

THE FURPHY

ARMADALE SUB-BRANCH OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

September 2022 Edition



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General Meetings: Second Sunday of the month at 1030hrs

Annual General Meeting: Second Sunday of September

Committee Positions

Armadale Sub-Branch Committee	
President	Mr Ken Hepburn
Vice President	Mr Hans van de Velde
Secretary	Ms Carol King
Assistant Secretary	Mr Mike Fairweather
Treasurer	Mrs Cheryl Cowie
Assistant Treasurer	Mr John Hennah
Warden	Mr Graeme Cowie
Warden	Mr Bob Giles
Membership Officer	Mr Tom Rynn
Committee	Mr John Hennah
Committee	Mr Laurie Sargeson
Advocate / Welfare	Mr Brent Errington
Bar Manager	Mr Mike Fairweather

ADVOCATE / WELFARE REPORT (ERRO)

I currently am available as follows:

***Operating out of RAAFA on Mondays and Fridays between 0900 – 1230hrs
and***

Armadale RSL Sub-Branch between 1000-1400hrs on Thursdays

Contact Details: Mobile: 0407 449 150

e-mail: welfare2@armadalersl.com.au



Diary Dates for September

4 th	Sunday	Social Committee Meeting	1100
6 th	Tuesday	Management Committee Meeting	1830
11 th	Sunday	Annual General Meeting	1030

Japanese scientists have created a camera with a shutter speed so fast, they can now photograph a woman with her mouth shut.

A mummy covered in chocolate and nuts has been discovered in Egypt. Archaeologists believe it may be Pharaoh Roche...

Since it started raining, all the wife has done is look through the window. If it gets any worse, I'll have to let her in.

PRESIDENTS REPORT

Hi Folks,

I would like to thank all those who attended the Service Members Lunch on Sunday the 21st of August. It was a good turn out and I believe enjoyed by all. The food was good, and the band topped off the day, with some great music.

The Military Brotherhood Military Motorcycle Club and have decided to re-locate from Armadale RSL and I would like to thank all their members, for the valued contribution and support they have shown to Armadale RSL Sub-Branch over the years. I wish them all the best for the future, and I know they will go well under the guidance of Rod Jonsson and Paul Newman.

Our Annual General meeting is to be held on Sunday, 11th of September and I hope to see many members there to vote in the new committee. Nomination forms for the committee positions are available at the club rooms.

METRONET have released information that the upgrade of the Armadale Rail Line will not take place until late 2023, so we mark time until then.

Regards,

Ken Hepburn

President

Returned Services League Armadale Sub-Branch

Ph: (08) 9497 1972. M: 0428 001 949

1 Commerce Avenue Armadale WA 6112 | PO Box 697 Armadale WA 6992

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Secretary's Notes

Hi Everyone,

The recent Service Persons Luncheon was extremely successful, and our appreciation goes out to Lois Davis and her Social Committee for arranging the event, we realise how much work goes into organising such a great day.

WA Spit Roasts did a fabulous job with catering, both great quality and quantity.

The band (Mid Nite Velvet) were very well received and we hope to be able to have them back again in the near future.

Fundraising on the day was exceptional and thanks not only to Lois and her team, but also to all those in attendance who happily supported all our raffles during the afternoon.

We are again nearing our current terms as Executive and Committee. Nominations for the AGM and Notices of Motion close on Sunday 28th August. The AGM is on Sunday 11th September, please make every effort to attend. This will ensure that an efficient and appropriate committee is voted in to take our RSL forward in the direction Members expect.

The Military Brotherhood Military Motorcycle Club have made the decision to re-locate from our Sub-Branch. In doing so, we have received resignations from two Committee members - Rod Jonsson and Paul Newman. We thank them both for their important contributions over the past year or so.

Carol King

Sub-Branch Secretary

Membership Update

as at 28th August, 2022

Service Members:	196
Affiliate Members:	44
Social Members:	<u>59</u>
Total:	299

September 2021 membership was 335 total so we have dropped 13% over the year. The main decrease has been in the number of Affiliate Members.

All Affiliate application and payments are now managed by the Sub Branches and any contact with RSLWA is now referred back to the relevant Sub Branches for attention.

Nurses are now eligible to apply to be Affiliate Members as per decision of the 2022 State Congress.

Please address all enquiries relating to Membership to the Membership Officer.

Tom Rynn

Tel: 0439 934 285
E-mail: tomrynn@bigpond.com



HAPPY BIRTHDAY



September Service Members:

Casey	Mr	Damien	30/09
Clements	Mr	Trevor	27/09
Dempster	Mr	John	24/09
Dodds	Mr	Henry	26/09
Earl	Mr	Brad	13/09
Ewers	Mr	Richard	14/09
Hackshaw	Mr	Mitchell	27/09
Hansen	Mr	Cyril	07/09
Hanson	Ms	Melissa	28/09
Johnson	Mr	Malcolm	13/09
Kealy-Bateman	Ms	Marcelle	19/09
Maskiell	Mr	Joseph	16/09
McCarthy	Mr	John	17/09
Messenger	Mr	Rodney	11/09
Meyer	Mr	Steven	06/09
Michelsen	Mr	Ivan	19/09
Neunborn	Mr	Gavin	25/09
Reilly	Mr	Bruce	06/09
Reynolds	Mr	Linton	09/09
Sheridan	Mr	Brian	24/09
Treasure	Mr	Colin	26/09
Van De Velde	Mr	Johannes	23/09
Veernan	Mr	Henrie	22/09

September Affiliate Members:

Armin-Grimm	Mrs	Michelle	10/09
Burgess	Mr	Bradley	26/09
Paul	Mr	David	22/09
Reeves	Mr	Anthony	30/09

September Social Members:

Burroughs	Mr	Andrew	03/09
Reed	Miss	Rosemary	02/09
Starling	Mr	Kevin	09/09
Thoroddsson	Mr	Agust	15/09
White	Mr	Neil	05/09

*If anyone has been missed off the list, please advise
Tom Rynn (Membership Officer)*

**The members above may collect a free drink of their choice during
the month of September**

We hope you have a very special Birthday

Bar Manager's Report

Hi All,

Numbers seem to be getting better, and the takings on Sunday of the Service Persons Lunch were really good.

Toasted Sandwiches are now available from the Bar at a cost of \$5 each. These are going well and we thank Jules for kindly offering to cook these for our members on Fridays and Sundays.

Due to an increase in excise, the price of Kegs have again risen considerably. This worries me a bit, but we will try to absorb this increase for as long as we can.

Cheers for now,

Stormy



THE HYPNOTIST

It was entertainment night at the Senior Citizens Centre.

Claude the hypnotist explained: "I'm here to put you into a trance. I intend to hypnotize each and every member of the audience."

The excitement was almost electric as Claude withdrew a beautiful antique pocket watch from his coat. "I want you each to keep your eye on this antique watch. It's a very special watch. It's been in my family for six generations"

He began to swing the watch gently back and forth while quietly chanting, "Watch the watch, watch the watch, watch the watch. . . ." The crowd became mesmerised as the watch swayed back and forth, light gleaming off its polished surface.

Hundreds of pairs eyes followed the swaying watch, until, suddenly, the chain broke. It slipped from the hypnotist's fingers and fell to the floor, breaking into a hundred pieces.

"SHIT!" said the Hypnotist.

It took three days to clean up the Senior Citizens Centre.

Claude was never invited back to entertain.





Symbolism of the RSL Badge

The badge is a symbol of a readiness at all times to render service to Queen and country and to former comrades. It is a time-honoured emblem - one that has been worn with a deep sense of pride by the most revered in our land and one that glorifies the coats of arms of all privileged to wear it.

No wealth or influence can purchase the badge which may be worn only by those who have served their country.

The wattle is symbolic of Australia. The leek, rose, thistle and shamrock are symbolic of and represent the link with Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland respectively.

In the badge the red represents the blood tie of war that exists between comrades. White stands for the purity of motives in joining the League - to render service without thought of personal gain or ambition. The blue indicates a willingness to render that service to a comrade anywhere under the blue sky - wherever he may be.

Depicted in the centre of the badge, and encircled by the name of the organisation, are a sailor, soldier, airman and service woman marching together with their arms linked in friendship. This is to show that within the circle of the League, all Services and all ranks march together in unity and comradeship.

We would ask that you look upon your badge as an inspiration to good citizenship, cherishing it as a symbol of all that is best in our national life and living up to the high ideals on which the organisation is based.

Bathtub Test

During a visit to the local mental asylum, a visitor asked the director what the criterion was to define whether or not a patient should be institutionalised.

"Well," said the director, "we fill a bath with water, then we offer the patient a teaspoon, a teacup and a bucket, and ask him or her to empty the bathtub."

"Oh, I understand," said the visitor. "A normal person would use the bucket, because it's bigger than the spoon or the teacup."

"No," said the director, "A normal person would pull the plug. Would you like a bed near the window?"



A woman and a baby were in the doctor's examining room, waiting for the doctor to come in for the baby's first exam.

The doctor arrived, and examined the baby, checked his weight, and being a little concerned, asked if the baby was breast-fed or bottle-fed. 'Breast-fed,' she replied..

'Well, strip down to your waist,' the doctor ordered.

She did. He pinched her nipples, pressed, kneaded, and rubbed both breasts for a while in a very professional and detailed examination.

Motioning to her to get dressed, the doctor said, 'No wonder this baby is underweight. You don't have any milk.'

I know,' she said, 'I'm his Grandma, but I'm glad I came.

A nurse was on duty in the Emergency Room when a young woman with purple hair styled into a punk rocker Mohawk, sporting a variety of tattoos, and wearing strange clothing, entered.

It was quickly determined that the patient had acute appendicitis, so she was scheduled for immediate surgery.

When she was completely disrobed on the operating table, the staff noticed that her pubic hair had been dyed green and above it there was a tattoo that read . . . 'Keep off the grass.'

Once the surgery was completed, the surgeon wrote a short note on the patient's dressing, which said 'Sorry . . . had to mow the lawn.'



During a recent password audit, it was found that a blonde was using the following password:

MickeyMinniePlutoHueyLouieDeweyDonaldGoofy

When asked why such a big password, she said (wait for it)...
Here it comes...

That it had to be at least 8 characters long!

Significant September Events

Significance of 3 September - Roles of merchant mariners in wartime

On this day we reflect on the important role merchant mariners have played during wartime. They've often served on merchant navy crews in the face of danger and under challenging circumstances.

During the World Wars and the Vietnam War, merchant ships and their civilian crew have been responsible for transporting service personnel, supplies and equipment. Some vessels were converted to military hospital ships for wartime service.

Unlike naval warships, vessels in the merchant navy were often unarmed. This left them exposed to attack from the enemy, both in foreign waters and closer to the Australian coastline.

Merchant mariners worked with the constant threat of attack from enemy submarines, surface raiders, aircraft and sea mines. Their work was especially dangerous because the convoys were slow.

The Battle of the Atlantic is a well-known battle involving merchant mariners. It lasted almost the entire duration of World War II. The battle was fought across the war's most dangerous shipping lanes. Over 3000 Allied merchant ships were sunk. Some 30,000 Allied sailors and merchant mariners were lost at sea.



The Battle of the Atlantic was the longest continuous battle of the Second World War and one in which Canada played a central role. The battle began on the opening day of the war in September 1939 and ended almost six years later with Germany's surrender in May 1945.

The Battle of the Atlantic was the struggle between the Allied and German forces for control of the Atlantic Ocean. The Allies needed to keep the vital flow of men and supplies going between North America and Europe, where they could be used in the fighting, while the Germans wanted to cut these supply lines. To do this, German submarines, called U-boats, and other warships prowled the Atlantic Ocean sinking Allied transport ships.

The Battle of the Atlantic brought the war to Canada's doorstep, with U-boats torpedoing ships within sight of Canada's East Coast and even in the St. Lawrence River. Canada's Merchant Navy, along with the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), played a key role in the Allied efforts. East Coast cities soon found themselves involved in the battle, since Allied convoys (groups of ships that crossed the Atlantic together under the protection of naval escorts) were frequently leaving busy ports like Halifax and Sydney, Nova Scotia, and St. John's, Newfoundland, during the war.

Challenges and Successes: Early in the war, German U-boats took a heavy toll on merchant shipping as the Allies struggled to find effective ways to combat the enemy threat. Between 1939 and 1942, the Germans increased the number of U-boats from 30 to 300 and developed effective hunting techniques like using groups of submarines, called wolfpacks, to attack convoys. Their efforts initially paid off, with 454,000 tonnes of shipping being lost to German U-boats in June 1941 alone. Their successes continued as nearly 400 Allied ships were sunk between January and July 1942, while only seven U-boats were lost. The situation was very serious for the Allies, as merchant ships were being sunk faster than they could be replaced, thereby putting the supply link between North America and Europe at great risk.

Technology played an important role in the Battle of the Atlantic. Aircraft were effective in protecting merchant ships, but the Allied planes used earlier in the war did not have enough range to offer air cover for the convoys all the way across the Atlantic. Indeed, the central area of the ocean beyond aircraft range became known as the "Black Pit" as that was where many of the heaviest convoy losses occurred. However, the introduction of new long-range planes helped reduce the hazards of this dangerous portion of the run.

Both sides kept trying to get the upper hand in technology and tactics during the Battle of the Atlantic. Germany developed torpedoes that were attracted to the noise made by a ship's propellers. Allied scientists responded by inventing a noise-making device that was towed behind a ship to divert the torpedoes. New radar and sonar (ASDIC) technologies helped the Allies find the U-boats and new weapons, like the "Hedgehog" bombs, helped sink the submarines more effectively. The Germans also developed technological advancements like snorkel tubes that allowed U-boats to run their diesel engines while travelling underwater and on-board radar that increased their submarines' capabilities. Eventually, the improved equipment and tactics of the Allies finally helped turn the tide of the battle in their favour, with the U-boat fleet suffering heavy losses during the later phases of the war.

The growth of Canada's navy was remarkable. At the beginning of the Second World War, the RCN had only six ocean-going ships and 3,500 personnel. By the end of the war, Canada had one of the largest navies in the world with 434 commissioned vessels and 95,000 men and women in uniform. Canada's industry also played an important role in the growth of our military and merchant navies. From 1941 to 1945, Canadian shipyards produced approximately 403 merchant ships, 281 fighting ships, 206 minesweepers, 254 tugs, and 3,302 landing craft.

Furthermore, Canada played an important role in directing Allied efforts in the Battle of the Atlantic. In 1943, Rear Admiral Leonard Murray was put in charge of the Allied air and naval forces in the Northwest Atlantic—the only theatre of war commanded by a Canadian during the conflict.

Sacrifices: Helping the Allies triumph in the Battle of the Atlantic came at a high price. More than 1,600 Merchant Navy personnel from Canada and Newfoundland were killed. Indeed, percentage-wise, their casualty rate was higher than those of any of Canada's fighting services during the Second World War—one out of every seven Merchant Navy sailors who served was killed or wounded.

The RCN and RCAF also paid a high toll in the Battle of the Atlantic. Most of the 2,000 RCN officers and men who died during the war were killed during the Battle of the Atlantic, as were 752 members of the RCAF. There were also civilian casualties. On October 14, 1942, 136 people died when the ferry SS *Caribou* was sunk as it crossed from Nova Scotia to Newfoundland.

Legacy: Allied victory in the Second World War would not have been possible without victory at sea. It would require overcoming great odds, but the courage of the RCN, Merchant Navy and RCAF personnel helped keep the Allied convoys running and the supply lines to Europe open. These brave men and women were some of the more than one million Canadians who served in the cause of peace and freedom during the Second World War.

The Australian War Memorial estimates that over 800 Australian merchant mariners died serving the Allied cause during the World Wars. On this day, we honour them and their fellow mariners.

The Merchant Navy Memorial on the edge of Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra commemorates the contribution made by the Australian merchant navy during the World Wars.

We commemorate Merchant Navy Day each year on 3 September. This is the anniversary of the first merchant marine sinking of World War II. The British liner SS *Athenia* was torpedoed and sunk without warning by the German submarine U-30. This happened only 10 hours after Britain's declaration of war in 1939.

The Sinking of the S S Athenia

This is the story of Michael McShane and how he survived the sinking of the SS *Athenia*, the first ship torpedoed by a U-boat in World War II.



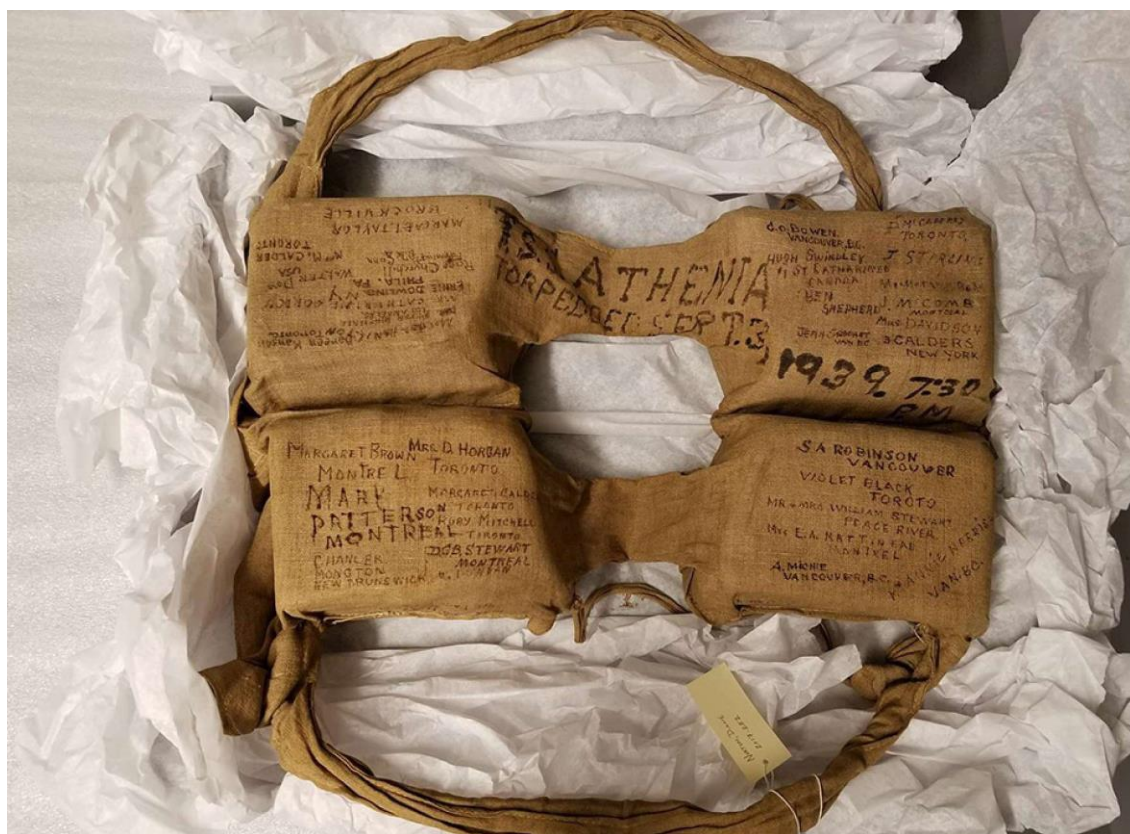
Call it fate, coincidence, predestination, or just bad luck, somehow Michael McShane ended up on the British passenger liner SS *Athenia* during the first few days of September 1939. McShane was returning across the Atlantic to his home in the United States as world events were spinning out of control.

Politicians were posturing, militaries were preparing, and almost every living citizen in Europe began to feel the fear and uncertainty not felt since Flanders's fields were sewn with the blood of an entire generation just over 20 years before. Gas is often the most remembered fear of the First World War.

Elemental feeling, seemingly unstoppable, it was carried by a gentle wind changing it from a peaceful breeze to a deathly whisper.

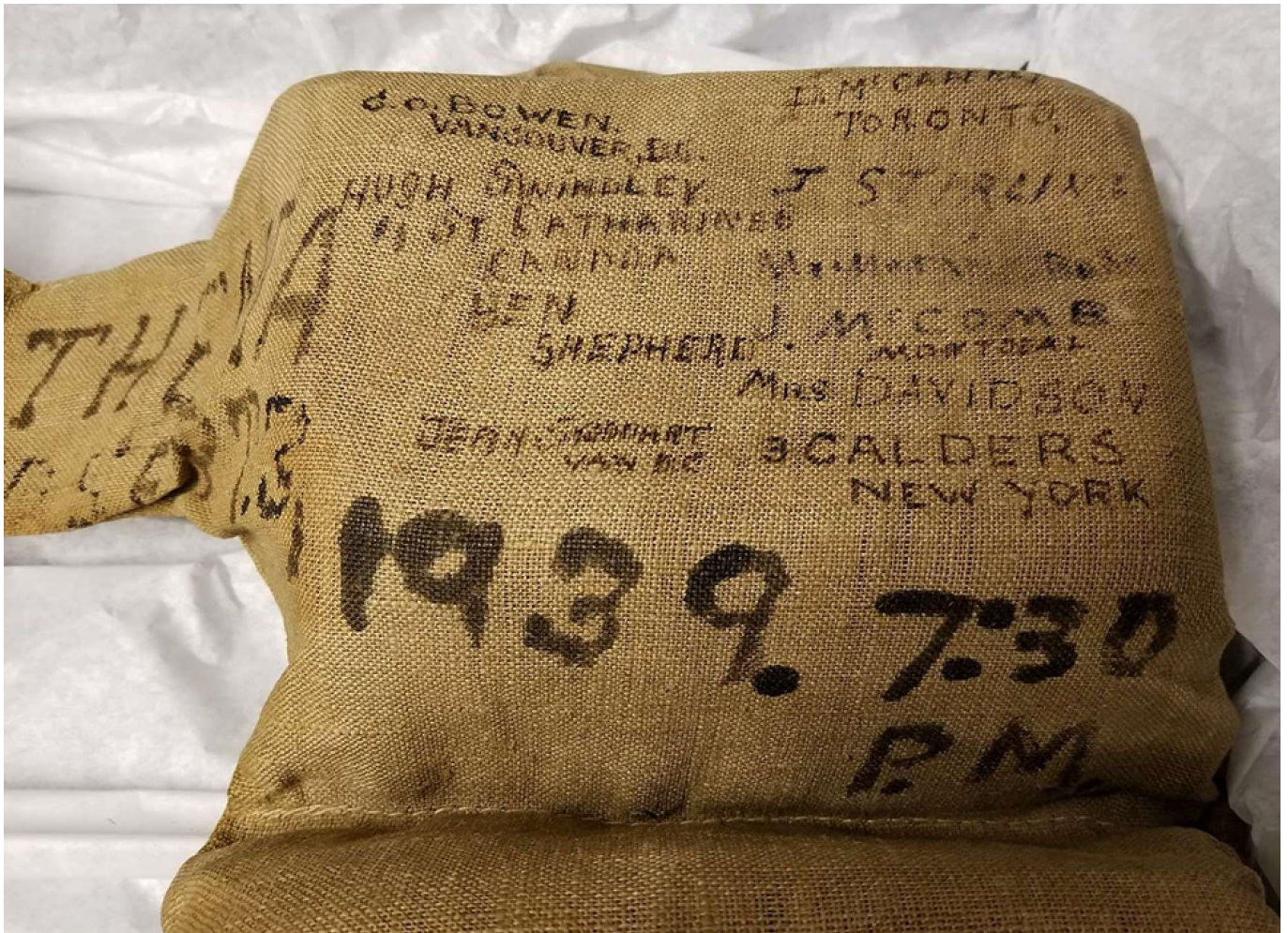
On land the word gas could easily replace fear in all uses. On the sea that word was "torpedo." Carried by the "underwater menace," the torpedo was the principal weapon of the submarine—or as it was called in the German Navy, the U-boat. These events and modern weapons, through purpose or fate, conspired to place an Irish American man in a fight for survival during the first major event of World War II in Europe.

The lifejacket of Michael McShane, a one-of-a-kind artifact was donated to the National WWII Museum by McShane's daughter. As with many pieces in the same collection it arrived with a train of provenance that was based on a few photos taken after the sinking of the Athenia and also word of mouth – a story told within the family.



The lifejacket Michael McShane wore when he abandoned the sinking SS Athenia. This was a standard civilian lifejacket for the time, consisting of cork floating blocks held together by canvas. The wearer placed their head through the hole in the centre of the lifejacket. McShane had fellow survivors sign their names.

Signatures of fellow survivors aboard the SS City of Flint. The majority of passengers travelling on the Athenia were Canadian citizens.



McShane recorded the date and time of the torpedo striking the Athenia on his lifejacket

The lifejacket itself is a rather mundane piece of equipment on a passenger ship.

Similar to the kicker on a football team, it waits on the sideline until needed—and when needed it is under a lot of pressure to perform properly. Although lifejackets existed long before the G7a torpedo launched by U-30 caved in the hull of SS Athenia, the abundance of lifejackets she carried aboard can be attributed to another disaster.

When the RMS Titanic struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic in 1912, resulting in the deaths of over 1,500 passengers, a number of “why” questions were asked.

Why was the ship travelling so fast? Why did they ignore ice warnings? Why were there not enough lifeboats? After the shock of the sinking had settled in, changes were instituted in response to the ultimate question of why had so many people died? The answers resulted in sweeping reforms, mostly codified in the International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea in 1914—an agreement still in use today—requiring more lifeboats, safety equipment, drills, and radio procedures on passenger and merchant vessels.

By September 1, 1939, the day the SS Athenia sailed for the United States, these rules had brought about real change. Athenia was loaded with lifesaving equipment.

Sailing with 1,418 passengers and crew, the ship was equipped with 1,600 lifejackets and 26 lifeboats capable of carrying over 1,800 passengers. For an added measure of safety, there were 21 Gradwell floats and 18 life buoys.

Each cabin, including the temporary spaces converted to carry extra passengers, contained a lifejacket for each soul. Upon boarding, passengers were required to perform a lifeboat drill - learning the location of their assigned lifeboat as a practice for any emergency.

No one ever planned on actually using this equipment—and no one planning their use expected the cause to be anything more than a maritime accident.

Michael McShane was a man just trying to get back to his family. He had recently won prize money in the Irish Sweepstakes, a lottery that provided funding to hospitals. McShane had travelled to his native Ireland to collect his winnings and to visit relatives. However, with war clouds quickly forming over Europe it was soon time to return home to his family in Detroit, Michigan. McShane was lucky to get passage on the Athenia.

The British government had already begun requisitioning passenger liners for conversion to troop ships or armed merchant cruisers. Cancellations were becoming more frequent as thousands sought to get to the relative safety of North America, only to have their ship handed over to the government. According to accounts, this added to an already high level of anxiety aboard the ship.

In the days leading up to the sailing on September 1, 1939, the news was full of headlines about ultimatums being issued between countries, while local preparations for war were beginning.

Before leaving the final stop at Liverpool, the Captain went to the Admiralty Building to ask for any updates for sailing instructions in the event war broke out. Since August 25, 1939, the Trade Division of the Admiralty had been directing the sailing routes of all merchant ships.

As he returned to the Athenia, the Captain brought a few updates to the already altered sailing routes, including a diversion 30 miles further north than his originally planned route, and also news that Germany had invaded Poland.



The boarding pass carried by Michael McShane during his short time on the SS Athenia

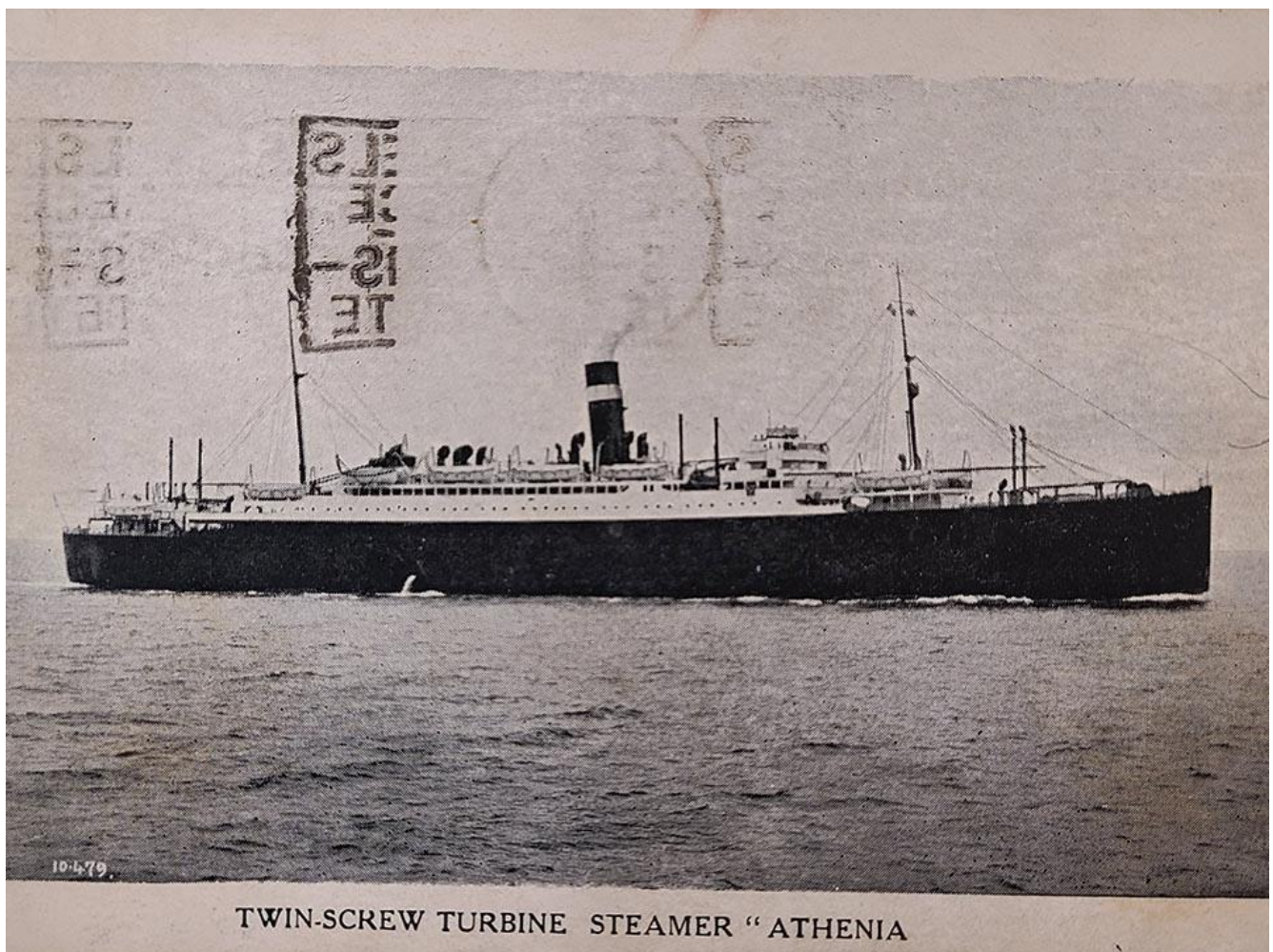
Upon arrival, Michael McShane presented his boarding pass and went to his assigned cabin, # D 89, deep within the Athenia, on the lowest passenger deck.

The Athenia was designed to provide people that could not afford first class accommodations with a more comfortable trip across the Atlantic. Containing only second and third-class cabins, the ship was equipped with a number of dining rooms, sitting rooms, bars, libraries, and smoking rooms to give lower paying fares the luxury often associated with transatlantic passenger liners.

A few of these spaces had been converted to bunk rooms to fit additional passengers. However, the ship still maintained most of the easy-going family reputation it had maintained since entering service in the early 1920s. Due to the large passenger compliment, meal times were divided into three separate sittings.

Each cabin was assigned a dining room and time to report for meals. Stewards and Stewardesses were on hand to care for the needs of all passengers.

Messmen prepared and served the meals while the crew went about the business of operating and maintaining a transatlantic passenger liner.



Post card card from Michael McShane showing a broad side view of the SS Athenia. Originally commissioned in 1922, the Athenia was part of the Donaldson line and made a regular passage between the United Kingdom and Canada.

McShane's typed account of his experience during the sinking of Athenia only addresses what happened as the evacuation began. We still do not know what he did during his first two days aboard or where he was when the torpedo hit. What we can say about his experience is the ship operated in a business-as-usual manner for September 2, and most of September 3, with the exception of the black-out regulations imposed by the captain at night. Of the 1,102 passengers aboard, McShane was part of two small groups: he was a citizen of the United States and he was male. There were only 311 Americans on the Athenia, and even though this had no effect on their treatment or really anything aboard ship, it became very important after the sinking when Germany and England thought back to World War I, when the torpedoing of passenger liners by U-boats killed American citizens and brought the United States into the war. The second small group he was a part of was being male. Including the crew, the ship was three quarters women and children. This would have a much more local effect later when it came time to row boats after abandoning ship.

The torpedo struck at about 7:30 in the evening during the second dinner sitting. Part of a spread of torpedoes fired by U-30 from 1,600 yards, the explosion suddenly and violently rocked the Athenia on the port (left) side near the engine room.

In this moment she became the first ship torpedoed in the West during World War II—the full declaration of war was only hours old at this point.

The explosion instantly flooded the engine room, killing the crew to the man. Dozens of passengers, mostly women and children, were killed when their cabins were smashed and flooded. Dozens more who were lounging on deck or on hatch #5 were launched into the air and fell into the gaping wound in the middle of the ship. Witnesses described a blast full of steel, soot, smoke, and body parts erupting from the hatch. McShane does not say where he was when the torpedo hit. If he was in his cabin, he was lucky to survive as many of the cabins on the after part of D deck quickly filled with water, drowning their occupants. If he survived the initial blast in his cabin, he would have had to struggle through a deck full of water and panicking passengers, in the pitch black. If he was not in his cabin at the time of the explosion, he would have had to either return to his cabin to get his lifejacket or acquire one by alternate means. His account does not tell.

What it does tell is how quickly the passengers and crew reacted to the disaster. The drills worked. Within minutes the watertight doors were closed, and passengers began to appear at their lifeboat stations, lifejackets in hand. McShane really stepped up to help where he could as crowds of panicked people began to gather to get off the ship. Worried they would run out of lifeboats, panicked parents and passengers began tossing children into the first lifeboats, and McShane threw three or four into waiting boats before being placed aboard lifeboat 14. As his boat was being lowered, the panicked parents of three-year-old Rosemary Cass-Beggs lowered her into boat 14, desperate to get their daughter off the sinking ship. Wearing only a thin dress, she was wrapped in a blanket and was seen being comforted by McShane as she cried for her mother. For the next few hours they drifted, awaiting rescue and dealing with new problems. According to McShane, he was one of only five men in his boat, a few of which were unable to help row the boat. Packed with almost 80 people it was very difficult to make any headway or even to keep the boat pointed into the waves to lessen their effect. To make matters worse, the plugs were out on their boat. Each lifeboat had a hole at the bottom to allow water to drain out when they were on the ship.

Before being launched, the plugs had to be put in place to keep the water out. Without a plug, it was not long before their boat was full up to the seat bottoms with water and fuel oil.

For hours they struggled with lost children, water, waves, and cold until the first rescue ship arrived. McShane could see the Norwegian ship Knute Nelson, but given their lack of rowing power there was no chance they could get to her. Then, the brightly lit luxury yacht Southern Cross appeared on the horizon. Originally owned by Howard Hughes, the Southern Cross was then owned by a Swedish millionaire named Axel Wenner-Gren, who immediately redirected his yacht as soon as the distress call was heard. Lifeboat 14 was one of the first to be picked up by the Southern Cross, eventually over 200 survivors were packed aboard. McShane wrote about caring for Rosemary Cass-Beggs by wrapping her in a blanket in the lifeboat and getting her aboard the Southern Cross.

Later, he was found with Rosemary, asleep in his arms by a Mrs. Winifred Davidson. McShane asked Mrs. Davidson to watch the little girl so he could search for her parents. He was never able to find them because they had been picked up by the Knute Nelson.

Lifeboat with survivors of the SS Athenia seen as they are being picked up by the SS City of Flint. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museums.

McShane's final part of his story shows a bit of pride in his own actions and the actions of his fellow survivors. Wenner-Gren, eager to get the Southern Cross to Bermuda, transferred all survivors over to the American ship City of Flint. Less than half the tonnage of the Athenia, the City of Flint was strained by the addition of hundreds of destitute survivors. Having been torpedoed during the First World War, the captain of the City of Flint did not hesitate to take on the victims as he continued a slow 10-day passage to Canada. As they sailed west, a strong community arose aboard the City of Flint. The survivors created a ship's newspaper, manufactured clothes for the children, held a parade, a party, and helped clean up the ship. McShane wrote about it as well: "when we went aboard the City of Flint we had to get busy and make berths to sleep in so the men folks started with hammer and saw to make the berths, and believe me we made dandys [sic]. We made 110 bunks. We made the framework and then stretched canvas along and then paper on top of that, so they made grand beds."

McShane's final action before departing the City of Flint gives you a sense of the moment and what it meant to him.

He took the lifejacket he was wearing when he abandoned ship and had his fellow survivors sign it. Like many of the others, Michael McShane lost everything but the contents of his pockets and the clothes on his back. But unlike any other survivor, aboard the first train home, McShane had a reminder of that fateful night as he carried a lifejacket from the SS Athenia covered in signatures of his fellow survivors.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – NOMINATIONS

Close: Sunday 28th August, 2022 at 6:00pm

(Forms are on the Notice Board)



**RETURNED SERVICES LEAGUE
ARMADALE SUB-BRANCH**

Your RSL