

The Allan Burrow's Story



Born in Tottenham, London in May 1939 and christened on the 3rd September. When we all got back home after the ceremony Chamberlain was on the “wireless” telling everyone that “we are at war with Germany” and I got the blame!! I think they said I was a loose cannon!!! Fancy that eh!

I had an interest in the Sea Cadets and intended to join the Andrew but one time I was on a fortnight summer camp aboard the cruiser, HMS Dido in Pompey

Harbour and one of the standby crew, (what an easy posting that was!) an old salt commented that he'd spent more time at shore stations than at sea! That put me off the Andrew.

Leaving school at the tender age of 16 years went to the Vindi for three long months in 1955 and left there as a smooth a**** deck boy!! The food was lousy, always hungry but would you believe it I actually put on weight!, and for quite some time I wondered whether I had made the right choice but I was made Bosun of C Section and I think that was due to my Sea Cadet training!

I was actually a “Company man” before I went to the holiday camp so I knew to which company I was going so most of my sea time was with NZSCo with one trip on Union Castle – that was quite enough – and quickly back to the good old NZSCo and then a stint with GSNCo and rose to the dizzy heights of a hairy a**** AB.....

Upon leaving the Vindi I joined the Rangitoto of NZSC on the 24/9/55, did three consecutive trips on her and finally paid off in London on the 23/20/56. Following this joined the Pipiriki on the 7/12/56 in London and on to Liverpool where the stevedores worked around the clock to get her away by Christmas Eve, otherwise she wouldn't have gone until after the New Year (b***** stevedores!!). The day before we sailed the Bosun had me and an AB over the side painting the name and generally tidying up the bow area. This AB was rueing the day he signed on and had been thinking up ways to get out of it and he must have thought that at last he had found a way. Suddenly he said, “hang on real tight”. “Why” says I, “Because I'm going to fall off this painting stage”. “In this temperature”, I remarked, “you must be barmy”. “Don't you know that if you fall into this stinking dock you are taken to hospital for a couple of days in case you catch something”. And with that in he went, paint, trays, rollers, the lot! Nearly had me in too the mad bugger. He was very quickly carted away and apart from packing his bags and putting them at the top of the gangway, thought no more of it.

The following morning we singled up one deckie short. Pilot came aboard and down river we went. Over went the pilot ladder as the pilot boat hove into view and there on the foredeck with his s bags was our old mate the AB! Apparently the Mate told the doctors that he would be sadly missed so they pulled out all the stops and lo and behold here he was climbing back aboard, and the Mate looked so happy to see him too!! That trip lasted almost 6 months and he never lived it down! That trip we went to Aussie and came home via Suez just after it had been opened the first time. We had a Russian pilot and a Gyppo interpreter. Paid off in Falmouth on the 1/6/57.

Got the train back to London, got a cab home, the cabbie sat on his a*** while I loaded my bags aboard. Got back home and paid him his fare, he then said, "what no tip". I replied, "So you want a tip do you, well, if you want extra money I suggest that you get off your fat a*** and earn it", and would you believe he never even said goodbye!!!

Went back and did another trip on the Rangitoto (I was missing those Kiwi girls!!!), and then thought I would have a go somewhere else and signed on the Dunnottar Castle, did just the one trip and went back to NZSC again, (I was missing those Kiwi birds again!!) Took the Hertford round to Swansea, picked up the Otaki and took her round to Liverpool, came back to London and signed on the Rangitane on the 5/7/58, did one trip on her – the Mate and I didn't get on and he suggested that I go forth and procreate – at my tender years, cheeky git.

My next ship was the Surrey of FSNC to NZ and this proved to be my last foreign going ship because by now I was married and nearly a dad.

After that my sea time was spent between home trade ships and the shore gangs waiting for national Service to finish. I went with GSNC and my first ship there was the Alouette of 276 tons Nett. She went up the Rhine with her main ports of call being, Nijmegen, Wesel, Duisberg, Krefeld and Dusseldorf dodging all the massive Dutch barges. One trip we left wherever it was to come back downriver. I was on the wheel and the old girl started to pick up quite a bit of speed with the fast running current and it was full on keeping away from these barges when out of the corner of my eye on the starboard bridge wing I saw movement, had a quick look and it was the skipper hanging onto the taffrail, wearing a big duffel coat, scarf, goggles and a Biggles helmet and yelling, "for Christ's sake slow this b***** thing down!!" Mad as March hares – all of us. Great days now sadly all gone.

The next ship was the Laverock, signed on in South Shields on the 31/8/59. She used to go to Italy, usually Genoa, Leghorn, Naples, Salerno and Palermo. One trip the usual skipper took time off over Christmas and we had a standby skipper filling in. The usual skipper used to stay relatively near the coast when rounding Gibraltar but this bloke decided to take the short cut straight across the Gulf du Lyon and a God Almighty storm blew up. This particular trip we had big bales of ex US and Canadian military uniforms/clothing stacked on No: 2 hatch (there was 2 hatches forward and one aft) and alongside No: 2 hatch on the port side was lashed a USAF truck. I was off watch and tucked nice and warm in my bunk down aft when the Mate called "all hands on deck".

The tarps on No: 1 hatch had come adrift and water was flooding into the hatch (the skipper had naturally brought her round into the wind), the wedges had worked loose and the tarps had come away. Not only that the truck was now half way up onto the boat deck with its rear wheels/axle crushing the companionway ladder and to make matters worse the bales on No: 2 hatch had come adrift because the port derrick had come loose when the truck had smashed the derrick support when it decided to get on the boat deck! The crew had mustered on the bridge wing and took all this in and there was no way anyone wanted to go down there with the seas that were coming aboard. The decision was made to come about and get the weather astern to give us a chance to go forward and secure everything. All the crew was called out complete with life jackets, both port and starboard life boats were swung out and made ready to drop and crew to stand by their boat.

I must say the "old man" did a masterly job in bringing her round stern first to the weather, but I swear if I had put my hand out I could have dipped it into the briny she rolled so much. Once she was stern to weather we all went onto the foredeck and the first job was to secure No: 1 hatch

which we did in very quick time I can tell you! Next was that crazy derrick merrily swinging from side to side and smashing the truck to a wreck and knocking some of the bales over the side (quite a few more went that way too which had nothing to do with the derrick!). The truck was jammed where it was, half way up the foredeck ladder and there it stayed until we got to Genoa. As I said some of the bales that had come adrift and were lying on the foredeck were a decided health hazard and went over the side as leaving them uncontained on the deck was not an option.

We finally we got the foredeck secured and got back on the boat deck where the skipper told us that he was bringing her round again into the wind because he was apprehensive that she might broach if the storm got any worse (God forbid!). After another nail biting about turn she was once more head to wind and the Mate told everyone to go below and get dry. Our accommodation was down aft under the main deck and the access was right aft with a companionway down below. The door was half off its hinges so opening the door didn't cause a problem, what I saw though did. Water was about 3 foot deep in our accommodation and it just covered the pot belly stove that stood in the middle of the space – which was very wet and decidedly cold. We were just deciding what to do to tidy this mess up when another “all hands on deck” was called. We had empty 44 gallon drums lashed along the taffrails either side of No: 3 hatch aft and now they had come loose as well. Back up on deck to sort that lot out, mostly by chucking them over the wall! Back down below but everybody was so knackered that the crowd decided to pack down in the mess room until daylight. In my cabin I had the top bunk but even that got wet but lucky me, I had an old navy hammock which I very quickly swung from the water pipes and hopped into it. Daylight and the mayhem could wait.

My next “cruise” was a two week trip on the Bosworth down to the Bay of Biscay to La Pallice and La Rochelle. She was owned by the Union Shipping Co: which was part of the GSNC empire. She ended her days wrecked on the Canadian coast I heard. My penultimate ship was the Ptarmigan for a week but try as I might I can't remember a thing about her! My final ship was the Harwich/Hook of Holland troopship Empire Parkeston, whose trooping days were over. Signed on in Harwich on the 18/10/60 and took her to Newcastle, to be subsequently broken up as I recall. Paid off on the 26/10/60 and swallowed the hook. National Service was over!!! I saw absolutely no sense in doing two years in the army after doing more than that in the MN

That wasn't my only reason for swallowing the hook because in 1958 I married Jean (who incidentally is still putting up with me!) and the following year I was a dad and so the boss put her foot down and I came ashore. We met one time when I was home on leave at a dance. I had arranged to meet a mate of mine at the dance at 2000 and the SOB didn't turn up until 2130 and I was just about ready to give it away. Anyway he breezed in, no apologies and said, “have a look at those two birds dancing, let's split 'em up”. He was a bit taller than me so I headed for the shorter one of the two and so did he and he got there a fraction of a second before I did so I got the taller one. My mate and this young lady immediately fell passionately in love and we ended up taking them home, got nowhere and thought to myself what a waste of an evening. Next day my mate comes round – no phones in those days! and tells me that we have a date with the pair of them that night!! To cut a long story short, they split up within a few weeks and I married mine!!! You gotta get lucky some times I reckon.

On coming ashore I was fit for naught else but as a seaman and so I drifted into various jobs over a period of 10 years being a jack of all trades and master of none! I was a truckie, bus conductor and got promoted to bus driver! Postman and finally I trained as a brickie so that I had a trade for when I emigrated out here. I finally convinced Jean in 1972 to leave her Mum and emigrate to Australia, being one of the last of the £10.00 Poms. In fact our dog cost more than all the family and all our belongings to get here but Jean wasn't going to leave him behind!

Upon our arrival here we were sent to a migrant hostel at Moorebank and we stayed there for 11 months while Jean cried and we had a house built! I worked for a couple of years in the building game but they haven't got a clue over here so I was coerced into becoming an insurance agent by no less than a fellow that turned out to be a Vindi Boy would you believe (no, he's not a member!). Since then all of my working life has been in the insurance industry where I eventually had my own brokerage company up until the time I retired.

Jean and I had one son, Steven who is now married to Sandie and they have two sons, Sam 17 and Jimmy 12 who keep us pretty busy.

My interests are reading although I rarely read novels, mainly concentrating on autobiographies, history and matters maritime. Because of my time as a mariner this subject interests me a great deal. Another great interest of mine is the Queensland Vindi Association and its success for the future. We have a unique organisation which should be used for more than just the occasional meeting to "swing the lamp" and tell tall tales. It should be there for the benefit of every member and they should all be encouraged to participate in it's future success and the fellowship to be found within the our association and also, most importantly, it should be utilised as a vehicle to provide assistance to any of our lads out there who need a hand.

I am also a member of the NZSCo Association and for over twenty five years I have been a life member of the Sydney Heritage Fleet I thought that now I had retired I would be able to devote some time to the SHF but I'm busier than ever, and also the fact that my boat takes up a lot of my time. For some time just after the Sydney Heritage Fleet's iron barque James Craig was commissioned I was a member of her crew for a while but when I bought my own boat I had to let that slide, one of them is quite enough!! From that comment you will gather that I am interested in sailing – Jean reckons I have two sheds and one is moored on the Lane Cove River! For those of you who don't know, the Vindicatrix is still afloat – because that's what I named the boat. Since becoming the proud owner of the Vindicatrix I have learned that she needs lots of TLC (Truck Loads of Cash!!) to keep ship shape and Bristol fashion.



That's why a boat is termed in the female gender – needs a lot of money spent on her to keep her looking good!