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The Merchant Navy War Memorial Fund Ltd (MNWMF)

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AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG DAY & MERCHANT NAVY DAY 3 SEPTEMBER 2023

DAVID FIELD, FAICD, CHAIRMAN, THE MERCHANT NAVY WAR MEMORIAL FUND LTD

In 1901 two flags were born.... The blue Australian National Flag and the Australian Red Ensign, the official flag to be flown at sea by Australian registered merchant ships.

The 3rd of September also marks Merchant Navy Day. It is an opportunity to remember the service and sacrifice of thousands of Australia's merchant mariners during wartime. We commemorate Merchant Navy Day each year on 3 September, as it is the anniversary of the first attack on an Allied merchant ship in World War II, only hours after Britain declared war on Germany in 1939.

During the World Wars and the Vietnam War, merchant ships and their civilian crew transported service personnel, supplies and equipment. Some merchant ships were also converted into hospital ships for vital wartime medical service. In World War II, some merchant ships were refitted with limited defensive capabilities.

For the most part, though, vessels in the merchant navy were often unarmed during wartime. This exposed them to enemy attacks in foreign waters and closer to Australian shores. Merchant mariners worked with the constant threat of attack from enemy submarines, surface raiders, aircraft, and sea mines. Their work was especially dangerous when their ship was part of a slow convoy or travelling alone and unprotected.

Australia has always been dependent on shipping for trade, freight movements, transport, and tourism. As such, Australians have served on board merchant ships for hundreds of years. In times of peace, as well as in the difficult and dangerous times of war.

On Merchant Navy Day, we also thank current day Merchant Mariners and acknowledge how dependant all Australians are, on the vital role they perform.

"Ships don't bring us goods, people do: seafarers. The seafarers job exposes them to some of the most dangerous, lonely, and isolating conditions to bring us more than 99% of our merchandise" - MISSION TO SEAFARERS SYDNEY

