

# Basic Detail Report

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## Title

The Mercer family looking out from the deck of NEW AUSTRALIA

## Date

17 February 1955

## Primary Maker

Vaughan Evans OAM

## Medium

Silver gelatin print on paper

## Dimensions

Overall: 136 x 209 mm

## Name

Photograph

## History

Born in England in 1924, Vaughan Evans served in the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm during World War II. After the war he worked as an assistant hull underwriter for Bland Welch and Co at Lloyd's of London. In 1955 he agreed to take over Prudential Assurance Company's Australian marine insurance portfolio in Sydney. Having always wanted to travel to Australia or New Zealand, Vaughan took advantage of the Australian Government's post-war assisted migration scheme and paid £10 for passage in a six-berth cabin on D-deck aboard SS NEW AUSTRALIA. The British migrants who travelled under this scheme were later nicknamed 'Ten Pound Poms'. NEW AUSTRALIA was built by Vickers-Armstrong and launched on 17 March 1931 as MONARCH OF BERMUDA. It served Furness, Withy & Co's New York-Bermuda run until 1939 when it was requisitioned for war service as a troopship. After the war the vessel underwent refurbishment for passenger service in Liverpool, where it caught fire, burnt to the waterline and was declared a total loss. The wreck was then purchased by the Ministry of Transport and rebuilt in Southampton as the migrant ship NEW AUSTRALIA. Managed by Shaw Savill & Albion Line, NEW AUSTRALIA embarked on its first voyage from Southampton, England, to Sydney, Australia, on 15 August 1950. It continued service as a migrant ship until January 1958, when it was sold to the Greek Line and renamed ARKADIA. On 19 January 1955, a calm and sunny winter's day, Vaughan Evans boarded NEW AUSTRALIA at Southampton port in England's south, and waved goodbye to his girlfriend and neighbours as he set sail for Sydney. It was NEW AUSTRALIA's 18th voyage to Australia. On board were 504 crew and 1,584 passengers. On 22 January 1955, three days after leaving Southampton, NEW AUSTRALIA passed through the Straits of Gibraltar. On 24 January, the vessel arrived in Malta and anchored in Valletta Harbour while about 250 Royal Australian Air Force servicemen, some with families, boarded the ship. When the ship reached Port Said on 27

January it was swarmed by 'bumboats' selling bags, wallets, fabric, baskets, food and other goods. Shortly afterwards NEW AUSTRALIA joined a convoy of ships and entered the Suez Canal. On leaving the canal at Port Suez, NEW AUSTRALIA steamed down the Gulf of Suez, the Red Sea, and eventually navigated the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb to arrive in Aden, Arabia (now Yemen) on 31 January. After mooring in the main harbour, the passengers went ashore by motor launches at a cost of two shillings and four pence return. Vaughan visited Ma'ala Bander with the hope of seeing Arabian dhows, and in his diary he notes, 'delight of delights, there were scores of dhows ... dhows of all sorts could be seen, supported on legs, being built, repaired and some in decay'. NEW AUSTRALIA crossed the Arabian Sea on 2 February and arrived at Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) on 5 February. While the ship completed bunkering and watering, Vaughan went ashore by launch and walked about the city, taking photographs and buying souvenirs. Around this time, the hot cramped conditions on D-deck began to take their toll on Vaughan and his fellow passengers. In his diary Vaughan writes: '... my own cabin is one of the least desirable - it is on the lowest accommodation deck ('D' deck); it is on the starboard side - the hot side; it is immediately opposite the toilets and so we have the doubtful benefit of the late night serenades of the semi-drunks; and it is immediately under the galley, so from just after 5 o'clock every morning we are kept awake by the noise of churns and crates being dragged across the bare steel of the deck immediately above our heads, by the galley-slaves wearing hob-nailed boots' (Vaughan Evans, Thursday 3 February 1955, transcribed from his diary in the Mitchell Library, Sydney). While travelling through the tropics, many passengers, including Vaughan, could not face the stifling hot cabins and took to sleeping on the ship's hard wooden deck. Despite this Vaughan goes on to note the positives such as 'ample washing facilities including showers, baths, drying and ironing rooms for clothes, cooled drinking water on tap, a well-stocked and not unduly expensive ship's shop, a barber, liberal bar hours ... a swimming pool on 'E' deck, and a library'. On 7 February NEW AUSTRALIA 'crossed the line' and three days later Vaughan saw the Southern Cross for the first time. On 13 February, he awoke at 6.30 am to see the west coast of Australia - 'Low, sandy and scrubby, but Australia never the less'. After mooring alongside F-Shed in Fremantle Harbour, passengers were able to collect mail and go ashore. Vaughan was greeted by Leslie Shenton, a member of the Shiplovers Society of Western Australia, with whom he had corresponded, who took him on a tour of Perth and the district. From Fremantle NEW AUSTRALIA crossed the Great Australian Bight and entered Port Philip Bay, before tying up at Station Pier, Melbourne. The next day Vaughan was given a tour of Melbourne by Mr Funder of Prudential's Melbourne General Branch and introduced to other Prudential staff. In the afternoon NEW AUSTRALIA passed through Bass Strait and into the Pacific Ocean. On Sunday 20 February NEW AUSTRALIA sailed under the Sydney Harbour Bridge and made fast by No 23 Shed, Pyrmont. Vaughan Evans' 32-day voyage from Southampton to Sydney had come to an end. He was met by Mr Reg Wyatt of Prudential and taken to his accommodation at 'Williams' Private Hotel' on Campbell Parade, Bondi, which the company provided for the first month. Vaughan later described the bed-and-breakfast accommodation as 'one of the most bug-ridden places you could ever imagine. [The landlady's] idea of breakfast was a continuous pot of curry' (Vaughan Evans, June 1984). After a few weeks (and a few pay checks, having arrived in Australia with only £20) Vaughan began to explore his new homeland. He took bus rides through Sydney and railway excursions to the Hunter Valley, the Shoalhaven, Snowy Mountains and Bathurst. In September 1955 Vaughan was posted to Prudential's Melbourne branch and stayed there until Easter 1959, when he returned permanently to Sydney. He worked for the Prudential Assurance

Company until his retirement in 1984. Vaughan remained passionate about maritime history while living in Australia. He was an advisor and consultant on maritime history issues to Federal and State governments and institutions, and as such both advocated and gave shape to the formation of the Australian National Maritime Museum. Vaughan was a founder of the Australian Association for Maritime History and was also its long-time newsletter editor. His extensive personal library, donated to ANMM in 1986, formed the nucleus of the museum library's holdings. Vaughan was awarded the Order of Australia Medal in 1988 for his role in raising the standards and profile of the discipline of maritime history. He died in 1993.