

“SIRIUS” – The first Australian Yacht to circumnavigate the World.

OAM Awarded to Richard Nossiter DSC.

Richard (Dick) Harwin Nossiter at the age of 25 played a crucial part as the navigator in an historic voyage undertaken by his father, Harold Nossiter snr, and one of his 3 brothers, Harold Nossiter jnr. They sailed the yacht *Sirius*, a 53½ foot staysail schooner of 35 tonnes, circumnavigating the Globe and making maritime history as the first Australian yacht to do so. Dick is the last surviving member of the crew and will be turning 100 on 22nd June this year, 2010. Because of this approaching milestone several people expressed the need for recognition by the Australian Government for this historical feat while one of them is still alive. One of Dick's sons, Tim Nossiter, nominated him for an Order of Australia award. This has been accepted and recognized by the awarding of ***The Medal of The Order of Australia (OAM)*** in the general division to Richard Nossiter for his part as navigator aboard the first Australian Yacht to circumnavigate the World.

THE VOYAGE

Harold Nossiter snr was an eminent yachtsman of his day and had always dreamt of a world circumnavigation. Nearing retirement in 1935 his dream was realised with the launch in February in the presence of about 300 spectators on Sydney Harbour of his yacht *Sirius*, purpose designed and built for the voyage. As crew he decided to take the two eldest of his four sons as they had been sailing and racing his previous yacht, *Utiakah II*, with him since childhood. On Sunday 14th July 1935, two days after his retirement, they slipped the mooring at their family home in Northwood on the Lane Cove River and commenced this historic voyage.

The following is an excerpt from the first page of the journal Dick kept of the voyage.

“Sunday 14th Jul 1935

We were up early this morning, after a last late night, as there was a lot to be done on board but by 10 o'clock the photographers arrived with their moving cameras & talking apparatus & had us pulling sails up & letting them down again & posing in various positions. They took a talkie of Dad with the crew behind him.

Before we knew where we were it was almost time to sail so we hurried ashore to say goodbye to the crowds of friends & relatives who seemed very upset. Mother was very upset & said that I would never come back again. I tried to reassure her for I am quite sure that I shall. It hurt a lot to leave her thus. I could only say a hurried goodbye to Sheelagh & then had to rush off & say goodbye to all the others.

I shall never forget our departure, I can see the shore lined with people & as we passed the wharf it was crowded with or friends. There was Ben (Dick's youngest brother) in his white sweater waving farewell.”

A number of craft followed us to the heads and some outside.-----I felt very glum & upset as did Harold, at leaving home & all our good friends for God knows how long.

Sailing out of Sydney Harbour and heading north the voyage took them via New Guinea, Bali, Singapore and Langkawi. Then on to Colombo, through the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean before arriving in Plymouth on 2nd June 1936.

They spent three months in the UK and it was during this time that owner/skipper Harold Snr, wrote "Northward Ho", the first of two books he wrote documenting the voyage. The other book, "Southward Ho" was written during the voyage home. He mainly wrote the books as he understood the historical nature of their voyage, he had a perspective of history and wanted the voyage documented. Both books were published in the UK and the USA.

They weighed anchor and departed Cowes on 17th September 1936 to return to Australia. This was to be the 'dream run' as it would be virtually all downwind sailing following the trades back home, unlike the cold headwind bash they had through most of the Red Sea and Med.

They crossed the North Atlantic and transited the Panama Canal on 12th December 1936 into the Pacific Ocean and homeward bound. From Panama they sailed on to Cocos, the Galapagos Archipelago and then came the longest leg of the voyage, three thousand miles to the Marquesas.

The next leg to the Tuamotu Archipelago was to be the most taxing as far as navigation goes due to very low lying atolls, reefs and dangerous currents. Dick, who was the navigator aboard, proved his skills yet again and safely navigated them in and out of this dangerous Archipelago. Harold snr, wrote in the first chapter of his books, "*The younger, Dick, gladly welcomed the chance of seeing the world and at my suggestion studied navigation with a view to obtaining a yacht master's certificate. In October, 1933, he sat for that examination and passed brilliantly*".

Dick's *Yacht Master's Certificate* was the second (002) such certificate to be awarded in Australia.

They sailed on to Sydney via Tahiti and Bora Bora in the Society Group, to the Cook and Tongan Islands. The final journey home proved to be the toughest. Naturally in a voyage of this length storms are to be encountered but ironically the severest one occurred within 120 miles of Sydney, less than a day's sail away, with force twelve winds from the south west. They were hove-to for three days and when the storm abated they set sail for Sydney and home, dropping anchor in Watson's Bay at 7pm on 20th May 1937 having logged 28,000 miles in the twenty-two month voyage and with *Sirius* earning her place in maritime history as the first Australian yacht to circumnavigate the world. The following morning, after pratique and customs clearance, they weighed anchor and under full sail with a southerly wind sailed back up Sydney Harbour to a wonderful welcome with ferry boats tooting and people waving from the shore, arriving at their mooring in Woodford bay, Northwood at 9.30am.

The sail up the harbour and at their mooring in Woodford Bay was covered by 'Movietone News'. This footage is available today as Dick donated a copy to the National Film and Sound Archives. It's only a 45 second grab but has sound with Harold Nossiter snr speaking. Its ID number is 49394-01.

SIRIUS TODAY

Sirius is still afloat today and is in outstanding condition thanks to the current owner, Simon Morris, a recently retired British Airways pilot residing in Thailand where he keeps the vessel, sailing and racing her regularly. Simon has travelled extensively researching her full history which can be viewed on his web site at www.sirius1935.com. He has met with Dick and his brother Harold, when he was still alive, on a couple of occasions and will be attending Dick's Birthday celebrations.

Dick later went on to serve six years overseas during WWII as Commander of Corvettes receiving a DSC for bravery during convoy work in the Arctic to Murmansk in Russia. Later in life he served nine years on Lane Cove Council as Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Alderman.

Dick, on the eve of his 100th Birthday is very fortunate as he has all his faculties although rather frail on his legs. His mind is as sharp as ever, remembering the smallest details from very early childhood. He was happily married to Nancy for 67 years who sadly passed away two years ago. He now lives by himself with his beloved cat Smoky in Newcastle, next door to his son Hugh.

Tim Nossiter.
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'Sirius sailing out through Sydney heads at the commencement of the voyage, 14th July 1935'