



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

MEDIA RELEASE

Friday, 3 September 2010

AUSTRALIANS COMMEMORATE MERCHANT NAVY DAY

Australians are today encouraged to reflect on the service and sacrifice of Australian merchant mariners who served with distinction during times of war.

The Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Mr Ian Campbell, said thousands of Australian merchant mariners served during the First and Second World Wars and the Vietnam War on Australian, Commonwealth and Allied ships, as well as merchant ships from other nations, performing vital and often dangerous duties.

Merchant Navy Day is commemorated on 3 September every year. This date marks the sinking of the first Allied merchant vessel, the British liner *Athenia*, on the first day of the Second World War.

"Merchant Navy Day provides an opportunity for Australia's merchant mariners to receive the recognition they deserve for their efforts in serving Australia and other allied nations," Mr Campbell said.

"While their story is not always widely known, merchant seamen played a key role in supporting Australia's defence forces during times of war. On this day we commemorate the 435 brave Australians known to have lost their lives serving in the Merchant Navy.

"Merchant seamen braved treacherous seas and oceans to deliver troops, equipment and supplies, as well as helping to evacuate civilians from threatened areas. The ships were often large and slow and many did not have weapons with which to defend themselves, making them ideal targets. As a result, many merchant seamen fell victim to enemy warships, raiders, mines, submarines and aircraft.

"The courage and determination of the merchant mariners has underpinned many Australian and Allied victories on land, at sea and in the air. Today provides a great opportunity for all Australians to understand and better appreciate the service and sacrifice of the Merchant Navy, and its importance in helping to defend our nation," Mr Campbell said.

MEDIA INQUIRIES: DVA media 02 6289 6203

*During caretaker period, media releases to mark major commemorative dates are issued by the Department of Veterans' Affairs.