



Re-union Down-under

NOVEMBER looks set to be an eventful month for retired merchant seaman and war veteran Alexander Bandeen.

Not only will he celebrate his 80th birthday, but he has also been invited to visit Australia for a memorial service for HMAS *Sydney*.

The Australian warship was sunk by the German raider *Kormoran* in 1941. Alexander's own ship, the tanker *British Union*, was sunk by the *Kormoran* a few months earlier in the Atlantic.

He had a shock 40 years after the event when he read in the book "Who sank the *Sydney*?" that there were no survivors from the *Sydney* — which was true — or the *British Union* — which wasn't.

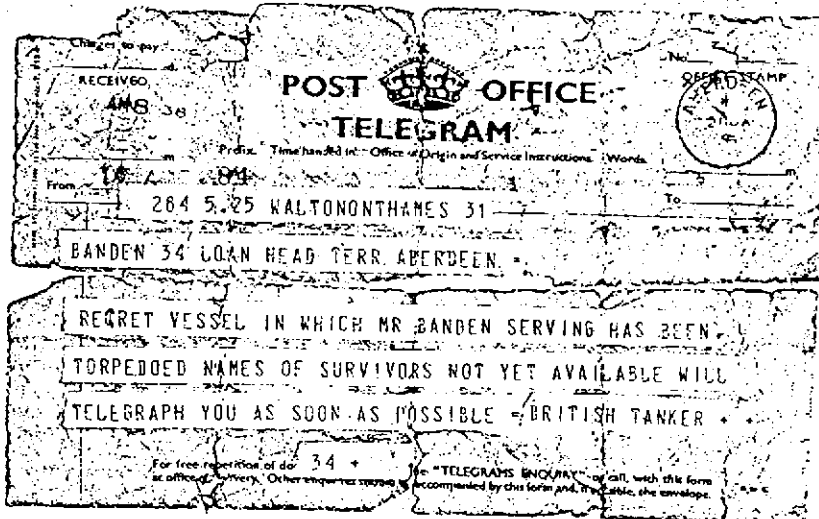
In fact he was picked up by HMAS *Arawa* after the *British Union* went down, having spent over nine hours in a lifeboat. He then returned safely to the UK along with a cadet, Neville Finnis, after being put ashore in Freetown, Sierra Leone. There were five others in the lifeboat too — but one died soon after the rescue and the rest had the misfortune to be killed when their convoy was attacked on its way to Britain.

Meet

"I hope to meet former sailors on the *Arawa* for the first time in 50 years," Alexander told *The Seaman* last month as he prepared to leave for Australia.

This will not be his first re-union of war veterans. Last year he was in Germany for a get-together of former crew members of the *Kormoran*.

He still vividly recalls seeing the *British Union*, which was sailing to the West Indies to load a cargo of fuel oil, go down



MISSING: The message sent to Alexander Bandeen's home in Aberdeen after the *British Union* was sunk.

while he watched from the lifeboat.

"All of a sudden a torpedo hit the ship midway. There was a large explosion and a wall of water rose up before she sank. Then there was just a sea of debris and wreckage — it was an eerie sight."

The *Kormoran* did not survive the subsequent battle with the *Sydney*. She also sank and surviving crewmen were taken to Australia.

When they arrived they had a monkey, which they had rescued from the *British Union*, whose crew had bought it in Bombay as a pet.

The monkey did not survive either. He was put down in quarantine in Australia.

Alexander meanwhile returned to sea — and stayed in the merchant service and the RFA — a loyal National Union of Seamen member throughout — until his retirement 15 years ago.



ALIVE: Alexander Bandeen today.