

## The Jack Secker Story



Life for me began at 7.10 am Saturday, 10/11/1934. Place: Hendon, Middlesex, England. Memories from two places, Harroweald (1-4years) and Wealdstone (4'ish until 1951) Home at Harroweald was bitsa memories, a front garden with lots of flowers and a white painted gate. I used to wait there in the afternoon for my older sister to come home from school. At that point in time there was no war and our family was Mum, Dad my sister and me. I can remember being sent up the road to some other kid's house to play with them. It was also so that I could

catch the measles from them and therefore become immunised. That was done to most kids for all the child diseases and it seemed to work well in those days. In those days too, each family could live on just Dad's wage unlike today when even Mum has to have two jobs to be able to just scrape by. Sometime in 1938 my sister and I contracted diphtheria. Within a couple of days we were both in hospital. My sister never came home again and I arrived home as a polio victim. It took Mum two years to be able to get me to walk again.

During this time, Hitler became a nasty man and plunged the world into 1939 when WW11 broke out. During this time Mum and Dad had been busy, and we acquired three lodgers by 1942. Mums Mum was bombed out of her home and came to live with us, and my younger sister and brother. Well I said Mum and Dad had been busy. The troubles we had were those provided by the war. Every thing rationed and in short supply. For what seemed like years, the Germans bombing London and surrounds. Education was the usual primary, juniors & seniors. Nothing startling but lots of fun most of the time, Then after that life got a little more serious as I went to College and was expected to start learning to go out in to the big big world. College life did not enthrall me as it wasn't at all like I expected, nor came very close to what I hoped for, so after three years I bugged out and joined the Vindicatrix.

Evacuation during the war was never an option for my Mum or for us kids. We had one spell away from London when Mum nearly had a nervous breakdown and the doctor advised her to go right away from home for 3 months. We did so and ended up at a relative's rather large flea ridden house in a twelve house village. One of which had the well for our water and another was the village shop. It was called Taverham in the county of Norfolk, and wow was it quiet compared to London.

I have often been asked if I was ever in the Sea Cadets? But NO I wasn't, but I joined just about every other youth group. Cubs, Scouts, Boys Brigade, Army Cadets, Air force Cadets. YMCA, both Junior and Senior Clubs. Local street football team. Swimming Club. Local Cricket Club. Table Tennis club team, (YMCA). At 16/17 I joined a Local Dancing club and got my Bronze Medallion, was training for my Silver when I joined the Vindi Boys

After leaving school at 13, went to Willesden Technical College to become a Carpenter. Three years later, very disillusioned left just before Christmas 1950 and became a temporary Postman to help out with the Christmas postal rush. (Even had to do an early round on Christmas morning) retired from there on Christmas Day and started work on New Years Day, in a sheet metal factory, (Adams Brothers & Burnley Ltd) Leaving that job about 7 weeks later to join the Vindicatrix on the 28th February 1951. After completing the Deck course.

I was in the Merchant Navy for about 10 years. Enough time to dodge the call-up for the army or better known as 'conscription' in those days. I preferred a 10-year stint in the MN as a fair exchange to possibly being shot in the Korean war. A few of my local friends were called up and about 6 of them were drafted to Korea. I know of two that didn't return. Odds of 30% against coming home again did not appeal to me. So I went to sea and my first trip was on the SS Kirriemore of the Runciman Line. Sailed from Cardiff for the West Indies to a place called Porto Padre to load bagged sugar. Every bag was loaded by hand into a sling on deck and the derricks and winches then lifted them into the hold. This was so the wharf management could create work for the men. They carried the sugar bags on their backs, up a very bouncy plank about 20' long and 6" x 2" to run up and the same sort of plank to go down again. No safety net either. It was amazing. These guys were on the run from daylight until dark, I do believe they were on piecework. There were no accidents and no hold-ups. My first trip to sea, and I had NO camera with me.

It took nearly three weeks to load all the holds FULL. I went to various and sundry other ships and trips until I went to the Moreton Bay (Aberdeen and Commonwealth Line) where I spent the next 2 years to and from Australia. She was a Migrant/cargo ship outbound and a Passenger/cargo boat homebound. Going home she always carried frozen lamb and mutton in all lower holds. Tween decks was bits and pieces of whatever they could load.

On one trip we loaded boxes of gold bars. Security on those few days of loading was tighter than a mouse's hole, and the wharfies still managed to misplace/borrow/steal a whole full box. Would you like to hear how it was done and why? OK! It all started as a joke between a wharf marshal and wharf gang boss. As usual, this sort of joke got serious after about the third schooner of ale. It ended in an £Aust100 bet that the gang could not steal a box of gold during the loading schedule. The rules were simple, it had to be done during the day of loading and not sometime after the day's work was completed. (That was the Why)

The scene was set at hatch No. 1. This was the closest hatch to the strong room in the fo'ard tween deck. There were 30 men on the team. It took two men to carry each box. (Gold is a heavy item) There was a section of proper ships gangway with a double cargo net slung underneath this access point. There was an armed guard at the bottom of the gangway, another at the top. There was an exclusion barricade raised at each end of the wharf and only special personnel were allowed in to the area. There was a 20foot walk from the gangway to the accommodation door with a guard halfway and another at the doorway. There was another guard about halfway to the strong room door. Outside the door was a tallyman, he was to scrutinise the box number and write it on to his scoreboard.

Early in the work, the tallyman was almost knocked over as he was very close to the doorway. Work stopped on both occasions whilst the wharf marshal was called in to authorise the man to move a little bit further back from the door to allow for better movement in that area. So the loading proceeded..... albeit slowly. Although there was 15 pairs of men to

work with, they were regulated very severely. At any time there was only 4 pairs actually engaged in the movement of boxes. One pair waiting at the truck to pickup, one pair at the top of the gangplank, one pair at the doorway and one pair at the tallyman. After the box number scrutiny, that pair moved into the strong room and stacked their box in the next spot in the pile. As they moved in to the strongroom the next pair started to walk towards the tallyman, the next pair proceeded to walk to the doorway and the last pair moved from the truck onto the gangway. All moving slowly. It was a boring job and by mid-morning people were losing interest.

There was NO POSSIBILITY that there would be a box missing at the end of the day. Too many guards, too many eyes and too much scrutiny all round. Now keep in mind the sequence of movements happening about 11.15am or so. Everyone is bored stupid, not really watching very much. The team has passed the scrutiny and are moving towards the strongroom doorway the other two teams on board are moving to their next point and the guys from the wharf are partway up the gangway. Suddenly the man walking backwards up the gangplank catches his heel on the cross strut and tumbles backwards to the deck pulling his mate down with him. Remember, these boxes are heavy. The guy on his back does not want this thing to land on his chest, so with a mighty heave, the box is shoved to the side and in an instant is over the side and crashing into the cargo nets hanging below, nearly taking the second bloke with it.

Results: The guys ahead of these two promptly drop their box and shouting loudly rush to help their mates. The next guys in the line stop and put their box down and start running back to see what is happening and if they can help. They too of course are shouting loudly for help. (That's two boxes of gold sitting alone on the deck) The guards are also looking at what is happening and shouting also. All this incredible noise has caused the tallyman to look around and stands up to see what is happening. The alleyway guard has rushed to the doorway to see what is happening ignoring the box of gold standing by itself on the deck. The two men entering the strongroom somehow walk past the door and one man takes the whole box, proving that they are not quite as heavy as they have been making out, and quickly moves to the next room along the alleyway, it is a crew members cabin. Opens the door slips the box inside and closes the door again then quickly moves back to the strongroom and re-joins his mate.

To the tallyman it looks as if they are exiting the room and both of them ask what the heck is happening? What is all the noise about? The tallyman says he doesn't know and takes a look into the room and all seems ok and neat and tidy. By the time he looks round again the two men are standing by the dropped box and one of them asks if they should stand and guard it until the right blokes come back. It wasn't until the work was finished that it was obvious that there was a box missing. The pattern was not complete as there were X amount boxes long and X amount of boxes high, so all rows should have been complete, and there was an unoccupied space in one line. There was of course instant pandemonium. The tally showed that all box numbers were correct and accounted for so how could there be one missing. Well, you now know how it was done. The marshal was informed where he would find the missing box and as far as I am aware he paid his debt and the wharf gang enjoyed a great evening out.

On that same ship, but not sure which trips, I do remember the threat of war in Egypt and the thought of the possibility of being stopped in the "Cut" waiting for the north bound convoy to come through. As night fell, the ship was darkened by order of the Captain and the passengers were asked to drop the deadlights to cover their cabin lights. That particular trip we didn't get

shot at, but on another of the trips we did get shot at a couple of times going through the Suez canal. Both South bound and North Bound runs through the canal. (Also the Durango (RMS) was shot at in Buenos Aries at a later date) In spite of all that, I bet I had more fun and certainly better conditions and pay than any squaddy. (In fact on at least a few trip through the canal we were approached in the Bitter Lakes area, by a group of swimming soldiers who asked us to stow them away on-board. We were being watched closely by the bridge and sometimes even the Master at Arms would also hang around the ships accommodation ladder, to prevent any unofficial boarding party.)

I retired from the Merchant Navy in November 1960, I believe, after doing a last trip on the RMS Durango down to BA and back, and I took my release then because my wife-to-be refused to marry me unless I stayed at home. So I took a job or two ashore to see if I could hack it. Could I, well I suppose I could have, because Dulcie and I were married the next June 1961. That was almost 51 years ago. I met her in 1959 and it took her 18 months to nail me down, and I'm glad she sure used some really good nails too.

We came out to Oz in April 1966 after I had endured 6 bl...y cold Christmases in England, The last bad one, in '64/'65 was the capper. We agreed to migrate to Australia as quick as we could. We could not afford to pay our way, so had to go through channels and became three £10 Poms. Yep, we had managed to create a baby daughter whilst we waited. We applied to Australia House, The Strand, London in January 1965 and it took us until February 1966 before we sailed on the Italian migrant ship "Aurelia". We arrived on Australian shores seven weeks later in Fremantle, It took us another six days to get to Sydney where we de-shipped and caught the train for Brisbane the same night and arrived at South Brisbane about midday the next day.

We have lived in four permanent houses, and about three 'in transit' places and two over 50's resorts. Our first permanent home was in Everton Park, north of Brisbane, next was Cleveland, south of Brisbane, then it was Cleveland South, then Thornlands. They were in Qld, Qld, Qld and Qld. The first was in the Pine Rivers shire, the next three were in The Redlands. Our in transits were spread out a bit. One was in Ipswich, one was in Carina and one was on Coochie Mudlo Island. The resorts have been Lewani Palms at Ormeau, Gold Coast, and Palm Lakes Resort, Bethania, Gold Coast/Logan Shire.

My employment in OZ have been varied from Production Manager in disinfectants, insect sprays, household detergents, for Hunter Products. Shift Super in a carton manufacturing factory, Gadsens of Stafford. AB/Crane driver on the Cape Moreton, Commonwealth Navaid Service (Lighthouse service). A self-employed, carpet cleaner, commercial & industrial painter, Interstate transport operator. My last paying job was with the Brisbane City Council, as a transport operative, (bus driver to the uninitiated). Though currently employed as a full time retiree and enjoying every minute.

I'm interested in Table-Tennis, as a player and a registered Umpire currently a registered Level 2 State Umpire. I almost made Level 3, but I stumbled at the last few questions. No excuses, just didn't interpret the meaning of them correctly. As a Player, I have played well over many, many years. I have many trophies to show. I never really made the top of the grade player, but I assure you, I made many of the top graders sweat heavily and have to play at the best of their ability. It has been a good run for me, but I realise that cunning and bastardry is not enough anymore. The younger players are too quick of eye and too fast on their feet and many have passed by me, and my standard, on the way to the top. One

particular player, in the 12/13 year age group, whom I used to beat on a regular basis, now makes me look like a rank beginner. (Last year he was No.62 in the World Rankings) I am very happy to see all these youngsters climbing through the ranks, as it means to me that the game will be played for many more years to come. It is amazing also to see how many seniors return to the fray after an absence of 20, 25 and occasionally even 30 years. Their resuscitation is a pleasure to see as that means our older ranks of players does not deteriorate too drastically, or too quickly either.

As an avid reader have no actual favourite books as such, but do have some preferred writers such as Thorne-Smith, Alistair McLean,. Each has a different type of story to tell, but both are fictional writers. There is another older writer by the name of Dennis Wheatley, and another more modern writer by the name of James Clavell. All have their own sphere of expertise and styles of writing”.

For the future my wishes, wants and requirements are not well matched. For instance, there are still many places I would like to visit personally. A virtual world visitation is not the same as doing things personally. I want to experience lots of other nationalities and their cuisines and the styles and types of living. That doesn't mean ALL nationalities, I do draw some lines in the sand. My requirements are the worst matched requirement of all. For instance, my health is not all I would like it to be. My doctor isn't much of a consolation as he says to many things, Well, you look pretty darned good to me. What do you expect at your age? Well to be honest, I suppose he is right, but I would like to be less lazy, I would like to eat less, I would like to exercise more and walk even more. All these things are 'up to me'. That is what I mean, I wish I wasn't so Lazy.

Lastly though, but not least by any means, is my available funds. I am quite comfortable, but I cannot just shut my book and say to my wife Dulcie, ok, let's pack a bag or two and take off to 'Timbuktu' wherever, whenever I like. As of my working life, I still have to save some pennies to go somewhere nice for a holiday. Then again, if I ever again go to the UK, I will go only if I can travel 1st class, and would rather do it by sea anyway. All things being even, I can't grumble, I am warm, well fed, comfortable and still mobile. Looking around in just this village I live in, I have much to be thankful for. Really my "Bucket List" is not overly full as I have done most things I wanted to throughout my life. So, roll on breakfast.