

Not many people decide to become volunteers at the age of 80. But Daniel Lyons did. He became an Apostleship of the Sea (AoS) ship visitor. And now, aged 92, he is hanging up his hard hat.

Daniel, who lives in Cowes on the Isle of Wight, admitted that he knew very little about the maritime world and seafarers when he approached AoS.

"The ship visitor at the time had to stand down for medical reasons, and someone was needed to replace him, so I thought I would have a go," said Daniel.

For the last twelve years, Daniel has been visiting ships anchored on the River Medina in Cowes. The purpose of the visits is to discover if there is anything the crew might need. This could be a mobile phone top-up card, internet access, transport to local shops, or warm clothing.

Approximately 600,000 tonnes of cargo are handled annually in the port of Cowes, including such commodities as fuel, oil/petroleum, stone, shingle aggregates, timber, grain, and general cargo.

The seafarers, most of whom come from developing countries, usually have little time in a port, due to the fast turnaround of vessels. This is why AoS can be a lifeline for them.

"When I made my first visit to a ship, I remember thinking the wharf on the River Medina seemed a rough open space, with tall cranes working to unload the cargo. It was quite a dangerous place if you strayed from the safe tracks."

One visit that sticks in his mind was to the Shetland Trader. "The Shetland Trader" was a new vessel, and the owner asked AoS if the ship could be blessed. The Filipino crew had requested this. I went on board the ship with Father Purbrick, my parish priest.

"The life for seafarers on these small vessels can be very difficult, as the crew will only be six or seven strong and they

are cooped up with the same faces every day.”

During World War Two, Daniel served in the Royal Signals and trained as a paratrooper. In 1944 he was parachuted into Normandy.

He was also involved in Operation Varisty, which took place towards the end of the War and involved over 16,000 paratroopers and thousands of aircraft.

“I had the job of driving a jeep and trailer loaded with radio equipment. It was loaded into a Horsa glider, which landed near Hamminkeln near the River Rhine in Germany. Once we landed, I was attached to a gunner regiment as their radio link, and I stayed with them until the division came home in September.”

After the War ended, Daniel was posted to Palestine, where he served for three years.

“I have kept fairly fit, and I think that the time I spent in the army had a lot to do with that.”

Before becoming a ship visitor, he hadn't realised that around 90% of goods imported into the UK arrive by sea. “Seafarers' work is hard, and can be very lonely, but we owe them a lot. I don't think that the average person realises the importance of the seafarer in their life.”

Greg Watts