

Flying Stations

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May The Memories Sail On Forever

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AIRCRAFT HANDLERS "LIVING LEGENDS" No. 14

MICK HOUSTON "ORIGINAL"



Born at Strathfield, NSW in December 1927. Left school at age 14 years and spent the war years working at Kriesler Radio, Newtown (Sydney) where we made Sonar Buoys and Clear View Screens for the Navy, Bomb Releases and Radio Transmitters for the RAAF. Joined Nay in February 1945 passing Medical and Educational examinations. Called up notice received in August to present for swearing in as Ordinary Seaman 2 in September. Departed Sydney by troop train for a 24 hour journey to Flinders Naval Depot. Having attained the age of 18 years in December I now had the exalted rank of Ordinary Seaman 1. Completing New Recruit and Gunnery course I was drafted to the Radar school at HMAS Watson in May 1946.

Having completed the Radar part of the Radar Gunnery Control course, I was drafted to HMAS Bataan in July. Sailing in August to Japan for our first tour of duty as part of the Occupation Forces under the direct command of General McArthur's Command (US 7th Fleet) Based in Sasebo, we conducted the Korean Patrol from that port. Numerous patrols were completed, before spending Xmas at Shanghai, China, where I was promoted to Acting Able Seaman. We returned to Australia via Hong Kong and Manilla, arriving in Sydney on the 30th January 1947.

Bataan's second tour of duty was from August to December 1947. December saw me confirmed Able Seaman. This tour of duty we came under the command of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces.

While "showing the flag" on a tour of New Zealand in March 1948, a call for volunteers to form the Australian Fleet Air Arm was made throughout the Navy. A number of General Service sailors volunteered. Eight from Bataan were chosen, all seamen, they were PO Bill (Ali) Barber, Reg (Tiny) Davis, JS (Cuddles) Cuncen, Bill Boal, Bill Barry, E (Doggie) Thompson, myself and my best mate Ray (Mac) McIntosh. Mac was killed at Nowra in 1951 (motor cycle accident).

In April all United Kingdom Draft were sent to their home ports awaiting transportation to the UK. I was drafted to "Penguin" where I spent my time as crew of Diving Boat (1). A month on Sydney harbour was really hard to take, but somebody had to do it.

Embarking "Kanimbla" 17th June 1948 we sailed from Sydney for the UK picking up the rest of the volunteers at Melbourne and Fremantle. Arrived at Plymouth thence to HMS Siskin at Gosport, Hampshire on 3rd August. So commenced our Aircraft handling course. Part of the course was 2 weeks aboard HMS Illustrious for "real" Flight Deck training. Spud Murphy and I were for most part Talker/Teller with the DLCO. When not flying some of our people, all ex seamen, were put to work rope and wire splicing. There were very few, if any of the Illustrious crew who could perform this task. Illustrious was at this time a training ship. When we left the ship they had enough "springs and hawsers" to last the lifetime!

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Returning to "Siskin" we commenced a six weeks Motor Transport course. During this period Prince Charles was born, which meant we enjoyed "Splice the Mainbrace" (double rum ration). Completing our training we were drafted to HMS Glory at Devonport. "Glory was a dormitory ship and we stayed aboard until boarding "Sydney" on the 15th December for Commissioning on the 16th December 1948.

After Xmas leave, sea and aircraft trials began on the 6th January, these trials continued until the 24th March and were conducted in the English Channel, Irish Sea and the North Sea. On the 8th February we took aboard the 20th CAG comprising 816 Firefly and 805 seafury Squadrons. My position on the Flight Deck when flying was DLCO's Talker and Teller.

My Xmas leave was spent at Nottingham with the Vines family. I had been a "Pen friend" of Nancy Vines for some months, who turned out to be a beautiful nineteen year old "red head". Nancy and I were married on the 26th March 1949 at Nottingham, a week after her 20th birthday. Five children, 11 grand children and 9 great grand children later we are about to celebrate our 60th wedding anniversary.

On the 5th & 6th April at King George V dock at Glasgow we embarked 58 aircraft and spares etc, then to Greenock for refuelling and stores etc. Then to Devonport to embark 450 serving and ex RN men to serve in our Fleet Air Arm.

Sailed for Australia on the 12th April arriving at Jervis Bay on 25th May 1949 where aircraft were disembarked by lighter and transported to Albatross. We arrived at Sydney on 28th May 1949.

After a stint at Homebush Bay (now the Olympic site) guarding the massive ammunition depot during the "great strike of 1949" I was drafted to Albatross on 30th August. (Nancy had arrived on the 29th per MV Asturias). I was the first of the "Originals" to be drafted to Albatross therefore for a time I was the senior Aircraft Handler at Albatross.

My first duty was Crash Tender Captain. Some months later when most of the "Originals" arrived at Albatross, I was Control Tower staff, Storeman and "Butch" Haines office worker.

Early in 1950 I completed Leading Airman's course and the rest of my time at Albatross I continued in the Control Tower as storeman. One of the "perks" was driving the Jeep over to a local farm and collecting 5 gallons of milk. Back at the Tower a gallon of milk was drawn off for our own use, and water substituted. The 5 gallons were then sold to the PO, Chiefs and Officers mess. Therefore we at the Tower (crash tenders crew etc) had free milk for our brew!

Leaving the Navy in 1951, Nancy and I moved to South Australia where after 12 months as an electrician's assistant in a factory I went to work for Australian National Airways at Parrasfield airfield in the catering department loading and unloading catering equipment. And when the new airport opened at West Beach we moved there. ANA was later taken over by Ansett Airways. After some years assistant catering officer. I left Ansett in 1961. Moving back to NSW we built a War Service home in the Blue Mountains at Springwood.

For the next 20 years I spent as a salesman, Commercial Traveller, Insurance agent and Insurance Advisor. The last 10 years working at the university of Western Sydney as Storeman and driver of the University Bus, (student field trips etc).

I retired in 1992 and studied to obtain an Ass: Diploma in Fine Arts. Painting and researching Family History are main hobbies. With a couple of trips to UK and Europe and lots of trips interstate, I have been kept busy since retirement.

A quadruple heart by-pass in 1986 was successful, as I'm still here!

Memories of Navy days are as clear today as they were 57 years ago. All the great mates will never be forgotten.

