

## Melbourne Branch

The Log  
The Monthly Newsletter of the Melbourne Branch of  
The Company of Master Mariners of Australia Limited

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**NEXT MEETING 31st July 2019**

**Dr. Jay Ludowyke**

**Carpathia and Titanic**

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## From the Branch Master

The Normandy Landings was one of the significant events of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Last month in the LOG I wrote about the Burns Philp ship “Bulolo” which was headquarters ship for the landing on Gold Beach. This month we have the recollections of Martin Spencer-Hogbin who was involved in that historic event. Martin was an Officer on one of the ships that carried troops from England to Normandy in the days immediately following D Day. Martin has been a member of the Melbourne Branch for over 50 years.

### **“A REFLECTION” by Martin Spencer-Hogbin**

With June 25<sup>th</sup>, “The Day of the Seafarer” now behind us and with 3<sup>rd</sup> September, “Merchant Navy Day” ahead it is good to know that we are at last being recognised and appreciated, unlike the days after WW2 when seafaring families inverted their MN badges to read Not Wanted. In that regard it is pertinent to note that when watching the commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D Day on 6<sup>th</sup> June, including the magnificent pageant at Portsmouth and the ceremonies on the beaches, no mention was made of the contribution of the Merchant Navy to “Operation Neptune”

The contribution of Alfred Holt & Co. (Blue Funnel Line, Glen Line and three vessels manned and managed by the Company), was considerable consisting of “Glenroy”, “Glenean”, both of which had been converted to Armed Merchant Cruisers with special davits to accommodate landing craft, “Antenor”, “Ascanius”, “Samneva”, “Samness” and Empire Capulet”, the last three carrying vehicles, guns and ammunition. The only casualties suffered were “Samneva” torpedoed and then towed to the Solent and beached but was written off as a total loss. “Ascanius” serving as a depot ship was also torpedoed but was not severely damaged and was later back in service, also “Glenroy” which struck a mine, had her engine room flooded and had to be towed to Portsmouth. The mines were of the type dropped by aircraft and operated by the change of pressure caused by a vessel passing overhead and for which no successful method of sweeping had by then been developed.



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“Antenor” (pictured) on which I was serving as 4<sup>th</sup> Mate had also been a A.M.C. and now converted to a troopship was one of several troopships acting in convoy conveying U.S. troops from the Solent to Omaha and Utah beaches. The Solent at the time being so densely crowded with shipping that it was dubbed “Piccadilly Circus”. Convoy orders and other communications were transmitted by lamp from Calshot Signal Station at the Western corner of Southampton Water and was good practice for future examinations. “Antenor” carried about 2,000 troops and made the crossing on a frequent irregular basis and during my time there were no serious incidents. In fact my most abiding memory was the consistent music relayed throughout the ship. Popular recordings by such as Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and Artie Shaw etc. were so persistent that I can remember many of the numbers to this day. I expect the U.K. convoys to the East of us were playing Vera Lynn and I’m sure the music helped a great deal to divert the minds of the troops from what lay ahead.

I did feel that we were playing an important part in this operation, and although I obviously felt we were also contributing to the war effort over the preceding years, the Normandy invasion felt far more condensed and relevant to the ultimate victory.



“ANTENOR”

11,174 GRT    Twin screw 15Kts    1924 - 1953

## Speakers Summary



The 25<sup>th</sup> June is the International Day of the Seafarer. This UN endorsed observance day acknowledges the work of seafarers and brings attention to the issues affecting their work and lives. For our June meeting we invited Nigel Porteous, a Board member of the Mission to Seafarers, and James McCully the general manager of Stella Maris to speak about their organisations involvement in Seafarers welfare. Nigel started by noting that Female Participation is the theme for this year. Many women now command ships, Newcastle has a female Harbour Master and groups such as WISTA are growing in importance.

Nigel spoke about how the life at sea has changed particularly since the advent of container ships and the move to smaller crews. The good social life on board has gone, time in port is short and there is little opportunity for shore leave. This has led to mental health issues and a high incidence of suicide.

Seafarers welfare has been the subject of many conferences, reports and papers but there is little evidence of anything being done.

Nigel referred to the 2018 Annual Report of the Seafarers International Research Centre at Cardiff University. "Loneliness is like a shadow it follows you everywhere" was how a ships messman described his life at sea. Many studies including one done by AMSA report serious concerns on mental health.

Nigel would like organisations like COMMA to lobby the government to get IMO to use its power to improve the social working conditions at sea.

## Speakers Summary Contd



James McCully spoke about the problems of International crewing. In a crew of 22 it is not uncommon to have 6 different nationalities. There is little comradship and social cohesion. Often there is no direct link between the crew and the owners of the ship. Managers are appointed to run the ship and they in turn use agencies to provide the crew. The result is that nobody takes ownership of the crews wellbeing.

With quick turn arounds and high demands on the crew in port there is little time available for shore leave. Stella Maris provide many services to visiting seafarers including phone cards and computer time but admit electronic communication is no substitute for face to face contact and that many seafarers are onboard for far too long.

Both Nigel and James spoke about a particularly distressing fatal accident that occurred on a ship recently. Had it happened ashore all involved would have been given time off and counseling. On the ship the crew received no support and the ship had to sail on time. No concern was given to the cultural sensitivity of the crew following a death on board. The Chaplain who attended the ship was left in no doubt that the shipping company considered the cargo more important than the crew.

There is an urgent need for support for seafarers who suffer trauma. Seafarers are often reluctant to complain to the ITF or other organisations for fear of losing their job.

Without Stella Maris and The Mission to Seafarers the situation for many seafarers would be much worse. The Branch gave a donation to each organisation to assist them in their work.



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## St. Lawrence Seaway



The US Department of Transportation's Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation has announced that Hands-Free Mooring (HFM) is now operational in all St. Lawrence Seaway Locks.

The HFM system uses vacuum pads mounted on vertical rails inside the dock chamber to secure the ship as it is raised or lowered. Each pad provides up to 20 tons of holding force.

This is the first time this technology has been used in an inland waterway and is the most important technological advance since the seaway opened in 1959. Claimed benefits are enhanced workplace safety, lower operating costs and decreased transit times through the locks.

## Operation Pedestal

The 77<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of Operation Pedestal will be held at the Shrine of Remembrance at 1200 hrs on Sunday 11 August 2019.



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