

AMC/LSI Association of Vic

Armed Merchant Cruiser / Landing Ship Infantry

ABN 64 106 175 155
E: amclsivc@gmail.com
www.amclsi.navyvic.net



President Chris Harvey
2 Clyde St Oakleigh Vic 3166
M: 0412 390 686

Patrons: Bruce Candy (dec), Hiram Ristrom & Norm Tame. (dec).

Chris Harvey President AMC/LSI Association of Vic



Hiram Ristrom Patron of AMC/LSI Association of Vic



Max Tozer Vice President of AMC/LSI Association of Vic



Mac Hay
Secretary of AMC/LSI Association of Vic



STAY SAFE STAY HOME ANZAC DAY 2020

Mission Statement

To honour and remember those who served with the AMC/LSI including but not limited to
HMAS WESTRALIA, KANIMBLA, MANOORA & ASSAULT

H.M.S. “ MORETON BAY ”
armed merchant cruiser
manned by the R.A.N. 1939-41 by Max Tozer Vice president

Each ANZAC day after the march we make our way to our sacred tree located in the gardens not far from the Shrine, we all know located at the foot of our tree is a plaque. Every year I give that plaque a cursory glance just to see the name of my fathers ship H.M.A.S. Kanimbla, for although I know there are other ships mentioned on that plaque that name Kanimbla stands out and fills me with pride, I then move on and let the many other descendants who I suspect also glance at that honored name plate just to see their Dad's or Grand Dad's ship forever inscribed. It gives us a good feeling, for we know that they were the ships that our fathers went off to war a long way from home to fight for our freedom, and thankfully those same ships brought them home again.

We all know those three ships Kanimbla, Westralia and Manoora but how much do we know about the two other ships that share equal space on that important piece of metal. Those two ships are H.M.S. Moreton Bay and H.M.S. Arawa .In the spring of 1939 three liners are being fitted out in Sydney as Armed Merchant Cruisers they are Moreton Bay,Arawa, and Kanimbla, although when Moreton Bay was launched as a passenger liner on the 23rd of April 1921 the world was at peace and cruising around on a luxury liner was not a bad way to see the world and that was exactly what she was designed to do carrying passengers and mail between UK and Australia, but come 1939 things were not so peaceful and the Admiralty had other ideas and on the 27th of August 1939 the Moreton Bay was requisitioned and converted to an Armed Merchant Cruiser and commissioned on the 4th of September 1939 as H.M.S. Moreton Bay, she was to carry an armament of 7-6” guns 3-3” anti-aircraft guns plus some machine guns for anti-aircraft defence.



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The Moreton Bay was a British ship with a difference, for she was to have a compliment of 230 ratings and officers mainly Australian reservist sailors or “Rockies” as they called them, and they came from all walks of life and with very little naval training. To the permanent sailors they were weekend sailors, it would not be long however before the permanent sailors no longer looked down on them. The word “Rockie” was soon to become almost a term of endearment. I quote from a statement made by Tom Atkins, who was a “Gunner’s Mate” in 1939. “The Moreton Bay’s crew was very well disciplined, due mainly to the Commanders, C.P.O.’s and P.O.s. None of this would have been possible without the willingness of the men themselves. I was proud to be a member of a great ship’s company”.

On Melbourne Cup Day 6th of November 1939 she sailed for Hong Kong. During the next two years, the ships crew were to find themselves in various parts of the world, performing monotonous patrols, from the Northern Pacific Ocean, with snow and ice covering the decks, to convoy escort duties in the cruel sea of the North Atlantic. Moreton Bay, Arawa and Kanimbla were despatched to the China station with the ships at sea on patrol for several weeks at a time. The ships company were generally very happy with their accommodation, which was so much more comfortable and roomy living on a liner converted to a warship, compared to a normal fighting ship. The colourful island of Hong Kong gave the men a chance to relax and get away from the monotonous patrols at sea. The patrols were necessary to intercept enemy merchant ships escaping from Japanese ports. There were also German raiders operating out of those same ports, attacking and sinking Allied cargo vessels, German raiders had a distinct advantage in that they were able to attack swiftly and then retreat before units of the far Eastern fleet could locate and destroy them. The patrol period was usually about a month. This meant steaming up the Chinese coast, around the Korean coast into the Sea of



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Japan and right to the port of Vladivostock, then down to the tropic seas among the islands below Japan and beyond.

The Japanese were moving quickly southward into China from Korea, and Moreton Bay was ordered to assist in the evacuation of two battalions of British troops in a hurry. That night a terrible typhoon raged covering the ship with the coldest ice on earth!

It was 1940 and things were hotting up in the South China Sea. With the German Invasion of Norway in April 1940 the Norwegian ships also had to be intercepted and sent to Hong Kong. This move was carried out by the three Armed Merchant Cruisers, suddenly the Moreton Bay was ordered to Capetown to be fitted with magnetic mine detection equipment, the crew knew something big was about to take place. With this project completed in three weeks Moreton Bay made for Freetown, British West Africa convoy assembly point, thus beginning the most dangerous period of the ship's wartime history a very different role than that of a passenger liner and a very worrying time for the ship's company, a long way from home and facing the unknown as their ship was now an escort vessel protecting convoys in the North Atlantic Ocean.

Convoy ships carrying vital supplies to war areas were often slow and prone to breakdowns making them easy targets for Wolf Pack U Boats prowling the Atlantic, crew members on these old ships often referred to them as floating coffins. Convoys were often under attack not only by submarines but also surface raiders and enemy aircraft. When being attacked a convoy would usually scatter like birds leaving a nest, with the escort ships steaming out to do battle often with German Battle ships with far superior fighting capacity than anything we could offer as challenge, at best we could just hope the Germans would not risk damage to their ships and make a run for safer waters. The next 24 hours was spent rounding up the survivors of the convoy and slowly making our way to the NW coast of Ireland always a welcome sight.



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It is almost impossible to imagine the hardships of surviving on a ship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean during WW2. These trips for the Merchant Seamen were dangerous to say the least. If they were sunk and managed to survive their pay was stopped from the day they were sunk. They were faced with the extra hazards of bitter cold, giant seas with waves 60 feet high and biting winds of 60-80 mph, making the chill factor up to -50c. And of course there was the devilish hazards of war for good measure. Most convoys faced the same dangers- the main ones being U Boats and Condor aircraft, but there was always the danger from an enemy surface raider. For the crew of the Moreton Bay for much of the time there was either boredom by being on constant alert or by enduring watches of 4 hours on and 4 hours off.

If you were faced with the misfortune of being in the Atlantic Ocean without your ship as it has just been sunk your only hope was to find a life-boat, life –boats carried small distress transmitters. Even so, they had little chance of ever being found in that vast ocean. Signal-men aboard the Moreton Bay carried the memory of receiving haunting weak distress signals from the many poor souls in the life-boats.

Of the 21 Armed Merchant Cruiser's assigned to the Atlantic area in the first 2 years of the war 18 would be sunk. It is sad there is almost no mention or recognition in Australian Naval circles of Moreton Bay and Arawa. One supposes it is because they were RN owned, but they were manned by Australian Navy personnel.

Story by Max Tozer

**[Wreath Laying Ceremony for AMC/LSI Association of Victoria — Live Stream](#)
[Saturday 5th December 2020 at 11am.](#)**

Due to COVID 19 restrictions we are unable to make our annual pilgrimage to the Sanctuary at the Shrine of Remembrance, however the service will be broadcast via the internet. Go to Shrine of Remembrance website www.shrine.org.au Remembrance Service / Upcoming / Scroll down to 5 December 11am (AMC/LSI Association of Vic) / Click Stream box.

Viewing on Facebook

Shrine of Remembrance / Events / Upcoming events (December events are not up as yet). Interested/Going

Our Ceremony will be available for viewing on **Youtube** after the event.

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March, Frank Byrne, John Peck, Danny Bolton.
April, Ian Gardner, Kelvin Smibert, Bob Hutcheson, Kevin O'Malley.
May, Frank Birmingham, Steve Gooch, Bruce Brown.
June, Keith Overton, Ron Feben, Pat Phillips, Brian Sullivan Hiram Ristrom, Bill Galton.
July; Jim Davison, Frank Barrile, Dixie Lee, Don Eglinton, Alan Booth, Jack Austin, John Hooper.
August; Reg Baggs, Ron Kleinig.
September; Tom Fowler, Cecil Browning, Les Barton, Ern Tyler, David Nelson, Bill Baird.
October; Graham Knight, Reg May, Sam Aitchison, Ken Kemp, Frank McGovern.
Nov; Ray Phillips, Bryan Peters, Neil Morris, Tas Luttrell.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

We wish to thank & acknowledge the following generous donations received from our members.

If you wish to donate to AMC/LSI Association of Vic, you can send a cheque to :- **The Treasurer, 2 Clyde Street, Oakleigh Vic 3166** or

Transfer funds to Westpac Bank
BSB No 033 070 Account No 42 2541

Hiram Ristrom, President Kanimbla Association of Vic.

Helen Jones in memory of her father Keith Jones.

VALE

We regret the passing of the following Veterans or their wives. Our sincere condolences go to their family, friends and shipmates.

Pt John Davey (Hiram Ristrom brother in-law) 11/05/20.

Coxwain Wilson (Bill) Tattersall, 05/06/2020 age 96.

PO Roy Seiboth, Oct 2019 age 95.

Cyril Ward Bayly-Pike, 25/11/2019, age 95.

Joyce Hooper wife of John / President AMC/LSI of S.A.

AB Gordon Keith Krause, 30 July 2020, age 95, NSW.

E.R.A. Keith Leslie Tonkin, 18 August 2020, age 97.

L/S Norm Tame, 13 Oct 2020, age 97, Melbourne.

Bill Tattersall



If you wish to have your **ASHES** committed to the sea by the Royal Australian Navy (serving or ex-Navy members only) make your wishes known to family beforehand, and families may request to commit the **ASHES** of their Family Navy Member to sea, by contacting Defence Community Organisation, Locked Bag 18, Darlinghurst N.S.W. 2010 or send an e-mail to LCDR Mark Burton at mark.borton4@defence.gov.au

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT: This newsletter has been a collaboration of team work from the AMC/LSI Association of Vic Committee Carol Zeuschner, Mac Hay, Max Tozer, Hiram Ristrom and Chris Harvey.

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