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Slipstream

Established HMAS Albatross 1957

SEAHAWKS OF 816 SQUADRON ON THE LINE AT HMAS ALBATROSS

Photograph courtesy RANAS Nowra Photographic Section



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FOREWORD

By

Commodore John Douglas Goble RAN (Ret'd)

Patron of the Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia

I would like to thank the Editor for the opportunity to contribute this foreword. In doing so I intend to mention some events in the years ahead, and some aspects of the year 2000.

By the time this edition of *Slipstream* is distributed we will have entered the year 2001. Whether 2001 is the start of the new millennium, or 2000 was, depends on a number of view points which I am not going to canvas. However, what it does signify is that we are rapidly approaching the centenary of the first powered flight that took place on 17 December 1903. On that day Orville Wright, dressed in a business suit, peaked cap, tie and starched white collar, made the first sustained and controlled flight by an aircraft under its own power. Whether by coincidence or design, the first flight of the famous Douglas DC3 also took place on 17 December in 1935. This remarkable aircraft is still in commercial use in Australia and other countries.

The date of 28 August 2003, will mark 55 years since the formation of the first RAN Squadrons, 805 and 816, thus aviation in the RAN has encompassed more than half the period elapsed since that first flight by the Wright brothers.

Unfortunately it cannot be said during this period that aviation in the RAN has developed in an orderly and progressive manner. Naval aviation has had to undergo a number of changes in government policy and to fend off attempts to abolish it completely. However, the helicopter force is now established as an integral part of the RAN, and has shown on numerous occasions that it can respond at short notice to unexpected demands. The Naval deployment, with the newly introduced Sea Hawk helicopters to the Gulf War was a classic example, coming as it did only a few years after the government had adopted a recommendation that Australia's defence forces should be developed having regard to the area of interest broadly described as the sea and air approaches – in other words about 200 kilometres from our coastline.

Turning to the year just past, there have been major reports/studies which recognise the special service given by members of the Forces. The first being the Report of the Review into Service Entitlement Anomalies in Respect of Far East Asian Service between 1955 and 1975 which was presented to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs early in the year. The Report, and the Government's acceptance of the recommendations has remedied many years of denial to members of all the services, in varying degree, during the period under review. Resulting from the Report, the amending legislation to give effect to the recommendations was passed by Parliament early in December.

Another 'study' – that undertaken by the Community Consultation Team was a new approach in providing input to defence policy. Among many matters discussed the Team identified and reported on problems affecting personnel. These have been drawn into the White Paper – 'Defence 2000, Our Future Defence Force'. Space does not permit comment on all of the matters related to acquisition of new systems set out in Defence 2000, but the Government's recognition that service in the ADF is unique, and is not just another job done by civilians in uniform is long overdue. Defence 2000 outlines some of the measures to remedy the ongoing effect of recent so-called restructuring and reductions. It is plainly inferred in the Community Consultation Report that many of the problems stem from a diminishment of technical skills by outsourcing, which in turn has a limiting effect on career satisfaction. The Government now recognises that: *'To be a 'knowledge organisation', Defence must retain skilled and experienced people. Ensuring that people do not leave the ADF when they are of most value is a priority concern for the Government'*. Other factors contributing to disenchantment with career prospects if not rectified, will mean that the services will become even more downsized, under-manned and over-committed.

During the first quarter of this year a booklet titled 'Australian Naval Aviation Doctrine' will be released. This publication will set out for readers, both military and the general public, the part played by naval aviation in the RAN and in the overall defence scene. It will be of special interest to members of the Association.

With all good wishes to those in Naval Aviation and the FAA Association.

R



EDITOR'S CORNER

Welcome to the first edition of *Slipstream* for the new millennium and Centenary of Federation.

I'm starting to love deadlines. I like the 'whooshing' sound they make as they fly by. Some people acknowledge their existence – others choose to ignore them.

In this edition you will note that there are no submissions from the National President or the National Secretary. I'm getting a bit concerned about the good ship 'National Executive', there appears to be a light glimmering on the bridge, but the wheelhouse is definitely empty.

You will also notice that despite many reminders, the journal doesn't carry an update from the Museum Director. Although there has been a great deal of activity at the AMoF, information to those interested is not forthcoming. Maybe a 'cone of silence' was included in the new extensions.

Thank you to those who do continue to write letters and articles for *Slipstream*, your efforts are very much appreciated, not just by myself, but all the readers.

To the many people and Associations, both here and overseas, who have sent Christmas greetings, thank you.

On a lighter note, I have been reliably informed that after Christmas is a very good time for plastic surgery – if you're interested, cut up your credit cards.

Be kind to each other.

ED



CAN YOU HELP?

- Penny, the widow of the late 'Tonto' Kerwitz, would love to hear from any of his old shipmates. The telephone number is: (07) 4054 5110.
- David Bengé is putting together the names and addresses of all ex-RANHFV veterans. If you wish to be included on this list, or know someone who would be interested in doing so, please contact David direct. Address: 3 Rowan Crescent, Meriwether NSW 2291 or E-mail dtbenge@aljan.com.au
- Warren 'Bomber' Browning, ex-ABWM, is trying to contact David Powell who was originally from Caringbah. Please contact by E-mail wbjb@cyber.net.au
- David Kay wants to know if anyone knew his uncle, CPO SBA Keith Keft, who passed away in 1981, seven months after he paid off. Any information about him would be most appreciated. David can be contacted by E-mail David.Kay@insearch.edu.au
- Chris Grimes, ex-ABATA is seeking help. In 1998 he was diagnosed with leukemia and has been informed by some reliable sources that there has been a number of his shipmates pass away from this type of cancer. As an aircraft maintainer he served at *Albatross* and aboard HMAS *Melbourne*. He is of the opinion that it was exposure to carcinogenic material at the Corrosion Control Section at RANAS that has caused his problem. He has requested – 'I need to obtain information such as postings to Corrosion Control for the period 1974 –1990, and medical/death information of those personnel.' If anyone can be of assistance to him, he can be contacted by E-mail gyro@clari.net.au
- Bob Clark, USN Riverboat Captain and Advisor in Vietnam 1970-71, is keen to make contact with friends from that era, namely, STD Robert T Horton R63408 and LAAH W. J. 'Chook' Fowler R 55619. Bob had been told that Robert Horton's family had a Ford dealership in Tasmania at one time. Please contact the Editor if you have their addresses. Direct contact can be made on mbclark69@hotmail.com

NB: If you wish to contact anyone listed above and do not have computer access, information can be sent to the Editor for forwarding.

The two photographs opposite, were taken from an ABC-TV Station Identification clip that was used in 1973. I would like to obtain the names, the squadron and the circumstances if possible. *Editor*

Photographs courtesy ABC

Dear Ed

Your request in the recent edition of *Slipstream* regarding Sea Fury 109...

I flew VX-730 in May 1957 for 'Familiarisation 3, No.7 Fighter OFS' at 805 Squadron (CO Gil Campbell – SP Brian Stock). I was in the squadron until that fateful day when we taxied all the Fury's to the dummy deck where they were to be broken up for scrap.

I can find no TF-925 or any side number like it; however, all the VW's seem to be 629 – 634.

I flew VW-632 on ten occasions and I wonder if your VW-232 is a misprint!

Other 'suspects' whose Log Books could yield information from around this time would be (this taxes the mind!) Dave Eagles, Ian Ogilvy, John Dacosta, Barry Roberts, Barry Orr, 'Junior' Davidson, Geoff Litchfield, Fred Lane, Bill Callan, SOS Smith, Roley Waddel-Wood, Bob Symmons *et al*.

It has been my good fortune to be associated with many 'lucky' aircraft. As a high school student in Port Pirie, I was lucky enough to fly in 'G' for George when the Lancaster did a War Bonds tour (1943 or 44?). In the Adelaide area are two Sea Venoms and a Wessex helicopter in air museums, all of which are in my Log Books.

'Zork' Rohrsheim

Dear Ed

In the October issue of *Slipstream*, you requested any readers with information in their log books about Sea Fury VX730, to contact you.

Following an invitation from the Director of the Australian War Memorial to a pre-opening visit to Bradbury Aircraft Hall, I checked my log book to if anything was recorded about that particular aircraft.

I was interested to find that on 24 November 1955, as a member of 805 Squadron, I carried out an Acceptance Check from ARS. Following on from this, I flew that aircraft on 37 occasions until July 1956, including taking it to the deck of HMAS Sydney on 13 March 1956.

For what it's worth, the date of the acceptance flight is slightly at odds with the date mentioned by 'Toz' Dadswell in a former issue of *Slipstream*, when he stated that the aircraft was not accepted into squadron service until a day later, namely 25 November 1955.

I hope this information may be of some use to you.

Peter McNay

Dear Ed

Your front cover of Volume 11 Number 3 – October 2000.

In 1950, when our RAN Conversion Course 14 completed training at HMS Condor (Arbroath, Scotland), Navy Board selected AA4 Jack Bootle and myself, AA4 Raymond 'Buck' Rogers, to go to HMS Sanderling. Our task was to carry out a Quality Assurance check on the newly delivered Sea Furys and Fireflies. We had to ensure that they were fully complete, equipped with all their Loose Equipment and the correct amount of desiccant included before the aircraft were embalmed.

VX 730 was one of the 34 Sea Fury VX and WE series that we signed for, plus 32 Fireflies in the WB and WD series.



We inspected and observed, but did not work on the aircraft. As a result we were twiddling our fingers for the best part of three months, for me this was too boring.

Whilst there we did the unforgivable thing and volunteered to help the civilian clerk who was responsible for carrying out all the A2 and A23 action for the air station. The 'civvy' hadn't had a holiday in three years because there was no one capable of carrying out his job. Needless to say, CMDR 'E' soon called me into his office to tell me that I was taking over the position for two weeks while the clerk took some of his delayed holidays.

On arrival back in Australia, whilst working at the Aircraft Repair Section at *Albatross*, our Divisional Officer, LT Percy Pallace, nominated me to take over as i/c of the Receipt and Dispatch Unit. His words were, 'You are the only one in the section that has had Aircraft Checking experience'. I stayed in this job until drafted to HMAS *Nirimba* in 1953.

Three years later, when I returned to *Albatross*, the Officer of the Day advised me that CMDR 'E' wanted to see me on my arrival. On entering his office, he said, 'Chief, as you are the only one with experience on Aircraft Checking I want you to create a new section that is Storage and Aircraft Preparation, we have lost control of Loose Equipment and I want it corrected'.

This working section was achieved and my position transferred to a CAA on my Free Discharge in 1956 (At that time I was an AA2).

The important lesson to be learned from all this is - 'DO NOT VOLUNTEER' when you are in the services.

RAN Conversion Course 14 – 1949/50, consisted of AA3 Jack Robens (deceased), AA4's Jack Bootle, James Sidney Easton, Neil Clive Macmillan and Raymond West Rogers, AA5's George Beasley and Bill Trevethan.

'Buck' Rogers



RAN CONVERSION COURSE 14 – 1949/50

L-R: Beasley – Bootle – Robens – Easton – Rogers
– Macmillan – Trevethan

Photo courtesy George Beasley

TOP SECRET

**DO NOT READ ANY FURTHER UNLESS YOU
ARE CLEARED TO DO SO**

The deadline for the next edition is 16 March 2001

Repeat - the deadline for the next edition is 16 March 2001

Dear Ed

I have just been given, courtesy of Les (not Len) Anderson, a copy of the October 2000 Slipstream.

I was delighted to note the picture taken when we returned to HMAS Sydney after the floods in 1955. The picture included Neil MacMillan, Seamus O'Farrell and Des Giles. I wallowed in nostalgia when I saw pictures and read about Dick Lea, 'Dooley' Lord and a number of other people I knew, including Keith Potts and Don Davidson, 'Lofty' Kenderdine, 'Gladys' Gledhill and Geoff Litchfield.

One of the main reasons for writing the letter, apart from thanking you for my trip into nostalgia, was to advise you that when the RAN and I decided to part company at the end of 1956, I was treated rather shabbily until the arrival of VAT Smith. Having released me from 'durance vile', he asked me what I would like to do with myself whilst waiting for my approval to leave the Navy. I suggested that the Fleet Air Arm needed a magazine – he gave me permission to start one. You can imagine how delighted I am to see, forty-three years on, that Slipstream is still going. Sadly I no longer have a copy of Number 1.

Congratulations on a great production!

Tony Batten – Phone/Fax (08) 9409 4221

Dear Ed

The recent article in Slipstream that mentioned 'Mumbles' Coplans, prompts me to ask if anyone can remember when he bought one of the first Holden cars.

He was extremely proud of it, but was very upset when it started to produce a rattling noise that no one could trace.

My question is: Who put the pennies in his hubcap?

Allan Johnson – ex AM(O)

Dear Ed

I enjoy receiving and reading Slipstream. The 'Moments in time' section brings back many fond memories.

I am enclosing a photograph of the Dakota and the blokes that kept it flying on 723 Squadron in the early days of 1953. The photo was given to me by a good shipmate who couldn't remember all the names (he spent too much time hopping in and out of Happy Hawkin's wet canteen).

As I recall, the names from Left to Right are: Jim Hearn, 'Kanga' Bounds, 'Pinky' Bramich, Tom Keeley, 'Paddy' Williamson and Len 'Shorty' Ackerley.

'Those were the days, my friend, we thought they'd never end'.

'Paddy' Williamson

**Dear Ed**

This is a little bit of action that may be remembered by a couple of the crew on board HMAS Melbourne in 1957 whilst in the Singapore Roads.

HOLE IN ONE

A group of us went ashore in Singapore to celebrate someone's birthday. We had to be back on board by 0700 the following day. We were on the wharf at 0600, just in time to see the liberty boat heading back to the Melbourne, which was anchored about three miles out.

Not wishing to get 'run-in' for being adrift, we decided to hire a 'Bum-boat' (the ones with eyes painted either side of the bow). The Chinese skipper said that it would cost fifty cents Singapore to take them to the ship, we all agreed to that, climbed into the boat and sped towards the carrier.

Halfway there, the skipper stopped the boat and demanded another Singapore Dollar from each of us before he would start the engine and proceed. After a bit of haggling we paid up and we were once again on our way.

When we got back on board, one of the blokes, still smarting over being held to ransom, told his mate: 'Stand down in the Admiral's Barge space and call the 'bum-boat' back in again. Tell him you want to go back ashore and in the meantime I'll give him the fright of his life.'

Whilst he was calling the boat back again, his mate dashed up to the overhead gun sponson, picked up a damaged 60lb concrete rocket head that was sculling there, and waited for the boat to come alongside. When the time was right, he intended to drop the projectile alongside the boat and scare the hell out of its skipper.

However...he misjudged and the rocket head tore straight through the bow of the boat. The gallant skipper, waving his arms and yelling 'blue murder' before going down with his 'ship'. He was soon rescued by one of his mates in another boat.

As to the outcome...I have no idea because we sailed about one hour after the incident; but it was a topic of conversation for some days afterwards.

'Weed' Smith

Dear Ed,

On returning from a recent holiday, I stayed overnight in Wagga Wagga.

This is the hometown of 'Blue' St Clair, not having heard of him for some time, I decided to see if I could locate him. Fortunately he was still at his old address and my wife and I called around to visit with him.

He was in great shape and had even put on a few pounds. He attends a day care facility and still maintains his sporting interests.

It was great to see and talk with him. He is well looked after and is enjoying life to the best of his ability. I felt good after the visit knowing that a disabled mate is still going strong. I thought I would share this feeling with all his Vietnam mates and FAAA members.

Kevin Camm

[Blue' St Clair can be contacted at: 5 Crawford Street, ASHMONT, Wagga Wagga, NSW 2650. Ed]

Dear Ed

'GANNETS GALORE' – PROGRESS REPORT

The history of the Fairey Gannet in service with the RAN has now progressed to the third chapter, dealing with its introduction to RAN aircrew at RN Air Stations Eglinton and Culdrose.

The aircraft alone does not provide the full aviation history; the people who flew, maintained and handled the Gannet or had any association with it completes the story. First hand accounts and recollections will create an accurate account of its service with the RAN. It is with this in mind that I am asking all ex- FAA personnel to contribute their experiences with the Fairey Gannet. This may take the form of an incident, a one-paragraph recollection or an in-depth description.

Many have already contributed their stories and photographs for publication, these include ex-FAA personnel Bruce Bounds, Bill Strahan, Norman Lee, Ted Drinnen, Noel Dennett, Jim Lee, Jack Constantine, Tho's Dadswell, Ian Ferguson, Ray Guest, Allen Hill, Hadden Spurgeon, Matt Jacobs, John Buchanan and Gordon Turner, with the assistance of John Arnold and Bob Geale.

The completed work will be offered to the FAAA or AMoF for publication as an historical record of the Gannet in RAN service. All contributions will be included and none omitted. So don't be relegated to history's dustbin, be remembered. Please feel free to call around (many have already done so) and I'll be more than happy to show you the work to date.

To ensure the safety of all material offered please send via registered mail. Photographs will be scanned and returned within one week of receipt. To add authenticity and interest please send a photo of yourself, either a contemporary or recent one will be fine. Any photographs showing serial and side numbers will be of great value to the database, recording each aircraft and to the artwork also.

Thanks to all those who have already contributed, have a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Ben Patynowski

16 Cowper Street, Fairy Meadow, NSW 2519

Phone: (02) 4284 1801 – E-mail: Patynow@1earth.net



This photograph was taken in the UK, it shows the late ex-Leading Pilot's Mate Phillip 'Bats' Lee on the left. What is the name of the aircrew on the right? Is he RN or RAN?

If you have the answer, please contact the Editor.

Photograph to be used in the Gannet story

Dear Ed

Whilst reading the latest *Slipstream* (a truly fine journal), my mind wandered back to those far off days when I resided with my wife and two children in the married quarters (the 'Patch') at *Albatross*.

Being a Junior Rate 'Birdie', my ambition to captain a boat had little hope of success, until I decided that I would build my own boat.

The project began to the exclusion of all else – no lawns mown, no firewood cut, and no outings for the family because the money was required for the boat. Its construction progressed and the framework was eventually completed, Huon Pine timber, copper rivets and brass screws. I thought it was a fine effort!

Things came to a sudden halt when Navy Office decreed that I should be posted to sea at short notice. My fine boat frame was carefully stored away under the house and I sailed away to warmer climates leaving my wife and children to survive the rigours of winter at 'The Patch'.

Melbourne eventually brought me home again to be reunited with my family. On returning home, my second thought was of the boat.

'How's the boat?' I asked

'The boat!' my wife exclaimed. 'Oh, the boat! Well, when you went away we all got cold and we had no firewood. I thought you wouldn't mind if I cut it up for the fire, I saved all the screws though!'

I said it was okay and that I didn't mind. What else could I say? It was my first night home from sea.

K. Allen – Tasmania

[One of our members, who was a CAA at the time, was building an autogiro at his home in Nowra. Whilst he was at sea, his wife donated it to the scrap metal merchant who was removing a car body from the adjoining premises. Ed]

Dear Ed

As usual, the last issue of *Slipstream* was a great read. With regard to 'Bungy' Williams letter and photographs on page 8. The John Robotham is indeed 'Cuthbert'.

Cuthbert, together with Jock Cunningham and others from the 20th CAG, travelled to Oz for the reunion in 1998. While watching Beat the Retreat he explained to me he was given the nickname 'Cuthbert' early in his naval career because there were two John Robothams in his intake. He also explained he was fortunate to continue flying and had retired with the rank of Captain.

The side number 100 was next assigned, ironically to VW232. Then it was assigned to VW647, the same side number appeared on quite a few aircraft over the years, again, ironically, one was VX730 in addition to it having 109. Fred Sherbourne's aircraft 111 (all the ones), if memory serves me correctly, hit a 20mm link on the runway and blew a tyre, which caused a ground loop.

Just recently I was asked about the fate of 4 X 50 calibre Brownings which were salvaged from an aircraft in St Georges Basin in 1956. I do not know the answer, but someone out in 'Slipstream-land' may. During July and August of 1956, I was a 'gash hand' after completing an Aircraft Mechanician's Course. I worked in the Gun Workshop until posted to 851 squadron. It was during this time that a group of local fisherman had a diver investigate why their nets were becoming snagged. The diver

found a sunken aircraft, and the fisherman decided to salvage it. When the aircraft was brought to the surface it was discovered it had four loaded 50 calibre Browning's aboard. A Petty Officer (I think Maurie Tiffen) was despatched to bring Guns and Ammunition to *Albatross*. The aircraft was a Royal Navy Corsair. Many signals flowed between Nowra and Navy Office. The last said make them work! The CAA in the Ordnance Section was Gordon 'GAF' Field, he asked me if I had any experience of the 50 calibre, when he learned I had some on its 'little brother', I got the job as his assistant.

The first step was to soak them in a 44 gallon drum of oil and kerosene over night. Each gun was stripped and all the marine growth removed. They were all in surprisingly good condition. Lockwire, when wiped with a cloth was as bright and shiny as if it had just come off a roll. The barrels showed some rust pitting but were in good condition. The electrical firing solenoids were all very badly corroded. Many parts showed bluing as through the parts were brand new. On removal of some cheese headed screws the OM13 oil underneath was as clear as if it had only just been applied.

Some half a dozen rounds had the projectiles removed and the propellant was laid in a thin line on a steel topped bench in the fitting shop. The propellant was lit with a match. It burnt freely and evenly as though it had just been manufactured. The cartridge cases were placed in the breech of a gun and all but one or two primers fired.

The details of the aircraft were sent to UK and it was learnt the pilot had a complete magneto cut on take off from the JB strip and ditched in the basin. The pilot was a Royal Navy Sub lieutenant, his name and the date of the ditching were supplied. But the question remains. What happened to the guns? Does anyone out there know?

Ian Ferguson

Dear Ed

Many years ago in a far away place, I was sitting in a recruitment centre attempting to join the Navy.

In answer to the question, 'What do you want to be, son?' I gazed around the walls looking for inspiration and homed in on a picture of a Fairey Gannet. 'Do they have aeroplanes in the Navy?' I asked. The answer was in the affirmative, so I said, 'That'll do me then', and away I went and signed on the dotted line. Little did I know how that snap decision would influence my working and personal life.

That was nearly forty years ago; I am now about to depart *Albatross* for the last time. Twenty years have been spent in uniform, then thirteen years at the Training School, and more recently as the Base Safety Officer. During that time I have had a couple of short sojourns into the outside world, but fate seemed to bring me back into the fold.

On reflection, I consider myself to be extremely lucky to have experienced the comradeship, and the highs and lows of service life. Where else could you meet and share life with so many great mates? Or experience that strange sense of humour, the pride of achievement and success, and the honour of being part of an organisation such as the Fleet Air Arm?

Unfortunately, my 'Use by date' has caught up with me and the time has come for retirement. I am very much aware of a

change in culture of today's Navy. Rightly or wrongly, I don't entirely blame the service. Perhaps it is a change in society. We of our era still have our memories, both good and bad, I'm happy to live with that.

Thank you, Ed, for allowing me space in your excellent journal to express my thanks and appreciation to all of my past and present shipmates who have shared their good times with me over the years. There are too many names to mention and, sometimes the memory can't quite match the names to faces.

That early decision to join the FAA also allowed me to meet my wonderful wife, Bev, who has been, and still is, a tower of strength to me (NO...I'm not being paid for this). A true Nowra girl who experienced life as a Navy wife and, as did many others, did so without complaint.

What does the future hold? We are very excited about joining the 'grey Nomads' and travelling around Australia by caravan. Where are we going? Well, in whatever direction 'she' points! Married life has taught me that the two most important words in the English language are 'Yes dear'.

We intend to depart in February 2001 and return whenever. We will be heading west in slow time to avoid the wet season up north, but intend to visit most places over the next couple of years and catch up with some of the 'old and bold'.

If anyone would care to contact me, my address is 80 Yarunga Drive, North Nowra 2541. Phone (02) 4421 6979 - Mobile 0411 543 774.

Col Poulton - ex-CPOATA R55485

Dear Ed

It takes a long time for *Slipstream* to filter down to me [Bognor Regis UK]. Being a founder member of the Royal Australian Navy Fleet Air Arm, perhaps I could join the Association?

I have just been 'handed on' the April and July copies, as a result, the following comments may be of interest.

The FAA Memorial on the Victoria Embankment in London.

A contribution towards its construction was made by the RN Armourer's Association, who also provided the ushers for the subsequent reception in St. James' Palace from their membership. My wife (picture in *Flying Stations* Pg. 72) and I attended. It was a very impressive occasion.

The mini-Vulcan.

I was at Boscombe Down immediately after my return from the RAN in 1952. There were three 'minis'. The 'A' was the fast flyer - 'B' the slow flyer and 'C' was a twin-seat trainer. I think it was about 1953 that all three flew in formation over Farnborough Air Show, they were led by the prototype Vulcan flown by Roly Falk. It was he who dispelled fears about flying deltas.



(Continued on page 8)

Barry Lister's letter re-tinnitus.

A condition from which I also suffer. It aggravates my deafness, for which I receive a 60% disability award. Although it is on the other side of the world from Barry, the Cromwell Hospital (private) in the Cromwell Road, London, has, or had, a tinnitus research unit. I participated in a trial run some years ago, to investigate the alleviation of tinnitus. That unit recognised that the complaint increases in intensity with the passage of time, something that I am only too aware of! If Barry Lister is interested, I will try to find more recent information on the Cromwell Hospital, it might be able to help him.

Barry Lord's account of the loss of the Captain's launch from HMAS Sydney. Although founded on fact, is, I fear, somewhat apocryphal. The incident occurred in the Pentland Firth, a notorious stretch of water between Scotland and the Orkneys.

There were two launches in the Starboard after stowage, the Captain's inboard on its chocks, and another outboard slung on the davits for transportation to Australia as we were shortly to leave the UK. The boat station led aft to the gangway and access to the Armoury, of which I was the AA i/c. I doubt if there was anyone in that station at the time. The flight and weather decks were out of bounds and both forward and aft access doors were sealed due to the exceptionally rough weather. However, one almighty wave ripped the outboard launch from its anchorage; we saw it go past the Armoury portholes with only the bow out of the water, it was never seen again.

I wonder if the Admiral's coxswain is still around? If he is, he may remember one of my armourers (who came from a Victorian fruit farm) ditching a dustpan full of sweepings and swarf out of one of the portholes into the immaculate barge beneath. The coxswain, who had little time for these new fangled flying machines, or anyone associated with them, paid us a visit to acquaint us of his opinions of maintainers of 'agricultural machinery'.

Happy New Year to all.

Maurice Ayling

[Maurice, who served in the RN 1940-1972 and on loan to the RAN 1948-1952 HMA Ships Sydney and Albatross, has just joined the FAAA of Australia. Welcome aboard.

It has been interesting to read about the launch being lost overboard, but what happened to the inboard launch? An article in the Sydney Morning Herald dated 15 Jan 2001 has this to say:

'Few trainees have ever had it so good. In a huge old boatshed at Chowder Bay, work for the dole trainees are restoring a historic timber launch for the interim Sydney Harbour Federation Trust...'

The vessel was built in England, possibly in 1947, as the captain's launch for the aircraft carrier HMAS Sydney, but in the late 1950s was being used by the Commanding Officer at Cockatoo Island to commute from the Navy's Garden Island base...

In later years it was used by Navy Cadets, but had been beached on Spectacle Island for more than a decade when the Navy donated it with a reconditioned engine to the Trust...'

So now you know what happened to the surviving launch. Ed]

Dear Ed

With reference to 'What are the details?' on Page 19 of the October 2000 edition – the photograph shows HMAS Melbourne on its last voyage as a commissioned ship of the RAN.

It was a 'cold move' undertaken by tugs on 11 June 1982, removing Melbourne from dry dock after having her hull sealed prior to her decommissioning on 30 June 1982.

The evolution was a low-key affair, no crowds to bid farewell to her officers and sailors; there were no aircraft embarked and there was no paying-off pennant flying.

Because she wasn't moving under her own steam, she couldn't fly her paying-off pennant, if she had, it would have been several hundred metres long with many helium-filled balloons required to keep it flying.

On the occasion of this move, the captain was CMDR Wally Rothwell, and the XO who had the final 'drive' was LCDR Linn Smith (deceased), who commissioned her in the UK as a SBLT. The Air Department was headed by myself, Joe Kroeger, Jim Lee and George Parker.

To complement your already published photograph, are two taken from the GDP ('goofers-land') on the Melbourne. Whilst leaving dry dock and then coming alongside the carrier wharf (Port side to) for the very last time.

The end of an era!

Jock Campbell



Dear Ed

After the recent death of one of our members, Peter James Redpath (ex-CPOATWL), in July 2000, his widow, Pamela, handed me some handwritten notes made by Peter just before his untimely death by a rare form of cancer.

On typing up those notes, it could be seen that he was in the process of writing up a story for Slipstream relating to naval life ashore in the north of our continent with the Tracker aircraft deployment.

As an old Tracker man myself, it raised more than a few hairs on the back of my neck, I could smell the Avgas and hear the throb of those twin radial engines as his story unfolded. I have forwarded his story to you as he had originally planned.

Keep up the good work, it is appreciated by those who receive the publication.

Ron Hobba – ex POATC

THE PETER REDPATH LETTER

Dear Ed

It was great to see some of the crew from VS-816 Squadron (Detachment Darwin) in your April 2000 edition. Delving through my memorabilia I found a photo of what I believe is the full crew, or almost, taken in about 1979-1980. It has been 20 years since those great days in the north. I am sure that most of us who were there during that period would agree that it was a unique experience. I have never come across 'teammanship' as strong as what we had in those days.

Our working conditions were just short of atrocious. For example, to carry out a 250 hourly inspection or engine change, a canvas tent was made available; all that provided was a 'green house effect' so it wasn't used all that often. Then an unserviceable RAAF C-130 arrived; it was reversed up to the hangar under power and provided us with additional ventilation. Typically most of the maintenance was carried out on the concrete hardstanding.

The Administration, Stores and Crewroom were crammed into two 30-foot caravans, it was very 'squeezey' and there was no air-conditioning. Things stayed this way for some time until Admiral's Inspection came about, after that some rapid changes were made (It's marvellous what a Naval broadside fired at the RAAF managed to achieve!).

The only commodity easily procured, purloined, pinched, borrowed or taken out on loan, were pushbikes. It seemed as if everybody had access to one.

Pride in the Senior Service ran high in RAAF Base Darwin, from Operations to the OR's boozier. Competition was fierce and all in good fun; sports days between aircrew and ground crew provided great entertainment.

Ground crews were in two watches and operations were 365 days per year with a holding of three aircraft; two of which had to be serviceable at any time with one on task and one on standby. I don't believe we ever missed a sortie in two years. In addition to normal operations, numerous searches were carried out for all kinds of lost people. (*Lost*, weren't they, Fred? Like lost mud crabbers, eh Fred!) The searches were carried out in the Gulf from Gove and also from Broome. I almost forgot - we saved the 'Crabs' (RAAF) on one occasion.

Early in the piece, the RAAF had two C-47's and **all** the crews

had flown to Groote or Gove to pick up a cargo of prawns and bugtails. Much to our disgust we did not get a 'look-in' when it was time to place the orders. As I recall, it was a quiet Sunday morning when the call for help came in. The RAAF C-47 was U/S with starter problems. I organised a spare starter, and as all the RAAF C-47 crews were over there, it was up to the good old 'Tracker-Wackers' to get the starter motor to them. I don't recall who flew it over, but the RAAF got the starter in exchange for a box of prawns! It's marvellous what the right collateral can purchase! (The prawns were later devoured underneath LCDR Gibson's house.) The Tracker did a 'running turn-a-round' on that trip, thank goodness; on the following day it was the duty aircraft and you wouldn't believe it, the No. 1 engine wouldn't crank over that morning. The starter lead had broken off at the starter-motor during the flight to rescue the RAAF! This was the first time I had to use jumper leads on a Tracker. The second time was at Groote Island after refuelling and the Tracker only having a marginal battery pack. An ex-helo pilot was at the controls and with red-hot engines, things were looking sad for an engine start. The options were an overnight stay at Groote, or try and get the aircraft started and make for RAAF Townsville. Townsville sounded the better choice, so a four-wheel drive utility from the mine at Groote was organised to provide some power. The 'ute' was crammed full of heavy duty batteries and, although it did look strange with cables running everywhere, the 'Grey Grumbly' was soon throbbing with life and flying southwards. The low level flight into Arnhem Land and across the escarpment was very spectacular with water pouring from the escarpment and running towards the coast, this was during the wet season and I shall never forget that sight.

Initially, times were hard for those of us with families. Many of the homes allocated to us were rejected by the RAAF for their own use but accepted by the Navy on the 'take it or leave it' basis and with no 'previews' either. They were 'liveable', but they still had signs of Cyclone Tracey about them; being a REMOTE locality, only personal effects were moved to Darwin so at first the homes were strange surroundings. Our children thrived, especially on the base with its swimming pool and other amenities in close proximity to their school. The school hours were strange to get used to, they were from early morning until about 2pm, as I recall. My two girls couldn't wait to get home from school and into a bath of icy water. My wife used to put three bucket-size ice blocks into the bath to cool the **cold** water. (Most water reticulation around Darwin is above ground and this makes for nice 'warm' water.)

As I mentioned earlier, camaraderie, 'teammanship' and professionalism reigned supreme. Rank was there but it was rarely exercised or needed. On Wednesdays it was the aircraft wash day; both watches turned to until lunchtime and usually two aircraft were washed in a few hours by available air and ground crews. 250 hourly engine inspections were normally carried out at weekends by all, regardless of trade, which included scraping off old rocker box gaskets and conducting power runs. The 'Boss', LCDR Ian Gibson, was ever present at the rag hangar to dispense with a slab or two of cold frosty lubricants to the boys, who were usually covered in grease, oil and 'gunge'. Of course, while we were rolling around in this muck, our wives became quite adept at inventing outings, meetings etc. One I recall was a series of 'Baileys' ironing parties organised by 'Woofa' Walker's wife,

(Continued on page 10)

Sandra. The entry fee was a beer jug of home-made Baileys' cream - per person. By 10am, all participants were chirping like magpies with hair lips.

Our 'off watch' days were, to a large extent, used for fishing trips at various camps in Arnhem Land; two of which were at Pt. Stuart Buffalo Station and Corroboree Camp. Both were on the Margaret River system (approximately a 12 tinny trip out). In those days everything had to be transported in, fuel, ice etc. was not available out there. On one particular trip, we had to drive my Chrysler Charger back home on outboard motor fuel - it looked pretty spectacular anyway.

Although our detachment was part of HMAS *Coonawarra*, we were all members of the RAAF Base messes where they made us very welcome. (And why not? We probably tripled the bar profits in the two years we were there.)

In the Sergeants' Mess, mess dinners were held monthly and all members were levied whether they attended or not. Hospital cases excepted. They were very good functions and as always, RAAF victuals excelled on those nights. I can remember that after one of those functions, 'Woofa', myself and others decided we were still hungry and decided on some take-aways from the Shell Service Station outside the base gates. What a sight we must have been. Two o'clock in the morning, with the wet season rain pouring down, sitting in a gutter eating soggy fish and chips whilst wearing rubbish tin lids to keep the rain off. Yes, it was very easy to go 'troppo' in Darwin!

There are hundred of stories to be told of the Detachment and I hope this letter turns up a few more stories of a little known group of professional sailors up north.

Of course everything good comes to an end and ours came towards November 1980 when the politicians decided that Coastal Surveillance would be contracted out to private enterprise. They would also use Nomad aircraft as part of the contract agreement. What a good way to offload slow moving government manufactured aircraft.

Most of us were to return to *Albatross*, my start being 24 December. This meant that Christmas was spent in a local motel, with no leave or directions for the detachment's future. Eventually the detachment was disbanded early in 1981.

After many years in Naval and Civil aviation engineering, I still have the fondest memories of the 'Grey Grumbly' S2 Tracker and will confess to being hooked on the smell of Avgas. As far as I am concerned, if it hasn't got a radial engine it isn't a real aircraft!

Some years later, whilst working for Ansett, I did manage to get a front seat ride in a Tracker at an airshow in Launceston, it made the hairs on my neck really stand out. It was absolutely great. I was shaking for an hour afterwards, so to all you 'Tracker wackers' out there, I hope you are all well and enjoying life.

Peter Redpath

[I spoke to Peter on the telephone in the weeks before he died, he commented at the time that he really should write something for *Slipstream*. I am humbled to think that a man who was so ill made such an effort for this journal. Thank you Peter, and thank you to Pamela Redpath and Ron Hobba for completing his project. Ed]

Have **YOU** done anything for *Slipstream* yet?
If not, is it because you are just too busy?

Dear Ed

It was with deep sorrow that we heard of the passing of Brian McKeon, affectionately known to his friends as 'Soapy'.

Brian had been in poor health for some time, but his determination to survive kept him with us for a considerable period; determination being one of his great qualities.

He also had a great affection for the Fleet Air Arm and its place in the Royal Australian Navy. Brian, and his wife, Margaret, were a team who contributed greatly to the formation of the Fleet Air Arm Officers' Association which was eventually absorbed into the Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia. Many of us will remember their great contribution. Brian was also honoured by other organisations for his charity work.

A strong family man, supportive and loving, his sense of values, integrity and genuine friendship, combined with his dry sense of humour, set a good example to his children.

All those who had the privilege and good fortune to know him will sadly miss Brian. He was a true friend.

To those of us 'survivors' he is not dead - he has gone to that other place.

'He has put out his hand and touched the face of God'.

Very sincerely,

Don McLaren

Dear Ed

I am attaching a short (?) anecdote of the early days in the Fleet Air Arm entitled 'FIRST OF THE FIRST'. I feel sure that it will shake a few memories loose among those of us who are still around and recognise themselves in the accompanying photograph.

I enjoy reading *Slipstream*, keeping tabs on former shipmates and hearing about what's happening in the world of the FAA.

Doug Dewhirst - ex-CAF(O)

2 Pepperbox Court, Glenside SA 5065 Ph/Fax: (08) 8338 4474

FIRST OF THE FIRST

The other day my mind slipped a couple of temporal cogs back to 1948, the year I became part of the Fleet Air Arm.

I recalled that after completing an annual tour of minesweeping in December 1947, I was sent on leave with the instruction to report to HMAS *Lonsdale* on 14 January 1948, the day before my 19th birthday. This move, I was informed, was in response to me putting my name forward some months previously, to be a part of the about to be created RAN FAA.

Along with a group of others, we went through the draft routines for our upcoming, unknown, change in our careers. I recall being in a long queue in a passageway with Sick Bay 'tiffies' and a couple of doctors alongside trestle tables carrying an array of needles, vials, bottles and sundry items. We moved along the passageway and stopped adjacent to these tables where we were immediately 'gang struck' from either side as our inoculations were administered. The needles were not removed after the first 'shot', but left dangling from our arms ready for the injections at the next table. There were some sore arms, faint heads and faint hearts for the next few days - believe me!

On 21 January 1948, we boarded the Shaw Saville line ship



THE FIRST CLASS OF ARMOURERS TO UNDERTAKE TRAINING AT HMS HERON – MARCH 1948

Rear L-R: Jack Lombard – Jack Constantine – Don Rashbrook – Dave McRoberts – John Cashmore – George Best
 Centre Row: 'Nobby' Clarke, Alonzo Brooks, Ian Ferguson – Jim Hallahan – Stan McCutcheon – Doug Dewhirst – Ron Sangster –
 Bill Sheriden – John Daisley – Gus Gundry – Jack Herbert – Max Vinen – George McKenzie – Peter Busby – Ned Kelly – Ike Saunders.
 Front Row: John Elliot – Neville Way – Jim Hibbert – John 'Blue' Harrison – Joe Gregory – Dennis Finn – Stan Dyker
 – Terry Egan – Keith Hope.

the *SS Largs Bay* which was to be our home for the next four weeks, it was a big change from the Grey Funnel Line. There we were, more than ninety sailors mingling with civilian passengers who looked down their noses at this 'awful riff-raff' who had the temerity to interrupt their relaxing journey back 'home'.

An Royal Navy 'two and a half' who was returning to the United Kingdom was put in charge of us. He had wonderful ideas about organising all these sailors, but alas, after leaving Western Australia his dreams started to crumble. He tried to organise early morning PT. It went well for a few days, so well that the civilians started to join in. This was too good an opportunity for the sailors, as each new 'civvie' joined the group, a sailor dropped out, this resulted in there always being the right number of heads at the PT. By the time we reached Colombo, PT had passed into history – but so had our money.

Although we had been paid before leaving Australia, the pickings were extremely austere. Card games in the lounge helped to supplement some of our funds. Some were more innovative, Dave Rice and the late A J Cox started washing and ironing service for the civilians. Apart from some ribbing regarding ladies 'undies', probably their most notable moment of their enterprise occurred when a 'Brit' accosted them in the ironing room and demanded they give up their iron to someone else. In response he received the curt comment; 'Who do you think you are – a comedian?' – a phrase much in use at that time, but very literal as it turned out that he really was a comedian who gave a few comedy skits at the concerts during the trip.

By and large it was a poor group who went ashore in Colombo. I had the unfortunate experience of having my pocket picked and my carefully saved pennies fast became a memory.

It was no better at Aden. What a place! In those days you wouldn't have missed anything if you never went there.

By the time we reached Malta our pleas to our guardian officer had paid off; he had signaled London and received approval to pre pay us a few pounds – ten shillings a head! Big Deal! Nevertheless it was welcome and allowed many of us to visit 'The Gut', although what for I don't know. My memory doesn't recall anything of note except perhaps a cold beer on a cold day.

Finally, on 28 February we reached Southampton. The beautiful summer we had left behind in Australia and the beautiful weather in the Mediterranean were soon distant memories as we found ourselves shivering away in the coldest British winter in 75 years. Such was our luck!

The next few days were a blur as we disembarked and were sorted out for posting to our selected depots. A large contingent of us found ourselves on our way to HMS *Heron* at Yeovilton, which is located in the west country of Somerset ('Zoomerzet', as it is called). Whilst here, we commenced our technical training until about mid-October.

Shortly after arrival, we were joined by a largish body of direct entry personnel, the first Recruit Naval Airmen (RNA) who were also to undertake their training at Heron. We were a motley lot as I remember.

There were the Ordnance 'bods' of course, my class was a small group consisting of Joe Gregory, Gus Gundry, Rollo Sangster and Bill Sheridan. We were given the soubriquet of 'The Indians' as the five of us (four plus the OIC) marched Indian file past the guardhouse four times a day as we passed to and from

(Continued on page 12)

the technical area. There were the others like Alonzo Brooks, Jackie Lombard, John Elliot, George MacKenzie, Ian Ferguson, John 'Blue' Harrison et al (see photo), and, if my memory serves me right, other right arm rates like Max Gant, Bruce Clempson (the tennis twins) etc..

I, and many others, enjoyed those halcyon days as we moved through Spring into Summer, which in the west country was (and I'm sure still is) a rather marvelous time of year. Who recalls the days out in the fields, picking potatoes in the balmy sun – or 'skiving off' on the pretext that having just donated blood we were too faint to engage in such rigorous activity.

Then there was our wonderful Divisional Officer, Lieutenant, The Lord Congleton, who arranged for the Australians to have time off to travel to nearby Taunton to see the 1948 Australian cricket team perform. Unfortunately, the great Donald Bradman didn't bat that day, but I remember Keith Miller being in devastating form. Later there was the Australian safari to Leeds to see the next Test.

There were the nights and weekends we spent slipping away to nearby Ilford, Yeovil or Poddymore for a few scrumpies, which at fourpence a pint meant that you could have a good night on 'two bob' and come home with some change. The pay we were receiving at the time, in comparison to our RN counterparts, resulted in them referring to us as 'The Barons' – it was quite apt.

Soon it all came to an end, we were off to join the 'big boys' on our very first squadron. Our group went off to HMS *Gannet* at Eglinton, just outside Londonderry in Northern Ireland. Here we became true naval airmen, putting into practice all the theory that we had learnt in the previous months. It was here that the 20th Carrier Air Group (CAG) really began. What a momentous and memorable time!

During off-duty periods there were weekends drinking Guinness over the border in Buncrana, or dancing the night away at the Police Club dances. Or what about the dance in 'derry where the band was enclosed behind wire netting to protect them from the bottles that might be thrown.

By and large, for many they were difficult days as we all tried to settle down to our new jobs with a new life and a new career; but as history records, we did it, and did it well. It is without a blush that I say not only were we the first, but we were also the best! Those that remember those days, and the days that followed, I'm sure will agree. We led the way for all who followed and set standards, which in some cases still hold today, as being the highest the Fleet Air Arm has known.

Those days at Eglinton were full of learning and feeling our way, despite the cold weather we achieved many good things. Perhaps not least of all, was the design and manufacture of an oil-heating furnace in the Armourer's crewroom, which was mainly based on an idea by Manxy Callister. We devised a method to drip feed anti-freeze oil (used on the Hispano cannons) from an empty starter cartridge tin, via a copper tube into our coal burning pot-belly stove. Boy, what a success! At times it was just too hot, the stove would glow red, not just in one spot, but the whole stove. We would have to turn everything off and go outside to cool off. No wonder the Armourer's crewroom became very popular as mates, and dozens of people found some excuse to visit us.

In spite of the gloom and cold of Northern Ireland, the accidents and a few damaged aircraft (a reminder was Freddie Sherbourne's 'bingle' with 'nucleus' Sea Fury 111, published

recently in these pages), we survived and eventually moved on, joining HMAS *Sydney* on 15 February 1949. After circumnavigating the UK, we finally set sail for home – Australia and *Albatross*. Despite the good times, we were all glad to be back 'down under'.

There will be many of you who will recall other great experiences during those prepubescent days of the Australian Fleet Air Arm. Hopefully, some of you might take us down memory lane with your tales, I'm sure your anecdotes would be warmly received. If some of my details are remiss it's because the ol' memory ain't what it used to be – but I'm sure I'll be told. Remember, we may be getting older but we are not old! Not yet anyway.

We can be very thankful for those days because there would have been many heavy hearts when, many years later, it was learnt that the Fleet Air Arm as we knew it was to be disbanded. All those wonderful times, the depth and breadth of experience – literally generations of knowledge that had been accrued over the years, virtually tossed aside along with the marvelous memories and traditions that had been earned in war and peace – everything that those who were the first had worked so hard to establish.

Perhaps one day we might see another Fleet Air Arm; I sincerely and fervently hope that we do – but something tells me it will never match the first one.

Dear Ed

Whilst in the UK recently, I purchased a copy of the book 'Ship without Water', by Graham Bebbington; it is a history of Clayton Hall and the Royal Navy Artificer Training Establishment (RNATE) which was accommodated there during the 1939-45 war.

Included in the book is a section relating to HMS *Fledgling*, an establishment at Mill Meece where the WREN Air Mechanics were trained.

On reading the report on Wrens and our friendly allies at *Vulture II* in the last edition of *Slipstream*, I felt that the enclosed might assist in bringing back a few memories to those girls that are still around. It might even cause them to write to you, just for the record. After all, they were a part of it all!

Anyone that worked with Wrens would have to have memories, even those of the 'Birds and the Bees'. I know that I certainly have.

My first draft was to Arbroath on a dispersal in a wheat field. Our aircraft were Swordfish and Seafire III's. A young Wren transport driver drove us there in a truck. It was necessary to cross the end of the main runway upon receipt of a GREEN from a controller on the runway. We saw the RED, but seemingly she didn't! A De Havilland Dragon Rapide which was taking off, clipped the front bar on the truck canopy – the driver stopped dead – we ended up in a heap and she sat there white faced and crying. The journey was concluded with a Petty Officer driver.

I wonder if she still drives through red lights? Or if she is still alive?

We had accidents caused by Wrens that, if caused by the matelots, it would have been a 'jankers job'.

One that comes to mind is that of a girl nicknamed 'Pickles' – she carried the name on her overalls. It would seem that she made a habit of making a mess, including removing the oil drain

plug instead of the filter on a Pegasus engine (they were located one above the other). Rumour has it that she checked the rev. drop on a Swordfish, switched both magnetos off, realised that the engine was stopping and switched them on again. This action promptly blew the top cylinder head off!

On another occasion, three of us 'poor fools' were hanging over the tail of a Harvard waiting for the lass in the cockpit to start it up for maximum revs. check. It didn't start, so, seeing that we were in Scotland on a very cold day, we retired to the hangar to get out of the wind. The aircraft suddenly started – she hadn't checked the rear – and, as she put it: 'The tarmac came up and hit the propeller.' We got the blame for that one!

Dear 'Pickles' married an unsuspecting POAF (A) and came to Australia with him, now a 'Tiffy'. We eventually returned to UK, he retired and the family returned as '£10 tourists'. She divorced me and is now living in a small village in the UK.

I am not a chauvinist!

Note: There is also a book available with the title 'Wrens in King Arthur's Country' by Fi Waller. It is about *Vulture* during 1939-45.

Eric Manuel

Extract from Graham Bebbington's book, 'Ship without Water', released February 2000 by Churnet Valley Books, UK.

THE FLEDGLINGS

On 15 April 1943 a 'sister establishment to HMS *Daedalus II* was commissioned at Mill Meece, a few miles south of Clayton. Situated in the beautiful undulating North Staffordshire countryside. HMS *Fledgling* also came under the control of HMS *Daedalus I* at Lee-on-Solent. Despite its brief life, HMS *Fledgling* has a number of claims to fame, yet sadly it seems to have been largely forgotten. It was the *first* purely WRNS technical training establishment. Secondly, it was then the only naval air station fully manned by the Royal Navy, although there were one or two instructors who had transferred from the RAF to the Fleet Air Arm. In addition, as the war progressed, HMS *Fledgling* was to train personnel from overseas. Consequently, its role in the war effort should not be underestimated.

Fledgling was located to the rear of the infamous Royal Ordnance Factory (ROF), Swinerton, not perhaps the most ideal of situations! ROF 55 Swinerton was a 'filling factory', in other words, shell, bomb and land mine cases, together with fuses and high explosives such as TNT, were transported from other factories for assembly into the finished product. Not surprisingly, it was a site much sought after by the Luftwaffe on its nightly bombing raids. There are those to this day who firmly believe that it was saved as a result of the frequent mists which shroud the Meece Valley, thus hiding it from the eyes of enemy aircrews. Radar, of course, was not available in aircraft at the time. *Fledgling's* staff and trainees were housed in accommodation released by the Ministry of Supply and which had been formerly utilised by those who had been employed on building the ROF.

Fledgling's Commanding Officer was Captain Percy R P Percival. Promoted to Midshipman in 1903, Percival had risen steadily through the ranks to achieve a distinguished naval career. He had seen plenty of action in WW1 and had been awarded the

DSO for action against German destroyers off the Belgian coast on 21 March 1918. After the war he continued to command destroyers, retiring from the service in 1932. Like many of his contemporaries, he was recalled to the colours in 1939 at the outbreak of WW2. Percival and his famous Old English Sheepdog were familiar sights at the station and in the locality, and a few local residents remember them fondly to this day. He remained in charge of *Fledgling* until it closed at the end of the war.

According to a contemporary report, much was accomplished in a very short time by the ship's company to achieve satisfactory adaptation of the buildings, etc to Admiralty requirements. Some of the work was undertaken by maintenance staff from HMS *Daedalus II* under Shipwright LT S C McClounan. Petty Officer Joiner Frank Plant can recall working at *Fledgling* where, at times, he was the only man! Having caught a packet from a Stuka during the siege of Tobruk, Frank had spent some time recuperating from his injuries before being posted to *Daedalus II*. Thankfully, he admitted it was 'much quieter' at Mill Meece than Tobruk, and the *Fledgling* girls 'spoiled him at times!'

As in the case of HMS *Daedalus II*, *Fledgling's* training schemes provided for the four categories of Air Mechanics, Airframe (A), Engines (E), Electrician (L) and Ordnance (or armament) (O). In addition, all trainees attended classes for extra and applied mathematics and also given lectures on such subjects as the history of flying, types of aircraft in use by the Fleet Air Arm and the duties of a naval air station. There were about 40 instructors employed at Mill Meece, mainly CPOs and POs, and these were under the control of LTCDR (E) W E Budge. Some of the instructors came in as required from *Daedalus II*. Also, Ordnance Mechanics received some training there until the Mill Meece workshops were fully equipped.

Nevertheless, the station had an array of equipment for training purposes from the beginning, and extensive use was also made of modern teaching aids such as educational films. The Air Mechanics (E) had the benefit of having access to an abundance of engines for training purposes which could be stripped and reassembled as necessary. Also, Ordnance Mechanics had the benefit of being able to work on examples of every aircraft gun in service with the Fleet Air Arm. They were taught how to strip the guns, clean and reassemble them. They also studied details of different types of ammunition and recoil systems, and learned just about everything that could go wrong and how to carry out repairs swiftly and efficiently. There was also a 'bomb alley' containing examples of models of all types of bombs in use on naval aircraft. In addition, the station has a small fleet of aircraft for ground handling and other practice. Amongst others, these included a Corsair, a Wildcat, a Fulmar, a Blackburn Shark, a Hurricane and a Percival Proctor.

Courses for all categories lasted about 18 weeks, with examinations every 4 weeks. Class sizes were about 15 trainees, and for practical work there were 2 instructors per class. HMS *Fledgling* was commissioned to produce a steady stream of well-trained Wren Air Mechanics, the intention being to save manpower in the hardpressed Royal Navy. At the time, it was estimated that resultant savings would be in the region of 25% - 30%.

Most of the girls found the area around the station to be very pleasant, sentiments that they have retained over the years.

(Continued on page 14)

Waxing lyrical, one described it as 'farming country, gently undulating with a lot of trees, little streams and dozens of intersecting lanes which were very pleasant for cycling'. What they didn't find so desirable was the close proximity of the Royal Ordnance Factory. For example, one correspondent recalls attending open-air services at *Fledgling* when the area of the parade ground (or quarterdeck) would suddenly become thick with smoke from the ROF as testing of ammunition commenced. Another formed the opinion that the factory was 'very spooky', particularly at night, with strange lights, explosions, and steam rising from various points. Whilst fulfilling an extremely important role in the war effort, there is little doubt that ROF 55 was a strange place – 'like something out of an H G Wells' novel', I once heard someone comment.

The factory bore very little resemblance to a conventional one, consisting of some 2,000 or so small buildings. These were separated from each other by substantial distances and often large earth mounds and walls to reduce the risk of explosions.

But for all this, the place had a wonderful working atmosphere and camaraderie. At its peak, Swynnerton employed between 20-30,000 personnel, the majority females aged between 18-35 years. Many lived locally in specially provided halls of residence and here they organised a remarkable social life for themselves including dances, film shows, pageants, and pantomimes. The *Fledgling* girls were invited to attend these events, which they did. However, when the American troops moved into nearby Nelson Hall, the social life was even further enhanced! Even so, many of the former Wrens carry memories of the ROF girl's yellow complexion and hair resulting from their work, and they were thankful not to be in a similar position.

The *Fledgling* personnel contributed in no small way to the social scene themselves. There was a wealth of talent amongst their ranks, singers, dancers, instrumentalists, and this revealed itself in shows that were staged at the station or, on occasion, at venues in the district.....end.

HEART SPAM

Let's say you are driving home, or cruising (alone of course) after an unusually hard day on the job.

All of a sudden, you start experiencing severe pain in your chest that starts to radiate out into your arm and up into your jaw. You are only about five miles from the hospital nearest your home, unfortunately you don't know if you'll be able to make it that far.

What can you do? You've been trained in CPR, but the person that taught you how, neglected to tell you how to perform it on yourself.

HOW TO SURVIVE A HEART ATTACK WHEN ALONE

Since many people are alone when they suffer a heart attack, this article seemed in order.

Without help – the person whose heart stops beating properly and who begins to feel faint, has only about ten seconds left before losing consciousness. However, these victims can help themselves by coughing repeatedly and very vigorously.

A deep breath should be taken before each cough, and the cough must be deep and prolonged, as when producing sputum from deep inside the chest.

A breath and a cough must be repeated about every two seconds without let-up until help arrives, or until the heart is felt to be beating normally again.

Deep breaths get oxygen into the lungs and coughing movements squeeze the heart and keep blood circulating. The squeezing pressure on the heart also helps it regain normal rhythm.

In this way, heart attack victims can get to a phone and, between breaths, call for help.

Tell as many other people as possible about this, it could save their lives!

A Doctor's Comments

The basic fact is true...cough resuscitation can be an effective way of maintaining consciousness when an otherwise lethal cardiac arrhythmia occurs. However, don't expect to be alert enough to drive to the hospital, make a telephone call, or discuss quantum physics while this is happening.

HARRIER PILOTS THREATEN TO QUIT

By Neil Tweedle, UK Telegraph

Almost a third of the Royal Navy's trained Sea Harrier pilots are threatening to resign their commissions rather than move to new bases under RAF control.

Some 13 pilots, equivalent to the strength of one of the Fleet Air Arm's two front-line Sea Harrier squadrons, plan to buy themselves out of the service before the expiry of their contracts. This would produce a manning crisis in British naval aviation, which relies on a small cadre of expensively trained jet pilots. Their action stems from the merger of Navy and RAF Harriers into a single force integrated for joint operations and sharing the same bases in eastern England.

Many Navy pilots oppose the move, which will result in uprooting their families, isolation from the rest of the naval community and loss of the Fleet Air Arm's identity as an independent entity. The Navy's Harrier force is concentrated in two operational squadrons, Nos. 800 and 801, and one headquarters and training unit, 899 Squadron based at Yeovilton, Somerset. They share only 45 pilots between them.

The RAF's three front-line Harrier squadrons already operate from Navy carriers and from 2003, the two services will share the same operational base at RAF Cottesmore, Rutland, and the same training base at RAF Wittering, Cambridgeshire.

That will mean Navy pilots and families moving more than a hundred miles from their West Country homes. In addition, Royal Navy pilots will effectively find themselves submerged within the RAF.

A Fleet Air Arm source said: 'Pilots accept being away at sea but they don't want to be taken away from the rest of the Navy and dumped in the middle of England, miles from carriers with flying restrictions they don't face over the ocean. There are plenty of airline jobs at the moment and so the decision to resign is a lot easier than it otherwise might be.'

From the Naval Open Source Intelligence, the following article.
World Naval Operational News Highlights for 2000

Several recurring themes were identified in this year's naval news stories:

- Iraq's successful attempts to circumvent the United Nations economic sanctions on the exporting of oil.
- The crisis in readiness, especially in the navies of the United States, United Kingdom, Russia and Canada.
- Piracy in the South China Sea.
- The standoff in the Taiwanese Straits between Taiwan and China.
- Ship handling accidents in the United States Navy.
- The ascendancy of the Indian Navy.
- Territorial disputes in the South China Sea, such as the Spratly Islands.
- Support for 'Operations Other Than War' including the Royal Navy and French Navy in Mozambique and Madagascar, the Royal Navy in Sierra Leone and the Royal Australian Navy and Royal New Zealand in the Solomon Islands.
- The most professional combined arms operation of the year was the deployment of British forces to Sierra Leone to restore stability to the country.
- The only ship-to-ship combat of the year was between the Sri Lankan Navy and the Tamil Tigers.
- The most intriguing naval news story of the year is whether or not Israel has developed a sea based nuclear deterrent in the form of nuclear tipped cruise missiles on its new Dolphin class submarines.
- The most strategically significant naval news story of the year is possibly that the USA may have to turn its base in Diego Garcia back over to the native Chagos Islanders, who were unlawfully evicted in the 1960s.
- The most narrowly averted naval disaster of the year was the serious problem found in the cooling system of the nuclear reactor on the Royal Navy's nuclear attack submarines.
- The most tragic naval news story of the year was the sinking of the Russian nuclear attack submarine *Kursk*, with the loss of all hands – and the terrorist attack on the guided missile destroyer USS *Cole* with heavy loss of life.
- The most bizarre naval news story of the year was the construction of a midget submarine in the mountains of Columbia, to be used by drug smugglers, with assistance from Russian nationals.
- The most humorous naval operation of the year was the sight of the Canadian Navy undertaking an operation to recapture Canadian Army equipment from a transport ship's crew which was holding it hostage in order to be reimbursed for its transport from Kosovo to Canada.
- Finally, the naval news story of the year with the most potential long-term significance, was the unsuccessful attempt of the Argentinians to sue the British Government over the sinking of the cruiser *General Belgrano* in the Falklands War. Will the wars of the future be refought in the courtroom, rather than in the simulator room?

HMAS VENGEANCE UPDATE

Several members have asked if the *Vengeance* is still around. This is the latest information available from the World Wide Web.

The aircraft carrier *Vengeance*, which became the flagship of the Brazilian Navy and renamed *Minas Gerais*, is still in service.

In 1996, Brazil lost its carrier capability when it retired the last of its eight S2E Trackers.

In January 1997, the Brazilian Navy asked their government to acquire a squadron of second hand A-4 Skyhawks to operate from the carrier.

In January 1998, Brazil was negotiating the \$70 million purchase of twenty-three A-4 Skyhawks from the Kuwait Air Force for use on the carrier.

In October 2000, the *Minas Gerais* was conducting exercises off the coast of Rio de Janeiro during which the Navy's A-4 Skyhawks made their first 'touch and go' landings aboard the ship.

In November 2000, France turned over the aircraft carrier *Foch* to Brazil; it is to be renamed the *Sao Paulo*, and refitted to handle American-made aircraft.

The *Foch*, which has been in service with the French navy for forty years, is still in good working condition. It was sold for 80 million French francs (\$10.49 million) and will sail for Rio in February 2001 after maintenance and refitting.



BRITANNIA ROYAL NAVAL COLLEGE

Courtesy RN Armourer's Association 4x2

The college was having one of its impressive passing out parades. The weather was fine, the Queen had just taken the salute, and the whole assembly was waiting for the traditional end to the ceremony where the Commander was to ride his horse up the imposing steps and across the Quarterdeck.

Horse and rider set off, but about halfway up the steps the horse suffered a bad attack of wind, the noise of which reverberated across the Quarterdeck, ricocheted off the drill hall and swept across the parade ground.

'I'm so embarrassed, Sir', apologised the red faced Commander when he reported to the Admiral after the march past. 'It couldn't have happened at a worst time, what with the Queen being there and everything; but there just wasn't anything I could do about it.'

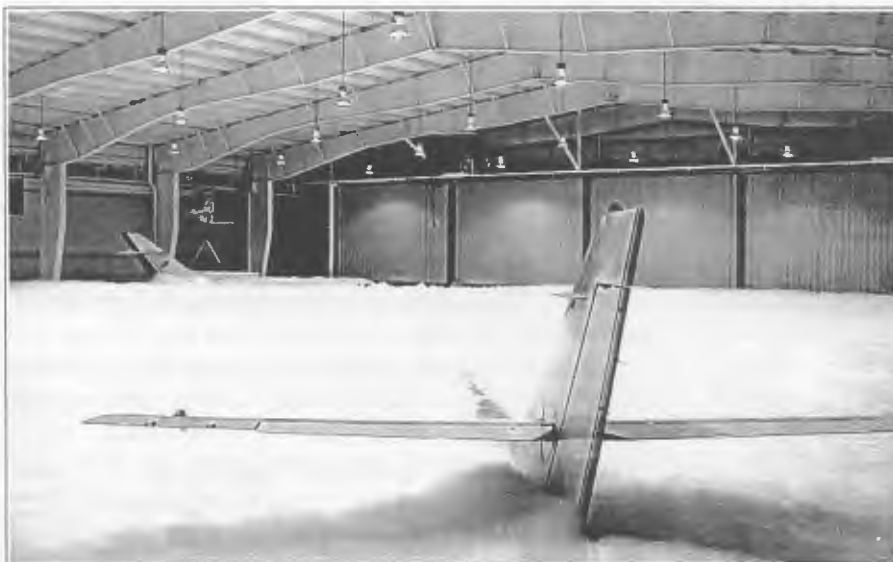
'Don't worry about it, old chap,' said the Admiral soothingly, 'I expect most people thought it was the horse.'

THE BEST CHICKEN JOKE EVER

A chicken and an egg are lying in bed. The chicken is leaning against the headboard smoking a cigarette and with a satisfied look on its face.

The egg, looking a bit 'peed off', grabs the sheet, rolls over, and says, 'Well, I guess we finally answered THAT question!'





FROM THE 'OH DEARY ME' DEPARTMENT

Scenario: You are the chief aircraft washer at the company hangar -

- 1 Hook high pressure hose up to the suds machine.
- 2 Turn machine on.
- 3 Get an important 'phone call and have to leave.
- 4 As you depart, yell to Don, your assistant, 'Don, turn it off'.
- 5 Don thinks he hears 'Don't turn it off', shrugs and then leaves for home.

AN AVIATION FIRST – Few people will argue with John Sproule's claim that he is the only man in the world to have flown off an aircraft carrier in a glider... backwards!

The strange assignment came at the end of WWII, when the Admiralty, worried by the number of carrier accidents, were keen to know about the effects of turbulence aft of the huge ships.

Their Lordships were looking for a pilot with gliding experience and a scientific bent. LTCDR Sproule was looking for anything that would prevent him being posted to an obscure job in India. The result was inevitable, and on a late May morning in 1945, he found himself in the cockpit of a glider on the deck of the converted liner *Pretoria Castle*.

The tests were not remarkable for any great scientific revelations but they did lead him into one of the strangest episodes of his career. With only limited periods available on the carriers for gliding, he found time heavy on his hands. 'So I persuaded the Navy to let me go to Germany to steal some of their gliders. I ended up with this 'circus', with a Tiger Moth for towing a couple of German gliders, and I went round all the naval air stations where there were hordes of bored pilots waiting for their demob'.

'I think I showed about 200 of them how to fly – and we didn't break a thing. I designed a conversion course for aeroplane pilots to fly a glider in one afternoon. We had chaps on their first flight that stayed up for a couple of hours.

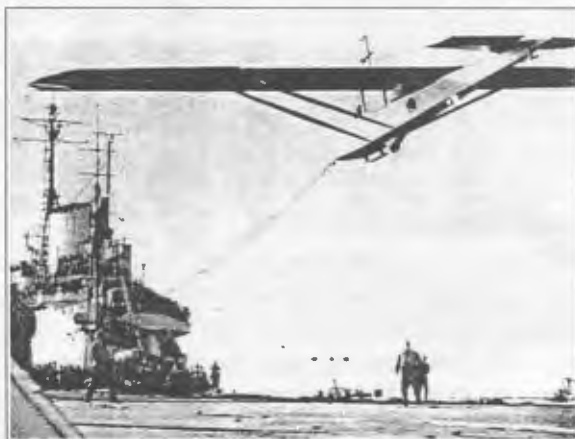
'For this glider-testing job, I was based at Gosport, which was a ragbag of naval activity at that time. I found myself working alongside helicopters, so I pulled all the strings I could to get on this helicopter course.

'With this oddball background, I was a natural for something different. The fixed-wing boys regarded helicopters as a bit of a comedown, but I could see as clear as crystal that any machine which could land on the back of a ship was going to be very useful, so I thought *let's get into this game as quickly as possible.*'

It was a 'game' that lasted from 1949 until the day he retired. He was Lieutenant

Commander Flying at Gosport for three years from 1950, then Commanding Officer of the newly formed search and rescue flight at Ford for two years.

Even two years behind a desk in Whitehall didn't stop him slipping down to Lee at every possible opportunity, and on his final day in the Navy, he flew the Whirlwind in which Prince Philip had done his training.



A SNIPPET FOR THE READERS IN UK

Ex-Royal Navy helicopter pilot, Nick Ross, recently donated one of his kidneys to his boss, Australian billionaire media mogul, Kerry Packer.

Nick is Mr Packer's personal helicopter pilot.

A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

It was World War II, and the captain was attempting to rally the crew on the eve of a big offensive.

'Out there,' said the captain, 'is your enemy. The man who has made your life miserable, who is working to destroy you; the man who has been trying to kill you day after day throughout this war.'

A voice from the back said: 'How the bloody hell did the cook get out there?'



MODERN GADGETS - *By Frank Halliwell - Jimboomba SA*

A cowboy from the Texas plains
East of the great divide
Inherited some money when
His rich old uncle died.

After weeks of celebration
And a big West Texas feast,
He packed his wife and all his kids
On a stagecoach headed east.

'Cause he'd heard about the cities
Where they never dim the lights
And he reckoned that he'd take his kin
To see those wondrous sights!

They had to change at Little Rock
Where ol' Tex got the word
That the new stagecoach was silver,
And it flew just like a bird!

So they flew on into Kennedy
Just gettin' on for dark,
And as all the tourists have to,
They got mugged in Central Park!

They saw so many wonders
In this new world they had found:
They travelled on a subway train
Way down under the ground!

They had their supper that night
In a big five-star hotel,
And Tex went to the lobby
To set and rest a spell.

The place was packed with people
With functions here and there,
An old folk's seminar was on
And a fashion show upstairs!

Two massive doors slid open
On the far side of the hall
In stepped an ancient lady
In an old and tattered shawl.

The doors slammed shut, the air was filled
With high pitched humming whine
Above the door a counter climbed
From 'G' to forty-nine!

A moment passed, then numbers came
Back down again to 'G'
An apparition stepped out
That was all ol' Tex could see!

She wore a tiny mini-skirt
With legs right up to here..
A tall and stately redhead
He couldn't help but leer.

Another old girl went through
Into the room beyond
A few short minutes later,
Out stepped a stunning blonde.

Tex reckoned that he'd seen enough.
This modern stuff was fun!
He leaned across the table,
And he whispered to his son..

'That aeroplane was okay,
But THIS gadget works real slick,
Rush back into the dining room,
And fetch your mother, quick!

'How would I be?'

I struck him first on a sheep station in
outback Queensland. He was knocking
a fleece from a four-year wether when
I asked the innocent question, 'How would you be?'



He didn't answer immediately, but waited until he carved the last bit of wool from the sheep, allowed it to regain its feet, kicked it through the door, dropped his shears, and spat out what looked like molten metal about three yards. Then he fixed me with a pair of malevolent eyes in which the fires of a deep hatred seemed to burn, and as he pierced me with them, he said: 'How would I be? How would you expect me to be? Get a load of me will you? Dags on every square inch of me bloody hide, drinking my own bloody sweat, swallowing dirt with every breath I take shearing sheep which should have been dog's meat years ago, working for the lousiest bastard in all Australia, and frightened to leave because me old woman's got some bloody hound looking for me with a bloody maintenance order. How would I be? I haven't tasted beer for weeks, and the last glass I had was knocked over by some clumsy bastard before I'd finished it. How would I be? How would I bloody well be?'

The next time I saw him was in Sydney. He'd just joined the Army and was trying to get into a set of webbing and almost rupturing himself in the process. I said, 'How would you be, Dig?'

He almost choked before replying, 'How would I be? How would I bloody well be? Take a gander at me will you? Get a load of this bloody outfit. Look at my bloody hat...they give me a size 8 and I take a size 7. Get a bloody eyeful of these strides. Why, you could hide a bloody brewery horse in the arse of them and still leave room for me. Get on to these boots...there's enough leather

in the bastards to make a full set of harness. What's more, some know-all bastard said this was a man's outfit. How would I be? How would I bloody well be?'

I saw him next at Tobruk. He was seated on an upturned box, tin helmet over one eye, a cigarette butt hanging from the bottom of his mouth, rifle leaning against one knee, and he was engaged in attempting to clean his fingernails with the tip of his bayonet. I should have known better, but, I asked, 'How would you be, Dig?'

He swallowed the butt and fixed me with a really mad look. 'How would I be? How would I bloody well be? How would you expect me to be, six months in this bloody place, being shot at be every Fritz in Africa, eating bloody sand for every meal, flies in my hair and eyes too frightened to sleep a bloody wink, expecting to die in this bloody place, and copping crow when there's a handout by anybody. How would I be? How would I bloody well be?'

The last time I saw him was in Heaven, and the answer to my question was, 'How would I be? How would I bloody well be? Get an eyeful of this bloody night-gown will you? A man trips over it fifty times a day, and it takes a man ten minutes to lift the bloody thing every time I want a pee. Get a gander at this right wing, feathers missing everywhere; a man must be bloody moulting. Look at my halo, only my ears keep the rotten thing on my head, and look at the dents in the bloody thing. How would I be? Cast your eyes over this bloody harp. Five bloody strings missing and there's band practice in five minutes. How would I be? How would you bloody well expect me to be?'



Courtesy Les Nicholson from the book, 'Collection of jokes, stories, verses and memorabilia of the World War II era.'

MOMENTS IN TIME



HMAS Sydney's FIRST TRIP TO KOREA – 1951
Larry Adler, harmonica maestro, entertains the 'troops' on the flight deck



Billy 'T' ON A BIG GIRL'S KNEE –circa 1948
Bill Trevethan showing he had a soft spot for big blondes, note the Beau Brummel collar and the Oxford 'bags'.
Photo courtesy George Beasley



A LAST MINUTE BRIEFING BEFORE AN AIR STRIKE ON HMS Eagle OFF THE NSW COAST – APRIL 1953
L-R: Knapstein – Arthur – Jocelyn – Brown (CO) – Webster – Williams (SP) *Photo courtesy AMoF*



21 JULY 1971 – NAVY MAN TOPS PILOT'S COURSE
Mishipman Jeremy Clark, 19, topped No.77 Pilot's Course at Pearce WA.. He received the De Havilland trophy for the highest aggregate marks and the S.J.Goble trophy for the most proficient pilot. *Photo 'The Age'*



02 MARCH 1965 NAVY TOPS RAAF COURSE
LT Ian McIntyre topped the RAAF Pilot's Course at Pearce WA. He won the Dux of the Course Trophy and the prize for the highest academic aggregate. LT McIntyre is a graduate of the RANC and the RN EC.
Photo 'The Age'



SE III CLASS NUMBER 5
L-R: Trouchet B.A. – Williams B.J. – Lawrence B.R Hawkins K.L – PO Urqhart R. – Lt Miller G.G.R. (RN) – Whitty A .M. *Photo courtesy Bruce Lawrence*



**NAVAL AIRMAN RECRUIT CLASS 9
HMAS Cerberus 1948**

L-R Rear:
J.P. McDevitt – R.C. Nicholson – G. Fathers –
M. Hardie – D. Daniels – A.J. Pilbeam –
H. Whitehouse – J. Moushall – B. Waterman

Centre:
S.K. Leonard – T.S. Raftery – D.W. Bruce –
A.M. Sandford – L. Eddy – K.M. McKay –
B.H. Ewer

Front:
F.B. Lord – R. Breaden – W.R. Forrest –
S.J. Love – K.C. Hughes – N.A. Purton
Photo Courtesy Ron Forrest



HMAS Melbourne – circa 1973
Prime Minister E.G. Whitlam and CDR Benny Matthews,
chatting to CPO Don Simpson
Photo courtesy RAN



HMAS Melbourne – 13 Feb 1969
LCDR John Da Costa, CO of 805 Sqdn,
with LT Mike Gump USN
Photo courtesy RAN



RANAS NOWRA – 15 Oct 1984
Prime Minister Bob Hawke being
welcomed by CMDRE N. Ralph
Photo courtesy RAN

THERE MUST BE A STORY AROUND THESE PHOTOGRAPHS - Write in and let me know. Ed



EAGER JOURNALIST

The scene is a newspaper office. The editor says to one of his reporters: 'There's a fire raging out of control west of town and I want you to get out there fast. Above all, get some good shots, if that means hiring an aircraft, just do it. Don't worry about the expense.'

So, the reporter calls the local airfield and orders a plane. He rushes out to the airport, spots a small aircraft with a young pilot in it, pulls open the door, jumps in and says to the pilot: 'Let's go, take off.'

As directed, the pilot takes off, gets up to altitude, and the reporter tells him: 'See that fire raging to the west? I want you to fly over that and get down as close as you can.'

Incredulous, the pilot says, 'You want me to fly over that fire?' 'Sure,' the reporter says, 'I'm a photojournalist and that's why I'm here...to take dramatic shots of that fire!'

The pilot looks over with a strange look on his face and says, 'You mean you're not the flight instructor?'



ROCKET ASSISTED TAKE-OFF GEAR

(RATOG)

Following my request to pilot's and 'goofers' for stories relating to their observations and experiences during the introduction of RATOG, there have been six responses – two verbal, three written and one 'ring-in'. Here we go...

► Jim Lee and Frank Donnelly recounted the story of Firefly WD 824, careening along in front of the hangars after a RATOG malfunction on 7 January 1953. The pilot, Lt (P) Leeson, was later killed in an accident at Beecroft Range.



LT LEESON'S FIREFLY CRASH AT RANAS NOWRA
The result of a RATOG malfunction and only one side firing
Photo courtesy AMoF

► Norman Lee wrote about his 'One and only RATOG', saying: I have a very vivid memory of RATOG, mainly because I have the dubious honour of having done the last Firefly RATOG from the deck of a RAN carrier.

I was a newly joined member of 817 Squadron, having only recently completed the OFS in the UK. It was during the 1951 work up to go to Korea and it had been decided that with three squadrons onboard, it would be a sound idea to have a back up to the catapult should the latter become unserviceable. The fact that the Firefly wasn't cleared to jettison the RATOG motors after take-off didn't seem to have bothered anybody. However, I doubt that we would have been too keen to lug them around on or armed recce sorties!

The briefing given to me for the big event was fairly basic; mainly, I believe, because nobody had any experience of RATOG from the deck, in fact I don't think anyone had done a RATOG from shore, I know I hadn't.

My aircraft was marshalled to just short of the Island; the rest of the flight having already got airborne. I was briefed to hold the aircraft on the brakes and to apply as much power as possible, and then, when I couldn't hold on any longer, to let the brakes off and to get full power on as quickly as possible, at the same time to literally stand on the left rudder to prevent a swing to the right as I got the tail up.

There was a brave chap standing on the edge of the flight deck holding a large red flag to indicate the point at which the rocket motors were to be fired. The drill was to hit the RATOG button, which was set in the end of the throttle, as you passed the flag. I did as briefed, and to my relief all four motors fired, giving the old Firefly a hefty shove. We were off the deck in a trice, but I really had to pole forward to prevent the aircraft from pitching up

due to the rapid increase in lift and resultant change in trim. The motors all gave out at the same time and things returned to normal as I climbed away.

Unfortunately, Bob Barnett in a Sea Fury, which was the next aircraft off, apparently torque stalled when his motors cut out and he crashed into the sea. All this took place just off Jervis Bay. From memory, the Fury used six motors and the Firefly used four, but I am unaware if there was greater tendency for the Fury to pitch up. Those of us who had made a successful RATOG then flew to the JB airfield, which was a matter of minutes away, for the motors to be removed before we went back to the ship.

Being the most junior member of the Air Group, I was subsequently detailed off to be the officer of the Board of Inquiry, responsible for ushering in witnesses. Surprisingly, I was not called to give evidence, even though I had taken off seconds before the crash.

However, all these years later, what remains uppermost in my mind, apart from a very exciting takeoff, is that the Board was charged with inquiring only into the loss of one of His Majesty's (yes, George VI was still on the throne) aircraft and not the loss of the pilot!

I'm told that our Air Group Commander, Mike Fell, did a RATOG in a Sea Fury shortly after the crash to prove that it was safe, but I have no recollection of the event.

An order was subsequently issued that a RATOG from shore was a requirement before a pilot could make one from the deck. To my knowledge, that was the end of RATOG from RAN carriers, but they continued to be made from shore as a part of air days as they were great crowd pleasers.

Finally, no doubt someone will tell the story of the set of rockets that detached from a Firefly immediately they were fired, taking the airscrew off after first shooting past a very startled pilot! The crowd would have *loved* that one!

► Gordon McPhee's recollections are: All the pilots in the 20th CAG had to carry out one RATO, and on 23 January 1950, I did mine off Sydney in Firefly VX388.

From memory, the briefing was to commence a normal free take-off, and on passing a flagman waving a flag, to press the RATO firing button. My take-off went as briefed, and I cannot remember any unpleasant sensations because the 'G' force experienced on a RATO would not have been anywhere near as high as that experienced on a catapult take-off.

As the RATO mountings were permanent loan items, which could not be jettisoned in peace time, it was necessary to fly ashore after a RATO and have the gear removed from the outside of the aircraft prior to landing on the ship. The reason for this was that the RATO mountings were designed to take the positive 'G' of take-off, and not the negative 'G' of an arrested landing.

► John Goble, said in his reply, that whilst browsing through the October 99 edition of *Slipstream* (with the aid of reading glasses) I saw the editor's note at the bottom of page 33, which read: '*WANTED: Personal stories of RATOG trials from pilots and casual observers.*'

In using the term 'casual observers' I am sure the editor is not casting aspersions on those gallant navigators, radar, W/T, visual signal, and sonobuoy operators who were classified as

Observers. The casual observers must be a reference to those who occupied the 'Goofer's Gallery' during take-offs and landings.

However, back to RATOG. Somewhere from the recesses of my mind (if I may be allowed to call it that) a memory glimpse came to the fore, and accordingly, after finishing my morning coffee, I creaked off the high backed stool and tottered towards a cupboard in search of a logbook which would record the date, or dates, on which RATOG had been used during my time as a member of 816 Sqdn.

Briefly, RATOG for the Firefly Mk's 4, 5, and 6 consisted of one or two large canisters fitted to frames which were secured to each side of the fuselage and located just behind the wing trailing edge, and on each side of the Observers cockpit. Thus two canisters for light load takeoff, and four for higher weights. At the rear end of each canister was an external venturi. The propellant was cordite. The gear was angled at about 30 degrees so that when fired the thrust component was forwards and upwards. In operational use the whole lot would be jettisoned.

The logbook contains four brief entries, the first three being at Nowra on 6th, 21st, and 22nd July 1949. The final entry being from HMAS Sydney on 13th October 1949 where the Duty column notes 'RATO and to Nowra'. The same day 'Nowra to Sydney K' is recorded. The diversion to Nowra took place to off load the apparatus. Economy! (AKA bean counting) Certainly it was not a highly intensive programme, I have no record of any further use of RATOG up to March 1951, when a posting sent me elsewhere.

It was a cumbersome gear to fit and this probably is the reason it was not further used by 816. RATOG was originally designed for 'free take-off' from the deck when the then catapult launching was a slow operation measured in minutes and literally required loading an aircraft onto a trolley. The advent of the tail down launch and towing bridle as fitted in *Sydney* meant that the catapult launch rate was greatly increased. Thus RATOG became largely irrelevant.

There is no doubt that RATOG reduced the 'free take-off' distances considerably and was quite exhilarating. However, at the end of the 'burn time' it was essential that the aircraft had gained sufficient speed to maintain flight when the extra thrust cut out, therefore after becoming airborne the aircraft attitude had to be levelled in order to build up speed while that thrust was still available.

► The irreverent 'ring-in' - 'RATOG in an urban myth' :

The Arizona Highway Patrol came upon a pile of smouldering metal embedded high in the side of a cliff rising above the road at the apex of a curve.

The wreckage resembled the site of an aeroplane crash, but it wasn't. It was a car. The type of car couldn't be determined at the scene. The lab finally figured out what it was and what had happened. It seems that this fool had somehow got hold of a RATO unit (Rocket-Assisted Take Off, a solid-fuel rocket, actually) that is used to give heavy military planes an extra "push" for taking off from short airfields. He drove his Chevy Impala out into the desert and found a long, straight stretch of road. Then he attached the RATO unit to his car, jumped in, got up some speed, and fired off the rockets!

The facts, as could best be determined, are that the driver of the 1967 Impala hit the RATO ignition at a distance of

approximately 3.0 miles from the crash site. This was established by the prominent patch of scorched and melted asphalt at that location. The RATO, if operating properly, would have reached maximum thrust within 5 seconds, causing the Chevy to reach a speed well in excess of 350 mph and continuing at full power for an additional 20-25 seconds.

The driver, soon-to-be-pilot, most likely would have experienced 'G' forces usually reserved for dog-fighting F-14 'jocks' in full afterburner, basically causing him to become insignificant for the remainder of the event. However, the automobile remained on the straight highway for about 2.5 miles (15-20) seconds before the driver applied and completely melted the brakes, blowing the tires and leaving thick rubber marks on the road surface, then becoming airborne for an additional 1.4 miles and impacting the cliff face at a height of 125 feet above the road, leaving a blackened crater three feet deep in the rock.

Most of the driver's remains were not recoverable; however, small fragments of bone, teeth and hair were extracted from the crater and fingernail and bone shards were removed from a piece of debris believed to be a portion of the steering wheel.



JERVIS BAY AIRFIELD 1950
Armourers assembling and fitting RATOG equipment
All photographs this page courtesy AMoF



CONTACT!

Murder on the High Seas

By Ken Cunningham

Courtesy of the Combined Services RSL Sub-Branch – Sandagte Sub-Section newsletter and the FESR Association

At 2155 on 13 March 1942, Stoker John Riley died in the sick bay of the RAN Flagship HMAS *Australia*.

The ship was operating in the Coral Sea at the time with other RAN and US Navy ships. Three days earlier, the ship had been part of a covering force for the US carriers *Lexington* and *Yorktown*. The carriers flew off 104 combat aircraft and struck targets in Siamua and Lae in New Guinea, places that had been taken by the Japanese shortly before. The combined task force remained patrolling at sea.

On the evening of 12 March, *Australia's* Commanding Officer, Captain Farncomb RAN, reported to the Fleet Commander, Admiral Crace RN, that a stoker had been badly stabbed and slashed.

Peritonitis set in and the injured man died the following day.

The loss of HMA Ships *Perth* and *Yarra* had just been announced and now the flagship had a murder inquiry on hand; the morale among *Australia's* Ships Company was badly shaken.

At about 1940 on 12 March, Riley had been talking to Acting Leading Stoker A R Gordon, aged 24, and Stoker Edward Elias, aged 23, on the port side of the forecabin upper deck, below deck 'B'. Apparently he accused them of homosexual behaviour and said he was going to report them. [The two were fitness fanatics and used to wrestle each other.]

In the darkened upper decks, Riley's screams brought crewmembers rushing up; they found Riley covered in blood and still in the presence of Gordon and Elias. The two claimed that Riley had left them to go on watch and that they were merely the first on the scene. However, witnesses reported seeing three men scuffling in the dark – Gordon and Elias were placed under close arrest.

Riley's injuries were horrific. He suffered fourteen stab wounds to the chest, abdomen, back and forearm causing injury to lungs, liver and intestines. He was taken to the sick bay suffering from shock and loss of blood. Before he died, he stated that Gordon and Elias had attacked him after he threatened to expose them for, the coily expressed, *unnatural vice*.

Apparently the two had been trying to throw Riley overboard, but he had grabbed the guard-rails and they used a knife to stab him to make him let go.

In the subsequent murder inquiry conducted by the Commander, 'Black Jack' Armstrong, his investigations brought to light a '*large nest of immorality in the ship*' with three other sailors being implicated in homosexual activities.

Australia was now heading for its base in Noumea. A doctor from the USS *Chicago* conducted a post mortem and at 1700 on 14 March, Stoker Riley was buried at sea.

Admiral Crace would have preferred to hand the case over to a civil court, but this meant that thirty of *Australia's* personnel would have had to attend as witnesses; the loss of that number could have immobilised the ship. He told the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board (ACNB) that he was compelled to place the two accused before a court-martial, stressing that the

accused should have the benefit of a good professional adviser to conduct their defence.

ACNB searched their records and found a Melbourne criminal lawyer, Trevor Rapke, serving in Darwin as a RANR Lieutenant. [Later to become a QC and Victorian Judge.] He was ordered to make his way to Noumea ASAP, he achieved this by flying with the RAAF to Adelaide, then rail to Sydney and steamer to Noumea.

In the meantime, *Australia* and the Anzac Squadron put to sea with the *Yorktown* task force. They remained at sea from 25 March to 11 April when *Australia* proceeded to Noumea for propeller vibration repairs. Whilst there, Admiral Crace commenced the court-martial proceedings.

The Commanding Officer of the RNZN cruiser was President and Captain Farncomb the Prosecutor. The court-martial completed hearing addresses on 18 April, they then retired for over four hours. After retirement, the board returned with the findings '*charges proved*'. The sentence passed was, '*to be hanged on board an RAN ship at a time directed by ACNB*'.

The President was shaking as he sentenced the two accused, but they were unmoved by the sentence.

ACNB took possession of the minutes of the court proceedings for referral to the Governor General for sentence confirmation under the Defence Act. *Australia* then took the two men to Sydney, arriving there on 22 April.

LT Rapke wrote to Admiral Crace giving a range of legal opinions to support his statement that both men were 'not guilty'.

Captain Farncomb also wrote to the Admiral as the men's commanding officer, giving a range of possible explanatory reasons for their behaviour. 'Farncomb watchers' could not believe their eyes when they read his submission, for they had long regarded him as a 'flinty-hearted' man of little compassion for his sailors. Farncomb had no compunction in stating that both men were guilty, but '*times were abnormal and were such that it could produce a warped state of mind. As stokers they worked in high temperatures and oppressive humidity. There was an absence of the softening influence of women and the two men had served under these conditions for two years*'. However, Farncomb rejected Rapke's objections to the Admiral.

On 22 April, the two men were transferred to Long Bay Gaol pending further advice.

Meanwhile, LT Rapke discovered a secret 'authority' which showed that on 17 November 1939, the Australian Government had handed over all RAN ships and personnel to the British Admiralty for the duration of the war. This meant that Australian sailors, as distinct from the AIF and RAAF, fought the war under the British Defence Act and not the Australian Act.

On 08 July, the Full High Court handed down their unanimous decision. The court-martial had been properly instituted and with full authority to pass death sentences. Further, it ruled that court-martials are not subject to appeal in civil courts. The appeal against the death sentence was dismissed.

There was an avalanche of political sympathisers and opponents of capital punishment appealing to the Government to annul the sentences. But primarily, the Attorney General, Dr Evatt, wanted to change that 1939 handover of the RAN sailors, for it gave away all power to alter that hanging sentence. He passed a Bill adopting the '1939 Statute of Westminster' which gave

Australia legal independence from British Law. [The previous effect was that the Army and Air Force could appeal but not the Navy.]

Meanwhile, the only legal way left to commute the sentence was for the King to authorise it – so the Government appealed to the King. He approved; and the sentence was then altered to life imprisonment.

The Elias family [Gordon was an orphan] organised a powerful committee agitating a sentence alteration because the two ex-sailors 'were innocent'. [Both long dismissed from the RAN.] They worked on the politicians and eventually Dr Evatt gave in and set up an inquiry 'in camera', by Mr Justice Maxwell of the Supreme Court, to check if there was any miscarriage of justice. His findings were that both men were guilty and the sentences were fair. However, he found that Captain Farncomb's prosecution conduct was such that *'some grounds existed for a degree of sentence remission to twelve years imprisonment'*. This was accepted by the Naval Board.

In the post-war 'victory remissions' granted to prisoners, the ACNB stipulated that the two men must serve their twelve years fully.

Still, the Elias committee persisted for further remission. They enlisted the support of both the RSL and the churches.

Finally the Attorney asked the Naval Board about a possible remission.

Reluctantly, the ACNB agreed for both to receive whatever remissions other NSW prisoners received.

Both were eventually released from prison in September 1950. They had served eight and a half years imprisonment.

The chief prosecution witness at the court-martial, Sailmaker Jack Harris, has read this article and comments; *'This is the most accurate account of the whole procedure that I have read'*.

[From my 'ditty box', I've located a clipping which states that: *'Aboard HMS Leven in 1860, Royal Marine Private John Dallinger, earned the dubious honour of becoming the last man to be hanged from the yardarm when he was executed for attempted murder.'* Ed]

THE VANISHING TRICK

A man left for work one Friday morning.

Being pay-day, instead of going home at the end of his shift, he stayed out all weekend partying with his mates and spending his entire pay cheque.

When he finally arrived home he was confronted by a very angry wife and was barraged for two hours with a tirade of verbal abuse befitting his actions.

Finally, his wife stopped her nagging and said, 'How would you like it if you didn't see me for a few days?'

To which he replied, 'That would be fine by me.'

Monday went by and he didn't see his wife.

Tuesday went by and he didn't see his wife.

Wednesday and Thursday were the same.

By Friday the swelling had reduced sufficiently for him to catch sight of her out of the corner of one eye.



CARELESS CODE RECYCLING CAUSES KILLER KANGAROOS

The reuse of some object-oriented code has caused tactical headaches for Australia's armed forces.

As virtual reality simulators assume larger roles in helicopter combat training, programmers have gone to great lengths to increase the realism of their scenarios, including detailed landscapes and - in the case of the Northern Territory's Operation Phoenix- herds of kangaroos (since disturbed animals might well give away a helicopter's position).

The head of the Defense Science & Technology Organization's Land Operations/Simulation division reportedly instructed developers to model the local marsupials' movements and reactions to helicopters. Being efficient programmers, they just re-appropriated some code originally used to model infantry detachment reactions under the same stimuli, changed the mapped icon from a soldier to a kangaroo, and increased the figures' speed of movement.

Eager to demonstrate their flying skills for some visiting American pilots, the hotshot Aussies 'buzzed' the virtual kangaroos in low flight during a simulation. The kangaroos scattered, as predicted, and the visiting Americans nodded appreciatively... then did a double-take as the kangaroos reappeared from behind a hill and launched a barrage of Stinger missiles at the hapless helicopter. (Apparently the programmers had forgotten to remove that part of the infantry coding.)

The lesson? Objects are defined with certain attributes, and any new object defined in terms of an old one inherits all the attributes. The embarrassed programmers had learned to be careful when reusing object-oriented code, and the Yanks left with a newfound respect for Australian wildlife.

Simulator supervisors report that pilots from that point onward have strictly avoided kangaroos, just as they were meant to.

* From June 15, 1999 Defense Science and Technology Organization Lecture Series, Melbourne, Australia, and staff reports

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS and the BATTLEFIELD

They are not our enemy; they're our socio-political compliment. We don't damage their aircraft; we make unauthorised in-flight modifications.

We don't spy; we deal in unreleased information.

They're not casualties; they're inoperative battle units.

We don't have scouts; we have unauthorised observers.

We don't miss; we fail to actively engage the target.

We don't waste missiles; we run a non-cost effective equipment exchange.

We don't attack; we aggressively move into pre-occupied territory.

We don't retreat; we consolidate at a previously held position.

We don't waste money; we fail to effectively utilise funding.

We're not at war; we're sanctioning with extreme prejudice.

IMPORTANT!

MEDICAL UPDATE FOR VETERANS

One of the indicators that you may be addicted to Viagra, is when you find yourself constantly spinning around to True North.

VICTORIA DIVISION



Well, another year has gone and one wonders where the last one went. On reflection, it had been a very enjoyable year which started with the Division AGM in February, then followed the Korean War Memorial dedication at Canberra, Anzac Day, the Annual Anniversary Dinner and the Memorial Service at Cerberus, the mini-reunion at Bundaberg, the Federal Council meeting at Nowra, Navy Week/Month functions and so on.

The Victoria Division was represented at the Navy Week memorial services at the Shrine of Remembrance, as were other Ship's Associations, unfortunately we all seem to be suffering the same problem – down on numbers. We seem to be unable to get members to attend these important events, none the less; thank you to the members who do make the effort, your attendance is greatly appreciated.

Our last meeting for 2000 was held on 10 December, this was followed by our Christmas break-up barbecue. Thirty members participated and I am sure that all would agree that the Social Co-ordinator deserves congratulations for another successful function.

I extend a personal thank you to Alan Clark, Rob Earle and John Champion for their donations of prizes for the fund raising.

Mons Frank 'Tiger' Lyons, Jim Ferguson and John Mann have not been too well of late, we wish them well and hope to see them back on deck in the very near future.

Our next major event will be the AGM, which will be held on Sunday 11 February at the Melbourne Naval Centre, 146 Toorak Road, South Yarra – commencing at 1100.

Whilst on the subject of the AGM, I will not be standing for re-election for the position of Secretary. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those members who have given me their support and encouragement over the years; it has been an honour and a pleasure.

On behalf of the President, Committee and members of the Victoria Division, I wish you all a 'Prosperous and Happy New Year'.

Ron Christie

[You will be missed, Ron. Thank you for your efforts in providing *Slipstream* with information and photographs over the years. Ed]

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN DIVISION



Greetings to all from the Western Australian Division. Welcome to 2001, may your New Year dreams be realised.

Our October meeting followed the successful format of having the meeting and then a barbecue lunch with our families and friends. We were joined on this occasion by Ken 'Bear' Hammond and his wife, Marlene, all the way from Banksia Beach in Queensland. They are enjoying an extensive vacation touring the country by caravan. We were all surprised when he introduced himself as Ken – we had only known him as 'Bear'.

Keith and Sue Doncon arranged a mini-reunion at Rockingham Naval Association Club. It was a tremendous day attended by 106 shipmates and ex-WRANS. This was further enhanced by a number of interstate visitors, we noted Marie Gillisand and Bernie 'Big Julie' Jeffries also from Queensland.

The function was blessed with a perfect Spring day, a superb buffet lunch and drinks. Thank you and BRAVO ZULU to the President and Committee for the use of the club facilities – and – a really big THANK YOU to Ray, the bar manager and general factotum.

Chalets and caravan parks surround the club and it is a great venue for hosting a reunion, probably in the year 2002.

On October 15, we enjoyed a Family Day as guests of the Wardroom at HMAS *Stirling*, this included a guided tour and brunch.

Our Christmas function was once again held at Mulberry Farm where 38 members and friends had a rather jolly time. The raffle raised some most welcome dollars and was won by Jack Duperouzel. Special thanks go to Brian and Elva Jost for their great effort in arranging a most enjoyable day.

Bevan and Kaye Daws returned from the nationally attended

reunion at Bundaberg and sent the following note.

'We have returned to the West after a well-earned rest in Queensland. Kaye had five weeks visiting her family in Toowoomba, I only had six days there but managed to do a lot of travelling around. We had the pleasure of the company of George and Kay Sue at Oakey before driving up to Bundaberg. We also met up with George and Judy Szymoniczek as arranged and spent a great weekend around 'Bundy'.

The reunion was great, many thanks are extended to those who put in such a special effort in organising a great weekend.

It was a pleasure to catch up with some old faces again, Lindsay and Erin McDonald, Mick Blair, Gerry and May Linnaker, Ted Winning, 'Mac' McDermott, Peter Fleming, Bill Strahan and, of course, Barry Lister. On our return to Brisbane, we stayed with 'Jock' and Leslie Todd...'

Now, Editor John Arnold, keep up the good work and may you be blessed with an easy time as Editor. I loved your sense of humour with your cartoon of me ZZZing. Naturally I must explain why there was no report from 'God's own country' in the last edition. It was faxed to you – perhaps the wrong number was dialed.

On a sadder note, Stan Brown, who recently transferred to our Division, passed away. Our thoughts and condolences are with his family. At the start of our meeting, Stan was remembered by those present with a minute's silence

Commodore David Orr suffered a stroke on 22 September and is currently being treated at Shenton Park Rehabilitation Centre. Our President, Jack Suriano, visits David and gives us regular progress reports. David is progressing well and is now

allowed home at weekends, he has an electric wheel chair, and whilst it gets him around it is definitely no Sea Fury.

We have also learned that Darryl Shelley of Nowra is recovering from a recent illness; we all wish him a speedy recovery.

The next meeting is the AGM on the second Sunday in February at the Naval Association East Perth, commencing at 1100. The most important item will be the election of Office Bearers and Committee, we ask that the members make this a better than usual turn-up. I will be stepping aside to let some bright member carry on as scribe for future issues of *Slipstream*. After almost 5 years in the job, one can become less interesting.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN DIVISION

Life has been somewhat earnest lately. There have been meetings with agendas packed with items requiring serious discussion. These meetings have come and gone and little has changed.

John Seibert and Peter Coulson journeyed to Nowra to attend the Central Council meeting and all went well to SA Division's satisfaction.

Some are getting excited about an overdue medal that may come their way, plus the fringe benefits. It is wise to belong to an ex-serviceman's association such as the FAAA Assoc. Someway I think that the information about the FESR entitlements would never reach the ears of those eligible through normal media. The SA division has promulgated as much information as possible through the regular newsletter. The over worked Dinsley Cooper and wife Junice are to be applauded for the document. What else have we been up to?

There was Navy Week. Apparently that is the best-kept military secret in SA. I was in the car with 'interactive radio' on (modern jargon for talk back) and a caller came in with a query about the big white flag flying at the Port Rd. Why that instead of the normal blue one? That puzzled the population for some time but every one settled on the explanation that the white flag is always hoisted when a ship comes into port!

The next teasing call came when someone wanted to know why was all the bunting being flown at Keswick Barracks? Eventually an explanation came forth. The flags spelt out that it's Navy Week. Leon Viner the announcer then exclaimed in a querulous voice 'what are we supposed to do on Navy Week?' I had the agenda with me but no mobile phone. I could have calmed the whole of Adelaide (all of Adelaide listens to 5AA) for the want of a phone. They remain in ignorance.

However, we in the know did attend some functions. Dinsley and Junice went to witness the solemn ceremony of raising the colours. Someone had decided that it was best to hoist the flag early before the wind got up (it is a big flag) so Dinsley and spouse went home vowing never to go again!

John Seibert and others including the faithful Dinsley and Junice (me too) laid a wreath during the Sunday Remembrance Service with many other Naval Associations. It is good to remember and honour those who sacrificed their lives for all.

The FAA has a plaque inset in the ground with the ships *Albatross*, *Sydney*, *Vengeance*, and *Melbourne* embossed in it. I was glad to be able to boast that I served in all four. So did

I do thank all those who have provided me with items for the past issues, I think the biggest BUZZ has been the many unexpected phone calls, please keep this up for the next scribe please. I must apologise to Les Wall who I have previously mentioned as Leon – sorry Les.

Well folks, farewell, it has been a pleasure to have been associated with such a fine publication.

Goodbye from all here in the West.

John Green

1/7 Prinsep Road, Attadale WA 6156 – Phone: (08) 9330 7386

[Thank you for your support, John. Sorry to see you go. Ed]



thousands of others. There were two sessions of Beat the Retreat. One at Keswick and the other at the Torrens parade ground. Then there were the social events. The SNO luncheon. I did not attend mainly because I did not get an invite. It would be hard pressed to get a good gathering of serving senior naval officers in Adelaide so I suppose some retired personnel were rounded up. Our most senior is Vice Admiral Sir James Willis KBE AO (rtrd) and then we fall away to Commanders. I suppose my mate Mel Jones went (he is a commander sub mariner that does something secret at the submarine factory) but I forgot to ask him when he said the other day he was off to Keswick to see some "Rocky Horror" pictures. Last there was the Navy Ball. I did not attend that because it was about \$60 a ticket and I couldn't find my dancing pumps. So that was Navy Week. We can hardly wait for next year.

Dinsley (he is the only reliable person in the division) organised our Xmas party. Thirty odd gathered at Charlie's at Brighton and had a great time. Many yarns were spun and we were all back mostly into the 50's. Peter Coulson won the raffle, which was a Xmas ham. He was in Mt. Gambier and there was a huge temptation for a re-spin but Dinsley is not only a hard worker he is also honest. Peter got the hamper!

There has been a bit of a recruiting campaign and we welcome new members John Hamilton, Robin Pennock, and Grant Lewis. John served from '67 to '85 Robin from '49 to '85 and Grant from '71 to '92. Robin is currently a training coordinator with DVA (voluntary) and may help us in the future to train people to be welfare and pension officers to guide people when applying for veteran's affairs entitlements. Some may remember him when he was Executive Officer at Nowra.

By the time this goes into print we will be in the year 2001 which seems impossible. By the way I was talking to 'Slug' Whitton who lives in Tewanin and he mentioned the article I wrote about Keith Potts. He said that Herb Becker and he were actually on the catapult in a Gannet ready to be squirted off and up went the red flag. They were disengaged and Barry Thompson and Keith Potts were placed on the catapult. This has nothing to do with the SA Division report but is interesting.

Barry Lord

[Unfortunately, the photographs of the Xmas Dinner that were E-mailed to me were not good enough for printing. I prefer to scan from the originals to obtain a better resolution. Ed]

QUEENSLAND DIVISION

Best wishes to all for a great 2001 – it takes a bit of getting used to, this new century!

We held our Christmas picnic at the Currumbin RSL at the Gold Coast on 10th December—we've been unlucky at getting to use the BBQ- the fishing club have priority and the last 2 occasions have seen them BBQ-ing away merrily. There were about 75 of us there and it was a good day for all, some coming from far distances to attend.

Bob Bryce won 1st prize of the raffle and Jan Williamson won the 2nd prize. Flossie Nugent reckoned she didn't win because there was no Bundaberg rum in the prizes.

We held our committee meeting before lunch and decided that our AGM would be held at Currumbin in mid- March. The date will be advised in the next Newsletter.

Harry Pierpoint was there and found it hard to believe that we could remember him as he left in '58. Harry was a pilot's mate. Shirley Neilsen was there- Frank was in respite for a couple of days. She reckons he gets her to read the Newsletter and much of *Slipstream* to him. It's been four years now since he had the stroke. Shirley drives the car confidently and is well supported by Peter McDonald and family.

We're pleased to welcome Ted Hundley as a new member. Ted came to Bundaberg and met up with many old mates. D'Arcy Dole is in St. Johns hospital, Gold Coast and was visited by some of the boys. He wanted to come to the 'do' but wasn't allowed.

Les Walker suffered a stroke a few months ago and we didn't know where he was until Kath rang me and told me he is in the Lakeside Nursing Home at Chancellor Park, Buderim, QLD. Both Trevor Bolitho and I visited him and he's unable to communicate, but I'm sure he knew us. Kath is living in a room in the same complex and is still very upset.

Bobby Brown, of Ningi, has had a liver transplant which has gone well. He's had another operation and is now recovering. He's in PA Hospital, Brisbane.

We were sad at the passing of Ray Bucholz recently. He'd just completed a pretty long trip and then the big 'C' got him. 'Googie' Withers was at Currumbin. He went close to losing a leg, but a young whiz-kid doctor tried out a new process on him and his leg looks nearly like a new one. 'Googie' is very pleased with it.

The Ladies' Day at the Casino was well supported. There were 18 Ladies and 8 blokes. Look out girls, or we'll take over! The next is on Feb. 9th at 11am – meet at the Queen St. entrance.

Our trip to USA was excellent and we had a four day wedding event for Warren Walters and Maria at Salinas.

At San Diego we got a look over the USS *Carl Vinson*, the huge aircraft carrier. It carries 5000 crew and close to 100 aircraft. It's about four times the size of the *Melbourne*. Had a good drive of Warren and Maria's '68 Mustang convertible.



WARREN and MARIA WALTERS

Immaculate condition with 21,000 miles on the clock. When you use the indicators, it plays 'Love me tender etc' and goes on and on.

Went to Virginia City-the 'old wild west' which is good fun. There was the Bucket of Blood Saloon – Suicide Table and much more. Gold Mining is still the go there and much is made of the Comstock Lode from the 1800's. At Lake Tahoe, we had four inches of snow and temperature of 28F. Nice place, but chilly.

Wildlife was pretty scarce generally. Saw some Mule deer at the Grand Canyon, a humming bird near San Diego, Sea Lions at San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf and an otter playing about at Monterey. Saw plenty of Black Bear signs but no bears, which is probably a good thing!

On the way back, we had four days at Hawaii. I stopped saying I'd been there in '58. Most people I spoke to weren't born then or didn't live there!

Ian and Florence Henderson are enroute over the Nullarbor to spend Christmas with their daughter in Cunnamulla. They sure have covered a lot of territory in WA since they left after Anzac Day. They met up with Sammy Marino in a park in WA and phoned me from there so I had a brief chat with Sam. It's funny, I hadn't seen him for many moons, but at the '98 reunion I kept bumping into him.

Marie Kempnich and son Des were at Currumbin and we enjoyed talking to Des, who is very much like Keith. There were a few tales about Keith being spun to him by some of the blokes, and Des enjoyed the telling.

Visited with Arthur Johnson in Townsville in September and had a great time. We played a round of golf at Mystic Sands, 50 km north of town, which Arthur built some years ago. There was a big sand goanna crossing the fairway and Arthur tried to shoo it closer to Dee so she could get a good photo. I warned him that it might run at him – it did. He moved very smartly behind a palm tree and was safe!

We didn't get to fly the Winjeel, so flew a Lightwing at Woodstock. It's an ultralight type made at Ballina. A bit of fun and tricky to land in gusty and thermal conditions.

I contacted Barrie Lovatt but he was busy and we couldn't meet up. Townsville is looking much better with the Esplanade very impressive and a new museum etc. Barrie is part of an improvement committee and they're doing a great job.



LADIES DAY AT THE CASINO

L-R: Reta McMurtrie – Rae Maude – Val Richmond –
Kath Day and Sharon Reid

I was sad to learn that Stan Brown had passed away whilst I was in the States. He and Kath put up a good fight for a couple of years. We send our condolences to Kath.

Well, that's it for now. Best regards to all from the Queensland Division.

Barry Lister – President



CHAPERONES – TREASURY CASINO LADIES DAY

L-R: Gary Reid – Mick Blair – Trevor Tite – John Stewart – Barry Lister – Bevan Mewett – Rex Day and Bill Strahan

TASMANIAN DIVISION

There isn't much news this time around folks, it seems to have very quiet.

Our last meeting was held in Hobart on 26 November, but as this was my birthday I didn't attend (On family orders!) I'm not sure how the meeting faired, but seeing that I haven't heard of any riots or mutinies, I'd say everything is OK.

By the time this is being read the festive season will be over and we will be into the New Year and back to normal again. I hope you all had a good time with your families, in my humble opinion this is what Christmas is all about. Being awakened by the kids at some ungodly hour to the 'Look what he brought me!' Then the toy trails, bike rides, whistles and squeaks, expensive wrapping paper in tatters all over the floor, then the phone rings – 'Merry Christmas, you old b.....!' - 'And the same to you too!' We wouldn't be dead for quids, as they say.

I'm sorry there is no Division news, better luck next time.

Matt 'Jake' Jacobs

A letter from Leon 'Swampy' O'Donnell – Tasmania...

On Sunday 26 November 2000, the Tasmanian FAAA Division met in Hobart for our Xmas meeting and luncheon. Something quite unusual and emotional happened that day and I would like to share it with my colleagues.

I would assume that most Navy types are familiar with the name 'Teddy' Sheean? I will run through his story for those who are a bit rusty.

At the outbreak of WWII in 1939, six of the Sheean family enlisted, four in the AIF, and two in the RAN. After training, Ordinary Seaman Sheean was drafted to HMAS *Armidale*. On 29 November 1942, the *Armidale* left Darwin with reinforcements for Timor.

On the afternoon of 01 December, 13 Japanese aircraft attacked *Armidale*, the ship was hit by aerial torpedoes and began to sink. The order to 'Abandon Ship' was given, and whilst many of the crew were in the water, the aircraft started to strafe them with their machine guns. For whatever reason, Teddy Sheean chose not to leave the ship, he clambered up the sloping deck, strapped himself to an anti-aircraft gun and began firing at the enemy. Despite the fact that he was obviously wounded, he brought down one aircraft and damaged another. As the *Armidale* went under, his gun continued to fire, he displayed great heroism

and respect for his shipmates that was unsurpassed.

His actions were worthy of a chaff bag full of medals, but for reasons known only to those in power at the time, the posthumous award of the VC was never considered. For many years, various groups have pushed to have his bravery officially recognised, as I write this letter, both Federal and State politicians have once again raised the issue. The fact that one of the Collins Class submarines proudly carries his name, would suggest that someone at high level has an understanding of what this gallant young Australian achieved.

Now – back to our luncheon. Former FAA PO, Bill Lowe (quite a notorious man, I might add), was in his usual form and introduced me to his older brother, Wesley Lowe, a 78 years old gent and ex-sailor of WWII vintage. A lovely man who still enjoys a beer and the company of 'old salts'. During our chat, he produced a photograph of himself in the company of other sailors, taken in Hobart in 1941. Alongside Wesley can be seen the young man I spoke of, Teddy Sheean.

Sixty years have passed since the photograph of those sailors was taken, one of them sits alongside me, and the other didn't make his 19th birthday. The photograph, the occasion, and the significance of life's ironies overwhelmed me.

I thank Bill and Wesley for passing to me a copy of the photograph and do hope it makes it into *Slipstream*.



JUNE 1941 – HOBART RESERVE – TASMANIA
L-R: D.Bird – B. Renshaw – R. Vivey – T. Sheean – W.A. Lowe

NEW SOUTH WALES DIVISION



Hello to everyone in the Association, I hope that you had a very enjoyable Christmas and that the NEW Year augurs well for you.

We have moved the National and NSW Division office from the old chapel at the rear of the Museum, and settled into the demountables that were formerly used by the Museum staff. The demountable previously used by the curator is now used for the sorting and mailing of *Slipstream*. We are settled in now and far more comfortable than in the previous accommodation.

The Museum staff are now ensconced in the recently completed Museum Stage 4 Building which provides a much better working environment. Archival materials will especially benefit from the temperature-controlled environment of the curator's department.

Several weeks ago I attended the funeral of Brian 'Soapy' McKeon, who had been in poor health for several years. The service was held in the Garden Island Chapel and there was standing room only for the many people who came to pay their last respects. 'Soapy' had worked very hard for the Museum in the early years, a support that continued until the very end. He will be fondly remembered and sadly missed as a member of the Association.

Ticket sales for our 2001 Raffle, have so far covered the cost of the prizes (paintings by Marine Artist John Downton), it is now hoped that the sales continue to make the effort worthwhile. The prizes will be drawn on 03 March 2001.

We have a ticket booth set up in the Nowra Fair shopping complex each Thursday. Len Bolden travels all the way down from Kiama, Mike Heneghan, who travels from Sussex Inlet, and a number of local members take turns in manning the point of sales for most of the day, this is a great help.

The Federal Council AGM for 2000 has come and gone, it was great meeting up with members from the visiting Divisions who were able to attend.

The NSW Division notice of motion to - 'revert the former

practice of having the organising of our annual meetings shared around by other Divisions' - did not meet with the approval of the Delegates, this was disappointing to the NSW Delegates, however, that is the way the vote went and we accept the outcome.

On behalf of the NSW Division Management Committee, I wish all Association members and their families a Happy New Year with the hope that it is kind to everyone.

Max Altham - President

FESR UPDATE - By Jim Lee NSW PRO

The Anomalies Report by the Hon. Mr Bob Mohr, was accepted by the Government - VEA legislative amendments have been passed and Royal Assent has been given.

ADF personnel who served in South East Asia between 1955 and 1975 are now entitled to apply for full Repatriation Benefits.

N.B: Former applicants must lodge a fresh claim form to be considered under the new provisions. The correct form is, 'Claim for Service Pension by a Mariner or Veteran' (No. ED 50. 10/00).

If you are not sure of your eligibility for Repatriation Benefits, you should lodge form 'Application to Determine Qualifying Service' (No. D2673. 1/2000).

Forms can be obtained from DVA State Offices, VAN Regional Offices, or your local RSL/ESO Office. Ensure that you use a current form to avoid delays in processing.

Your claim must be received before 01 April 2001 for payment of service to commence from 01 January 2001 (this is not a typo).

You must supply proof of identity to establish '100 Points' standards.

Advice and help is available from your ESO (Ex-Service Organisation).

A.C.T. DIVISION



Sorry readers - they must still be in party mode. Ed.



ENGLISH AS SHE IS SPOKE

A university creative writing class was asked to write a concise essay containing the following four elements:

RELIGION - ROYALTY - SEX - MYSTERY

The prize winning essay read:

'My God,' said the Queen, 'I'm pregnant. I wonder who did it?'

* * * * *

The Pythagorean theorem has 24 words

The Lord's Prayer has 66 words

The Ten Commandments has 179 words

Lincoln's Gettysburg address has 286 words

The US Declaration of Independence has 1300 words

The US Gov't regulations on the sale of cabbage has 26,911

On the bridge of the small mail steamer *Glasgow*, enroute to the west coast, stood the captain and a couple of lady school teachers he had invited up there.

Noticing the approach of a heavy shower of rain, the captain shouted down the voice pipe to the crew member in charge of the saloon bar below: 'Is there a big macintosh down there that would cover two ladies?'

There was a pause before the answer came back, 'No Sir, but there's a wee MacGregor that's prepared to try'.

* * * * *

Middle age is when the broad mind and narrow waist start to exchange places.

Eyewitness to tragedy – the loss of the USS Princeton

Article by Harry Popham courtesy 'The Historynet'

A tremendous explosion in Leyte Gulf on 24 October 1944, broke the American light carrier in two and devastated the light cruiser USS *Birmingham*.

The 600 foot light carrier USS *Princeton* (CVL23) was commissioned in the Philadelphia Navy Yard on 25 February 1943, and was sunk 20 months later, on 24 October 1944, in Leyte Gulf during heroic efforts to retake the Philippines from the Japanese.

One of the two light carriers in Task Group 38.3, *Princeton* carried 23 fighters and 10 torpedo bombers. I am probably one of only two living eyewitnesses to a tragic event. Except for a buddy and me, everyone who had been in a position to see the start of the explosion that eventually sank *Princeton* was killed outright that day. Official tallies on casualties from the death of *Princeton* were 347 killed, 552 wounded, and 4 missing.

The majority of those casualties were not aboard *Princeton*, however, but were, as I was, aboard USS *Birmingham*, a light cruiser that was also part of the task group. *Birmingham* had drawn alongside to assist *Princeton* after a successful bombing run by a lone enemy plane crippled the light carrier. Aboard *Birmingham*, the tally was 230 dead, 408 wounded, and 4 missing.

I am convinced, that it would have been impossible to improve upon what a single Japanese pilot, flying a Yokosuka D4Y 'Judy' dive bomber with two 550-pound bombs, achieved that day, had the bombing been the result of meticulous plan rather than chance encounter. In the explosion that occurred hours after the Judy's bombing run, my right leg was blown off at the knee and buried at sea. So, in effect, I already have one foot in the grave.

Birmingham had been at sea for eight months. It had become part of Task Group 38.3 in August 1944. For eight weeks, the fast carrier forces ranged throughout the Palau and Philippine Islands inflicting serious damage and destruction on the enemy. From the 18th through the 23rd of October, in fair and calm weather, Task Force 38 launched extensive airstrikes covering the length and breadth of Luzon, as part of the drive to retake the Philippines.

October 24 dawned with broken clouds and occasional squalls, but there was good visibility, allowing continuing airstrikes in support of land operations on the island of Leyte. The day began before sunrise, with general quarters sounded for all the ships in Task Force 38.

To start the day, *Princeton* contributed 20 planes to the air over Leyte Gulf. The first wave of 40 to 50 Japanese planes was intercepted and their attack broken up with many enemy losses. A second group of about 30 enemy aircraft quickly took to the air. Out of the two waves, *Princeton*'s planes alone shot down 34 enemy aircraft with a loss of only one. Pilots became aces in a matter of minutes. The planes returned to the carrier for refuelling and arming in preparation for an airstrike against a Japanese force of four battleships, eight cruisers and thirteen destroyers south-east of the island of Mindoro.

At 9:12 am, USS *Essex* reported a possible bandit plus a friendly aircraft about six miles away. No other unidentifieds were within a radius of 25 miles. At 9:38 am, a single Judy was sighted by *Princeton*'s lookouts, diving on their vessel from out of the low cloud cover ahead of the ship. The plane immediately came under

fire from the forward 20mm and 40mm batteries, and the helm was put over to port in an attempt at evasion.

The Judy dropped two bombs. One missed *Princeton* and fell harmlessly into the sea. The other 550-pound bomb fell almost in the centre of *Princeton*'s deck, causing jarring on the bridge and a dull thud in central station. Black smoke issued from the hole in the flight deck, the forward elevator and every access trunk to the hangar aft of the island. Ed Butler, a radarman said, 'I saw him [the Japanese aircraft] high-tailing it away from our stern, trailing smoke.'

Pete Callan, one of the crew who had refuelled and armed the torpedo planes, says he heard machine-gun fire at a more rapid rate than any of the guns aboard *Princeton* were capable of. He heard bullets striking the wooden planking of the flight deck. Fifty years later, Pete told me, 'The Japanese pilot utilised the striking bullets to guide his aim by stitching the deck and the surrounding water, then making the appropriate corrections to his bombing run.'

The bomb passed through the flight deck, leaving a small jagged hole about fifteen inches in diameter, continuing downward and severing the main gasoline line used to fuel the planes. The bomb then passed through an auxiliary drop tank under one wing of Lieutenant Tom Mooney's torpedo plane parked in the hangar. The bomb continued on its path, piercing the hangar deck and detonating in the crew's galley on the second deck. The bomb blew a hole through the second deck and into the third, above the after engine-room.

Structural damage was relatively minor, but a raging gasoline fire flared up in the wreckage of Mooney's plane and spread rapidly to the other five planes parked there. The quantity of gasoline dumped onto the hangar deck from the severed gasoline main is unknown, but those six fully fuelled aircraft had more held more than 2,500 gallons of high-test aviation fuel.

The bomb had created a five-foot indentation around the small fifteen-inch hole, which acted as a funnel for gasoline spilling onto the hangar deck, directing it into the lower decks where the fire raged. Within seconds of the explosion there were fires on the third deck over the after engine room, on the second deck, and in the hangar. Billowing black smoke from the burning gasoline poured from every opening in the lower decks.

Less than ten minutes after the bomb was dropped, the fire-fighting sprinkler system was completely disabled. Within the same short time-span, the main engines lost almost all power, which first slowed *Princeton*, then brought her to a halt and turned her into a burning drifting hulk.

Many American naval history books refer to USS *Birmingham* as the most tragic ship to participate in World War II, because of the number of engagements she was involved in and the damage she sustained. By the same measure, *Princeton* must be considered the most unlucky. One small bomb, which should have been a minor inconvenience for the light carrier, caused a great deal of death and destruction.

Lieutenant Mooney said: 'I was in the pilot's ready room,

(Continued on page 30)

which was directly under the flight deck on the port side, forward of the hangar; at the instant the bomb pierced the flight deck, the TBM [torpedo bomber] pilots in their ready room heard a thump or a bump similar to the sound made as if a heavy object dropped somewhere. The ready room door led onto a companionway that was normally closed, but at this time, for some reason, was open.' Mooney looked toward the door and saw something he will never forget. 'It was a fireball, a true ball of molten flame, maybe the size of a basketball, that sailed forward through the companionway past the open ready room door!'

Mooney and the other pilots wasted no time leaving immediately through an emergency hatch opening onto the port side catwalk, then up to the flight deck, where Mooney saw controlled chaos. Everyone had something to do and was doing it 'with great vigour and proficiency.'

Pilots had not been assigned a ship's function, so Mooney grabbed a fire hose and joined a group directing streams of water down into the forward elevator shaft, which was partially below the flight deck. Several other crewmen were similarly engaged when an incredible eruption blasted the elevator platform out of its shaft. Mooney was knocked backwards but otherwise unhurt.

The destroyers *Irwin*, *Cassin Young* and *Gatlin*, along with the anti-aircraft cruiser, *Reno*, were ordered to stand by to render assistance to *Princeton*. From her flight deck, several small explosions were felt. There were about twelve men in the Executive Officer's office that were badly burnt but could not be reached because of the very hot water on the decks.

Eighteen minutes after the bomb struck, steering control in the pilot house was lost. *Irwin* came alongside *Princeton*'s port side to fight the fires, but was too small to have much effect on the furnace that *Princeton* had become. *Irwin* took aboard more than six hundred of *Princeton*'s crew who had been forced to abandon ship. Moderately heavy swells caused *Irwin* to collide with *Princeton*, a much larger vessel, and the little destroyer took a physical beating from the collisions.

Irwin's port engine was out of commission because its main circulator pump and condenser screen had become plugged with debris floating on the water. There continued to be explosions aboard *Princeton* and *Irwin* cast off for fear of being too heavily damaged. *Reno* attempted to come along *Princeton*'s starboard side, but the carrier constantly drifted into her.

Nearly ninety minutes after the bomb hit, *Birmingham* was ordered to fall out of formation and assume command of the fire-fighting operations. *Birmingham* manoeuvred aft on *Princeton*'s port side, the ships smashing into each other in the incessant swells. It was sickening to watch; it seemed as though the two ships were attempting to destroy each other.

To be effective, *Birmingham* had to stay in direct contact so fire fighters could move from ship to ship. To stay in physical contact, *Birmingham* deliberately crowded the carrier. *Princeton*'s anti-torpedo blisters on both sides below her waterline amidships effectively limited the approach of any supporting ships to the bow or stern areas. The two ships were built to the same hull design, so *Birmingham* was not so heavily battered as *Irwin* was. Coming in from the weather side also allowed *Birmingham* better control. But things did not go smoothly for long...

After an all-night shift below decks making repairs in the after engine room of *Birmingham*, I was relieved from duty. I went above with Vernon Trevethan and George Thompson. No longer

servicing under general quarters, we were off-duty and sightseeing.

George, Vernon and I, headed for the open bridge above the starboard flying bridge. We wanted to observe the fire-fighting efforts on *Princeton* but still stay out of the way. Clearly, *Birmingham*'s starboard side and *Princeton*'s port side were severely damaged by the grinding impacts that ensued during *Birmingham*'s attempt to manoeuvre to the advantage of the fire fighters aboard both ships.

Damaged by the constant collisions between the vessels, a hatch door was ripped from the carrier's hull, exposing the interior of what appeared to be a companionway. Today, the memory of what I saw scares me. Then, however, I was only twenty-three and not easily intimidated by potential danger.

What I saw was a row of bombs standing upright. If memory has not failed me, those bombs were in the neighbourhood of five-feet tall and twelve inches in diameter. Fire fighters on *Birmingham* were directing streams of water onto those bombs, causing them to sizzle like hot frying pan when water is sprinkled onto its surface. This effort by the crew to cool down the bombs with fire hoses was desperately hampered because of the narrow quarters and the constant rolling of the ship. The bombs were hissing and generating clouds of steam.

My buddies and I watched this activity from our vantage point less than twenty feet away from the nearest bomb. *Birmingham*'s skipper, Captain Thomas Inglis, was just below us on the flying bridge, directing the entire operation. The grim expression on his face indicated his deep concern at the stress of the situation.

Three hours and seven minutes after *Princeton* was hit, the destroyer *Morrison* came alongside starboard amidships. In short order, a jeep and an aircraft-towing tractor fell from the carrier's deck onto *Morrison*'s bridge. Fifteen minutes after coming alongside, *Morrison* became wedged between *Princeton*'s No. 2 and No.3 stacks, as a result *Morrison*'s mast bent and eventually broke.

At around 1:32 pm, *Birmingham* sounded general quarters due to threats of air and submarine attacks, as she pulled clear of the carrier, fires and smoke were still observed. My companions and I left for our respective battle stations.

Four hours and sixteen minutes after the encounter with the *Judy*, *Morrison* finally cleared herself and rejoined the screen of destroyers with her mast dragging in the sea. *Reno* fired on enemy planes, but a concerted attack did not develop.

When general quarters ended, *Birmingham* once again moved into position alongside the *Princeton*. My little group reconvened.

We were now perched on the after mushroom ventilator between the No. 3 and 4 turrets, intently watching the activities as *Birmingham* prepared to rig for towing. From a distance of seventy yards or so, no smoke or fires were observed, only fog-like vapours coming from the numerous openings in the carrier's flight deck. *Princeton* seemed to be serenely drifting with the current, and our little group figured that the excitement was over and all the fires extinguished.

The ships were still separated by about fifty-feet, when the sailors shot their messenger lines across in order to secure a spring line between the two ships. George, on my right, suddenly exclaimed, 'Look at that flame!' We saw a single tongue of flame shoot out from the area of the after elevator, followed by a puff of white smoke like a billowy cumulus cloud. To our horror, a slender

column of pale, orange-coloured smoke, shot several hundred feet straight up into the air. All hell broke loose with an enormous eruption. One hundred and thirty feet of *Princeton's* stern blew off, as well as one hundred and eighty feet of her flight deck.

As a high-speed shock wave headed my way, my reflexes took over. I threw myself backwards before the concussion could hit me head-on. This reflex action undoubtedly saved my life. Still, the force of the shock wave tumbled me backward for thirty or forty feet before dropping me about ten feet to the deck. The shock wave hit me a split second before the thunder of the explosion reached my ears.

Whilst I was tumbling, I was aware that Vernon, my best friend, was also somersaulting. I saw him land on his feet and run around the barbette of No.3 turret to disappear from my sight. Some time later, I learned that he had dropped dead on the other side of the turret.

I was momentarily stunned, yet at the same time my senses were heightened. When the roar of the explosion abated, I became aware of an ear-splitting silence that seemed to last for an eternity and was almost painful to my ears. The deafening hush was finally brought to an end by the sound of burning hot shrapnel raining down all around me.

The shrapnel was burning through my clothes in what seemed to be a hundred places. I had to get out from under the shower of hot steel. When I glanced down I saw that my right knee was mangled, so I thought I would get up on my left leg and hop to the overhanging No.4 turret. But, my left leg wouldn't support me because it was broken. I tried to crawl on my belly, but the pea-sized, gravel-like bits of the *Princeton* painfully burned my hands, forearms and even the nape of my neck. All I could do was roll around on the deck, trying to escape the searing pain.

Finally, the shrapnel stopped falling and the pieces of steel cooled, I collected myself enough to look around at hundreds of dead or unconscious bodies. Out of maybe three hundred crewmembers on the after starboard deck of my ship, there was only one person, other than myself, who was conscious. There was no moaning, only an eerie quiet.

On my back and propped on my elbows, I surveyed the extent of the damage. Wherever I looked there was carnage. The deck was strewn with assorted body parts and rivers of blood poured from the scuppers into the sea. It was scene from a nightmare.

I was wondering what to do when a shipmate, John Miskis, suddenly appeared from nowhere. His face was burned cork black, and he was completely covered in soot. At first I didn't recognise him, only his voice identified him to me. He was excited, I was calm; he started slapping both my cheeks, maybe I was going into shock but this was irritating. I snarled at him, 'Cut it out, John!' He went below to get help and he and another shipmate, Dick Stern, tore a bunk from its hanger and rushed back to the deck so they could carry me to a first aid station.

Gerald Baldwin, another good friend onboard *Birmingham*, was standing aft and a little to port of the No.4 turret when *Princeton* exploded. The shock wave pitched 'Baldy' over the port side into the sea; he was stunned, and wounded from a piece of steel in his shoulder. As he landed in the water, *Birmingham* slowly backed down leaving him forward of the bow. He spotted *Princeton's* broken stern floating aft, swam to it and attempted to climb aboard – it was too slippery. He abandoned that idea and attempted to board his own ship but was in danger of being

sucked under by the screws as the ship was manoeuvring fore and aft. Spotting two wooden planks floating in an oil slick, he managed to swim over to them and lay down on top of the boards until the destroyer, *Cassin Young*, came along and hauled him out of the ocean.

Aboard the carrier, four people had miraculously escaped the incredible explosion that had originated abaft the after elevator on the hangar deck. They were about three hundred feet from the origin of the blast. One of them, Gene Mitchell, sustained multiple wounds. Mitchell pulled himself together to look over at the *Birmingham*, what he saw was so ghastly and traumatic that he experienced flashbacks for years.

The prompt action of my shipmates saved my life. Events from that time on are a blur, my war was at an end.

Many years later, I met an ex-Navy man who had been attached to the Mare Island Navy Yard at the time *Birmingham* came in for repairs. He told me that civilian workers brought in to clean up the ship prior to repair, refused to do the job – the stench of rotting flesh, even after three months was too awful. A crew of Navy enlisted men was assigned to the job.

Despite *Princeton's* punishment, and even after that final tremendous explosion, the carrier was still afloat without even a list; the side blisters, which contributed greatly to her marvellous stability, probably provided her buoyancy.

Princeton's skipper reluctantly gave orders to his damage control party to abandon ship for the destroyer *Gatling*. The gallant light carrier was to be scuttled by torpedoes.

Irwin fired her first torpedo from 2,500 yards to no effect. A minute later she fired a second torpedo, again with no effect. Two minutes later, *Irwin* fired a third torpedo that ran true for 1,500 yards but reversed course, U-turning right down the pipe back towards *Irwin*. The destroyer was forced to outrun its own torpedo on less than healthy engines. A few minutes later, *Irwin* fired her fourth and fifth torpedoes, both of which missed. Later inspection showed that *Irwin's* torpedo tubes had been seriously damaged during her earlier encounters with *Princeton*.

The destruction of the carrier was finally assigned to *Reno*. The anti-aircraft cruiser fired two torpedoes into the carrier's main magazine, where some seventy tons of explosives were stored, triggering an enormous explosion. *Princeton* disappeared under the waves of the Pacific in about forty-five seconds. She didn't die easily. She was a tough old ship.

* * * *

HERE BEGINNETH THE FIRST LESSON

The new recruit was walking through the base when another 'sailor' came towards him.

As they passed each other, the recruit said, 'Giddy, mate'.

A little further along, as he passed a building, an arm with three gold buttons on it reached out and pulled him around the corner, a voice bellowed in his ear, 'Do you know who that was who you called mate? That was the Captain!'

The recruit hurried back the way he had come and pulled up in front of the Captain, saluted as best he could and said, 'I'm sorry about the way I spoke to you, Sir, but I have only been in the Navy for three days.'

The Captain said, 'That's alright, son, but for God's sake, NEVER do that to a Sub Lieutenant!'

LOVABLE LOUISE - A Christmas story

As a joke, my brother used to hang a pair of panty hose over his fireplace before Christmas. He said that all he wanted was for Santa to fill them. What they say about Santa checking the list twice must be true because every Christmas morning, although Jay's kids' stockings were overflowing, his poor panty hose hung sadly empty and grew increasingly threadbare.

One year I decided to make his dreams come true. I put on sunglasses and a fake beard and went in search of an inflatable love doll. Of course, they don't sell those things at Wal-Mart. I had to go to an adult bookstore downtown.

If you've never been in an x-rated store, don't go. You'll only confuse yourself. I was there almost three hours saying things like, 'What does this do?' 'You're kidding me!' 'Who owns that?' 'Do you have their phone number?'

Finally I made it to the inflatable doll section. I wanted to buy a standard, uncomplicated doll suitable for a night of romance that could also substitute as a passenger in my truck so I could use the car pool lane during rush hour. Perhaps one that is subject to wild mood shifts and using a French accent for no reason at all (like some of my ex-girlfriends).

Finding what I wanted was difficult. Love dolls come in many different models. The top of the line, according to the box, could do things I'd only seen in a book on animal husbandry. I figured that the 'vibro motion' was a feature that Jay could live without, so I settled for Lovable Louise. She was at the bottom of the price range. To call Lovable Louise a 'doll' took a huge leap of the imagination.

On Christmas Eve, with the help of an old bicycle pump, Louise came to life. My sister-in-law was in on the plan and cleverly left the front door key hidden under the mat. In the wee morning hours, long after Santa had come and gone, I snuck into the house and filled the dangling panty hose with Louise's pliant legs and bottom. I also ate some cookies and drank what remained of a glass of milk on a nearby tray. Then I let myself out, went home, and giggled for a couple of hours.

The next morning my brother called to say that Santa had been to his house and left him a present that had made him VERY happy but had left the dog confused. He would bark, start to walk away, then come back and bark some more. I suggested he purchase an inflatable Lassie to set Rover straight. We also agreed that Louise should remain in her pantyhose so the rest of the family could admire her when they came over for the traditional Christmas Dinner. It seemed like a great idea, except that we forgot that Grandma and Grandpa would be there.

My Grandmother noticed Louise the moment she walked in the door. 'What the hell is that?' she asked.

My brother quickly explained. 'It's a doll'.

'Who would play with something like that?' Granny snapped.

I had several candidates in mind, but kept my mouth shut. 'Where are her clothes?' Granny continued.

I hadn't seen any in the box, but I kept this information to myself.

'Boy, that turkey sure smells nice, Gran,' Jay said, trying to steer her into the dining room.

Bur Granny was relentless. 'Why doesn't she have any teeth?'

I could have answered, but why would I? It was Christmas and no one wanted to ride in the back of an ambulance saying, 'Hang on, Granny! Hang on!'

My grandfather, a delightful old man with poor eyesight, sidled up to me and said, 'Hey, who's the naked gal by the fireplace?' I told him that she was Jay's friend. A few minutes later I noticed Grandpa by the mantel, talking to Louise. Not just talking, but actually flirting. It was then that we realised that this might be Grandpa's last Christmas at home.

The dinner went well. We made the usual small talk about who had died, who was dying, and who should be killed, when suddenly Louise made a noise that sounded a lot like my father in the bathroom in the morning. Then she lurched from the pantyhose, flew around the room twice, and fell in a heap in front of the sofa. The cat screamed, I passed Cranberry sauce through my nose, and Grandpa ran across the room, fell to his knees, and began administering mouth to mouth resuscitation. My brother wet his pants and Granny threw down her napkin, stomped out of the room, and sat in the car. It was indeed a Christmas to treasure and remember.

Later, in my brother's garage, we conducted a thorough examination to decide the cause of Louise's collapse. We discovered that Louise had suffered from a hot ember to the back of her right thigh.

Fortunately, thanks to a wonder drug called duct tape, we restored her to perfect health. Louise went on to star in several bachelor party movies. I think Grandpa still calls her whenever he can get out of the house.

With thanks to Ladymexal

* * * *



DEAR SIR... *Reprinted by request from a 1991 Slipstream*

Dear Sir,

It is with regret and haste that I write this letter to you, regret that such a small misunderstanding could lead to the following circumstances, and haste in order that you will get this report before you form your own pre-conceived opinions from reports in the world press, for I am sure that they will tend to overdramatise the affair.

We had just picked up the pilot and the apprentice had

returned from changing the 'G' flag for the 'H' and, it being his first trip, was having difficulty rolling the 'G' flag up, I therefore proceeded to show him how. Coming to the last part, I told him to 'let go,' the lad although willing is not too bright, necessitating my having to repeat the order in a sharper tone.

At this moment the chief officer appeared from the chart room, having been plotting the vessel's progress and, thinking that it was the anchors that were being referred to, repeated the 'let go' to the third officer on the fo'cstle.

The port anchor having been cleared away but not walked out, was promptly let go. The effect of letting the anchor drop from the 'pipe' while the vessel was proceeding at full harbour speed roved too much for the windlass brake, and the entire length of the port cable was pulled out 'by the roots.' I fear that the damage to the chain locker may be extensive. The braking effect of the port anchor naturally caused the vessel to sheer in that direction, right towards the swing bridge that spans the tributary to the river up which we were proceeding.

The swing bridge operator showed great presence of mind by opening the bridge for my vessel. Unfortunately, he did not think to stop vehicular traffic, the result being that the bridge partly opened and deposited a Volkswagen, two cyclists, and a cattle truck on the foredeck. My ship's company are at present rounding up the contents of the latter, which from the noise I would say were pigs. In his efforts to stop the progress of the vessel, the third officer dropped the starboard anchor, too late to be of practical use, for it fell on the swing bridge operator's control cabin.

After the port anchor was let go and the vessel started to sheer, I gave a double ring full astern on the engine room telegraph and personally rang the engine room to order maximum astern revolutions. I was informed that the sea temperature was 53 degrees and asked if there was a film tonight. My reply would not add constructively to this report.

Up to now I have confined my report to the activities at the forward end of the vessel. Down aft they were having their own problems.

At the moment the port anchor was let go, the second officer was supervising the making fast of the after tug and was lowering the ship's towing spring down onto the tug.

The sudden braking effect on the port anchor caused the tug to run in under the stern of my vessel just at the moment when the propellers was answering my double ring full astern. The prompt

action of the second officer in securing the inboard end of the towing spring delayed the sinking of the tug by some minutes, and thereby the safe abandoning of that vessel.

It is strange but at the very same moment of letting go the port anchor there was a power cut ashore. The fact that we were passing over a cable area at that time might suggest we may have touched something on the river bed. It is perhaps lucky that the high tension cables brought down by the foremast were not live, possibly being replaced by the underwater cable, but owing to the shore blackout, it is impossible to say where the pylon fell.

It never fails to amaze me the actions and behaviour of foreigners during moments of minor crisis. The pilot for instance is at this moment huddled in the corner of my day cabin alternately crooning to himself and crying after having consumed a bottle of gin in a time that is worthy of inclusion in the Guinness Book of Records.

The tug captain on the other hand reacted violently and had to be forcibly restrained by the steward, who has him handcuffed in the ship's hospital, where he is telling me to do impossible things with my ship and my crew.

I enclose the names and addresses of the drivers and insurance companies of the vehicles on my foredeck, which the third officer collected after his somewhat hurried evacuation of the fo'cstle. These particulars will enable us to claim for the damage that they did to the railing of the #1 hold.

I am enclosing this preliminary report for I am finding it difficult to concentrate with the sound of police sirens and their flashing lights.

It is sad to think that had the apprentice realised that there is no need to fly pilot flags after dark, none of this would have happened.

Yours truly
Master

A NOVICE'S GUIDE TO AN AIRCRAFT CARRIER

HMS INDOMITABLE 1950

Forwarded by Bernie Butler

At first, it is all utterly baffling!

The ship is so huge and her geography so complex, that one is continually getting lost. Drifting into Seaman and Stoker's mess decks; or the galleys full of shining ovens and sweating cooks in soiled white aprons; reaching dead ends, chilly metal corners smelling of potatoes, lobbies smelling of high octane fuel and kerosene. Time and time again facing the dilemma of the two alternative watertight doors and half afraid to take off the clips for fear of what? Of not being able to clamp them closed again and somehow endangering the ship – of being thrust back by a roaring wall of green water... Any fantasy can sweat coldly to birth, like a mushroom, in those empty, echoing iron corridors. The air is alive with half-heard orders and shrill with bosun's pipes, brassy with bells and bugles.

Then, gradually a pattern begins to emerge. The essence of the ship, her brain and nerves, are housed in the island. Tucked away on the starboard side, streamlined threaded with narrow passages and steep metal ladders. It contains the Compass

Platform, from which the Captain handles the ship, Commander Flying's position, a narrow gallery with an uninterrupted view of the flight deck, the Admiral's Bridge, the Fighter Direction Office, the Air Operation's room and the Signal Bridge. It embraces the funnel and supports the radar aerials and contains, besides all these, the Pilot's Ready Room, a hot little box with one scuttle which is their only refuge whilst waiting to fly.

The armoured table top of the flight deck runs away for'ard and aft. It is bare but for the arrestor wires and the barriers that traverse it and the innumerable ringbolts for lashing down aircraft and equipment. Surrounding it for the greater part of its length, are the nets and walkways below the level of the deck coaming where the flight deck party crouch out of the wind and where all manner of equipment is stowed from fire extinguishers to chocks.

Here on the port side, the Batsman has his perch and screen, and the Flight Deck Engineer his controls for raising and lowering the wires and barriers. The nets terminate fore and aft with the

(Continued on page 34)

turrets of the twin 4.5s, the ship's main anti-aircraft armament. The tops of the turrets project a foot or two above the level of the deck.

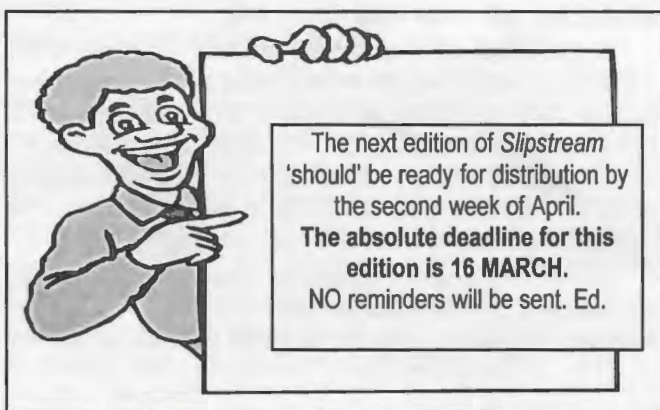
There are two lifts. The for'ard one communicates with the upper hangar, the aft lift serves both upper and lower hangars. The upper hangar runs the length of the ship from lift to lift, it is a hollow, echoing steel box, which is the headquarters of the squadrons non-flying activities. It is garage and workshop, with points for fuel, oil, compressed air and power for the tools. Round and about through innumerable watertight doors and lobbies, are grouped the endless cubby holes that ships and squadrons need for their well being. Squadron stores, battery-charging rooms, blacksmith shop, paint store, dope shop, bosun's stores, engineering and electrical workshops and squadron offices. It is full two decks high. Among the arrestor gear machinery in the deckhead, are fire main sprays that can flood the hangar from end to end if a fire breaks out. Spare mainplanes and propellers are clamped to the bulkheads like trophies.

The aircraft are parked almost touching. One squadron in echelon along the starboard side, the other squadron along the port side. To prevent them getting adrift, they are chocked fore and aft and lashed down with wire lashings. These are so arranged that it is almost impossible to take more than two steps without tripping over one. The air has a dead, flat taste, and stinks of oil and fuel, a sickly cloying smell that seems to condense on the metal surfaces of the deck, aircraft and tools, in a tacky black film.

This is where the maintenance ratings, fitters, riggers, electricians and radio mechs spend most of their time. Amidships, one of the watertight doors leads out through a lobby and a second door to a ladder up to the island. Down aft another one leads down to the cabin flats and the wardroom, others give access to the weather decks where the ship's boats are stowed, and there is fresh air and the sea sluicing past and the paintwork carries a bloom of salt.

The hangar, flight deck and their appurtenances are the domain of the Air Department. They take their shape and situation from the ship, but their function and character from the aircraft. Only on the compass platform, or among the capstans and enclosed cables on the fo'c'sle; on the narrow weather decks, or on the quarter deck with its bell, brightwork and gratings where, at twenty-six knots, the vibration makes your teeth chatter, is the ship's other essence expressed.

Nevertheless, it is there. Before she is a floating aerodrome, she is a ship, with the beauty of a ship, and a ship's particular apprehensible character.



OBITUARY



When Brian Charles McKeon passed away on 01 November 2000, not only did the FAA lose one of its staunchest supporters, Australia lost one of its finest citizens, a man who gave so much to the wider community in so many ways.

Brian McKeon, more commonly known as 'Soapy', was a Queenslander by birth and did his early schooling in the Brisbane area. He excelled at Brisbane Grammar and then entered the University of Queensland to study Architecture. He never finished the course as he joined the Navy in 1952, gaining his observer wings in 1954. He was an original member of 808 Squadron when it reformed with Sea Venoms in the UK in 1956.

He survived two serious aircraft accidents in 1957, but was severely burnt in the second one. After considerable medical treatment he returned to duty as Photographic Officer, serving at HMAS *Albatross*, Navy Office and HMAS *Melbourne*. His skills with the camera were matched by his accomplishments with the trumpet and he was the life and soul of many a wardroom party and ship's concert.

He left the Navy in 1965 and entered the business world; here he quickly made his mark and by 1976 he was one of the principals in his agency. Despite his heavy workload, 'Soapy' never lost his love for the Navy, and the Fleet Air Arm in particular. After the demise of the carrier he became determined to ensure that the FAA of old was not forgotten. His first FAA project was the creation and installation of a stained glass window in the Naval Chapel at Garden Island, in memory of those members of the FAA who died in the execution of their duties.

He then turned his attention to the creation of a permanent FAA Museum at HMAS *Albatross*. The Museum we have today is a legacy to 'Soapy's' vision and dedication. Whilst running his agency and devoting time to fund raising for the Museum, he also found time to become involved with the St Johns Ambulance organisation. In 1987 he became Chairman of the organisation and in 1991 the Queen promoted him to the rank of Commander in the Order. He then became the inaugural National Chairman of the newly formed Community Care Branch. When failing health forced his retirement in 1997, the Community Care Branch had 1500 volunteers providing 90,000 hours of community service per annum. When questioned one night, over an odd glass of 'red', as to why he didn't slow down and relax, his reply was typical of the man: 'There is so much to be done and we are given so little time.'

The Fleet Air Arm Association extends to 'Soapy's' wife, Margaret, and his family, our sincere condolences. His many friends will miss him, a shipmate who only knew how to give and expected nothing in return.

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A PRAYER

Lord, thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will some day be old. Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs.

Make me be thoughtful but not moody, helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom it seems a pity not to use it all, but thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details, give me wings to get to the point. Seal my lips on my aches and pains; they are increasing, and my love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of other's pains, but help me endure them with patience.

I dare not ask for improved memory, but for a growing humility and a lessening cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a Saint – some of them are so hard to live with – but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil.

Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places, and talents in unexpected people; and give me, O Lord, the grace to tell them so.



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A LAST FAREWELL

The Association records with regret the deaths of the following members, shipmates and friends:

Donald Sidney 'Fingers' Long
 October 2000

☪

Colin William 'Tubby' Carroll
 25 October 2000

☪

Brian Charles 'Soapy' McKeon
 01 November 2000

☪

Stanley Gordon Brown
 03 November 2000

☪

Trevor John Gibbs, OAM
 20 November 2000

☪

Colin Davidson
 30 November 2000

☪

Robert Brown
 ex-WOAVN
 January 2001

☪

Arthur 'Jim' George
 January 2001

☪



TOP PHOTOGRAPH

*
817 Squadron's
50th Anniversary
Sea King helicopter over
the South Coast of New
South Wales
Photo courtesy RANAS
Photographic Section

* * * * *

LOWER LEFT

*
Sea Venom of
805 Squadron
aboard
HMAS Melbourne
Photo courtesy
Clem Conlan
Vic.Div.

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