



Captain Samuel James Benson CBE, OstJ, RD and Bar RANR

12 July 1909 to 26 July 1995

Member of the League from 1963

Captain Samuel James Benson, General Secretary of the Merchant Service Guild of Australia 1969-1972, died at Heidelberg Hospital, Melbourne on Wednesday, July 26 1995 at the age of 86.

Captain Sam had a most remarkable and unique career covering merchant and naval sea service, community service and politics, all of which were highlighted at his memorial service at the Holy Trinity Church, Williamstown.

He was born on July 12, 1909 in Adelaide and educated at St Peters College, thanks to the assistance of Legacy following his father's death in France during World War 1. He joined the Royal Australian navy Reserve in 1926 and was promoted Midshipman in 1927. He first went to sea in 1928 as a deck boy with the Adelaide Steamship Company and in 1935 became First Officer. At the outbreak of World War 11 he was the first naval reserve officer, then with the rank of Lieutenant, to sail overseas from Australia and serve with the Royal navy in the Atlantic and North Sea in HMS Moreton Bay. In 1943 he returned to Australia to take command of HMAS Kiama. He served with distinction in HMAS Kiama, winning the full and everlasting respect of his crew. He was mentioned in despatches twice.

After the war he became a Master Mariner and Marine Consultant. From 1949 to 1969 he was a Port Phillip and Victorian Sea Pilot and during his time was Secretary of the Port Phillip Sea Pilots Association.

In 1956 he became an Alderman on the Williamstown Council. During 1957-58 he served as Mayor of Williamstown and he inaugurated the first ever "Meals on Wheels" in Victoria. In 1963 he entered Federal Politics, winning the seat of Batman for the Australian Labor Party. He served one term in the House of Representatives as a Labor Member and following a falling out with the ALP he stood and won a second term as an Independent. In Parliament he was known as the Opposition's number one old sea dog.

In 1956 when Prime Minister Harold Wilson declared that Britain would not get involved in the Vietnam War, Sam brought to the attention of Prime Minister Menzies that Australian ships would be flying the British White Ensign and stated: "We are in Vietnamese waters flying the flag of another nation. This is not correct". He then recommended that an Australian white ensign should be created and as a result the Royal Australian Navy flew the first Australian White Ensign in March 1967, thanks to the "old sea dog".

Sam Benson's greatest pride was that he was made a younger brother of Trinity House London. Sam was the only member to live outside Britain, which qualified him as the Queens official Australian advisor. Sam was always active in Legacy. He was Vice President of the Victorian legacy Council and at the time of his death was on the Council of Melbourne Naval and Military Legacy. He was Life Member and Trustee of the TPI Association of Victoria, past president of Northcote RSL, inaugural member, past president and patron of the Naval Commemoration Committee, a former member of the State Executive and State Council of the Victorian RSL and foundation committee member of the Victorian Association of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

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