



**Isaac Samways Sr.
Merchant Mariner
World War II**

Born: 08 Feb 1913

Place of Birth: Coley's Point, Bay Roberts,
Newfoundland

Parents: Charles and Caroline (Morgan)
Samways

Born in Coley's point to parents Charles and Caroline Samways, Isaac signed up to serve in the war effort as a merchant mariner. It's unclear from his family when he joined but they do know that he served.

When Isaac finished his service, he went on to work in a plumbing and heat shop until he retired from work in 1979.

Isaac married Ethel May (Snook) of Battle Harbour, Labrador and together that had seven (7) children, Emma, Levi, Rose, Mabel, Isaac jr, Valerie and Leonard. Ethel passed away in 1984 and Isaac in 1999. They are buried in the St. John The Evangelist Cemetery at Coley's Point, Newfoundland.

Brief Background on the Merchant Marines:

Merchant mariners played a vital role in the Second World War, transporting desperately needed food, equipment, and personnel to Britain and other Allied countries on non-military vessels. Although not part of the armed forces, these men and women faced constant threat from enemy submarines, destroyers, and aircraft seeking to cut off supply lines. Thousands of merchant mariners were killed at sea; hundreds more were captured and sent to prisoner of war camps.

Despite these risks, recruitment was high in Newfoundland and Labrador, where some 10,000 volunteers joined the service before hostilities ended. Many served on Newfoundland ships, such as the passenger

ferry Caribou, while others joined the merchant navies of different Allied countries, including Canada, the United States and Panama. Most, however, served on British ships.

Britain relied on imports from North America for its war effort. Any significant interruption of the shipping lanes across the North Atlantic would have made likely a British defeat at German hands.

Recognizing the importance of a strong merchant navy, the British government sought volunteers from Newfoundland and Labrador soon after hostilities broke out.

The response was enthusiastic. Alongside the hundreds of sailors already serving on commercial vessels, thousands more volunteered after the call went out. Most were older men or teenaged boys not eligible to serve in the armed forces. Small numbers of women also joined, generally as stewardesses on passenger ships. Upon acceptance, recruits usually signed on for a certain number of voyages with the possibility of renewal. However, if a volunteer decided to stay ashore, he or she had the right to do so. Although some mariners attended a gunnery school on the Southside of St. John's, most received little

or no safety or emergency training – many did not even know how to properly use a life jacket.

Nonetheless, merchant mariners were prominent on the front lines and suffered heavy casualties. The largest threat came from German U-boats, which patrolled shipping lanes in groups and torpedoed passing merchant vessels. At the peak of hostilities, between late 1942 and early 1943, U-boats sank on average 33 Allied merchant ships each week. Most losses occurred in the North Atlantic, but Axis forces sunk many merchant ships off the coasts of South America and Africa. Unable to replace destroyed shipping vessels quickly enough, Britain pressed every available ship into service, some of which were quite old. This presented another danger for merchant mariners, who now had to serve on vessels previously deemed unseaworthy.