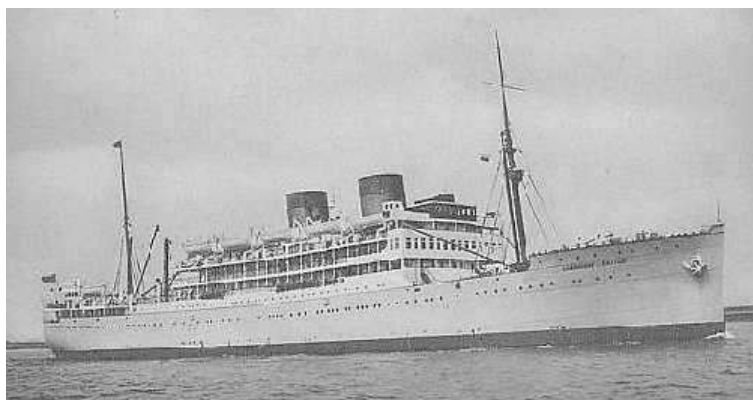
Strathaird Built in 1931 by Vickers-Armstrong Ltd in Barrow.
Tonnage: 22,568 gross
Service Speed: 20 Knots
Propulsion: Turbo-electric/twin screws
1939 requisitioned as troopship
1948 recommenced Australian run
Final voyage to Australia March 1961, left Sydney in May and returned to Tilbury then sailed for Hong Kong on 17th June arrived 24th July for demolition.
Strathaird and Strathnaver were replaced by Canberra



Tale of an Ancient Mariner cont.

I left you with the paying off in Glasgow after returning as a survivor of *Dundrum Castle* and getting eight days survivors leave. As was the practice during the first stages of the war, seamen's wages stopped when their ship was sunk and I think I got a railway ticket home to Buxton and £10.00 subsistence money. I reported to Manchester Shipping Office after getting home for the weekend (and a bath) and was issued with a new identity card, clothing and food ration books.

The previous section of my story mentioned I was a Boy Scout, so on joining *Vindictrix* I transferred to the Deep Sea Scout branch (more of this later). My second weekend at home after reporting at Manchester I had nothing much to do so went up the road to the local Scout HQ a couple of hundred yards away. There was a Cub meeting that evening and the Arkela (Cub Mistress for those who don't know) got me talking to her pack about my travels, bearing in mind the current exhortation 'Careless Talk Loses Lives' plastered all over England. After the meeting closed we went for a coffee on her way home and arranged to meet next day when she got home from work six miles away. The next morning my mother told me that my 21st birthday present was up in the attic room and as it was summer weather and I had nothing to do I could have it then (my birthday is in November). It was a brand new bicycle (my uncle ran a Halfords branch of cycle and hardware items in Manchester). It was a little small for me and was one of those termed 'sit-up-and-beg' bikes. However, Arkela (I'll call her Florrie from now on) was a keen cyclist and knew all the history of the district and surrounding villages so we spent each evening cycling all over the place whilst the good summer weather kept up visiting historic place's in Derbyshire and Cheshire over the moors.



After my eight day's leave was up I reported back to Manchester and sat for my Efficient Deck Hand Certificate which I passed on 21st July 1943 and signed on MV *Llangibby Castle* as EDH in Liverpool on 31st July. The entry in my Discharge Book was dittoed *Dundrum Castle*, which of course, had blown up in June. There are no report stamps by 1st Officer or Master or signatures as to efficiency and character. Incidentally the previous entries for *Dundrum Castle* were

for 2nd October 1940, Liverpool to 27th September 1941, Victoria Docks as Deck Boy, 28th September 1941 to 4th July 1943 Manchester as sailor. It was a rating instituted to fill the gap in shortages of AB's owing to so many getting sunk and prior to three years sea going service. It was on the advice of the 1st Officer on the ship. I was never an Ordinary Seaman (sometimes now called extra ordinary).

Llangibby Castle left Liverpool for the Mediterranean ports of Algiers (Invasion), Bone and Taranto Italy, Phillipville, Tunis and Port Said, returning to Glasgow on 17th March 1944. I had 17 days leave before reporting back to *Llangibby Castle* and signing on again on 3rd April. Sometime before signing on originally in July 1943 or it may have been the day we signed on 31st July 1943 we were asked if we would volunteer for 'Special Duties' if required and those who volunteered had a 'V' in ink on their Identity Card. I was one so after re-signing at Glasgow on 4th April 1944 we all had to sign off and those with 'V' on their cards had to re-sign on again for 'Special Operations'.

During my 17 days leave I first went home, travelling by train to Manchester arriving at 10.30pm at Exchange Station, the train to Buxton was from London Road Station but was not running so I walked back to Central Station and got the 7.20am home. During the night I slept in the paper train van at Central Station. That was Sunday morning. On Monday I reported to Manchester Marine Office to collect two weeks ration coupons and register for the dole. The next eight days at home and out with Florrie on our bikes. It snowed the first day and on the Wednesday after attending the Scouts as Assistant Scoutmaster left for London at 9.30pm to visit my younger brother Tony. At 6.30am on the Friday morning I left for home (Buxton) via Manchester arriving 9.30pm. On the following Monday 3rd April went to Glasgow via Manchester 7.50am arriving at 3.30pm and was on board at 4pm and slept on a mattress that night. Tuesday 4th April drew bed linen and squared up after signing on as AB. On the Thursday 6th April I signed off 10.30pm and re-signed 'Special Ops' and had a lecture by 1.30am Friday morning. Turned in at 2am and was out at 8am. Turned to from 9am until 11am. I packed all my clothes except working gear and went ashore to post a parcel, clothes etc home. Sent a telegram and letter, caught the 4pm train to Newcastle to visit Children's Home and the gardener. (It was now a Roman Catholic Boys Home) from 8pm to 11.15pm. I Caught the 1.09am train to Glasgow. The next few days were spent in Leith fitting minesweeping paravanes and otters, shrapnel protection around wheelhouse, chartroom and the front of the bridge and mounting twin 20mm Oerlikon guns in pits on each wing of the bridge and a Bofors AA gun on the stern with our 4" naval gun.

The ship sailed to Southampton on 12th April via Milford Haven for ammunitions, arriving in the Solent at 9.40pm. The following day I went ashore at 2.30pm and missed the ferry back. The seaman's mission was showing the film 'Last of the Mohicans' so I stayed until 9pm and was back on board by 10.15pm

That was our last leave for 31 days. The next morning was foggy, weighed anchor at 10am and went across the channel with our flotilla of six vessels led by HMS *Bulolo* which used to be a mail ship on the Netherland coast. Fog cleared to brilliant sunshine and we were able to see the French coast and Germans on the cliffs. Forming a circle using appropriate signal blasts on ships sirens, we anchored for a while, returning to the Solent by 6.30pm. Next day Tuesday 18th April we were given a lecture by Naval Officers on 'Security'. Shore leave was granted for the rest of the evening. I was ashore by 8pm and made my way to the cinema to see 'Thank Your Lucky Stars' until 10.30pm. The mail came on board on Friday at 11.30pm and I received a letter from my mother.

The following Tuesday we were again over the channel and circle maneuvers began once more. On 5th May leave was granted and I was ashore by 12.30pm getting soaked in the rain. Catching the ferry to Southampton and the 3.30pm train to London I was able to catch the next train to Buxton at 5.45pm. I was unable to find anything hot to drink. Bought a pair of grey flannel trousers as all my other clothes were sent home from Glasgow. I finally arrived home at 10.30pm. On Saturday I had a haircut and called at Florrie's house. She was at the hospital after suffering appendicitis. Collecting my shoes from being repaired, which cost 7/6, I then bought batteries for my torch. I cycled to the nearby villages of Chelmorton and Taddington. That evening I went to the cinema to see 'Dixie' and was home by 12.15am.

Sunday morning I went to church and then cycled to the local dams with Florrie, returning at 4.30pm as I had to catch the 6.30pm train back to London. Arriving at 11.30pm, I walked around looking for tea or coffee while waiting for the 5.40am train which I caught along with one of the AB quartermasters. By 9.30am I was on the ferry to the Isle of Wight and as the ship was not in port I made my way to the Seaman's Mission for my dinner and was back on board by 4.30pm.

As we did not get to make an allotment per month, owing to security rules and doubt of survival I sent £10.00 home by telegraph. On Saturday I caught the bus to Farnborough to visit two of the sisters who were at the Newcastle branch of the



children's home. They had been transferred to the little children's branch at Farnborough. I went to RAF Halton on Sunday to see my elder brother who was in the radar training section, finally managing to see him at 6pm and then got a lift back to the Isle of Wight in RAF transport. The following Tuesday afternoon I caught the bus (last one) to Tidworth wheremy American girl friends husband was stationed. The bus stopped by the main gate, where I waited for the sentry to locate Charles, unfortunately I had to leave before he arrived as the bus came back on its return journey and it was the last one that night. (I finally met him in 1965 whilst on a trip from Sydney to England via the USA and Canada).Whitsunday Bank Holiday Monday 20th May I went for a swim over the ships side in the West Roads IOW but the current was so strong I didn't go far from the ship.

After all the preparations and my afore mentioned doings we embarked troops for D-Day on the night of 3rd June. The weather turned rough so sailing was postponed until 11pm Monday night the 5th June. We arrived at Sword beach at 6am, I was on lookout in the crows nest until we dropped anchor off the beach. The leaving naval ships were firing over the fleet to soften up the beaches and cliffs and it felt too close being up the mast. We had landing craft assault boats instead of the original lifeboats which were taken off in Glasgow. Each of the 19 davit positions had three craft allocated, one on the wire falls, one shackled to the davit head and one inboard on the promenade deck on chocks. Each carried 36 men and 3 crew. We had Canadian Bicycle Parachute Regiment troops amongst the rest of the troops. The first wave went off at 6.30am and most of them were blown up as they reached the mined concrete posts on the beach. The next wave we unshackled from the davit head onto the falls and loaded the 36 troops. The three crewmen were Royal Marines, one battened down in the motor room astern, one forward to operate the ramp door and the third stood on the deck aft steering. Each wave from *Llangibby* was 36 craft and they were supposed to return after putting men ashore and take another load. As mentioned before, most of the first wave were damaged so did not return. The second wave lost a few craft and some were left on the beach by the marine crews as they didn't want to return in the rough weather so they went up to fight with the rest of the boat load.

As a consequence the marines ran out of coxswains so we were asked if any AB's would volunteer to take a couple of the final barges ashore. The weather had calmed down a bit and there was no enemy aircraft around and the beach head was almost taken so myself and two others volunteered to steer a craft ashore and back. It was a rough ride in the heavy swell with the flat bottomed craft but we made it both ways OK. We took the last of them off at 4pm. There was only one aircraft alert (one plane) which flew over at 1.30pm.

On Sunday 25th June a service was held on No 3 hatch at 10.30am led by the Captain. I had a weekend leave on Friday 30th June and managed to get up to London and stay the night with my younger brother who was in a reserved occupation in a factory and in the Home Guard. From D-Day onwards until the end of August we spent most of the days to and fro across to France with troops and to the Cherbourg peninsular beaches with American troops. I paid off the *Llangibby Castle* on Tuesday 29th August at Southampton.

Llangibby Castle		OF DISCHARGE		B	
No. 1		No. 2		No. 3	
* Name of ship and other particulars (including name of vessel)		* Rating		* Description of cargo	
* Date and place of departure		* Date of arrival		* Name of Officer in Charge	
* Name of Master		* Name of Officer in Charge		* Signature of (a) Master and of (b) Officer in Charge	
1	Llangibby Castle	27/1/44	27/1/44	AB	7
2	do	27/1/44	27/1/44	AB	7
3	Sandart 169950	24/1/44	8/1/45	AB	7
4	London Castle	21/1/44	21/1/44	AB	7
5	Glanville	27/1/44	27/1/44	AB	7
6	AND C				

Copy of Discharge Book showing Special Operations in second row

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

D. DAY - The hard-worked 'Llangibby Castle' attached to J Force Lland carried 1,500 British and Canadian Troops. She was fitted with 18 assault craft operated by 124 Royal Navy and Royal Marine officers and ratings attached to the ship. At 06.30 hours on D.DAY she anchored off the beach at Courseulles. Over the following six months she was to cross the channel more than 60 times and ferry more than 100,000 servicemen.



'LLANGIBBY CASTLE' PICTURED IN THE SOLENT, AUGUST 1944. COMPLETE WITH CAMOUFLAGE, LANDING CRAFT AND GUNS.