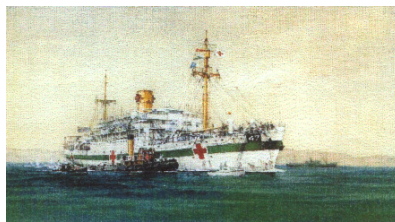


2/3 A.H.S. CENTAUR ASSOCIATION (INC.)

Executive Committee:

President: Mr Richard Jones
Secretary: Mrs Jan Thomas, OAM
Treasurer: Mr Anthony P Bracken

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NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2011

Editor: Jan Thomas
02 6564 8400

AGM BACK ON DRY LAND

After our last AGM in the boardroom of HMAS Manoora following our wonderfully moving day visiting the site of Centaur, this year's AGM brought us back to reality. Thank you Tony Bracken for making your living room in Melbourne available.

Richard gave an overview of 2011's activities in particular the decommissioning of HMAS Manoora which he attended on our behalf. Commander Stephen Dryden proposed, and the committee accepted, that the replica of the Centaur Plaque designated for HMAS Manoora now be offered to one of the replacement vessels, HMAS Canberra or HMAS Adelaide, due to come into service in 2014/5, and that the emergency ward in that ship be named the AHS Centaur Ward. The committee will follow this up periodically.

Replicas of the Plaque now resting on the deck of the Centaur have been accepted by several organisations and are in place with their accompanying board telling the AHS Centaur story.

Richard thanked the committee members, and in particular the three who are not standing for re-election, Tom Evans, Ian Hudson and Ted Leask (*see stories p3*). He welcomed Pam Gilbert (Brisbane) who filled an occasional vacancy during the year, Michael Forrest (Brisbane) and Peta McAlister (Queanbeyan) whose nominations, like those of the Executive and remaining members, were accepted unopposed. Committee member, Doug Hoare remains our Public Officer.

Tony presented the **Annual Financial Statement** which is available to members on request. The full **Minutes** and the **President's Report** are also available on request.

During the year the Association has continued to direct our efforts towards honouring those we lost, supporting those who lost them and the survivors, and continuing to tell their stories.

The AGM was followed immediately by a **Special General Meeting** which accepted the new Constitution to comply with the Associated Incorporation Act of 2009 to the satisfaction of the NSW Department of Fair Trading. The amended Constitution is available on request.

Where to from here?

We are asked periodically where the Association is going now that the Centaur has been found. It wasn't founded to find the Centaur, it was founded to supply a need for still grieving people by uniting them in a common bond of collective remembrance. In the process we have become a family. Families last as long as living people need them; those that have gone before are part of that family, still missed and honoured. The Association will continue while that need lasts. Since those we lost gave their lives for us all, and many Centaur casualties have no known relative to remember them, our family has become an extended one.

And there is a 70th anniversary ahead...

HMAS Manoora, was decommissioned in a ceremony held at Garden Island on, 27 May 2011. The ceremony was attended by the Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Russ Crane, AO, CSM, RAN, Commander Australian Fleet, Rear Admiral S.R. Gilmore, AM, CSC, RAN and Commanding Officer HMAS Manoora Commander Stephen Dryden, RAN. Manoora gave 17 years of distinguished service to the Navy which included deployments to the Solomon Islands, East Timor, and the Middle East. During her commission, Manoora has provided the ADF with significant amphibious capability, which has seen her serve effectively in humanitarian aid and disaster missions, non-combat evacuation operations, border protection, exercises and active service. Manoora is making way for a bold new capability with the first of two LHDs (amphibious assault ships) due to enter service in 2014.



Photo Dept of Defence



CENTAUR COMMEMORATIONS IN BRISBANE

Our Roving Reporter, committee person **Pam Gilbert**, and her intrepid assistant, daughter **Debbie Butler** attended Services at both Point Danger on 13th and Brisbane on 14th May. Pam reports:

The Service in Brisbane at St Andrew's Anglican Church, Lutwyche was very different to the one at Point Danger—from informal to very formal. The dignitaries were the Hon. Paul de Jersey AC, Chief Justice, who is currently the Acting Governor of Qld as the Governor (and Patron of the Fund) was in London for the Royal Wedding. In attendance also was Graham Quirk, the new Lord Mayor of Brisbane.

The choir of Brisbane Girls Grammar School, and the Pipe Band from the Brisbane Boys' College provided special music and the Cadets from TS Centaur, Maleny, were the flag-bearers. Emily Allan was again the bugler. Under her maiden name Lashmar, Emily is well-known to Brisbane attendees

The Hon Paul de Jersey read the First Lesson and the Second Lesson was read by Mrs Margaret Hamilton OAM, a former President of the Returned Sisters who was one of those evacuated from Singapore in February 1942.

There was a seat reserved for **Bobbie Pettiford** near us, but we didn't see her, although I believe she was there. **John and Denice Foley** had seats reserved near us, but sat at the back of the church. **Tony Booth** representing **Sir Keith Jones** also attended. I believe there were other Centaur families in attendance but I didn't get to meet them as the hall where we had refreshments was very crowded.

Phyllis Butcher from Murwillumbah, sister of Pte Bill Lawson 2/12th FA, was there with her family, **Jack and Leone Bade, Bill and Liz Munro** and **Bill Earnshaw**. Her niece, **Janet Earnshaw, OAM**, was Guest Speaker. Janet spoke briefly of her grandmother receiving her telegram and how it had affected the family, and then went on to speak about the day we heard that the Centaur had been found, and the trip on the Manoora. It was a very moving talk.

It is about 10 years since I last attended this service and, while the church was fairly full, the number of military nurses attending has dwindled to a handful. Mostly young ones representing various nursing organizations attended, and we spoke to some of these afterwards.

FUNERAL OF MATTIE MORRIS, survivor



The young Mattie Morris

About 30 people farewelled one of the last remaining survivors of the torpedoed AHS *Centaur* at a moving ceremony on 14 April 2010. Friends and family gathered at Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital's Anzac Memorial Chapel for an hour-long service to remember Matthew Morris. Mattie was a 23-year-old merchant seaman on the ship when it was torpedoed. He died at Regis Amaroo Nursing Home in Ringwood aged 89.

Civil celebrant Ted Worthington spoke about Mattie's life as a silversmith before he became a merchant seaman on the *Centaur*. He later had an unsuccessful marriage before buying a house in Richmond, where he lived until moving to the Ringwood Nursing Home several years ago.

Friends spoke glowingly of a gentleman who was not afraid to have a laugh. Lifelong friend Doody Martin, 85, said she had known Mr Morris since they were children: "I was his girlfriend though we both went our separate ways and married others, but we remained friends until he died." Mrs Martin said Mattie had a 'dry sense of humour'. "He always wanted to marry me but I would say he drank too much and he would laugh," she said. "He was a terrific guy with a heart of gold."

Regis Amaroo activities assistant Liz Van Meurs, who helped care for Mattie in his final years, said she would remember a 'total gentleman'. "He was a pleasure to look after; you would open a door for him and he would stand there with his walking stick waiting for you to go first."

Fellow *Centaur* survivor Martin Pash, 87, attending the funeral had been close friends with Mattie since they met on the ship. "He was a great mate."

Austin Health Veteran Liaison Officer Robert Winther said it was fitting that Mr Morris's funeral was held at the chapel. "This wing is called the Centaur Wing and the plaques commemorate all who served on the Centaur," Mr Winther said.



Mattie Morris and Martin Pash sharing a laugh in 2003.

Photo scanned from a copy of the Herald Sun

Farewell and happy retirement...

Three intrepid committeemen stepped down at the 2011 AGM to rejoin the ranks of ordinary members of the Association. We thank them for their commitment and dedication during their term of office.



Tom Evans, grandson of Pte Michael O'Brien 2/12th FA, is a past president who oversaw the incorporation of the Association which put us on a sound business footing, and unbeknownst at the time, prepared us for the momentous events of the last couple of years. Tom and his sister **Caroline** set up our website and between them they will continue to update it as requested by the committee. Tom runs his own

business and with wife Trish has three children, Fintan, Martha and Ben, the latter two played a vital role in the Centaur Commemorations in Melbourne this year. (See p6)

Ted Leask is one of six nephews of the three Leask brothers who lost their lives on Centaur, Ptes Alexander, Harold and Henry Leask, 2/12th FA. We first heard of Ted on late night talkback radio speaking about his uncles and realized the speaker had to be a Leask. We ran him to earth at the unveiling of the memorial to the 2/12th at the AWM in 2000 where he and brother **Laurie** joined the Association. When the groundswell from members for a search for the Centaur became too insistent to ignore, Ted joined the search sub-committee and his buoyancy and enthusiasm encouraged the committee through those difficult days of launching the campaign, and seeing it through to completion. It was Ted's initiative to establish the Canberra Commemorations last year and he leaves the committee with a solid foundation for future commemorations in the National Capital.



Ian Hudson, is godson of Lt-Col Clem Manson, CO of the Ship's Medical Staff. Ian had been a member for some time but first came to the attention of the Committee during the 60th Anniversary Commemorative Journey in 2003. He came to prominence in the Association on the discovery of HMAS Sydney with an insistent voice that we should do something, and do it *now*. And we needed to go to the *top*—which we did, and, with the benefit of the considerable

contribution made by Tuck Thompson and the editorial staff of the Courier Mail, we achieved the outcome that all previous advice had thought to be impossible. Ian lobbied all Federal and State parliamentarians in SE Queensland, eliciting their support and maintaining the pressure throughout the campaign. He became the face of the Association in North Queensland and played a vital role in the establishment of Centaur Park in Cairns, where he unveiled the first of the replicas of the Centaur Plaque.

Last Post

Fran Gardner, widow of Pte John Maynard and sister-in-law of Pte Allen Maynard at Centaur Hostel Caloundra. 2 April 2011.



Br Greg Moran, brother of Pte John 'Jack' O'Neil Moran 2/12th, 28 July 2011

Spud Murphy, MN, Association member, actively threw his support behind the search for the Centaur. Custodian of 2/12th banner in Sydney. 4 August 2011

Doris Aldritt, aged 97, longtime member of the Sydney Hospital Ladies Auxiliary who organized the luncheon on ANZAC Day for the veterans of the Oranje-Centaur Group, from their earliest reunions after the war until recently. 15 September 2011.

Peter Harris-Walker MN. Association member. 16 September 2011



Margaret and Richard Jones represented the Association at the Merchant Navy Annual Memorial Service at Rookwood, Sydney, in April



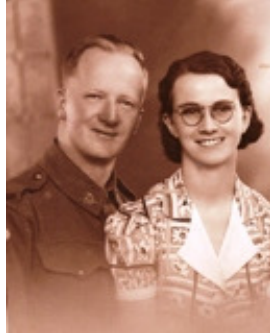
Pat O'Brien represented the Association at the Navy Week Commemorations at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne in October

An enduring love story...

ALBERT VICTOR (BERTIE) BROWN, 2/12th FA, and ADA MARY (MEG) SAUNDERS

Contributed by their nephew Eric Saunders

Bert and Mary first met at Sunday school at the Salvation Army in Petersham, Sydney.



In 1928 Bert was studying the violin as a youth and Mary studied the piano. Mary's family moved from Petersham to Enfield and Bert followed to the Salvation Army at Enfield when he could afford the travel cost.

It was the love of music at first, then it blossomed into love for each other, and on 6 March 1941 Bert and Mary were married and lived at Bridge Road Menai in the Sutherland Shire near Mary's two elder brothers, Leslie and Jack Saunders.

Uncle Bert was a practical joker. I recall being chased around the back yard at Menai with a dish of water which he threatened to throw over me. Bert and Mary also taught my sister and myself at Sunday school and sang in the Salvation Army choir at Petersham. Bert would play the violin and Mary would accompany him on the piano. The Salvation Army had a great social life for the youth then and now.

Pte Albert Victor Brown 2/12 Australian Field Ambulance embarked on the Australian Hospital Ship Centaur for a tour of duty in Papua New Guinea when on the 14 May 1943 it was torpedoed off Queensland, east of Morton Island. Bert went down with the ship.

Mary had a lonely life without her husband. She had some happiness in her life but waited for the day to join her husband Bert.

From her later telephone conversations with the Association Meg indicated that she had lived a very full life. Though privately missing Bertie, she seems to have been a very gregarious lady. She loved her Bowls and said the Bowls ladies were very good to her, picking her up and bringing her home. Even when she could no longer play, they would take her for the company and to watch the game. They always saw her safely home again, and when the day was over, in her heart she would spend the quiet of the evenings with her Bertie. *Ed.*

Let Meg take up her own story as written in the letters to the Association. When her handwriting became too shaky she took to the telephone and when I heard a quavery voice say "Hello Jan", I knew it was Meg. Ed.

23/5/1999

I'm so glad you sent me that mail. I so much want to be part of anything concerned with the Centaur.

These long years and many tears I thank the Gentleman upstairs (God) that He built a bridge over troubled waters. I know He takes one hand and my Darling Husband takes the other and leads me safely across.

My Darling said to me Darl if anything happens to me in the war keep swimming, Darl, and you will make it.

I have our Wedding Photo on the wall above where I sit on the lounge so I know my Darling is watching over me. I often think back on what might have been and then I have to snap out of it and I say Darl I'll love you forever.

When the tragedy happened I said no mongrel war will ever take anyone from me again, that is why I've stayed alone all these years, but I have a lovely friend in **Erica (Costigan, Caloundra Ed)**. I feel I have a friend for life.

I hope you can understand my shaky writing. I would dearly love to be there on the 14th May but health wise I can't. I can only say God Bless you all,

Love from Meg Brown

22/5/00

I'm sending you a photo of myself and our President. That's me with my Husband's medals on my bowls uniform, I am proud of them, sad, but proud. I'm sure you will understand. It was ANZAC Day. Our Men's President took part too. I have the honour of placing the floral tribute. I was going on for 26 then, now I'm going on for 84. Well, Jan, I'll say cheerio for now.

Love from Meg.

Undated

So glad to hear from you. Yes, I'm doing OK. I still have the bad asthma but I'm coping. When one gives up then that's bad. I'm not the give up type, and the Gentleman upstairs helps me a lot. I mean God. I rang **Erica and Bryan (Costigan, Caloundra Ed)** last week.

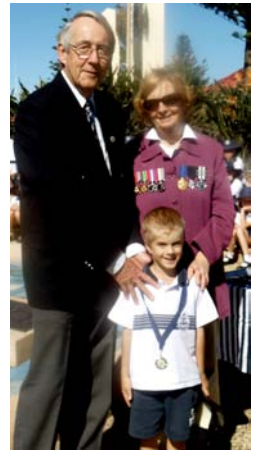
We had a big ANZAC Service at our bowling club. I laid the floral tribute on behalf of the women bowlers. I can't write much more, Jan, just to say I want to be involved in anything to do with the Centaur.

Love from Meg.

CENTAUR DAY AT POINT DANGER and CANBERRA



Back row L-R: Kirstin Knight, Leone Bade, Dennis Miller, Jack Hubbard, Warren Keats, Doug Parker, Jean Pearce, Ian Hindmarsh, Pamela Gilbert, Ken Pearce, Bill Burroughs and Frank Adcock.
Front Row L-R: Debbie Butler, Martin Pash, Mavis Cromack, Phyllis Butcher, Sr Mary Moran, Jan Thomas and Abigail Knight. Missing from the photo is Sr Frances Moran.



Ian Hindmarsh and Jan Thomas with Joshua King, a recipient of the Hindmarsh Medal.



At Point Danger, Phyll Butcher with her brother Bill Lawson's photo flanked by Sr Frances (L) and Sr Mary (R) Moran with school students.

On 13th May, the **Point Danger** Service was held on a balmy late autumn morning with the sun sparkling on a silvery sea. By contrast, a few hours later in **Canberra** a crowd of hardy souls gathered to commemorate the sacrifice and service of the Centaur personnel on a bleak, blustery, and bitterly cold afternoon. See below Centaur families with representatives of allied organizations. So many to fit in the photo that the rows take a bit of imagination to work out. Doreen Witchard said the ceremony allowed her to accept she had lost her two brothers, and to find peace knowing they will continue to be remembered.



Georgie Wilson, Year 6 played the Last Post



Photo: Steve Burton, AWM

L-R back row ?, Peta McAlister, Karen Shaw, John Perryman (Army Historian), Steve McGrath, Jeremy Leask, Karen Sokolovic, Michael Kirkby-Jones, Chaplain Stuart Hall, RAN, LT-COL Kim Sullivan, RAANC, Tony Francome, MN.

3rd row: Dale Liepins (partly obscured), Brad Thompson, Sharon Ruskie, ?, Graham, Alison Ryan, Philippa Kirkby-Jones, John King (RSL), Cpl Matthew Creek (bugler).

2nd row: Emma Parkinson, Wilma Griffin, Sanya Ritchie, Ros Benton, Elizabeth Leask, Joan Hughes (Red Cross), Beth McGeachy-Blay representing the Director, AWM.

Front row: Audrey Wills, Doreen Witchard, Mary Sutton, Judy Leask, Ted Leask, Louise McCosker (Red Cross), Margaret & Richard Jones.

Legacy was represented by Legatee John Connor (he is probably one of the ?s). The US Consulate sent profound apologies.

CENTAUR DAY AT CONCORD



Back row: Richard and Margaret Jones, ?, Laurie Hindmarsh, Robert Holland, Alison Holland, Rod Blackman, ?, ?, Bruce McSkimming.
Front row: Malcolm Knight, Lucy Walton, Eric Hodson, Joan Fisher, Isabel Fitzgerald, Marjorie McSkimming, Enid Blackman.
Can you identify the ??? (the shade doesn't help)

Centaur Commemorations were held as usual on 12 May, International Nurses' Day. Given his untimely death on 16 September, it was perhaps fitting that **Peter Harris-Walker** from the Merchant Navy recited the Ode.

The group photo captured most people but several faces are missing (and some not recognized by the editor who wasn't there this year).



Anne and Tony Stephens (at right) with Richard Jones, Alison Holland, Laurie Hindmarsh, and Robert Holland.

CENTAUR DAY AT HEIDELBERG IN MELBOURNE

*From Pat O'Brien,
d/o L/Cpl Michael O'Brien 2/12th FA*

The Melbourne Service was held again at the ANZAC Chapel, Heidelberg Hospital, and the numbers were steady as per past years, around 30 people. Two other families I recognized: **Brackens**, and **Leonard** and **Faye Williams** with their two grandsons. **Judy Moore** was also there. **Martin Pash (survivor)** was there with Billie, both looking sprightly and amazingly fresh considering they had just come from the Service at Point Danger on the Queensland border with NSW.

Robert Winther ran a beautiful and respectful service as usual, presided over by Rev. Dierdre Ragless, the Austin's veteran chaplain. Special mention was given to the three nurses from Heidelberg.

The replica of the Centaur Plaque placed on the deck of the Centaur in January 2010 with its storyboard telling of its significance was draped with a Blue Funnel Line flag lent to Robert for use during the service by ex-Navy Chaplain John Brownbill whose father had worked with them.

The Williams grandsons laid the wreath on behalf of the Association and did a sterling job, decked out in their scout uniforms (partly motivated by a badge if they participated!)

The unveiling was done by Martin and all the great grandchildren there (*see photo*), which meant the Williams boys and two of my grandchildren. This was Robert's idea and was a wonderful touch to the ceremony. We then went outside to the established plaques and had a minute's silence in front of all the names. Again the children became involved as Robert asked them to ring the memorial bell located in the garden. (Just a hint for anyone wanting to organize a ceremony: get the kids involved and they behave beautifully, and are very chatty about it afterward!)



After the ceremony we were all invited to the Preston and Darebin RSL which has been re-built. They have kept the Centaur Room as a dining room. We were warmly received and the occasion was very well catered.



Martin Pash, survivor, with Ben and Martha Evans, and Laurence and Timothy Williams

CENTAUR DAY AT CALOUNDRRA



Our crowd was slightly smaller than last year's, which of course reacted to the *Discovery Day*. However, a very dedicated group gathered on a truly magical autumn morning to mark this special part of our wartime history. A very interesting address was given by Colonel Win Fowles (Ret.), a former Commandant of Royal Aust. Corps of Transport, while Pastor Arthur Fry led the Prayers of the Service. Beautiful wreaths were laid, and whilst that part was in progress, student representatives from three of our local schools placed individual flowers at each Centaur plaque. The flowers were smaller this year, and rather difficult to acquire, but the sight of this wonderful tribute in Centaur Park certainly makes this Caloundra tradition very worthwhile on behalf of the many far away Centaur families.

The student representatives from the Caloundra Primary School, the Caloundra City School, and the Talara Primary College told me that they were honoured to be involved in the ceremony, and hope to learn more of the Centaur story. This is the real message that I hope to pass on to Caloundra's youth. Each year three different schools are invited to take part in the flower-laying, while all other schools have an open invitation to attend.



Keith Clegg with the Association wreath.

Within the last few weeks of writing, the passing of three special Centaur folk has saddened Caloundra. Fran Gardner, a resident of our Centaur RSL Home and former widow of John Maynard (victim); Rita Howard, the last surviving sibling of Pte. Jack Clark (victim); and Don Rogers, one of the famous Rats of Tobruk and an inaugural member of Caloundra's Centaur Commemorative Committee formed in 1993 to prepare for the 50th Centaur Anniversary. Don was a most respected former RSL Committee President and Life Member.

Vale – Fran, Rita and Don.

Erica Costigan



Centaur families in front of the Centaur Memorial at Centaur Park, Caloundra, 2011

We are eager to hear from Centaur families who wish to have a plaque installed in Centaur Park. There are 110 plaques currently installed in the Centaur Section of Caloundra's War Memorial Walkway, and new plaque applications would be welcome. With regard to the plaques already installed, I would appreciate a short "story" about each loved one as an historical record associated with the Walkway. I do have quite a number already, but many are missing. My address is 111 The Esplanade, Golden Beach Qld 4551 or Email to bryan.costigan@bigpond.com

Erica suggests that the stories be about A4 size, preferably accompanied by a photograph, if one is available. Ed.



Passing on the memories. Keith Clegg, with his grandchildren at his father's plaque on the Walkway.

The printed edition of this Newsletter has been generously donated by Macksville (NSW) Public School as a community service. Captain Hindmarsh (lost) and the family of Pte Eric Taylor (saved) were residents of Macksville NSW at the time of the sinking

RESEARCH INTO CENTAUR NURSES

Dr Madonna Grehan, Honorary Fellow in Nursing at the University of Melbourne and Director of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery History Project (www.anmhp.unimelb.edu.au) has received a grant to research the lives of the Centaur nurses in time for the 70th anniversary in 2013.

The scholarship for Dr Grehan's postdoctoral studies was awarded by the Royal College of Nursing Australia. The research aims to produce biographies of the twelve nurses on the *Centaur* at the time of the torpedoing, including their schooling, nursing training, details about military service, as well as the whereabouts of memorials to the nurses nationwide.

She will also examine nursing work aboard hospital ships in WWII and the public response in Victoria to the *Centaur's* sinking, especially in relation to the founding of a Centaur Nurses Memorial Education Trust in Victoria.

Dr Grehan welcomes contact with *AHS Centaur* nurses' families or others who may have information such as photographs or private correspondence/diaries. Madonna may be contacted at: mgrehan@unimelb.edu.au or 03 9484 8076.



JOAN FISHER, OAM

We congratulate our Oranje veteran, Mrs Joan Fisher on receiving the Order of Australia Medal in the 2011 Queen's Birthday Honours, for services to veterans, and to the community.

Story next edition.

The Myth of Immunity

This book by Christopher Milligan and John Foley is still the definitive book on 2/3 AHS Centaur. Painstakingly researched, it reads well and answers most of the questions.

Available to members of the Association for \$35 posted anywhere in Australia from:

Nairana Publications,
6A Doncaster St
Hendra Qld. 4011.

Quote this Newsletter.



OUR RATIONALE

To honour those who gave their lives on 2/3 AHS Centaur.

To provide a means of communication for Survivors, Descendants, Relatives, Friends & Organizations interested in 2/3 AHS Centaur

To help the healing process which for many still continues.

To ensure that the memory never fades, and the facts are not forgotten by succeeding generations.

To turn a tragedy into a triumph, and to foster a peaceful and forward-looking attitude.

ANZAC DAY IN SYDNEY

Marching on ANZAC Day in Sydney were Richard Jones, Dennis Miller, Rod and Enid Blackman, Keith Pryor (Manunda), Joan Fisher (Oranje), Joan's son, John and granddaughter, Peter Harrison (Oranje descendant) and Nathan Bryen (Manunda descendant).

Malcolm Knight, whose grandfather, Capt Hindmarsh, served on both Centaur and Oranje, again led the March, with AB Chris Fehrenbach, g/g/s of Pte Henry Fehrenbach, 2/12th, carrying the Australian flag, and Jan Thomas bearing the Hospital Ships placard. Jack Grey, passenger on Centaur's first voyage to NG joined us for lunch. With ANZAC Day being so close to Easter, regular marchers, the McSkimmings and Carol Miller were away.



Some of the Sydney marchers at Hyde Park at the end of the March when the rain had gone:

Nathan Bryen (Manunda descendant), Enid and Rod Blackman, Richard Jones, Joan Fisher (Oranje), her son John and granddaughter, and Keith Pryor (Manunda)

Disclaimer:-

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Let us remember Centaur - a vessel of mercy on the turbulent waters of a world at war