



**Captain Basil Walker**  
**March 23, 1925 - May 1, 2019**

*From the Eulogy presented by Captain Walker's partner, Yvonne Holt, at his funeral.*

*Additional information from Patrick McMenamie, Chief Engineer with Captain Walker on many voyages.*

In 1941, aged nearly 16, Basil became an Apprentice Cadet at The Thames Nautical College.

During his Cadetship, for the seagoing part of his apprenticeship, he was an Indentured Apprentice to Alfred Holt and Company (no relation). The company agreed and I quote, 'to provide the said apprentice with sufficient meat, drink, lodging and medical treatment and to pay the said apprentice the sum of 12 pounds for year one, 15 pounds for year two and for the third and last year, 24 pounds.'

Because of the war the cadetship training was cut short by two years from five to three. The first sea voyage of his cadetship was with an Alfred Holt ship, sailing from London to Sydney. He was then barely 16 years old.

#### **First voyage**

On leaving UK on his very first voyage, the signal flags broke away from the rigging. The sea was very rough. Basil as the youngest crew member on board was ordered to climb up the mast and secure the wayward flags. He describes climbing up the mast and along the rigging to secure the flags as the most terrifying experience of his entire seagoing career.

#### **Attack by Japanese submarines**

Sailing from London to Sydney in convoy with other merchant ships, convoys were always guarded by two or more Royal Navy Frigates. On one of his earliest voyages crossing the Pacific, they were attacked by Japanese submarines. Two merchant ships were sunk and Basil's ship was damaged and two crew members killed. They managed to reach Sydney for repairs.

Basil explained to me – merchant ships had no defence against enemy attack other than what he called, a 'pop-pop gun' on the main deck. They had to rely entirely on Naval Frigates to guard them.

On another voyage to Sydney, they were again attacked by Japanese submarines. This time his ship was badly damaged and taking on water fast. One frigate was sunk leaving only one to protect the rest of the damaged convoy. The remaining frigate signalled it had to abandon them to protect the rest of the convoy. Basil's ship was too badly damaged to keep pace with the rest of the convoy. With great difficulty they limped into Sydney dock.

The year was 1942 and the date was 31<sup>st</sup> May. This was the day that Japanese two-man midget submarines managed to get through the defence net to strike at naval vessels moored in Sydney Harbour. When Basil told me this I said 'oh how awful. Your ship was in Sydney Harbour. Was your ship damaged and did you see the Japanese submarines?'

'No, our ship was in dry dock and at that time we were all ashore getting drunk.' He was 17 years old.

### **Completion of apprenticeship**

At the end of the war he had successfully completed his apprenticeship and was now 3<sup>rd</sup> Officer. I suspect that after his terrifying war years' experiences he had had enough because on another trip to Australia he and a mate jumped ship at Strahan in Tasmania. He was twenty years old.

Strahan dock was being built at that time and once ashore they signed on as dock labourers. This didn't last long and for the next six months or so they 'bombed' around the east coast working odd jobs to pay for beer and board – bar work in Sydney, labouring up the NSW coast and in Queensland cane cutting and logging.

His father caught up with him in Queensland and persuaded him (though how he persuaded him Basil would never say) to return to UK to complete his Masters Certificate.

### **In 1956 he got his Master Mariners Certificate.**

In 1957 he married his first wife Anne and in 1963 they migrated to Australia and bought a home in Sydney.

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### **R. W. Miller and the oil-tanker trade**

Captain Walker was one who was closely involved with the development of Australia's oil-tanker trade with R. W Miller. In 1963 bringing the *Millers Canopus*, previously *Merchant Knight*, from Singapore to Australia. *Millers McArthur* and the *R.W. Miller* were also part of the growing fleet of oil-tankers and he captained the *Amanda Miller*, the largest tanker built in Australia. Captain Walker remained active with Millers for many years, also in the training of crews.

### **Pilotage exemption**

In 1964 he was granted the Australian Certificate of Exemption from Pilotage for all major Australian ports and other ports.

### **Barrow Island, North West Shelf, WA**

Captain Walker was Pilot at Barrow Island, WA before returning to Millers.

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### **Retirement**

In his retirement he ultimately moved to Banksia Village and that is where we met. We were neighbours at Banksia.

In 2005 I had a serious car accident and was in hospital and Banksia Nursing Home for over four months. I was eventually discharged with a moon-boot and Zimmer frame. My one longing at that time was to walk along the firm sand at Moruya Airport Beach. Basil offered to take me and for probably close up to 18 months he took me to walk on the firm sand three times a week. Of course

we got to know each other very well during that time. His wonderful sense of humour and sense of fun helped my healing.

One day as we were walking along the beach hand in hand as usual, he suddenly said 'you know, we get on so well I think we should get together.'

'What do you mean?' I asked, 'are you asking me to marry you?'

'Yeh, I guess so.' he replied and paused. 'Except I don't 'do' weddings and funerals'.

'That's the most cockeyed proposal a girl has ever had.' I continued, 'because I don't want to get married and I don't plan to die in the near future.'

All the time we were together he never once came with me to a wedding or funeral.

We decided to look for Retirement Villages closer to Kiama and found Lakeview Gardens. We had nearly ten happy years here and made many wonderful friends. In the early years we had several wonderful trips to Tasmania to visit Libby and Gerry who were living there at that time and also enjoyed visits to Merimbula three or four times a year.

### **Deteriorating health**

Basil's health slowly deteriorated and it became obvious he was developing dementia. Numerous falls with various fractures, - broken ribs, fractured wrist, fractured collar-bone, concussion and fractured hip.

Following this he had a hip replacement at Nowra Private Hospital. He also had several other spells in Nowra Private Hospital for minor surgery. His last fall just over a month ago was the most serious and caused bleeding on the brain. Ambulance men, when called to take him to hospital following another fall, were greeted as friends. The doctors at Milton Hospital decided it was time for him to go into full-time care and arranged a place for him at Greenwell Gardens Nursing Home in Nowra where he sadly died on 1<sup>st</sup> May.

Throughout the years of his deteriorating health, we were fortunate to have the help of all our wonderful IRT friends. Their help meant so much to me and their help enabled Basil to stay at home and for me to look after him at home for many years.

### **Part of the family**

As Basil didn't have any children, in fact had no family at all as his two older sisters had both passed away some years ago, he really appreciated being part of my family and enjoying large family gatherings with the laughter, teasing and just being included in all the fun of being part of it all. He especially loved Libby and thought of her as the daughter he never had.

In the earlier years he enjoyed rock fishing with Gerry and when we visited them in Tasmania when they were living there, we had many happy times on Libby and Gerry's boat '*Kerry Girl*'. *Kerry Girl* was named after my granddaughter Kerry who is now living in London.

When Gerry moored the boat in his favourite fishing spot, Basil and Gerry had a great time fishing off the stern while the rest of us just enjoyed lazing on deck chatting or soaking up the sun. There was always an unspoken competition between them as to who would catch the first fish, the biggest fish and the most fish. Except for one occasion, Gerry always won. Such happy times.

Our years together were filled with loving, laughter and a very special friendship. Dementia is a very insidious disease and as it progresses, shuts down personality and zest for life and can change a personality completely. However, we never parted without a little kiss and hug and he would always say 'don't be long my darling – I miss you already.'

Throughout the latter years he never lost his sense of humour and our love remained as strong as ever.

*With thanks to Captain Walker's partner, Yvonne Holt, for providing detailed information from his Eulogy and to Patrick McMenamie who served as Chief Engineer with Captain Walker on many voyages.*