

# 2/3 A.H.S. CENTAUR ASSOCIATION, INC.

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## NEWSLETTER MAY 2021

Because of the uncertainty in these COVID times, Centaur Commemorations this year will be affected by whatever restrictions are in force on the date proposed. Some plan to go ahead as normal, some will be adapted to the prevailing conditions and some will be cancelled for this year altogether. If you hope to attend any that are advertised in this newsletter, please contact the organisers nearer to the time.

### **Brisbane, Qld.**

**Friday 14 May 2021, 10 am for 10.30 am.**

**Please note change of location.**

The Service will be held at the Australian Catholic University, 1100 Nudgee Rd, Banyo, with morning tea to follow. Take the main entrance off Nudgee Road which is very close to an entry/exit point of the freeway. The chapel is site 201. General parking is to the left of the main access road. A map of the layout can be found at <https://www.acu.edu.au/locations/brisbane/brisbane-campus-map>.

Enquires: contact the Secretary,  
Georgina Blomfield 0411695317, or email:  
[admin@centaurnursesfund.org.au](mailto:admin@centaurnursesfund.org.au)

### **Canberra, ACT.**

**Friday 14 May 2021 at 4.45pm.**

**Please note change of time**

The Last Post Ceremony is ticketed due to COVID-19 and tickets for the Centaur Last Post Ceremony are available now via the Memorial's website ([awm.gov.au](http://awm.gov.au)).

**Ticket entry begins at 4.20pm** with the ceremony beginning at 4.45pm. The ACT Government requires visitors to check in using the Check in CBR app. If you don't have the app or a smart phone, staff can assist on entry. For those unable to attend personally, the ceremony can be viewed by live stream on <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKmio2JTTLpxC3gniK1f2IA>

The Centaur casualty to be commemorated will be Pte Brian Burrett, Ship's Medical Staff.



### **Melbourne, Vic.**

**Sunday 16 May, 2021.**

**Shrine of Remembrance.**



A special for this year will be a guided tour of the Imagining Centaur Exhibition at the Shrine of Remembrance before the Centaur Last Post Service.

Program:

2.30pm. Guided tour. Meet at the Visitors Centre.

3.30pm. Afternoon tea.

4.45pm. Last Post Centaur Service. Assemble at the Forecourt at 4.30 for a 4.45 start time.

The Shrine is located on Birdwood Avenue and St Kilda Road, 1.3km from Flinders Street Railway Station. You can walk or take a tram from the city. Take any southbound tram from Federation Square (except Route 1) to Stop 19, the Shrine of Remembrance.

Please RSVP to the Secretary if you will be attending and whether you wish to lay a wreath. [jthomas44@bigpond.com](mailto:jthomas44@bigpond.com) or tel: 02 6564 8400 (answering machine)

For any questions or assistance on the day please contact our Melbourne Representative, Tom Evans, on Mobile 0438 123 265.

### **Macksville, NSW.**

Unfortunately there will be no Centaur Commemorations in Macksville this year. Hopefully they will be resumed in 2022. Readers may wish to make their own commemorations at the War Memorial in River Street.

## Caloundra, Qld.

**Friday 14 May 2021 at 11am.**

At the Memorial in Centaur Park. Morning tea after the Service at Caloundra RSL. Anyone wishing to lay a wreath please see RSL Sub-Branch President and Service Chair, Heather Christie, before the Service begins. Enquiries: Caloundra Sub-Branch President, Heather Christie, tel: (07) 5438 5800.



## Dapto, NSW.

Dapto-Port Kembla RSL sub-Branch plans to hold a small service with only a few people attending as they did last year.

## Concord, Sydney. NSW.

Centaur Commemorative Services at Concord ceased in 2019. Because of COVID there was no Service last year. The Association is in consultation with the chaplains at Concord Hospital with a view to reviving the Centaur Commemorations in the chapel in the future. Such a Service would be organised by the Association and be smaller and more intimate than those previously conducted by the hospital. We hope to have news for you later in the year for a revived Service in 2022.

## Centaur Primary School, Banora Point, NSW. Friday 14 May 2021.

Because of the uncertainty of the times Centaur Primary School will hold their commemorations at the school. COVID restrictions at the time of planning would have made a return of the whole school to the Memorial at Point Danger prohibitive. The Service will be limited to students, parents and a few invited guests.

## Point Danger, NSW.

**Friday 14 May, 2021, 10am**

The Grubmier (Robert Grainger MN) and Gilbert (Ptes Alan and Fred Fortier 2/12th FA) families invite readers to meet them at the Memorial for an informal commemoration. There is no program planned, just a meeting of like-minded people who wish to remember and pay homage to those who served on the Centaur. Afterwards it is proposed to repair to the nearby café for refreshments and fellowship.

## The Centaur Memorial Fund for Nurses, Brisbane

*Contributed by Georgina Blomfield,  
Hon. Secretary, CMFN*

The Fund continues to be active in Brisbane. It serves to honour all nurses lost in war through providing an annual Centaur scholarship to a PhD student of Nursing or Midwifery.

The activities underway for this year are fundraising; AGM and presentation of the 2021 CMFN Centaur Scholarship; participation in the Nurses Anzac Eve Vigil in Anzac Square Brisbane on Friday 23 April and the Annual Commemorative Service on 14 May.

Our recent movie night and raffle was successful with over 100 supporters enjoying the acclaimed Australian film 'The Dry' at the historic Red Hill Cinema.

The AGM was held by Zoom this year on Monday 29 March. On this occasion the successful 2021 Scholarship applicant received their award. It is always interesting and rewarding to hear of the progress and research findings of current and previous Fellows.

The CMFN also presents annually the Joy Croker Medal to the highest performing student of Nursing and Midwifery at each of the seven Queensland Universities that have a school of nursing and midwifery. This prestigious award raises the profile of the CMFN and is always graciously received.

On Friday 23 April, 2021 at 6pm in Anzac Square Brisbane we held our annual Nurses' Candlelight Vigil, in the presence of His Excellency the Honourable Paul de Jersey AC, Governor of Queensland.

Friday 14 May. As always the Commemorative Service will be held on 14 May at 10 am. This year it will be at the Australian Catholic University Banyo, with morning tea to follow. This very moving service allows an hour for family and friends to remember those lost in the sinking of AHS Centaur, and pause to remember and pray for world peace.



*The Centaur Memorial at Point Danger*

*The Centaur Association is not only about commemorating the past. We also look to the future, and are very pleased to hear stories of today's youth, and those who provide opportunities for them in the name of the Centaur.*

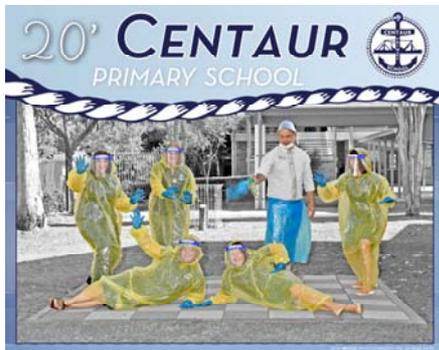


## **Centaur Primary School Banora Point, NSW**

Life wasn't easy for anyone in 2020, and especially for those trying to run a school and keep children from falling behind in their education. Parents became teachers and teachers became IT specialists. More than ever was the need for the school to stay connected to students, families and the wider community, thus increasing the workload of the administration staff.

Centaur Primary School remained open. Staff worked from home on a roster basis to minimise the number of adults on site. Children were encouraged to stay home as far as possible to maintain social distancing. Teachers kept in contact with their students using technology and were able to monitor students' progress through online learning at home, and gave support when needed.

Mr Stephenson, the Principal supported families that were in employment even those in jobs that weren't deemed "essential". Students who attended school were completing the same curriculum as those learning from home. Classes were combined due to limited staff.



*A moment of levity as the Principal and admin. staff have fun with the PPE which was sent to all schools. It's moments like these that helped staff cope with the seriousness of the pandemic and the difficulties they had to face.*



On a lighter note, the school adopted a mascot named Warjum. A competition was held across the school for students to design a mascot and the winning entry from Indy Honda-McBride was a whale (Warjum is an aboriginal word for whale). The colours on the costume represent the colours of the sporting houses, Moss, Savage, Lawson & Colefax, named after four Centaur casualties from the Tweed district.

casualties from the Tweed district.

## **TS Centaur, Maleney, Qld**

### **A Youth Organisation with a difference!**



Recognised as an official unit in January 1997, TS Centaur provides the opportunity for the youth from Maleney and surrounds to acquire skills in leadership, self-discipline, confidence, communication and teamwork by taking part in sailing, kayaking, power boating, bushwalking, rifle shooting, drum band, parade activities, organised camps with other units, and many other activities.

The Australian Navy Cadets is a voluntary youth organisation, open to young people between 12 (turning 13 in the current calendar year) and 19 years of age and supported by the Royal Australian Navy.

TS Centaur, commemorates the Australian Hospital Ship Centaur (AHS 47) and utilises the Crest and Motto of HMS Centaur, a British Light Aircraft Carrier. The unit has a long term connection with the Centaur Memorial Fund for Nurses in Brisbane and enjoys participating in their annual Commemorative Service on 14 May each year.

All cadets are educated in the history of AHS Centaur, and it was their choice that the new safety boat be named after Sister Savage, the only nurse to survive the sinking. Sister Savage's family graciously gave permission for the boat to be named 'Sister Ellen Savage GM'. Unfortunately because of COVID restrictions they have not yet been able to hold a naming ceremony.

The Centaur Association welcomes the new leadership of PO John Gutke and PO Tayler Gale, and offers a very special thank you to LEUT Eddie and LEUT Linda Vann who have been leading the Unit for many years, almost since the inception.



*Cadets with the new safety boat, Sister Ellen Savage GM.*

Celebrating our own

## JOAN FISHER, OAM

Sgt, Australian Army Medical Women's Services,  
 Veteran of NMHS Oranje, Morotai, Labuan,  
 Foundation Member of the 2/3 AHS Centaur Association.  
 Centenarian.



At war's end, veterans of NMHS *Oranje* and the survivors of the 2/3 AHS *Centaur* formed the Oranje-Centaur Group. They created a magnificent banner, honouring those who served on both hospital ships, and they marched proudly under that banner in Sydney until there was no one left. In more recent years they were joined by *Centaur* descendants. They graciously saw us as the new generation, someone to pass on the torch, and the Association is now the custodian of that banner.

Joan lost eighteen of her close colleagues when the *Centaur* was sunk. In her retirement she made a wall hanging depicting the sinking, and down in the water she had stitched eighteen seed pearls, one for each life lost. Each was a friend and colleague, and she shed many tears in the making.

Joan grew up in Sydney's inner west and when war was declared she joined the Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) at the age of nineteen. Her branch was in Strathfield where she learned first aid and nursing skills, before working as a volunteer in Ward 8 in the new Concord Military Hospital.

As soon as she was 21 in 1941 Joan enlisted in the Army for overseas service. She was taken on strength at 113th AGH Concord where she had been volunteering. Some months later, she was transferred to Goulburn where Kenmore Mental Hospital was being converted to the 114th AGH. Joan was next called to serve on the Netherlands Military Hospital Ship, *Oranje*, a luxury liner newly converted at the expense of the Dutch Colonial Government and loaned to the Australian Government for the duration. At last Joan had her wish to serve overseas. *Oranje* plied the Indian Ocean, taking wounded from the Middle East to hospital in Durban, and bringing wounded Australian and NZ troops home.



It was on board ship that Joan forged many friendships, living and working with the same people in a confined area. They were happy days, but the hospital staff were ever conscious of their vulnerable

situation. Though on loan to the Australian Government, the Axis Powers regarded *Oranje* as the property of an occupied country. Should she fall into enemy hands she would have been classed as 'spoils of war'. She was painted as a hospital ship, but she travelled blacked-out at night. She relied on the expertise of her Master, Captain Potger, and her speed and manoeuvrability. Joan said they knew they were in danger when they felt the ship zig-zagging...

Young nurses were not allowed ashore alone or even in groups of girls; each had to have a male escort and move around in a mixed group. Joan's regular escort was Pte George Ockwell and they developed a very close friendship. In her book "Come with Me" Joan described George as a typical Australian lad from a devout Baptist family. He was of average height with brown hair and eyes and a cheerful personality. He enlisted with Ray Hutchison, another Baptist boy who also wanted to heal the sick and injured.

The first few days on board were devoted to boat drill, orientation, nursing lessons and evacuation exercises. On one such occasion they were put into teams and given secret instructions of their role. Joan was 'injured' in the pan room of B Deck with Captain Hindmarsh in charge of her team. Those who were 'in the know' simply waited at the ward door and jumped on the stretcher as it ran past. Joan, being new, took her role very seriously, and lay down on the pan room floor awaiting rescue. Much to the ire of Captain Hindmarsh, the team lost valuable time searching for their 'patient', and came last in the competition. Afterwards Captain Hindmarsh said to Joan: "I could bloody well throttle you." "That's how he used to speak," Joan said.

The *Oranje* regularly plied between the port of Aden and Durban where wounded from the desert campaign, mostly British, some South African and other Allied forces were taken to the military hospital in Petermaritzburg in Natal. They made several voyages and became adept at rapid embarkation. There was much relief when they left the danger of Aden and were in the Red Sea, heading for Durban.

The third trip back from Tewfik to Durban was their last as the victorious 9th Division were on their way home from the Middle East. War in that part of the world had ended for them, and they were needed to fight the Japanese in the New Guinea campaign. *Oranje* carried only the wounded and the theatre worked overtime removing old plasters placed on wounds in desert conditions. The wounds underneath were festering and the smell was appalling.

There was no longer any need for Australia to maintain the *Oranje*, and it was too big for the shallow waters and inlets of New Guinea, so it was handed back. *Oranje* continued her good work of caring for the wounded for the rest of the war, with British medical staff replacing the Australians.

*Oranje* was replaced in the Australian theatre of war by the newly converted *Centaur*— ‘our wee tub’ as she was described by the liaison officer Sister Mary McFarlane. And “It wouldn’t take much to sink this,” said Red Cross Representative Mr Darwin Clark rather prophetically, as they gazed at the two ships moored together in Sydney Harbour, the *Centaur* looking like ‘a little puppy at the heels of its master’. But *Centaur*’s smaller size and shallow draft admirably suited her to the current situation. Being smaller, *Centaur* didn’t need as many staff and Joan reluctantly said farewell to friends and colleagues as the VAs and others became land-based again.

At this point to their great surprise they discovered they were no longer VAs but AAMWS (Australian Army Medical Women’s Services). They had to start from scratch and do an army rooky course at Ingleburn Barracks in Sydney. They also had to say goodbye to the beloved blue uniforms of the VAD and change to drab khaki. On the upside, Joan was reunited with her old nursing friends from her pre-*Oranje* days, and they had a hoot of a time trying to complete physical endurance tasks designed for men. Many efforts ended with them collapsed in laughter. Somehow they survived and managed to pass, and on the completion of the course, the others rejoined their hospitals and the *Oranje* girls were scattered. With two others, Joan went to Bathurst, while some went to the Atherton Tablelands.

Let Joan tell us in her own words what happened next:

“I was in Bathurst and it was here on 14 May 1943 that I was to hear about the saddest event of my life. I was on night duty when Ron Johnson, our RSM from the *Oranje* came to my ward with the most shocking news. The *Centaur* had been sunk by a Japanese submarine off the south coast of Queensland; no word of survivors at this stage... Only 29 of the ship’s crew, 34 army medical personnel, one nurse, Sister Nell Savage, and the ship’s pilot survived the attack with 268 lost as we were to find out later. A terrible tragedy! Ron and I wept for our wonderful shipmates. George was on board and I had only just sent him a letter. I was heartbroken. Not only George but our officers, including Matron Jewell, Sister Adams who was my Sister on the homeward journey, all died. George’s mate Ray was also on board as well as Captain Hindmarsh whom I had frustrated in our evacuation practice; now all lost. It was some time before we heard that Ellen (Nell) Savage had survived with nine of our lads ... That day 14 May will always remain the saddest day of my life. Over seventy years later and tears still choke me when I think of what happened to that ship and my dear friends.”

With a little conspiracy the ex-*Oranje* nurses on the Atherton Tablelands and those in Bathurst managed to get themselves reunited at 2/6 AGH on the Tablelands and remained firm friends for the rest of their lives.

On the Tablelands they lived in tented accommodation, with their AGH nearby. For the most part they made their own fun and had many adventures in between the seriousness of treating wounded soldiers from N.G.

As the war in the Pacific was drawing to a close in July 1945, Joan and her companions left Australia on 2/1 AHS *Manunda* for ‘destination unknown’. They passed off the coast of Hollandia, New Guinea and journeyed to Morotai Island in the Molucca Island group, where they stayed with the 2/9th AGH. Here Joan met up with *Oranje* girls, Norma Fisher and Winsome Lipcomb. Norma’s brother Mac was a patient at 2/5th AGH. Joan says: “I didn’t take much notice of him, but he seemed a nice man... Amazingly Mac was to come into my life a few years later and we would renew our acquaintance.”

*To be continued*



*Oranje medical staff in happier times. One third of those in this photo perished on Centaur.*

## Christmas on a Hospital Ship

From a letter written by Sister Haultain, formerly of Hay Base Hospital, to a friend in Hay, as published in the Riverina Grazier Friday 28 May 1943, and reprinted in a book compiled for Ingleburn RSL Sub-branch by Peter McFarlane.

“My very dear ‘Hay Mother’ - It was a thrill to get a letter from you yesterday. All the time I was on the *Oranje*, well over a year, I got very little mail, as it always seemed to be a lap behind — in the Middle East when we were at home, and vice versa.

“We were lucky enough to have three trips to South Africa, one for docking and two carrying patients. You can just imagine how excited we were to hear that we would be taking the first British casualties from the Alamein battle to Durban. It was a new and very happy experience looking after men from famous regiments and especially the 52nd Highland Division.

“The Tommies and Jocks were quite a different proposition to our own Australians — much quieter and very shy. They were so used to discipline that even a ‘good morning’ from a sister brought them out of their beds and to attention. This state of affairs didn’t last long as we always treated the boys as patients first and soldiers afterwards. The majority of them were badly knocked about and out of a ward of 45 I had 30 stretcher cases. But game! Not a complaint from one of them. Most of them were so tired that they slept most of the day, waking up only for meals and dressings. We were flat out from six in the morning until nine at night and only wished the day was twice as long.

“Our second trip was much lighter as far as nursing was concerned, and we had more time to make friends with the boys who this time included quite a number of South Africans. We had Christmas at sea and made up our minds to give the boys as nearly a home Christmas as possible.

“Here the Red Cross turned up trumps. Mr Clark, the representative on board, let us have pretty well anything we wanted. We made up almost 700 stockings. We put in a pair of socks, a handkerchief, a packet of cigs and some chocolate with a bow of bright crinkle paper round the packet. The night staff played Santy and weren’t the boys thrilled in the morning. We had been practising carols for a week beforehand and on Christmas Eve, beginning on the top deck at 9pm worked our way all through the wards to the strains of Silent Night, Good King Wenceslas and all the old favourites. We carried torches covered with red paper, the result being most pleasing. In nearly every ward the patients joined in so I think they really enjoyed it.

I forgot to tell you about Christmas dinner.

The Mess was decorated with bunting and streamers, with a large tree trimmed in the



usual way with tinsel and coloured lights topped with a large silver star. Instead of using electric lights, there were coloured candles on the tables. The usual Christmas fare was served but didn’t the lads cheer when blazing plum puddings were carried in. We had been saving up 3d bits for ages and were able to collect about 300 so that most if not all the boys had something out of the pudding. My blind laddie was thrilled to find two in his helping — one that got there legitimately, and one that I had slipped on to his plate, just in case.

“It is with real regret that we disembarked our boys, but as we were in Durban for a few days while the ship was getting her bottom scraped we went to the military hospital at Petermaritzburg about 10 miles away to see them settled in their new home.

“The hospital is in a beautiful spot on a slight hill some miles out of the town itself — no traffic noises, no buildings surrounding it — just green fields and peace! What it must have meant to those poor lads you can just imagine. The nurses were mostly Canadian, but the V.A.s were South Africans. The former wear a most attractive uniform of royal blue with a snowy apron on the bib of which is a large red cross. They all seemed such nice girls, smiling and eager to make the boys happy and comfortable. The ward for the blind boys, and I had one — a boy of twenty one — was ideal. Round it was a garden of sweet scented flowers with a little sunken lily pond at one end, where the boys used to dabble their feet on very hot days, much to their enjoyment, but to the detriment of the lilies, I’m afraid.

“I’m terribly sorry that I will not be able to visit Petermaritzburg again, particularly as it was there that I met Miss Edith Campbell. I’m sure you’ve heard of her — she was known as The Durban Signaller in the last war. I believe she met every troopship (Australian) that came to the port and entertained vast hordes of diggers. She still loves anything in a slouch hat and keeps open house for the Aussie sailors.

*(cont. next page)*

*Sr Haultain's letter cont.*

"Our home voyage was a most enjoyable one, lovely weather and a six week's trip, as we went to New Zealand first and stayed there a fortnight. Even the sickest of the patients had improved out of sight with sea air, peace and good food. Every one was glad to be home again.

"We were given a fortnight's leave and told that our unit was to be disbanded. We were all very much upset as we had been very happy in our job and hated the thought of settling down to life ashore again. After ten days at home I was recalled to barracks and told that I along with most of the Australian staff of the "O" had been appointed to the *Centaur*. She is a tiny little ship, about one-sixth the size of our luxury liner but in spite of that she has been marvellously converted and very well equipped; she carries nearly half as many patients as the "O". We have done two trips already up north, and missed excitement up there by less than 24 hours, much to our disappointment.

"Still as things seem to be warming up, I daresay we will have all the active service we want..."

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**Joan Fisher** can add to that two weeks in New Zealand on their final voyage:

"We sailed east from Australia and landed in Wellington, much to the delight of the New Zealand servicemen. The Aussies were livid. All they wanted to do was get home to their loved ones and here they were being taken away from their shores to New Zealand. Captain Potger had heard about the submarines in Sydney Harbour and he didn't want to risk it.

"We arrived a few days after an earth tremor in Wellington and we were amazed to see cracks in the roadway and people were very nervous of another quake. After we had disembarked the New Zealand lads, the captain pulled away from the wharf a few metres to prevent the Aussie patients from leaving the ship, and now it was only attached by hose lines.

"However this didn't deter three of my patients, one with crutches over his shoulder, sliding down the hoses to the wharf and rapidly disappearing into the crowd. They were impatient to leave for home. Somehow they managed to scrounge a lift back to Australia. One lad had borrowed £10 from me and to my surprise, when we docked in Sydney twenty days later, there he was on the wharf with his hand in the air, saying: 'See, I told you I'd pay you back, and here it is.' I couldn't believe my eyes!"

## ROLL OF HONOUR

Some tributes published in the Sunday Mail (Qld) on the first anniversary 14 May 1944

CRIPPS—a tribute of love and remembrance of my loved Son, QX23456, Pte Leslie Joseph Cripps, & his brave comrades of the 2/12 Field Ambulance AIF who lost their lives in the sinking of the hospital ship *Centaur*, May 14th 1943. Loved in life, honoured in death, their duty done. Inserted by his loving Mother, A. Cripps.

CRIPPS—in sad and loving memory of our Son and Brother, QX23456, Pte Leslie Joseph Cripps. 2/12 Field Ambulance who lost his life on the hospital ship *Centaur*. Treasured memories of one so dear, Are oft recalled by a silent tear, Dearer to memory than words can tell, Is the one we have lost and loved so well. Loving and kind in all his ways, Upright and just to the end of his days, Sincere and true in heart and mind, What a wonderful memory to leave behind. Inserted by his loving Mother, Father, Brothers and Sisters.

FORREST, QX24017, John Matthew—A sad but proud & loving tribute to the sacred undying memory of our beloved Brother & Brother-in-law, & all other gallant souls who died as a result of the treacherous sinking of the hospital ship *Centaur* by enemy action, 14th May, 1943. Inserted by his loving Brother, Herbert, (9th Div., A.I.F.) & Sister-in-law, Grace.

FORREST. QX24017 John Matthew.— A tribute to the honoured memory of our dear Friend, who made the supreme sacrifice in the sinking of the Hospital Ship 'Centaur,' 14th May, 1943. He gave his life for others. Inserted by Mr. & Mrs. Hugh O'Loan & Catherine, "Tramore," Indooroopilly.

### Disclaimer:-

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### OUR RATIONALE

To honour those who gave their lives on 2/3 AHS Centaur.

To provide a means of communication for Survivors, Descendants, Relatives, Friends & Organizations interested in 2/3 AHS Centaur

To help the healing process which for many still continues.

To ensure that the memory never fades, and the facts are not forgotten by succeeding generations.

To turn a tragedy into a triumph, and to foster a peaceful and forward-looking attitude.



## 56th Annual Merchant Navy Commemoration

within the Merchant Navy Memorial Garden  
Rookwood Necropolis Sydney, Sunday 11 April 2021



2/3 AHS Centaur was represented as usual by our president Mr Richard Jones at this very moving annual commemoration. The officiating clergy were Sister Mary Leahy OAM, Chaplain, Apostleship of the Sea, the Rev Tey Un, Head of Mission to Seafarers, and Mr John Kewa, Lay chaplain, Mission to Seafarers at Port Kembla. Accompanying music and bugle calls were provided by the Bankstown City Band.

The Guest of Honour delivering the 2021 Merchant Navy Address was Commander Michael Oborn, CSN, RAN, Commander Shore Force.

In his introduction and opening remarks, Mr. David Field (Chairman Merchant Navy War Memorial Fund) made special mention of the efforts over many years by Richard Jones, President, and Jan Thomas, Secretary, of the 2/3 Australian Hospital Ship Centaur Association. The Association works to ensure the ongoing remembrance of those who lost their lives in the sinking of AHS Centaur in May 1943, and supporting the families who were left bereaved. In the horrendous sinking of AHS Centaur, 268 lives were lost out of the 332 medical and merchant navy personnel on board including Jan Thomas's father Captain Bernie Hindmarsh and Richard Jones's uncle Major Gordon Jones who were both doctors on board. Jan Thomas was unable to be here today but Richard Jones will be laying a wreath in memory of those lost on AHS Centaur.

Each year those merchant mariners who have 'crossed the bar' since the previous commemoration are remembered with Tennyson's poem of the same name, and their names immortalised.

The Opening Hymn: God is our Strength and Refuge from Psalm 46 with its refrain of confidence "God the Lord of Hosts is with us ever more" was stirringly sung to the tune of the Dambusters March accompanied by the Bankstown City Band.

This was followed by a reading from Matthew 8;23-27. - the story of Jesus calming the storm at sea was very pertinent.

During the Act of Remembrance Mr Don Kennedy OAM, read the Naval Ode in which the regular Ode is prefaced by: "They have no grave but the cruel sea, no flowers lay at their head, a rusting hulk is their tombstone, a-fast on the ocean bed." Don is president of the Merchant Navy RSL sub-Branch, Veterans Adviser to the Merchant Navy War Memorial Fund Ltd, and a long associate and staunch supporter of the 2/3 AHS Centaur Association.

Following the Last Post one minute's silence was concluded with the tolling of 8 bells. The 8 bells is recognised on board ship as the end of the watch and is a way of saying a sailor's or merchant mariner's own watch is over—a nautical euphemism for 'finished'.

After the wreath-laying and Reveille, plaques to deceased mariners that have been installed since the last annual commemorations were blessed.

The **Vision Statement** of the MNWFM is to ensure that the Australian Merchant Navy, a title that is 'Emblazoned in Battle and Honoured in Freedom' is recognised as an important part of Australian Maritime history and social culture.

The **Primary Objective** of the Fund is honouring the memory of Australian Merchant Navy mariners who gave their lives in service to their country in WWs I & II, and giving thanks for those that were able to return to their families.



Commander Michael Oborn, Sr Mary Leahy, and Mr Richard Jones, president, 2/3 AHS Centaur Association.

*Let us remember the Centaur - a vessel of mercy on the turbulent waters of a world at war.*