

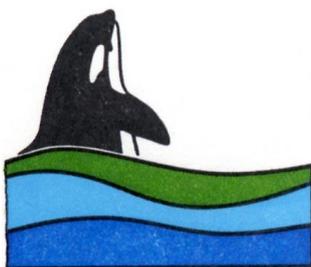
Special Interest Articles:

- ❖ ALL ABOARD THE RAG TAG FLEET WITH JOHN
- ❖ MISSION X
- ❖ MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES CONFERENCE
- ❖ ROB VAN DEN HELM'S INTERNSHIP
- ❖ THE KIMBERLEY CAMP DOG VISITS EKWM
- ❖ WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN
- ❖ EKWM OPEN DAY
- ❖ SEHGI VISITS MAHRATTA HOMESTEAD
- ❖ FAMILY HISTORY EXPO

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All aboard the Rag Tag Fleet with John



Photo Credits -John Abbottsmith in uniform. Courtesy of the Abbottsmith Family
-Heard Island Expedition crew taking a break. John Abbottsmith far left. National Library of Australia.
-Son, Garry, with his father's US Army issued duffel bag, recently donated to EKWM.

The Rag Tag Fleet (5 June – 4 Feb 2018)

This special exhibition at EKWM commemorates 33 civilian men from the South Coast who served with the American Army in New Guinea in World War II. Around 3,000 Australians served with the US Army's Services of Supply branch which was comprised of all manner of vessels not already engaged in defence. Nicknamed the *Rag Tag Fleet* by one of the commanding officers, ships ranged in size and types and included fishing trawlers, yachts and coastal steamers. Those who manned them were either too young, too old, or considered medically unfit for general defence service. These civilians navigated their ships through hazardous, uncharted, and reef strewn waterways, facing both enemy and friendly fire. They transported vital supplies and troops up along the front line, and returned with the sick, injured and dead. Thanks to the families of these men, our Collection Manager, Jody White, has been able to gather more photographs and information about these amazing men. A photographic slideshow puts a face to those names commemorated at Eden's Cenotaph, though we have been unable to locate a photograph for some of our servicemen. We

would be grateful to hear from families who may have one, or more information on their lives.

We'd like to thank the generosity of the family of John Abbottsmith. They have donated photographs of John, autobiographical material, and his original 1943 US Army issued duffel bag – the first time this bag design was issued to US troops. By the time John joined the US Army Small Ships fleet, he had already served overseas with the Australian Army in the Middle East and had been a snow ski instructor at the Australia Corps Ski School in the Lebanese mountains of Syria. After this was disbanded, he returned to the desert where he was wounded at El Alamein and subsequently medically discharged. In his autobiography, John commented:

'I decided to have a go at joining the Yank's ships as I heard some good stories about the boats. Well, I got the job and set sail for New Guinea and the War Zone. [I] was an engineer on the LST landing craft until sunk at the landing in the Philippines.'
John's worldly adventures

continued after the war. He joined the Australian Antarctic Research Expedition (AARE) to Heard Island for the 1946-1947 season. This expedition claimed the island for the Australian government and conducted geographical mapping, meteorological and wildlife observations, all of which he documented in an incredible collection of photographs. John's contribution continues to be recognised by the AARE, and Abbottsmith Glacier remains as a testament to his service.

John's contribution to the Snowy Mountain region includes measuring and gauging water flows for feasibility studies for the Snowy Mountain Hydro-electric Scheme, establishing the first commercial NSW commercial ski field rope tow, and being an integral member of the Kosciusko search and rescue team. He was also the first to import snow mobiles into the region.

John led an incredibly full and interesting life and we are thankful to the Abbottsmith's for sharing his story with us. Watch this space for news on a future presentation on the wonderful adventures of Johnny Abbottsmith.

*Article and Photographs by
Jody White EKWM curator*

Mission X – The Rag Tag Fleet

3,000 small ships docked at Pier 10 of Walsh Bay, amid the hustle and bustle of Sydney Harbour during WW2 to be stripped, reinforced, fitted with machine guns, painted grey and given an S number and an American flag. The fleet included elegant barquentines, ketches and schooners; solid fishing trawlers, tugs and barges; launches and speedboats; ferries, coastal freighters, the motor yacht of a Los Angeles entrepreneur, and even the Sydney showboat Koondooloo (S181). Thus the ragtag fleet was purchased, hired and requisitioned by the US Army to carry troops and the material needed to meet the Japanese advance along the north coast of Papua New Guinea.

US Army Captain John Sheridan (Sher) Fahnestock had led a small crew on two maritime expeditions to the south Pacific before the war. When the USA entered the war, Fahnestock proposed Mission X using the Small Ships Section to General Douglas MacArthur. He believed shallow draught small ships could navigate the tropics and be less conspicuous than big ships. After the Philippines fell, and MacArthur evacuated to Australia, Fahnestock reactivated Mission X from US Army Headquarters in Melbourne in March 1942. The Mission later moved to the Grace Building in York Street, Sydney, which remained the HQ for the US Army Small Ships Section until 1947. Owner skippers often came

with their own vessels, collecting crew along the way. Older and experienced, they had the know-how and bravery to keep their vessels going and were working on paid 6 to 12 month contracts. Vi Miller was the only woman in the fleet. She joined as paid cook and deckhand on her husband's 15m fishing launch Sunshine (S67) when it was hired in Mackay QLD in July 1942, but was put off before leaving Australian waters. Our government allowed the US Army to employ men over 45 years of age and 15-17 year old boys as crew, and the Americans opened the Apprentice Seaman's School at Walsh bay in 1943, specifically to train 163 boys in sea craft under the tutelage of Arthur Morgan of the Volunteer Coastal Patrol. The Small Ships took men, food, medical supplies, ammunition, tanks, cranes, even pre-cut wooden wharfs, and on one voyage 50 live sheep. They sheltered by day under the cover of jungle estuaries, and delivered their cargo by night, returning with the wounded and the dead. Smaller boats remained in makeshift ports as transports and to deliver cargo to beachheads and along rivers. They were strafed and bombed by Japanese aircraft and were also mistaken for the enemy by American aircraft. On 16 February 1944 the Lorinna (S135) a big Tasmanian

timber trader, was hit by a Japanese aircraft nicknamed 'washing machine Charlie' at Cape Gloucester, New Britain. Seven crew members were killed and 14 wounded. There were a few sets of brothers, one husband and wife, many itinerants, and at least one father and son in the Small Ships. Movie star Gary Cooper visiting New Guinea to entertain troops recognised a grey motor yacht in Lae Harbour. It was Norab (S206), once the most elaborate private vessel in San Diego and now a hospital ship of the US Army Small Ships that ferried up to 100 stretcher cases and 70 walking wounded at a time. Cooper was often a guest of its owner Baron Long on Hollywood parties to Mexico. Long had leased Norab to the Army for \$1. The Hollywood connection doesn't end there, in 1960; the exploits of the Small Ships were celebrated by Hollywood in the film 'The Wackiest Ship in the Army' starring Jack Lemmon and Chips Rafferty, followed by a TV series in 1965. Some wonderful objects, many lent for the Mission X exhibition included a log book, navigation log, and sextant retrieved from the Helen Dawn (S56). While loaded with ammunition, the wooden fishing trawler from Ulladulla ran aground at Harigo on the PNG coast on Thanksgiving Day 1942 with US General Harding aboard. She was strafed and sunk by Japanese bombers the next morning. Skipper John Plumb, rescued his sextant (with shattered lens and bullet hole) and logbooks from the wreck

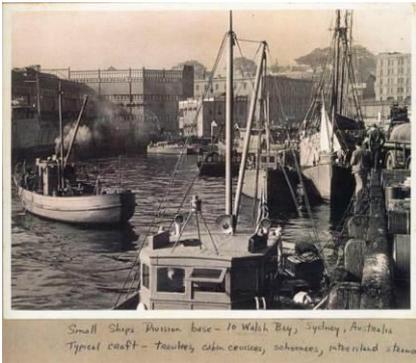
From Inside History magazine talk with Richard Wood, United States of America Gallery at the [Australian National Maritime Museum](#) about [Mission X – the ragtag fleet](#)

Museums and Galleries Conference

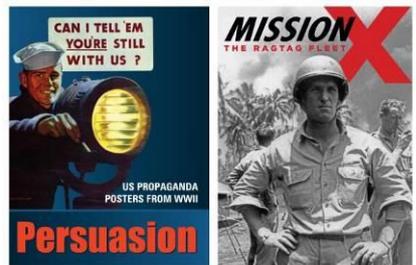
Our curator, Jody White, attended this year's annual Australian Museum and Galleries conference in Brisbane and while she was there visited the office of US General, Sir Douglas MacArthur which has been restored to its original WWII décor. Here many a decision would have been made in relation

to the US Small Ships fleet – see our article on the *Rag Tag Fleet*. The conference is an opportunity for Jody to learn from museum colleagues, and about their projects, right across the country and the world, and is a good brainstorming tool for generating new

exhibition ideas including design and interactive technologies. She also attended sessions associated with conservation and visitor services which are all part of her role here at the museum. Each year bursaries are made available to volunteers and paid staff. Jody was lucky enough to be supported through this Museum Australia program.



Small Ships Division base – 10 Walsh Bay, Sydney, Australia
Typical craft – trawler, cabin cruiser, schooner, motorised steamer



General MacArthur's office above and curator Jody White below chairing a curatorial meeting.



Rob's van den Helm's internship

Robert van den Helm has been a volunteer at the Museum for the past two years and has been helping our curator keep museum displays in ship shape order, coordinate our volunteers and in 2016 joined the Museum committee. In April, Robert completed an internship at the Australian National Museum which was generously supported through the Maritime Museums of Australia Project Support Scheme (MMASS). While at ANMM, Robert had the

opportunity to meet with volunteers and staff associated with volunteer management, customer service, education and conservation and curatorial projects and learn how they work compared to EKWM. When reflecting on the experience, Robert said, 'Everyone was so generous with their time and knowledge. I enjoyed talking to several ANMM volunteers about their experience at the Museum. I learnt that we

weren't too different down here in Eden - similar issues and personalities. We are lucky in having a much smaller structure in getting some things done, conversely the smaller structure also means less people to get things done.' The MMASS grant program is administered by the ANMM and in the past has also assisted us with a restoration of a rare opalotype portrait of George and Sarah Davidson.



EKWM volunteer, Robert van den Helm, at the ANMM with fellow internship volunteer, Cathy Mann from Holbrook Submarine Museum. Courtesy of ANMM.



Jila with her family on the deck looking down on Twofold Bay, and shaking paws with Kerri Brady.

The Kimberley Camp Dog visits EKWM

Families enjoyed meeting Jila, *The Kimberley Camp Dog* at EKWM on July the 2nd where Kerri Brady, President of the Far South Coast Animal Welfare League launched the book written by author Susie Sarah. This story about this travelling

doggie who enjoys flying by Qantas to Melbourne, then travelling with her family to Eden to enjoy Christmas with Trish and Richard Lamacraft Friends of EKWM. A table of activities relating to the story kept holiday makers busy and each family donated dog food to the

Animal Welfare League. The book, along with other Little Ant stories, is available in our shop. The previous day the museum hosted the Eden Cash Mob which raised \$160 towards the Scout Hall Mural.



Rob Whiter above, and below Janet in the EKWM shop with a copy of *When the Chips are Down*



When the Chips are Down

Rob Whitehead's book *When the Chips are Down*, published by EKWM about local sleeper cutters, will delight those who are deeply interested in local history and our timber industry. In the late 1940's and early 1950's there were around 300 sleeper cutter licenses in the Eden area.

'*Sleeper cutters came in all shapes and sizes*' states Ross Dobbyn, Regional Forester of the NSW South East Forestry Region, in the foreword of the book. After reading parts of Rob's book I can see exactly what he means.

An example of this is Irene King, who, with her

sister followed their father into the forest to cut sleepers. It was often a family tradition.

This book goes into great detail providing examples of the equipment, methods used, how they cut and shipped timber, the species of trees harvested and even how the camps were set up. It paints a vivid picture of a long gone era.

A collection of amazing historical photographs make this book a delight for collectors of early Australian history.

Do yourself a favour and call in to the EKWM bookshop and grab a copy. **A great read! ★★★★★ (5 out of 5)**

Bring the Family along to the EKWM Open Day

Bring the whole family along to the Eden Killer Whale Museum Open Day on Tuesday the 19th of August, with free admission from 2pm to 4pm.

This special event coincides with International Lighthouse Weekend so our own lighthouse will be manned with guides and open to visitors.

Museum curator Jody White has

selected some very special and unusual historic objects sourced from our collection to get us all thinking, and many of us will remember how they were used.

We will be asking children to think of modern day objects that have replaced these in our homes.

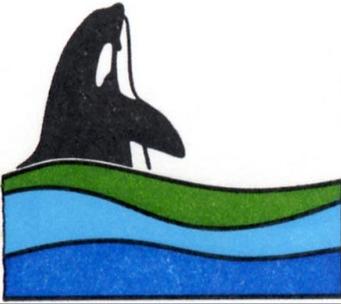
An information table manned by Friends of EKWM will provide

details of museum membership for those interested in joining this merry crew of volunteers and enjoying the benefits of membership.

Check out the window alongside the Commonwealth Bank in town for our History Week display from September 2nd – 10th. The theme this year is *Popular Culture*, Jody has come up an amazing display showing how well the museum documents our history.



A visit with SEHGI to Mahratta Homestead



COMING EVENTS:

BUSH POETS AT THE RUSTY PLOUGH SATURDAY AUG 5TH 2PM.

COMMUNITY OPEN DAY EKWM 2-4PM 19TH AUGUST

LIGHTHOUSE WEEKEND AUGUST 19TH – 20TH

HISTORY WEEK 2-10TH SEPT.

FAMILY HISTORY EXPO 12TH SEPT. SEHGI MEETING 12TH AUGUST

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L - SEHGI at Mahratta homestead Photo Jenny Drenkhahn. R - In the middle row forth from left is Hyam Moses Joseph. Photo Bombala Times.



On May the 13th SEHGI met at the Bombala court house residence then after hearing about the history of the 1860's Mahratta homestead and the Joseph family, they later headed off to inspect the homestead and view the original Mahratta holding.

Clensendorf known as Clear-em-off took possession in 1833 of the site on which Bombala now stands, running sheep and cattle. After Jimmy Quinn, his stockman was found drowned in the Bombala River, Clensendorf moved away and the land became the Mahratta run.

Mahratta was taken up by May, an English gentleman

A must see - the Family History Expo

On 12 August, EKWM will be participating in the Family History Expo to be held at Club Sapphire, Merimbula. Friends will be on hand to assist with inquiries and book sales. Our curator Jody White will be on hand to help family historians discover what records are held within EKWM's database. This help proved to be a success when we attended in 2014 and was quite overwhelming for one member of the public who found a photograph of her father she had never seen before. This resulted in information sharing between both parties and photographic donations to

who returned to England after a few years and Throsby of Bong Bong. May lived at "old Mahratta" on Saucy Creek where The Willows now stand.

John McKinlay (1819 – 1872), the explorer, visited Mahratta often during Throsby's time. He took delivery of a mob of cattle there and drove them overland to Adelaide.

Throsby sold the property to George Hebben, a connection of Throsby's, from 1852 to 1856. He hired German migrants to work as shepherds paying them 50 pounds per annum for a two year term. He approached

EKWM which were not only of her family, but photos that also place them with other significant members of Eden's fishing industry. A beneficial exercise for both parties, and future researchers! All museums of the South-East will be represented, as well as the Australian War Memorial. Come and see us at Club Sapphire between 10am-4pm on the 12th and uncover the heroes and villains in your family. This project is supported by Arts NSW's Volunteer Museums Grant Program, a devolved funding program administered by Museums and Galleries of NSW on behalf of the NSW Government.

teamster William Went to set up a less hazardous trail to get his wool clip down the mountains to the coast using German labour to complete the track.

Hebben later sold Mahratta to Moses Joseph (1812-1899), a Sydney merchant. . So much money had been spent on the estate that to keep running sheep and cattle in the old way would not pay interest on the capital. In 1886 his son Arthur Joseph turned to dairying. The large scale production of butter and cheese on his property was later utilized by co-operative dairy factories in the district.

The next SEHGI meeting coincides with the Family History Expo where each museum will have a stand. You can catch up and meet representatives at the Sapphire Club Merimbula on September 12th.

LIFELINES EXPO
Celebrating family & local history

- Lucky door prizes
- Tips and advice from experts including Australian War Memorial
- Talks by Jenny Higgins on 'How to Start Your Family History' and 'Finding Family History Treasures in Trove'
- Entertainment with bush poet, Peter O'Brien

10am - 4pm Saturday 12 August 2017
Club Sapphire Merimbula
Free Entry & Wheelchair access

Contact ursulahunt@bigpond.com for more info

Museums & Galleries of NSW | NSW | NSW | Arts NSW | Bigo Valley Wine Council | Bigo Valley Shire library

This project is supported by the NSW Volunteer Museum Grant Program, a devolved funding program administered by Museums and Galleries of NSW on behalf of the NSW Government.

EDEN KILLER WHALE MUSEUM SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS:

EXEC PANEL MEETING	1 PM 2 ND WEDNESDAY	MUSEUM LIBRARY
CURATORIAL MEETING	1 PM 1 ST MONDAY	MUSEUM LIBRARY
FRIENDS MEETING	9 AM 3 RD WEDNESDAY	THEATRETTE