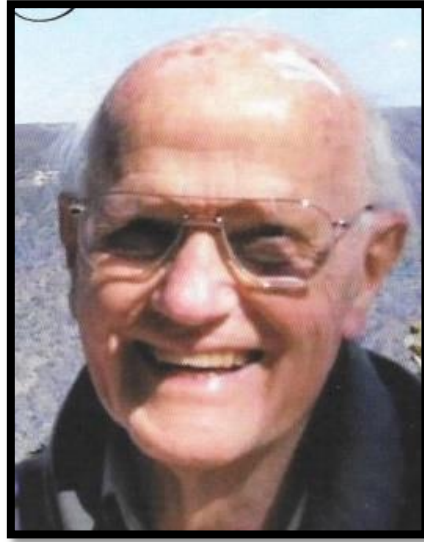


# Captain John Wilfred Webster

November 10, 1925 – May 21, 2023

League Roll No. 317



## Eulogy by Capt Webster's son, John Webster Jnr.

Good afternoon everyone, I would like to welcome you to this celebration of Dad's life, and farewell to him, and thank you for coming today.

Capt John Wilfrid Webster was born at Woking, Surrey, in the UK, on 10 November 1925, one of two siblings of his elderly father's second marriage, and moved to the Isle of Wight within a year of birth due to his father's work as a doctor. He lived in a house on the Isle at Ryde called "Inverkip" which he revisited in 2012. The house overlooked The Solent Channel where he no doubt formed his love for the sea.

From the age of 6 until 14, bar one year, he attended boarding schools, firstly at Seefield Park, and then at Bishop's Stortford College between London & Cambridge.

He then learnt seamanship and completed his schooling on the "HMS Conway", a fully rigged naval training tall ship, before getting "sea time" as a 16yr old apprentice as he sailed on the Shaw Savill ship "Karama" for 3 years during the 2nd World War. As such, he was part of the 2nd World War Merchant Navy, sailing in supply convoys in the Atlantic, Europe and to South Africa, and independently in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. In 1945 he returned to school where he qualified as a 2nd mate, and then after the war, he continued his career at sea as a First Officer and then Ship's Master, sailing on various Shaw Savill ships until 1953.

One story which Dad told was when he befriended a wild bird while at sea off the coast of Madagascar – it was December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1946. Dad was on watch during a rainy storm when he

noticed a bird – he thought it was a Kestrel or a Sparrow Hawk – which had become exhausted and helpless in the rain. It had been driven aboard deck. Dad rescued the bird and took it to his cabin and cared for it during the bad weather while it recuperated. During this time it became quite tame and would sit on Dad's hand without fear. Dad named the bird Madge – after Madagascar – and it seems that Madge quite liked Dad. Two days later, on Christmas Day and in calmer weather, Madge was set on her way when Dad's ship reached Durban. A photo of Dad and Madge is in the Order of Service.

In 1950 he suffered a serious back injury whilst at sea, resulting in a back operation at St Albans UK, which was repeated when he was in his late 70's, coincidentally, by a student of the Medical Professor who carried out the first operation.

Dad sailed on the Largs Bay for 3 years from 1953 - 56, during which he met and subsequently married an Australian, Margaret Donnellan in London in 1954; and then sailed on the Persic, Canopic, & Arabic until 1958, when he gave up his life of 16 years at sea, emigrated to Australia, and settled in Sydney. Together they had a family with three children - John, David, and Bernadette.

Work opportunities in Sydney were not quite what his qualifications allowed, and his first job was at David Jones Market St, filling a role similar to Capt Peacock in the English TV series "Are you Being Served?"

He then obtained work at Port Jackson Stevedoring, before joining Overseas Containers Aust Ltd (OCAL) where the work was a little bit more befitting his qualifications, filling the role of Australian Operations Manager. He worked with OCAL until it was taken over by P & O Shipping. I later discovered through a schoolmate who also worked at OCAL, that P & O issued an edict that any employee of 50 years or more would be "retired" within 6 months.

From the time of his involuntary retirement from OCAL, until he reached official retirement age, he worked for a number of years at Bridge Line, a shipping company founded by another maritime colleague, for the census, the electoral office, teaching Navigation at Randwick Tech, baby-sitting decommissioned vessels moored in Sydney Harbour, exam supervising, and basically anything else which came up.

He was a true "Do it Yourself" expert and handyman, whether servicing or repairing a car, building shelves or a cupboard, or renovating the house. (I remember when I bought my first car, the following birthday or Christmas, his gift to me was a mechanic's manual the size of a telephone book).

Above all, he led an active lifestyle as long as he could. He loved his almost daily walks and swims at Maroubra Beach, being able to jump in the car to go shopping at the Junction, barracking for the Wicks and Rabbitohs, and in his later days, exploring on the computer. He maintained his interest in all things nautical, and particularly enjoyed his nautical newsletters and his weekly trips to the city by bus for the Port Club Luncheons. These get-

together with other mariners, some of whom are here today, meant so much to him, and I thank these gentlemen for helping him to enjoy particularly the latter years of his life.

He is predeceased by his sister Elizabeth (in the late 1990's), and wife Margaret in 2016, and survived by his three children. He lived until the age of 97 years 6 months.

*John Webster Jnr*

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## **Captain John Wilfred Webster**

### **A tribute presented by Captain Peter Murphy**

He grew up on the Isle of Wight in 'Inverkip', a house overlooking the Solent, watching the constant arrival and departure of all manner of ships, including the grand liners of the day.

It should come as no surprise therefore, that after initially wanting to study medicine as his father had, John developed a keen interest in sailing and a love of the sea.

At the ripe old age of 14 1/2 he went to school on the Conway and some two years later in 1942, he joined the Shaw Savill vessel 'Karamea' as an apprentice, remaining there until the end of the war.

John well and truly served his time during those years, when he took part in the infamous Atlantic convoys with their constant threat of submarines, as the German wolf packs stalked their unarmed prey.

And then again in transporting desperately needed supplies to the 8th Army in North Africa.

Who knows - his supplies may have been vital to the British Army's campaign in Tunisia, a campaign in which my father was involved and in which he lost his life.

But there was no stopping John and following the war, he remained with Shaw Savill, steadily climbing up the ladder to command, until in 1958, after meeting his wife to be Margaret on the 'Largs Bay' some 5 years earlier, they made the decision to seek their fortune in Australia.

It is a familiar story for many of us – someone knows someone who knows someone else and that person has heard of the opportunity of a job somewhere - in this case Australia and the someone that John knew, worked at the local bank on the Isle of Wight.

Perhaps like many of us who came here, the promised job never materialised and in John's case, being the quintessential example of an innovative Master Mariner, he took a job at the David Jones' store in Market Street, as a floor supervisor.

I cannot stop my imagination running away with me, as I see him deftly organising the sales staff, immaculately dressed in pinstripe suit, striding the floor, just as if he was in command on the Bridge.

But again chance, or was it serendipity, came by in the shape of someone from Port Jackson Stevedores – a Dennis Dalziel, whom John had known from his days at sea.

History does not tell us unfortunately, what it was that Dennis came to David Jones to buy – was it a shirt, a suit or perhaps a pair of shoes – whatever it was, it led to John being offered a supervisor's job and resigning forthwith to start work with Port Jackson Stevedores. But with containerisation now a reality, it was not long before John was offered a job with Overseas Containers Australia Limited.

It is not my intention here to give a potted history of John Webster's full and rewarding life, but it saddens me, that many of us I feel, have never heard the real story – until perhaps today.

Every time I met John, he was urbane, always smiling and with a wry sense of humour, which I know will be missed by all of us.

He was without doubt, a great exemplar of the strength of character that the sea imbues in many a mariner.

He was also a great example of the legendary skills of the mariner and the 'make do and mend' mentality of our seagoing era.

How well I recall as a first trip cadet at sea, the insistent voice of the Mate, telling us 'there's no corner store here laddie, you make it yourself or improvise or else you go without.'

The saying that you can either be an officer or a gentleman - but not both, could never have been applied to John Webster, who played such an integral part in our seafaring community - in his earlier time in the Port Club being elected President for a number of years.

But to the end he was one of our staunchest supporters, a regular each week and a credit to the Club.

I don't think that I have ever seen such a united set of condolences – every one of them – and there are many as you can see – remarks on his decency, ready smile, friendship and importantly in this age of social media, in my view, his wonderful sense of humour.

He will be remembered as an outstanding member of the Port Club, the League of Ancient Mariners, the Company of Master Mariners and above all, of our profession as a whole.

None of us can ever avoid the 'Crossing of the Bar', but in leaving behind his family, with whom our deepest sympathies must lie, we take this opportunity to remember our dear friend, as an example of an outstanding life of service to our industry and a truly decent human being.

To close I would like to quote from Rudyard Kipling's poem 'The Sea and the Hills':

**'Who hath desired the sea? – The sight of salt water unbounded –  
The heave and the halt and the hurl and the crash of the comber  
wind-hounded?**

**The sleek-barrelled swell before storm,  
grey, foamless, enormous and growing –  
Stark calm on the lap of the Line or the crazy-eyed hurricane blowing.  
And here the sea-fogs lap and cling  
And here, each warning each,  
The sheep-bells and the ship-bells ring  
along the hidden beach...**

On behalf of us all, thank you for the great privilege and honour of farewelling John.

***Captain Peter Murphy***

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