



SHIPMATES

Reardon Smith Seafarer's Newsletter

Issue No.34 March 2005.



New Westminster City Tom Major supervised the building!

Thomas Wilson Major

Crossed the bar on 29th November 2004. He was Technical Director of the Reardon Smith Group and was also one of the four founders of Reardon Smith Seafarers Newsletter "Shipmates".

The funeral service took place in the Brionant Chapel at Thornhill Crematorium, Cardiff, at 2.45 P.M. Wednesday 8th December, 2004. It was conducted by the Reverend Garth Williams.

A tribute was read by Captain John Lee (see page No.2).

"Shipmates" members who attended the funeral were:-

Roy Burston, Alec Gardner, Graham Griffiths, Paul Hunt, Captain David Griffiths Jones, Ian Jones, Captain John Lee, David Litson, Alec Osborne, Eric Poindestre, Malcom Rayner, John Reardon Smith, Reg Smith, Captain Mike Thomas, Gordon Walker, Pam Ward, and Alec Westal.

A TRIBUTE TO TOM MAJOR (CE FIMarETS)

Tom Major was a marine engineer. He started his apprenticeship at the Mount Stuart dry dock in Cardiff and completed it at William Doxford marine works in Sunderland. On completion of his apprenticeship in 1938 he went to sea with the Reardon Smith Line until 1945, rising in rank to become Chief Engineer. This meant he was at sea during the whole of World War 2, seeing service on the North Atlantic convoys, Sicily invasion convoys and D-Day convoys.

He came ashore at Grayson Rollo ship repair yard in Liverpool until 1947, when he went to Lloyds as a surveyor working in the London docks area.

Tom returned to Reardon Smith in 1948 as an engineer superintendent and in early 1950 he was seconded to the States Marine Lines of the U.S.A. to supervise the building of four ships for that company at Fairfield shipyard in Glasgow. He and his family lived in Glasgow during this time. When these ships were completed he returned to Reardon Smith who posted him to Sunderland to supervise the building of four ships at William Doxfords. In 1956 he returned to head office in Cardiff for field work duties.

In 1963 he became Chief Superintendent and four years later was invited to join the board of directors of the Reardon Smith Group as Technical Director. By 1975 Reardon Smith had a fleet of 20 ships and 3 oil rigs which kept him very busy.

Tom was an icon in the marine engineering and ship building industries and was on first name terms with the managing directors and chief engineers of many of the companies in this business. He was also well known by the Classification Society and Board of Trade Surveyors. He knew all the masters, chief engineers and officers that served in the Reardon Smith fleet and when he visited ship, he mixed freely with them all.

Tom was a chartered engineer and a member of the Institute of Marine Engineers, he was Chairman of the South Wales branch from 1964 to 1967 and ably presented papers on related subjects to this group.

Tom was a hard working, determined, kind and honest man with dignified integrity. He was a great leader who had to make some very hard and difficult decisions about ship breakdowns all over the world. He worked

hard and expected his staff to work hard as well, but he ensured that they were rewarded for their hard work. He also helped many young members of his staff to better themselves.

I'd like to finish with a little story to illustrate his honesty. On one occasion, Tom and his wife had coffee at an airport café. They set off home and were traveling down the motorway when he realized he had forgotten to pay for the coffee. When he got home he wrote out a cheque for the coffee and sent it to the café manager. The owner was so surprised he sent the cheque back saying that the coffee was on the house.

It was a great privilege to have worked with Tom. We have all been enriched both professionally and personally. He will be sadly missed.

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New Members

We welcome aboard three new members:

Mr. L. Judd from Cardiff who was an apprentice with the Reardon Smith Line. He sailed on the S.S. "Madras City" when she left Newport, Mon. in 1952. - *I was also sailing on the vessel as 3rd Engineer - Editor*

Capt. Phillip Vanner from Pembroke who served his apprenticeship with the Reardon Smith Line. He sailed in the company from 1950 to 1960. His father served as Master with the company and was Master on the RSL steamer "Bradfyne" when she was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U100 South of Rockall on 22nd November 1940. The Master and 38 of the crew were lost, there were only four survivors. His brother Richard served with the Reardon Smith Line all his sea going career and was Master on several of the ships. Unfortunately Richard crossed the bar in May 2000 at the age of 61.

Walter James who was sailing on the M.V. "Eastern City" in 1953/55, he served as an Engineer with Reardon Smith for about 10 years. He was introduced to "Shipmates" after Capt. Terry Rooney met up with him, after many years, and chatted about the time they sailed on that ship.

BAHAMAS

Sea Story

This week a young man of 20 left Nassau in the Bahamas to rejoin the war. Behind him already lay one of the most hair-raising adventure stories to come out of World War II and one of the most amazing in seafaring history.

On August 21, 1940, the British freighter *Anglo Saxon*, out of England bound for Buenos Aires, was attacked 500 miles south of the Azores by the German raider *Weser*, since captured by a Canadian armed merchant cruiser. The raider shelled the ship, killing most of the crew and destroying all but one of the ship's boats. Unseen by the raider, the last boat, a 16-ft. jolly boat containing seven men (the ship's chief officer, third engineer wireless operator, gunner, three seamen), got safely away.

The men rowed and rowed westward, under a maddening heat. On the tenth day, the wireless operator died. Four men jumped overboard. The only men alive after 25 days were Able Seamen Wilbert Roy Widdicombe, 24, and Robert George Tapscott, 19.

When the sun did not attack them, storms tore at their boat. For food they subsisted mostly on seaweed. They were no longer strong enough to row. Little rain fell. Finally, parched, shriveled, black-skinned, they broke the glass of their compass and sipped the distilled water and alcohol. After that they never knew where they were going. They just drifted.

They saw two ships pass, and signaled frantically but without avail. They fought to keep hold of their minds. Widdicombe broke off his front teeth trying to eat his shoes. Tapscott spent most of the time torpid in the boat's bottom.

On the 68th day Widdicombe, too, grew weaker and nearly lost consciousness. He could hardly see. Then a lone sea gull flew close to the boat. There were other signs that they were near land. Next day an island was visible. Somehow he roused Tapscott, and somehow – he never knew – they guided their boat to land. It was the 70th day. The island was Eleuthera, in the Bahamas, over 2,500 miles from where they had abandoned ship. A farmer and his wife, who saw the empty boat on the beach and followed the tracks, found them nearby.

By last week Seaman Tapscott, a thin-featured blond fellow now weighing more than 170 pounds, was ready once more for action. A few days after he received his pay check for the 70 days he spent in the open boat, he left Nassau for Canada. There he meant to enlist.

Widdicombe did not go with him. First to recover, the elder seaman sailed last February from New York to see his father in Wales. His ship, the *Siamese Prince*, was torpedoed in the Atlantic. All aboard were presumably lost, including Seaman Widdicombe.

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S.S. "JERSEY CITY" (2)

In the story about the S.S. "Jersey City" survivors being transferred to H.M.S. "Walker", in the last newsletter, I wrote that the U-boat Commander Kapitanleutnant Otto Kretschmer was lost, this was incorrect, our member Capt. Ray Newbury has given me some information on this. When U99's made a surface attack on the convoy HN112 he sank five ships in one hour. From the tankers that were hit and set on fire U99 was clearly illuminated and was detected by the convoy escort. Kretschmer U99's lookout sighted a destroyer and gave the alarm. Hearing the alarm report the startled Officer of the watch gave the order to dive, which were Kretschmer's standing orders. Once dived U99 was immediately detected by the destroyer H.M.S. "Walker's" asdic system and was attacked. Kretschmer realized this was the worst attack he had ever suffered, six depth charges burst around the submarine which plunged to 700 feet below the designed crushing depth, before pulling out of the dive. The U99 was uncontrollable and came to the surface. Kapitanleutnant Kretschmer ordered to "abandon ship". He then had the message flashed to H.M.S. "Walker" "Captain to Captain. Please save my men drifting in your direction I am sinking U99." H.M.S. "Walker" picked up Kapitanleutnant Kretschmer and all but three of the 43 members of U99. Kretschmer became a prisoner of war and was taken to Canada. He was released in 1947. He went back to Germany to become the first President of the newly formed German Marine-Bund (Marine Federation). He was promoted Admiral in 1965 and was Chief of Staff Allied Naval Baltic Nato Forces Approaches until he retired in 1970. A schoolmaster's son he was born in 1912 he went to his father's primary school and studied in England, France and Italy. He was commissioned in October 1934. He died aged 86.

Editor

JOINING R.S.L.

The last year in the Smith Junior Nautical School, Cardiff - 1947-48 seemed to me to be taken up with trying to obtain an apprenticeship berth in a British Shipping Company. Endless lunchtime visits to the austere and silent Victorian reference library situated in the centre of Cardiff perusing through the pages of Lloyds Register of Shipping are etched in my mind. Continuously recording the names and addresses of shipping companies, noting the number and tonnages of their ships and impressed with their size gave hope to us boys planning on a career in the Merchant Navy.

Most of us, I think, had ambitions to join the established liner companies and it was with some disappointment that replies to our enquiries contained the phrase, 'We only recruit apprentices/cadets from Approved Nautical Training Centres'. This phrase always stuck in our throats for we were, and most of us still are of the opinion that our overall maritime and general education was second to none and certainly approved by us, its students.

Somewhere along the way we altered our sights and started to apply to shipping companies more amenable to our requirements - we could do without Cunard, P.& O., and would deprive them of our expertise. Letters to Runciman's, Reardon Smith, Tate, Evan Thomas Radcliffe, Ropners and many other similar companies drew some positive response. Colleagues would arrive in class and inform all that they were placed on a 'waiting list' or if very fortunate promised a berth. Frank Tinsley's and my application to R.S.L. drew the 'waiting list' response.

Come the end of the summer term, the outlook was quite bleak with nothing appearing on the horizon. Shore employment was difficult to obtain, for every employer knew that at the 'drop of a hat', a positive response from a shipping company would see their youthful employee disappear over the horizon. Frank called at the house one day to tell me he had obtained an errand boy's job with Marshalls the shipping butcher in Holton Rd. Barry and that there was another vacancy in an adjacent shop. So Frank and I began our sea career by delivering meat to ships in the port of Barry! We use to arrange to meet at the dockside and watch the ships sail through the lock gates. I remember Frank and I delivering meat to a Holder's vessel named the Maquessa.

My father was making his own enquiries at this time. He had a friend who during the war had sailed as Master and came ashore 1944/45 to act as Convoy liaison officer for the Port of Barry. He had contacts in the Shipping Federation and promised to keep his ear to the ground for any apprenticeship berths becoming vacant.

On a bleak November morning, pushing an ancient bike, loaded with meat up College Hill, Barry, my mother appeared out of a bus shelter waving a letter. One I still possess, informing me to report to the Shipping Federation, Cardiff for an interview with Gibbs & Co. of Penarth. The Company had lost all three ships during the war and they were taking possession of a Ministry requisition named Empire Glen/Aylesbury and now renamed West Wales. An additional

surprise was that a S.J.N.S. colleague from the same class was also being interviewed, namely, David Saunders. We were both eventually successful and signed our indentures together in the presence of the late Bill Henke. Later, my parents received a letter from R.S.L. informing me they had a vacancy, however, I was now on my way to Baltimore to load maize for Hamburg. Frank was also informed of a vacancy about this time and joined the R.S.L. as an apprentice. It was with sadness that in January 2002, myself and a number of his class mates attended his funeral. Frank having lost a brave fight to cancer.

'Tramping' was the order of the day for Gibbs and Co. You name it, we carried it and took cargoes worldwide. The only time I docked in Barry my parents left the same day for a two week holiday in Ireland! Little did they realise that my next voyage would last from August 1950 to June 1952. Phosphates from N. Africa for Capetown and then 20 months on the East & South African Coast.

During our African Tour, we met up with many R.S.L. ships and always I boarded to find out if any of our S.J.N.S. pals were on board. If my recollection is correct in June 1951, the Queen City called into Durban on her maiden voyage and didn't she look different! A smart modern looking vessel with excellent accommodation for her apprentices. Ernie Hatcher, 'Flash Thomas, Popperwell and others were among the apprentices on board.

The photograph below was taken at the Nagal Dam, Natal, June 1951. Queen City apprentices Having a day out with apprentices from the West Wales. A trip laid on by Bob and Mary Precious from the Durban Mission to Seamen.



June 1952 saw the West Wales off Durban awaiting the new Master and Chief Engineer. Indentures completed and excess sea-time in the bag, David and I were shipped home as First Class passengers on the Edinburgh Castle!

November 1952 saw me with a Second Mate's Certificate, ink still wet, but now I was going to serve with the 'big boys' who turned me down in 1948. I applied to a well known liner company trading worldwide. I completed their application form and within a week received orders to proceed to the Royal Docks, London to join one of their new passenger/cargo vessels trading to South America. I was never interviewed and never met anyone from their London office. No Marine Superintendent set foot near my door. I did learn to type endless dock passes for officers going ashore and I began to consider myself as a general 'dogs body' to one and all. I was also informed I would share the bridge watch with the Chief Officer, hence my sea-time would be halved.

One February day I was instructed to position myself on the 'monkey island' with the ship's telescope trained on the dock entrance to observe the owner's Roll Royce entering the precinct.!

We were loading for ports on the South American coast when a vessel approached under tow bound for the sugar berth in the Albert Dock. Identification revealed her to be the King City loaded with a cargo of sugar from Jamaica and so large was our ship that I was able to look down on to the bridge Third Mate, Ernie Hatcher, a friend of long standing and ex-S.J.N.S. was at the telegraph and I couldn't wait to go on board as soon as she berthed.

Later that day I boarded the King City and met Ernie and Alan Millward on deck. Ernie told me to wait in his cabin as he was not allowed to leave the deck at the present time, but would arrange for a coffee to be brought to me. As I was sitting on his settee and sipping hot coffee - the cabin curtain was open - a person, dressed in an immaculate grey lounge suit informed me my place was on deck. I informed the gentleman I was not the Third Mate of the ship but of a liner loading in the Victoria Dock. He followed up with the comment, 'So you're a big ship man'? My immediate response was, 'Not likely'. I was asked, 'Do you have a Second Mate's Ticket?' Yes I replied and with that he said, 'Do you want a job with R.S.L.?' Without hesitation my reply was an emphatic, 'Yes'! He gave me his card, it read, Alan Reardon Smith and he requested I report to the office in Cardiff at my earliest convenience. I telephoned the offices of my present employer and tendered my resignation.

The following Monday I reported to Colum Buildings for interview, during which I was asked if I had completed a Browns Gyro Course. I hadn't, so the following Sunday I returned to the Merchant Navy Hotel, Lancaster Gate. Daily journeys to Watford and with satisfactory completion of the course, the following Friday saw me returning to South Wales to report on Monday to the office for joining instructions. On Monday, 23rd. March 1953 I joined the Eastern City at Avonmouth under the command of Capt. Joe Thornhill. What a fortunate move this turned out to be, for I couldn't have sailed with a more experienced, considerate and understanding shipmaster. The Mate was Arthur 'Mortician' Davies, Second Mate, Johnny Harris, Chief Eng. Wainwright, Second Eng. 'Tiger' Munroe and Third Engineer, a 6 foot Geordie who went by the name 'Tinkle' Bell! We sailed for Newport News to load coal for Muroan, Japan on the 28th. March 1953 and that's another story. T.C.Rooney . R.S.L.

TRAFALGAR REVISITED

It's now 200 years since Lord Nelson's famous naval victory over the French and Spanish in the Battle of Trafalgar. To kick-start the anniversary celebrations, an actor dressed as Nelson posed for pictures on the River Thames at Greenwich. But before he was allowed to board an RNLI Lifeboat, safety officials made him wear a lifejacket over his 19th century admiral's uniform.

How would Nelson have fared if he had been subject to modern health and safety regulations? You are now on the deck of the recently renamed British Flagship, HMS Appeasement.

"Order the signal, Hardy."

"Aye, aye sir."

"Hold on, that's not what I dictated to the signal officer. What's the meaning of this?"

"Sorry sir?"

"England expects every person to do his duty, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religious persuasion or disability. What gobbledegook is that?"

"Admiralty policy, I'm afraid, sir. We're an equal opportunities employer now. We had the devil's own job getting 'England' past the censors, lest it be considered racist."

"Gadzooks, Hardy. Hand me my pipe and tobacco."

"Sorry sir. All naval vessels have been designated smoke-free working environments."

"In that case, break open the rum ration. Let us splice the main brace to steel the men before battle."

"The rum ration has been abolished, Admiral. It's part of the Government's policy on binge drinking."

"Good heavens, Hardy. I suppose we'd better get on with it. Full speed ahead."

"I think you'll find that there's a 4 knot speed limit in this stretch of water".

"Damn it man! We are on the eve of the greatest sea battle in history. We must advance with all dispatch. Report from the crow's nest, please."

"That won't be possible, sir."

"What?"

"Health and safety have closed the crow's nest, sir. No harness. And they said that rope ladder doesn't meet regulations. They won't let anyone up there until proper scaffolding can be erected."

"Then get me the ship's carpenter without delay, Hardy."

"He's busy knocking up a wheelchair access to the Fo'c'sle Admiral."

"Wheelchair access? I've never heard anything so absurd."

"Health and safety again, sir. We have to provide a barrier-free environment for the differently abled."

"Differently abled? I've only one arm and one eye and I refuse even to hear mention of the word. I didn't rise to the rank of admiral by playing the disability card."

"Actually, sir, you did. The Royal Navy is under-represented in the areas of visual impairment and limb deficiency."

"Whatever next? Give me full sail. The sea spray beckons."

"A couple of problems there too, sir. Health and safety won't let the crew up the rigging without crash helmets. And they don't want anyone breathing in too much salt – haven't you seen the adverts?"

"I've never heard such infamy. Run out the guns and tell the men to stand by to engage the enemy."

"The men are a bit worried about shooting at anyone, Admiral."

"What? This is mutiny."

"It's not that, sir. It's just that they're afraid of being charged with murder if they actually kill anyone. There's a couple of legal aid lawyers on board, watching everyone like hawks."

"Then how are we to sink the Frenchies and the Spanish?" "Actually, sir, we're not."

"We're not?"

"No, sir. The Frenchies and the Spanish are our European partners now. According to the Common Fisheries policy, we shouldn't even be in this stretch of water. We could get hit with a claim for compensation."

"But you must hate a Frenchman as you hate the devil."

"I wouldn't let the ship's diversity coordinator hear you saying that sir. You'll be up on disciplinary."

"You must consider every man an enemy who speaks ill of your King"

"Not any more, sir. We must be inclusive in this multicultural age. Now put on your Kevlar vest; it's the rules."

"Don't tell me – health and safety. Whatever happened to rum, sodomy and the lash?"

"As I explained, sir, rum is off the menu. And there's a ban on corporal punishment."

"What about sodomy?"

"I believe it's to be encouraged, sir."

"In that case kiss me, Hardy."

Contribution by John Cann

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Letter to the Editor

Terry Davis of Askam-in-Furness writes to say: -

I am sadden to learn of the death of Tom Major, obviously I didn't know him that well, but he employed me as an Engineer Cadet in 1967 and I can clearly remember working with him on the funnel design of the "Eastern City" during a spell in the Cardiff Office. Not forgetting, of course, my interview with him before my first trip as Chief Engineer in 1977. Memories which I shall never forget.

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"Shipmates"

"Shipmates" need more stories, short or long, hand written or typed, so get out the new pen you had for Christmas, or computer or old typewriter and write a few lines. Please send in your stories, now, to Alec Osborne 24e Heol Hir, Llanishen, Cardiff. CF14 5AE

THANKS TO ALL THE MEMBERS WHO SENT "SHIPMATES" CHRISTMAS CARDS

THIS CONTRIBUTION TO "SHIPMATES" WAS SUBMITTED BY
MR ALEC GARDNER

My first experience with ships was when I entered Chatham Dockyard as an Engine Fitter Apprentice on September 1936. In those far off days quite a stiff examination of twelve subjects had to be taken, and depending upon ones position, those who passed were able to make their own choice of trade.

The apprenticeship was of five years duration, up to four years of which dockyard schooling took a prominent part. The wages of an apprentice started at 12 shillings (old money) a week, but at the age of 16, 9d. was deducted for my stamp, so there was not much surplus for riotous living! Towards the end of my apprenticeship World War II broke out, and it happened that I was in a reserved occupation, by which time I had moved from working in the Engineering Factory where we built Diesel Engines for submarines, to outside work in one of the nine docks, some of which can still be seen in the dockyard which is now a museum.

It will be of interest to readers to learn that apart from cruisers, destroyers and submarines I did a spell on a ship that was being converted into a "Q" ship, and unknown to me at the time, it was, if I remember correctly, the M.V. "Willemette Valley", a Reardon Smith vessel.

Since I was quite thin, one of my jobs was to climb into the torpedo tubes after the 21" body gauge had been pulled through, and scrape off the blue marking to ascertain that a torpedo could be fired without disastrous consequences. Apart from a whole variety of engineering work on wartime vessels, I was employed on the gutting of the first German "U" boat to be captured. This was done to discover how "U" boats were able to remain submerged for much longer periods than British submarines. Readers will know that this was achieved using "Schnorkel" Apparatus, which was soon introduced into British submarines.

Later on I was seconded for work in Belfast where I gained experience working on Aircraft Carriers, in particular the servicing of Assisted Take-Off Gear, on carriers "Formidable" and "Illustrious". This was followed by a long spell in Gibraltar where a squad of some five hundred workmen of all trades descended upon the Rock in support of the North African invasion. We worked long hours repairing damaged ships, sending them back into the Mediterranean in double quick time.

The war ended, and in the course of time I was appointed to Cardiff as a Nett Cost Recorder with the Admiralty where I, with others, supervised the casting of Admiralty vessels being "moth-Balled" in Cardiff, Penarth, Barry and Newport.

There was a vacancy in Reardon Smiths for someone with an engineering background to check and record deck and engine spares, and I started work with the company in November 1956, when the M.V. "Great City" was docked in Mountstuart Dry Dock.

I spent a happy few years in the Technical department when Mr Tom Watson was the director, and I will never forget the first Job assigned to me. It was to go to M.V. "Cornish City" in Rotterdam. His instructions to me were to take the train to New Street Station, Birmingham where I would see someone on the platform reading a Technical Magazine (real cloak and dagger stuff!). I was to approach him and identify myself. It was there that I had to collect a box weighing some hundred-weights containing "Tufnel".* "Watch it with your life", I was told, "it is urgently required". The job was completed next day after a sleepless night and a rough crossing on the ferry from Harwich. I breathed a sigh of relief.

Very soon I found myself visiting Reardon Smith ships in various ports in the United Kingdom and abroad. After some time I took on the added responsibility of supervising the storing of our vessels. A bit of time was spent in Upper Clyde Shipbuilders on new construction work and at Doxford in Sunderland, together with similar work in Oslo when our vessels were being converted into car carriers. I also took charge of our warehouse in Penarth, and was responsible for the safe collection of spares for future dispatch to many parts of the world. For some time I was also employed in the Purchasing Department and the newly formed Oil Rigs Department with Chief Engineer John Howell. I retired from the company in 1982, and so have spent nearly 23 years in happy retirement.

This article may read like a C.V., but it is not so intended – just a reminder to myself and others who are interested how diverse and interesting life can be, sometimes it is true in retrospect, but I have enjoyed every moment of it, and hope you will find the account interesting.

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*Note: *Tufnel is a man made material that was used to reline stern tube propeller shaft bearings.*

**THIS CONTRIBUTION TO "SHIPMATES" WAS
SUBMITTED BY RALPH WOODWARD**

I joined "Queen City" in Leith as a 'first tripper' on 28th December 1958 sailing with Danny Lloyd, Master, and Dan John C/O. Paid off in Hamburg after two trips in October 1961.

Joined "Devon City" in Avonmouth in January 1962 with same Master and C/O paying off in Rotterdam in December 1962.

Joined "Cardiff City" with V. Picton-Davies, Master, and Don Jack C/O in February 1963 and paid off in Bremen March 1964 (having gone 3 months over my apprenticeship time).

Joined "Australian City" in Glasgow in October 1964 on its maiden voyage as 3/O with Danny Lloyd, Master and Michael Barclay-Thomas C/O, then John Cann C/o, Brian Jones 2/O. Paid off in Long Beach, USA in April 1966.

Then back to London for First Mate's Certificate and emigrated to Newcastle, NWS in August 1966.

I worked on the Australian coast until June 1967 with ANL but then decided to work ashore with the prospect of marriage, home and a family. I joined the shipping department of BHP Co. Ltd that had a fairly large fleet of vessels (the 'Iron' ships) on the Australian coast and trading to far-east ports.

At that time I started to specialize in employee relations in the Australian maritime industry – there were no less than 8 different trade unions represented in each vessel. Between the ships and waterfront unions I was kept fairly busy resolving industrial disputes and as Company's advocate before various tribunals. This led to a promotion and transfer to Western Australia employed in industrial relations in the steel and iron ore mining industries in the north-west of the state. I spent 17 challenging and enjoyable years with much travel to the remote mining centres in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of Western Australia and studying for a degree at University of Western Australia. We lived near Fremantle.

I transferred again to Karratha on the northwest coast as Port Superintendent for the Australian LNG Ship Operating Company – back into shipping operations. Then, after only a year I was requested to come down to the 'head office' in Melbourne as part of the management team. Involvement in personnel, occupational health and safety, and quality assurance was varied and interesting work. I made several audit voyages from Western Australia

to Japan in the LNG tankers that at the time were technically very advanced vessels and vastly different from my early days at sea with RSL.

In 2000 after a 'Company Restructure' I left BHP and, after a break, joined a relatively small family concern as their Marine Operations Manager in Williamstown near Melbourne. Their core business is delivering bunker fuel to vessels visiting Melbourne and Geelong in addition to tug and barge operations around these ports. This has been again a challenging and enjoyable role however I have now decided to retire and spend more time on our yacht sailing around Port Phillip Bay and also traveling. We are very happy living in this beautiful area and intend to stay near "The world's most liveable city – Melbourne". Hopefully we will make it over to the UK later this year for the RSL reunion.

Only a relatively brief part of my career was with RSL however it formed a great introduction to what has been a very happy and rewarding life – Australia – family and a career in industries that have made it all possible.

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DID YOU KNOW?

One bee would have to fly around 90,000 miles – more than three times round the globe – to make one pound of honey.

A honey bee can fly as fast as 15 mph.

It takes one ounce of honey to fuel a bee's flight around the world.

The honey bee is the only insect that produces food eaten by humans.

At the height of the active season of bee keeping, a typical hive may contain from 10,000 to 100,000 bees.

When foraging for nectar, bees may fly up to three miles from the hive.

More people die each year from bee stings than from all the poisonous snakes worldwide.

Honey has always been highly regarded as a medicine. It can help everything from sore throats and digestive disorders to skin problems and hay fever.

M.V. FRESNO CITY

The "Fresno City"(2) was torpedoed by 3 torpedoes from U boat 118 SE of Cape Farewell on the 12th April 1943 in position 54°15' N 30°00 W

Captain LAWSON Reported to the Admiralty the following:-

We were bound from New York to Liverpool with a cargo of 8,965 tons general stores, including 3,000 tons Manganese Ore. We were armed with 1 - 4", two .5 Colts, 2 Oerlikons, 2 Twin Hotchkiss, 4 P.A.C. Rockets, and 2 Pig Troughs. We carried 1 bag Diplomatic Mail addressed to the Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 1 large bag and envelope addressed to the Admiralty. These were taken on board at Cristobal, and were all thrown overboard in weighted bags, and seen to sink. My crew numbered 48, including 6 Navy and 2 Army Gunners. There were no casualties. The Confidential Books and Wireless Codes were thrown overboard in weighted boxes. Degaussing was on.

2. We left New York on April 1st, and joined up with Convoy H.X. 232, taking position 122, second ship of the starboard wing column. As soon as we were outside the Ambrose Channel, we ran into heavy fog, so the Commodore sent out wireless instructions to anchor in a certain position, and we accordingly anchored off Fire Island for the night. The shore station repeated these wireless instructions several times, but in each case gave incorrect bearings. We hove up anchor the following morning, at 1130, the fog having cleared, and proceeded. During the morning, fog descended again, and when it cleared during the afternoon about half the ships in the convoy were missing, there being only about thirty ships left. The Convoy did not regain its original formation, but the remaining ships carried on, and on the 5th April the Halifax section, consisting of about 15 ships, joined us. I still maintained my original position, No. 122.

3. On 10th April, we received signals from the Commodore reporting that several enemy submarines were known to be in the vicinity, but we proceeded without incident until the early hours of 12th April, when the M.V. "PACIFIC GROVE" was struck by one torpedo. We heard a terrific explosion, then a few seconds later, at 0245 on 12th April, when in position 54° 15' N, 30° 0' W, steering a course of 087° at a speed of 10 knots, we were struck by one torpedo from a U-boat. There was a moderate swell, and S'ly wind, Force 3. The weather was fine and clear with good visibility, and it was moonlight. One of my gunners saw the submarine abeam of the ship just after we were torpedoed; it then turned westward, steamed between Nos. 113 and 114, who were at least two miles astern of their stations, and torpedoed the Dutch S.S. " ULYSSES", No. 103.

5. No-one saw the track of the torpedo, which struck my ship under the bridge on the starboard side, with a dull thud. A huge column of water was thrown up, and the explosion blew the forward starboard boat completely away, although this boat was in the chocks at the time. Had our boats been swung outboard, I feel sure both would have been lost. I was in my room when the torpedo struck, and was momentarily stunned as my head banged against the deck. I rushed up on deck as quickly as I

could, and could see no signs of extensive damage, except for the deck and hatch coaming, which were buckled upwards for about three feet. I could not see a hole in the ship's side. I ordered "abandon ship", and the Chief Engineer went down into the engine room and stopped the engines. The W/T aerials had been destroyed, so we were unable to get away a wireless message; the rockets were blown away by the explosion, and the red light was destroyed.

6. Although I had previously instructed my crew many times not to lower the boats until the weigh was off, there was some slight panic, two of our remaining three lifeboats were lowered while the ship still had some weigh, thus parting their painters and allowing them to drift away. The Chief Officer's boat (the after starboard boat) was lowered without the Chief Officer, and he had to jump overboard and swim to get on board. The same thing happened with the 2nd Officer's boat (the port forward boat); he also had to jump overboard and swim to his boat, although he could have abandoned ship in my lifeboat, the port after boat, which was being lowered in an orderly manner. Eventually everyone was clear of the ship in the three lifeboats, within ten minutes of the torpedo striking.

7. While we were abandoning ship, No. 122, an American Gulf Tanker, abeam of me, was firing across our ship with his Oerlikons, presumably at the submarine. One of the shells went through the beret of one of my gunners but fortunately he was unhurt. This ship then went ahead, and in passing, fired shells across the "PACIFIC GROVE"

8. We lay to in the lifeboats until 0645, a little before daylight, when we were picked up by the corvette AZALEA, which also took on board survivors from the M.V. "PACIFIC GROVE" and the "ULYSSES". The "FRESNO CITY" was still afloat, so at 1000 we decided to reboard, to see if she could possibly reach port. With the Chief Engineer, and five of the boat's crew, I pulled back to our ship, the Chief Engineer and I reboarded her, leaving the lifeboat alongside. After going below, the Chief Engineer reported that the main steam pipes were fractured; the ship was settling by the head, the fore deck was awash, so we came to the conclusion that the ship could not be saved. We reboarded the lifeboat, and two minutes later two further torpedoes struck the ship, practically simultaneously, one in the engine room and one abreast of the mainmast, both on the starboard side. The ship straightened up on to an even keel, the magazine exploded, and the stern was blown off. She sank at 1050, five minutes after these two torpedoes struck.

9. We reboarded the "AZALEA", which then hunted the submarine for about 1½ hours, without success. She did not rejoin the Convoy, as she had 159 survivors on board, but proceeded direct to Gourock, where we landed on the 15th April.

10. I am of the opinion that the escort provided was inadequate for the size of this Convoy.

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U Boat 118 was sunk 12th June 1943 West of Canary Islands by air attack in position 30°49' N, 38° 21' W. The U boat's C.O. was Korvettonkaiptan Werner Czygan.