



**A FEW MEMORIES
OF
SIR VICTOR SMITH**



AUSTRALIAN NAVAL INSTITUTE PRESS



**A FEW MEMORIES
OF SIR VICTOR SMITH**

To My Friends of the Fleet Air Arm

*Lieutenant-Commander Peter Jones
whose work in this project
has been outstanding and is
greatly appreciated*

*V. D. T. Smith
April 1992*

PROFITS FROM THE SALE OF THIS PUBLICATION GO
TO THE AUSTRALIAN NAVAL AVIATION MUSEUM TRUST

**A FEW MEMORIES
OF SIR VICTOR SMITH**

**The Recollections of
Admiral Sir Victor Smith AC KBE CB DSC RAN Rtd**

Australian Naval Institute

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INTRODUCTION BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN NAVAL INSTITUTE

The Australian Naval Institute has great pride in publishing *A Few Memories of Sir Victor Smith*. Admiral Sir Victor Smith made a significant contribution to the Royal Australian Navy over nearly five decades of service. Sir Victor has also been a source of great encouragement to the Australian Naval Institute for which he was made an Honorary Life Member.

Readers of *A Few Memories* will quickly realise the large part Sir Victor played in the development of the Fleet Air Arm. His keen interest in the Fleet Air Arm is unabated and Sir Victor has asked that all profits from the sale of this book go to the Australian Naval Aviation Museum Trust. The Australian Naval Institute is pleased to assist in supporting this worthy project.

The origin of this book lay in a series of interviews with Admiral Sir Victor Smith conducted by Commodore "Toz" Dadswell. The oral history project received considerable support from Admiral M.W. Hudson, Vice Admiral I.D.G. MacDougall, Commodore I.A. Callaway and Captain J.G. Hill.

I wish to thank also Commodore "Toz" Dadswell and Lieutenant Commander P.D. Jones for their considerable efforts from initial planning of the interviews through to the publication of these memoirs. Commodore W.S.G. Bateman, Commander A.W. Grazebrook, Mr. J.R. Mortimer, Mr J. Straczek, Lieutenant Commander R. Jones and Lieutenant T.R. Frame all provided valuable suggestions in the interview preparations. Lieutenant Commander M.C. Peake and Lieutenant Commander D.M. Stevens gave their time and expertise in laying up the draft for publication. Acknowledgement is also made of the excellent support provided by Able Seaman L. Leonard, Able Seaman J.M. Pfeifer and Denise Holt in typing and preparing transcripts. Their efforts allowed this valuable project to be completed in a timely manner.

Finally I wish to thank Admiral Sir Victor Smith for sharing his memories. All those with a love of the Navy will be most grateful.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "D.B. Chalmers", written in a cursive style.

D.B. CHALMERS
Rear Admiral RAN
President

A Few Memories of Sir Victor Smith



CHIEF OF
THE DEFENCE FORCE

FOREWORD
BY
GENERAL PETER GRATION AC OBE
CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCE

It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to write a Foreword to these *Few Memories* of such an outstanding Australian. I had the privilege of serving Sir Victor for a little over a year as his staff officer in the early seventies during his time as Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee. This however was long enough to know that the Australian Defence Force had as its most senior officer a man of rare distinction and ability, modest and underspoken, yet with a commanding presence and manner, a warm personality and a keen sense of humour.

This little book reflects all these qualities. Those who know him best will be prepared for the modest understatement which emerges in the first paragraph. Sir Victor "could see no purpose in (writing an autobiography) as my experiences in the Service were, to a degree, similar to others". Similar to others indeed! He was the first graduate of the Royal Australian Naval College to become a four star admiral, probably the only Australian who will ever serve 49 years in uniform, the man who led a squadron attack on the *Scharnhorst*, who was shot down twice in the Mediterranean, who is widely recognised as the father of the Fleet Air Arm, who went on to become not only the head of his Service but Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, and who was described by Sir Arthur Tange, not known for his overgenerosity in bestowing praise, as an outstanding public administrator and a man who had "won enormous respect from us all".

Therefore we must read between these modestly written lines to appreciate how extraordinary a career is encompassed in these pages. For example in describing the attack he led in *Scharnhorst* in which two aircraft were lost, he says simply that it was "... rather a frightening experience, but on the other hand in a situation like that there is no option and you have to press on. I think that probably sums it up." Accurate, pithy and shorn of non-essentials.

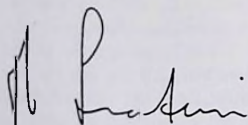
A Few Memories of Sir Victor Smith

The memories make great reading. Many will enjoy the account of life as a junior naval officer in the thirties, with its mix of professional training and other activities including sport. Sport has played an important part in Sir Victor's life, with his particular talent for tennis, which he still plays, and rugby in which he maintains a lively interest.

He had a distinguished record in World War Two, much of it with the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm and including time in the North and South Atlantic, the Mediterranean and a convoy to Murmansk. He was one of the few Australians to take part in the planning for Operation OVERLORD, the invasion of Normandy, and to be ashore in France from shortly after D Day for some months. This period was important for other reasons too, because it gave him the opportunity to meet and marry Nanette at five days notice ("I asked her if we could get married the following Saturday").

Readers can make their own judgement on which of his main accomplishments will count most for prosperity. Some will see his work as a father of the RAN Fleet Air Arm as being pre-eminent, from early planning in 1944 through to a tour as Captain of *Melbourne* in 1962. Others will see his time as his country's most senior military officer during the great reorganisation of the mid-seventies.

Be that as it may, a *Few Memories* makes great reading, not only for the events that unfold through half a century's service, but for the portrait that emerges of a great naval officer and an outstanding Australian. Not least is his keen sense of humour and ability to appreciate the ridiculous and deflate the preposterous. One story particularly tickled me. Recalling his time as the bass drummer in the wolf cub pack band, and the cub who walked in front to share weight of the drum, Sir Victor muses "I wonder how he's getting on? He is probably stone deaf by now."

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'N. P. Smith'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'N' and 'P'.

I

It had been suggested to me by several people that I should write an autobiography. I could see no good purpose in this as my experiences in the Service were, to a degree, similar to others. However, I made a compromise to the effect that I would set down a few memories which might be of interest to some people. The following is the result.

I will begin with some recollections of my grandparents. On my father's side, my grandfather was a man by the name of Charles John Smith. He was born on 7th October 1835 in Aylsham in Norfolk, England and died in the Sydney suburb of Chatswood on 12th January 1919. Charles John Smith migrated to Australia in the 1850s and, in 1859, he settled on a property he named "Bomera Creek". The nearest small country town was Tambar Springs in north western NSW, and the nearest larger town was a place by the name of Gunnedah. My grandfather settled on this property, ran sheep and grew wheat. I remember him fairly well. He was a very straight forward God-fearing man and he was well respected by all who knew him. He left Tambar Springs in 1918 as he was getting too old to run the property and he and my grandmother came to visit my parents for a time. One of the memories I still have is of the occasion when my mother, my brother and myself had gone up to "Bomera Creek" to accompany my grandparents when they travelled down to Chatswood. The train left from Gunnedah and as we waited at the railway station before boarding the train to Sydney, a lot of the people from the district came to say farewell. As my grandparents went to board the train all those present spontaneously burst into the hymn "Abide With Me". That gave me a memory I have never forgotten.

My maternal grandfather was an Englishman by the name of Charles Thomas Trumper and he migrated first of all to New Zealand and later from New Zealand to Australia. He set up a footwear manufacturing business in Sydney and lived in Paddington. His health began to suffer in the early 1900s so he got rid of his manufacturing business and, obeying doctor's orders, moved to the suburb of Chatswood on the North Shore of Sydney, as the doctors thought the increased height above sea level would be beneficial for his health. He was a quiet, kindly man devoted to his family and to cricket.

The Smith family on the Tambar Springs property had seven boys and three girls. My father, George Smith, was born at Gunnedah on 17th September 1886 and he died in Chatswood, on 15th May 1959. As a boy he went to the nearest government school at Tambar Springs; this involved riding on horseback twelve miles each way. He finished secondary school up to all but two years and these he completed later in Sydney. My father decided to get a job in Sydney and obtained employment in a pastoral firm, remaining with this firm until he retired in the 1950s. He enjoyed his work as it was a continuation of his interest in the land which began on the property at Tambar Springs.

My father was the youngest son of the Smith family. Of the others, one went on a property near Roma in Queensland, another one took over the property at "Bomera Creek" and later brought an adjoining property "Brooklyn". The third brother came down to Sydney and he rather faded from the picture. Three boys died while quite young.

My mother, Una Margaret Smith, was born in Paddington in June 1885. Her maiden name was Trumper and she continued to live in her parents' home at Paddington, then Chatswood, until she married my father in 1909. As for the circumstances under which Una Margaret Trumper and George Smith met I know nothing definite. The Trumpers lived in Paddington, they had three sons and all three boys were very keen on cricket. Mr and Mrs Trumper kept open house and their children were welcome to bring any friends home. My father boarded in Paddington and was a very keen cricket supporter, so it is my guess that he met one of the Trumper boys who invited him to the Trumper home where he met my mother. They were married on the 9th November 1909. After their marriage they rented a house in Chatswood, close to where my mother's parents had built their home. In 1926, my parents built a house opposite my mother's parents and they lived there for many years. It is very interesting how times have changed over the years. This house was located about six minutes walk from Chatswood railway station. When the house was built it was a normal size bungalow. After my father died the house became too big for mother and she sold it in 1971. The people who bought it razed the house to the ground and built a sizeable motel there. In much more recent years, the motel in turn was demolished and today there is a large size office block on the site. I suppose if my mother had held on to the house over the years she would have got far, far more money than she actually did at the time, however that's the way things go.

My father and mother had three children – my brother, who was born in 1911, I was born in 1913, and my sister was born in 1919. I was born 9th May 1913, at Chatswood. I remember that in my early years the street lighting was done by gas. Until 1931, to get in to the city you caught a steam train from Chatswood to a place called Milsons Point, just about where the foot of the north end of the Sydney Harbour Bridge is today, and from Milsons Point you caught a ferry boat over to Circular Quay. From what I remember life seemed to be far more leisurely then. There were no supermarkets as today. Most of the tradesmen called at home to collect orders and then delivered whatever you wanted. Everybody has certain very early memories which remain and I remember being taken to the World War I armistice celebrations in the city of Sydney. On another night we went to the local armistice celebrations which were held at Chatswood oval.

I was christened Victor Alfred Trumper, Victor and Alfred being names of my mother's and father's brothers. Trumper was of course my mother's maiden name. The Victor was after my uncle the well-known cricketer. I never really knew him as he died in 1915 from Bright's disease, but in view of all I've read and heard about him he was a man of quality. In fact, I don't think I can do any better than to quote the closing words of Jack Fingleton in his book "The Immortal Victor Trumper" and Jack Fingleton writes:

well might one echo the words of Horatio as Hamlet dropped dead:
Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince, and flights of
angels sing thee to thy rest.

I had a very happy and very full childhood. I joined the local wolf cub pack as early as possible and remained with them, finally as a cub instructor, until I went to the Naval College. I was in the local church choir for over four years and I played rugby and cricket. Cricket didn't turn out so happily as my talent was just about nil, and as soon as I realised that, I switched to tennis. The family went to the seaside for five weeks every Christmas time and we greatly looked forward to that during the rest of the year. In those days I always seemed to be so very busy. There was the cubs meeting Friday night with the cubs outing on Saturday afternoon, sport during the week, Thursday night was choir practice then church three times on Sunday. It was decided by the committee running the local pack of wolf cubs that the pack needed a drum and fife band. As I had been learning the piano for several years I was elected to be the teacher of this band and we used to practice at my home after school on Tuesday afternoons. I think we probably did reasonably well in the music line in a simple way. I was one of the bigger boys in the wolf cubs and of course a large bass drum was an essential part of the band. The solution we found was that I would play the bass drum taking some of its weight, and another cub would walk in front of it sharing the weight of the drum. I wonder how he's getting on? He is probably stone deaf by now.

It was during this period that my interest in the Navy developed. Looking back I think the origin was because occasionally at our wolf cub meetings a RAN lieutenant commander would come along to teach us how to do bends and hitches and he would also tell us about life in the Service. I do believe this initiated my interest. I had no relatives in the Navy, but nevertheless the more I found out about it the greater its attraction became.

Our family was middle class. We were not deprived of anything, we were taken on outings quite frequently and any friends we liked to bring home were always welcome. I mentioned the holiday when we went away at Christmas time. My brother, sister and I had a very happy childhood.

I remember that the first car my father bought was in 1925 and it was a Model T Ford. This at times used to cause some irritation on my father's part and discreet amusement on the children's part. Model T cars were hand cranked and, particularly in cold weather, they were very cantankerous. It was always a good thing to retreat well away from father when in winter time he was trying to get the Model T Ford going. He got rid of the Ford in 1927 and purchased a car that had just come on the market called an Essex Super 6. It went very well, but looking back on it my father was not really car minded nor was he a man of great patience where an obstinate car was concerned.

During this period there was this continuing and growing interest in the Navy and I began to seek out more information. There was a teacher at the Chatswood primary school, a Mrs Bradford, and her son was at Jervis Bay at the time and he told me quite a lot about it.

The family plan for our schooling was that my brother and I would go first to the public primary school and then to Sydney Grammar School. At the end of 1925, I finished primary school and had at that time made up my mind that I wanted to join the Navy. My parents decided that rather than send me to Sydney Grammar School, it would be better if I stayed for the first year at Chatswood High School and had special coaching to ensure that I would get through the educational exam which was part of the entrance procedure for the Royal Australian Naval College at Jervis Bay. So I attended Chatswood High for one year and during that year passed the entrance exam for the RANC.

In applying for me to join the RANC, my father contacted the office of the Senior Naval Officer in Sydney and was told to make application direct to Navy Office in Melbourne. My father duly applied to Navy Office in Melbourne and after a time a letter arrived outlining the procedure which was involved. The selection process was firstly an education examination and this took place in a room at Sydney University. The educational examination went on for no more than three hours, during which there were different papers. The actual subjects I can't remember, but I think I would have done so if there had been anything really extraordinary.

A few weeks later I was told to report to a room in the Commonwealth Bank Building in Martin Place in Sydney. There I underwent a medical examination and later I had to face up to an interview committee. After these examinations or tests I departed and awaited the results. There were three officers on the interviewing committee. My first impression was one of amazement at the amount of gold braid on their uniforms. The questions were all straightforward. The identities of the officers who formed the interviewing committee remain unknown to me but the Captain of the RANC would probably have been one of them. The competition was pretty keen in 1926 for the 1927 entry and there were well over 200 candidates for 13 vacancies. It is interesting to note the bureaucratic usage of the language of that time. I still have a copy of a letter signed by a Mr Spurgeon for the Secretary to the Navy Board. It is worth reading today, some sixty five years after it was written.

Dear Sir, In connection with your son's candidature for entry to the Royal Australian Naval College, I am directed to inform you that he has been selected for appointment as Cadet Midshipman and will be required to take up appointment at the Royal Australian Naval College Jervis Bay early in February 1926. (That was a mistake of course and should have been 1927). Forwarded herewith are three forms. The first form advising the Railway Station from which your son will travel when proceeding to take up appointment and the second form showing his measurements, (self-measurement form), should be filled in and returned to the Secretary, Naval Board, Navy Office, Melbourne as early as possible. The third form showing details in regard to size of hat etcetera should be filled in without delay and forwarded to the Commanding Officer, RAN College, Jervis Bay, NSW. It is requested that you will have the measurements required in the two accompanying forms taken by a professional tailor if possible. Yours faithfully.

II

I did not previously know any of the other successful candidates who comprised the 1927 entry, "The Flinders Year" as it was known. A group of thirteen year old boys assembled on a railway platform at the Central Railway Station, Sydney one afternoon and were put on to a train which took us down the New South Wales south coast. Some hours later we arrived at the small station of Bomaderry where we were met by a chief petty officer. From Bomaderry there was a bus trip into the night, some 25 miles to the RANC, and this was the inauspicious arrival of the Flinders year. We were delivered to the mess room where we were met by the two Term officers. We were given biscuits and a cup of cocoa and then taken by the chief petty officer to the Flinders Year dormitory where our beds and sea chests were allocated in alphabetical order. We turned in and that was the end of Day One.

The following day began at 0630 when we were awakened and made to realise that our life in the Navy had certainly started. After breakfast we were taken around to the clothing store to get our uniforms and other clothing. We were given a number of talks about life at the College, what we could do and what we couldn't do and the majority of things at that stage appeared to be things which we could not do. Then we changed into our uniforms and started to learn how to salute, march and double. The following day the college really came alive with the arrival of the second, third and fourth year cadets.

The Commanding Officer was Captain R.H.O. Lane-Poole OBE RN and the Executive Officer Lieutenant Commander J. Durnford RN. Our term officer was Lieutenant M.W. Lancaster RAN. The Captain was a high and remote person and we didn't see very much of him. We saw a bit more of the next Captain, who was Captain H.A. Forster MVO RN. The Captain was naturally very distant from the cadets, however Captain Forster did take great interest in the sports which the cadets played. Whether it was hockey, football, cricket, or if it was the College playing another team then you could be certain that the Captain was there as an onlooker.

I had no outstanding first impressions of my twelve companions in the Flinders Year. We were absolute strangers that had come from Tasmania, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. I think we were all standing a bit apart and eyeing each other rather carefully. We did not start any sort of mateship until later on.

The highlight of 1927 was the opening of the New Parliament House in Canberra. All of the cadet midshipmen took part and we were accommodated at RMC Duntroon. We were involved in the actual opening when the cadets lined either side of the approach steps to Parliament House. Also we were present at the review of all the forces who had been brought to Canberra for the opening. Most of us probably did not appreciate the true significance of the occasion at the time. We were fortunate to be among those who heard Dame Nellie Melba sing the National Anthem at the opening. Canberra in those days seemed to be such a remote place. I remember asking some Duntroon cadets what they did

for social activities. Their reply was that a number of them had bicycles, but all of the reasonable young girls seemed to live so far away from Duntroon that it required serious consideration whether it was worth a bicycle ride to go and visit any of these young girls. During our short stay it seemed that there were very few suburbs Civic of course, Ainslie, a bit of Kingston and not much else.

Life for junior cadets was not easy. There was beating. A second year could beat a first year and a fourth year could beat a third year, second year, first year. It was overdone. I was glad in later years when it was abolished. It could easily be not some sort of justified punishment but bullying. I recall that some of the seniors had very strong arms.

The fagging system was also operating at this time. In my first year I believe that it was taken to an unnecessary degree. First year were fags for third year and second year fags for fourth year. Fags were more or less at the beck and call of the fag masters. Quite often at times I was given a job and it occurred to me that why cannot the silly fool do the thing himself. For example, sending a junior year to the sports store to get a football.

In a cadet's second year he had some authority and had a few more privileges. However, best of all, he had far more experience so that he knew what corners might be safely cut at times.

My memories of Jervis Bay would be incomplete if I did not mention Commander E.S.F Fegen RN who was the executive officer in 1928-29. He was an arresting character and to the cadets he was on a pedestal, having been an international rugby player. He personally gave me quite a lot of help in rugby. In 1929 he told me that instead of playing on the left wing I would be playing fullback in the coming season. Well, initially I did not have much idea on how to play fullback, but he was very patient and I valued his coaching enormously. It didn't really surprise me that in World War II as captain of an armed merchant cruiser he took on overwhelming enemy forces and won the Victoria Cross. He was a fine man and I was very proud to have known him.

Life at the RANC was very insular. Outside national and international events were not of very great interest to the cadets who were kept very occupied. For instance, when Kingsford-Smith flew the Pacific it was recognised as quite a great feat in aviation – but no more. However I think it would be fair to say that many people in the Service, back in the '20s, looked upon almost everybody who had anything to do with aircraft as being rather unusual.

In 1929 we were approaching the upper hierarchy among the cadets. We were in third year. You were well experienced in the routine, in the standard of discipline expected and the form of existence which went on. Looking back on it, I think the training was very soundly based. With the small total of cadets (we are talking about 50-52 at this time) it was almost approaching personal tuition, so that there was every opportunity for cadets to become very well versed in any particular subject. The balance between the purely academic and the Naval Profession subjects was about right. It is



The 1927 Flinders Year. V.A.T. Smith is in the back row on the right.

probably unavoidable, but today it seems that some of the good points in a junior officer's training have disappeared, compared to the 1930s. Perhaps this is just an old seadog growling.

Dr F.W. Wheatley was the Director of Studies and head of a devoted academic staff. At Sunday divisions Dr Wheatley was always most impressive in his academic regalia. He was a Doctor of Science, which in those days was a fairly rare degree in Australia. There was the history master, Mr Eldridge, Mr Simpson the physics master, Mr Macleod who taught English and who was a very good cricketer, and Mr Geoff Adeney, the French master who took some of the classes for French and some for English. For many years the French master was Mr Morrison who was the father of the later to be Rear Admiral T.K. Morrison.

Naturally there were some diversions from the normal routine. For several years before I entered the Service I learnt the piano. That had a spin-off later on at Jervis Bay. The cadets used to have weekly dances on a Wednesday night. The married officers' wives and the masters' wives used to be very longsuffering and come along to have their feet trodden on to some extent by the cadets. The rest of the cadets would dance together. Smith would play the piano. The remainder of the orchestra's instruments comprised drums and a tin whistle. The quality of the dancing reflected the quality of the music. There was another musical task. Divisions were held at 0900 every week day morning in the gym and there would be evening prayers in the chapel on

Sundays. I was the organist for playing the hymns at divisions and at chapel. I was learning early that one had some extraordinary and unusual duties at times.

The location of the RANC at Jervis Bay could scarcely be bettered. The sea was part of the college environment. The arrival of the *Australia* and the *Canberra* was terribly impressive. We were able to watch these big cruisers steaming in and anchoring a few cables off the College. The sight of these two big 10,000 ton County Class cruisers in Jervis Bay was unforgettable. The comparable place at *Cerberus* was Hanns Inlet which even a destroyer had some difficulty entering.

In mid-1930, in my fourth year, came the move to HMAS *Cerberus*. The move was an upheaval in many ways. We moved to absolutely unfamiliar surroundings and instead of being at an institution whose main objective was the training of future RAN officers, the college became one unit in a much larger training establishment. As I have mentioned, Hanns Inlet was not to be compared with Jervis Bay. However, things worked out reasonably well and the survivors in Flinders year graduated at the end of 1930.

It had been the practice for many years for the Governor General to take the salute at the graduation parade. In other years there had been Lord Stonehaven and Sir Isaac Isaacs. Lord Somers, the Governor of Victoria was acting Governor-General in late 1930 and he took the salute at our graduation. On graduation those cadets who had been cadet-captains were presented with a silver cigarette case. With the changed views on smoking I do not suppose that cadet-captains of today would get cigarette cases. I admired mine greatly.

I have used the expression "the survivors of the Flinders Year". There had been some wastage, but nothing abnormal. We had an addition in our fourth year, one Bill Langford who had come down a year. The outstanding cadet in our term was Peter Hancox who was lost in enemy action in March 1942. He was a very good all round sportsman and a chap of great charm.

Having graduated, I had a few weeks leave and then on the 20th January 1931 I joined the *Canberra* as a cadet midshipman. After graduating from the Naval College a cadet went to one of the cruisers; he started off as a cadet midshipman and after a couple of months was promoted to midshipman. I think that the time at sea as a cadet and later as a midshipman was probably one of the most valuable times in a young naval officer's career. Being a midshipman, the officers of the ship were very tolerant and they made allowances for mistakes, but just as importantly was the help that the young midshipman got from the sailors. He had no hesitation at all in asking sailors to explain something he could not understand. When, for example, a midshipman was the midshipman of the motor boat and going on liberty trips or taking officers ashore, the crew would be quite happy to talk to him. He could learn far more about sailors and life on the lower deck than any opportunity that ever came later.

Another thing that is gone, more's the pity, is the extent one had for playing organised games in those days. At that time almost every Wednesday afternoon was a make and mend, which meant that the ship's teams would be out playing. As a midshipman in the *Canberra* I was kept very active. Apart from being midshipman of the watch or midshipman of a motor boat or having divisional work to do, there was the writing up of the Midshipman's Journal (an obligatory task). Also there were daily physical training and flashing or semaphore exercises. Then there was a form called an E.190.

The E.190 was a booklet which started when one went to sea and ended when one finished one's midshipman time. It had various sections which had to be filled in by the appropriate officer when the required training was completed, such as torpedo, gunnery, navigation, star sights, engineering. These forms were inspected by the captain from time to time, so the requirements had to be met by the instructing officer and by the midshipmen. There was always plenty to do and activities on a typical day might include the following. The hands would turn to at 0600, and if a midshipman did not have PT he was expected to be at hands fall in. Later on there would be a communications exercise, that is, semaphore or morse, after that breakfast. Then you would have to be present when all watches turned to. There might be, on some occasions, divisions at 0900, otherwise the morning's work would continue with the midshipmen having organised instruction. Outside of formal instruction hours we would be midshipman of the watch or midshipman of a motorboat or pinnace. There was plenty to do and as I mentioned, the opportunity for organised sport was very good.

The gunroom where the midshipmen lived was an entirely separate mess from the wardroom and the sub-lieutenant, or the senior sub-lieutenant as the case may be, was the president of the gunroom mess and was called the "sub" of the gunroom. We had a completely different menu from that of the wardroom because the midshipmen preferred a cheaper rate of messing. Midshipmen were usually referred to as "snotties" so the officer in charge of the midshipmen was known as the "snotty's nurse".

Alcohol was allowed in the gunroom but a strict eye was kept on consumption. The president of the mess had to look at the Wine Book every week and the snotty's nurse would check the Wine Book every month. In any event, with the pay for midshipmen being so small there was not much chance of anyone going off the rails.

The sub of the gunroom in my time was firstly K. Fogarty, he later became an observer and was killed in action off Dakar. Fogarty was replaced as the sub by Rupert Robison.

The snotty's nurse was in charge of all midshipmen and had to make sure that their training, behaviour, appearance and so on were up to expectations. He inspected the snotty's journal every month and if any dereliction of duty appeared in any respect then extra duty or stoppage of leave was awarded. At that time in *Canberra* the snotty's nurse was Lieutenant T.A. Godsell who was the assistant torpedo officer.

Canberra was flagship and carried the commodore commanding the squadron. His name was Holbrook. He had previously been captain of *Canberra* and was a brother of the famous submariner. Captain Charles Farquhar Smith RAN was the captain. The annual cruises for *Canberra* and other ships in the squadron generally followed a pattern. It usually meant going down to Tasmania in February. The two events down there which particularly remain in one's mind were the Matron's Ball which the midshipmen were required to attend and escort the debutantes, and the other one was the squadron pulling regatta. The form was that the ship would go off during the week to Storm Bay or one of the bays near Hobart and do quite an amount of naval training and at the same time be working up for the regatta. Later on in the winter months, the ship normally went north; sometimes the program would include a voyage around Australia, other times to Suva and places like that. New Zealand was on the itinerary occasionally. Of course there was always the Melbourne Cup for some ships in November.

In May 1932 there were five midshipmen left of the 1927 Flinders Year entry and all five went in the Orient Liner RMS *Otranto* to the Mediterranean to join HMS *London*, the flagship of the First Cruiser Squadron.

We travelled first class in the *Otranto*; it was an experience none of us had ever had before and we enjoyed it immensely. The comfort, the high standard of the meals, being able to play all the deck games and having the swimming pool available made it a very comfortable and easy means of travel. Although we were first class passengers our midshipman's pay permitted very few luxuries but, with care, it was adequate. Life became much more difficult later. In 1932 we were on six shillings a day. However, after we had been in the Mediterranean Fleet for a time, owing to the Depression, our pay was reduced to five shillings a day. It was not very much.

We joined HMS *London* in Malta. It was quite an impressive sight to arrive at the Grand Harbour at Malta and to see at the various buoys, battleships, an aircraft carrier and cruisers; the Mediterranean Fleet was a most formidable sight. The captain of *London* was Captain Henry Harwood RN. Harwood who achieved fame later at the Battle of the River Plate. The commander's name was John Edelsten. He later became Admiral Sir John Edelsten.

London was a very smart ship and, being on foreign service, the ship's company was kept very stable, that is, there were very few draft changes during the commission. Not many people were married in those days or had their families in Malta. The ship's company was a very cohesive gathering of people right from the start of the commission until the ship paid off. That was an enormous benefit, as the officers and the sailors got to know each other very well. Unfortunately circumstances make it impossible for that sort of thing to happen today.

We did not find life as a midshipman in *London* much different to our time in *Canberra*. Looking back, I do not think any of the RN ships were more efficient than the Australian cruisers. This might have been because there were in the RAN only the two County Class cruisers, *Australia* and *Canberra*, and the

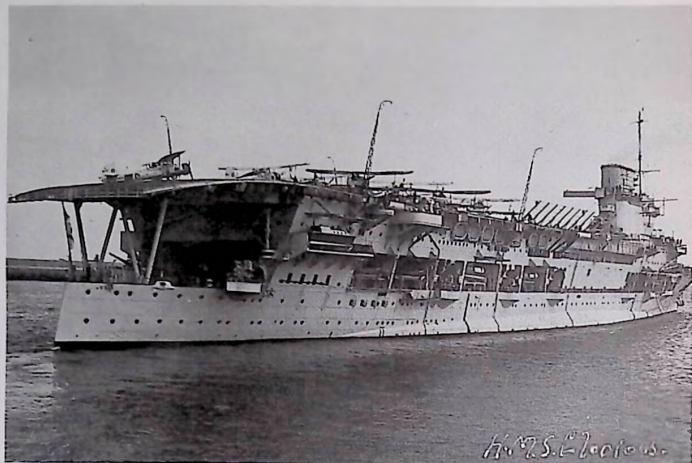


HMAS CANBERRA as Flagship of the Australian Squadron. A Seagull Mk III amphibian is embarked.

rivalry was very intense between them. An exciting period occurred during our time in the *London* when the midshipmen were sent to undergo a two week air course in HMS *Glorious*, the aircraft carrier with the Med Fleet at that time. This air course I found to be absolutely absorbing, and seeing the great advantages which carrier aircraft gave the fleet, plus the additional duties and their nature which Fleet Air Arm officers undertook, awakened an interest in me towards the Fleet Air Arm. The future increasing importance of aircraft became clear to me. It was not only that I saw the greater use of the aircraft in the commercial sphere, but also the RAF could be seen spreading its wings. It did not require much imagination to see that this expansion, which was going on in these other avenues, had quite an application to aircraft flying over the sea.

We did not always have an aircraft embarked in the *London*. On one occasion the *Sussex* (another ship in the squadron) did and the story went around the cruiser squadron that the *Sussex's* aircraft was doing some close circuits of the ship prior to landing. This so infuriated the captain of the *Sussex* that he sent his cabin hand for his shotgun and started taking a few shots at the aircraft. Fortunately, he didn't hit.

During our time in *London* we also were sent to do our destroyer training which was a requirement for midshipmen. The five of us were split for four months between two destroyers. The destroyers in those days in the Med Fleet were very smart indeed. Their normal berth was in Sliema Creek and the berths there consisted of head and stern buoys. To secure so that they were



HMS GLORIOUS. *"The carrier awakened an interest in me towards the Fleet Air Arm".*

facing seaward the destroyers had to make a stern board, that is they had to go up the creek stern first. There was always intense competition between the destroyer captains to see who could secure the stern and head buoys in the shortest time. To watch some of the ship handling in performing this manoeuvre was something wonderful to see, they were very good.

After we had completed our midshipman's time in the destroyers, we returned to HMS *London*. Our time as midshipmen was running out. In August 1933, we sat our seamanship board, which, if passed, cleared the way for promotion to acting sub lieutenant. The examination included ten subjects plus marks for one's midshipman's journal, and former service marks. These marks were for ability, keenness, and other qualities throughout one's midshipman's time. One of three classes of certificate was awarded, assuming one passed, depending on the total marks obtained. The board comprised a captain and two commanders. Both commanders, Kerr and Nicholson, achieved considerable fame in later years. All five Australians passed the seamanship board and I got a comfortable second class pass. The next move was to England to commence our sub lieutenant's courses.

III

In 1934 the world was still in the grip of the depression. Several of my year had been retrenched during the early 1930s and there was no such thing as a golden handshake in those days. They called for volunteers to leave and there was some response to it. In my year when we left Australia for service in the Mediterranean there were five of us and the five – Dowson, Langford, Knox, Hancox and Smith – remained intact as a group until completion of the sub lieutenant's courses. None of us was pressured to resign. As well as the depression there was another area of great concern at this time. The situation developing in Spain and the attempts of fascism in the Middle East were a worry to the world leaders.

The newly promoted acting sub lieutenants went from Malta to England in a merchantman and arrived at Tilbury. From there we went by train to London and had some leave, though not very much. Our appointment was to HMS *President*, for six months training at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich. One could not but be impressed by the very high standard of instruction and the majesty of the buildings at Greenwich. One of my greatest personal enjoyments was playing rugby for Greenwich throughout the season. Of course, there were wonderful opportunities to see the sights of London and I took full advantage of these. London in those days was very clean and orderly and in all respects a most imposing city.

The course at Greenwich comprised almost entirely academic subjects; English, history, maths, physics, science, French and so on. I remember that none of the Australians did very well in French. The instructor was an eminent French professor and one of his favourite methods of increasing our French vocabulary was to get us doing crossword puzzles. The Australians for the most part could not even write down the French clues, let alone sort out the answers. The history professor was Professor Geoffrey Callender who wrote the very good book "*Sea Kings of Britain*". Our group consisted of officers from most of the British and Dominion Navies although I do not remember there being any Canadians in our particular group. The great majority of the class comprised officers who had gone through Dartmouth at the same time as we had gone through Jervis Bay. They were the Anson term. Altogether I suppose there would be between 30 and 40 in the group.

Our pay was not very great and on being promoted from midshipmen to sub lieutenants we had to acquire a number of new uniforms and that inevitably meant the creation of a bill with Gieves, the naval outfitters. I think Gieves had been supplying uniforms from the beginning of the 19th century and it was rather rare for a naval officer not to get his uniforms from them. The firm had a time payment system and so an allotment at Gieves was a fairly usual thing. Gieves had shops in Bond Street in London, in Portsmouth and at Valetta in Malta. They were without any doubt very good tailors. I remember an example of the way that care was taken about the dress for a young officer in those days. When we were promoted to sub lieutenants one item you had to buy was a frock coat. Our frock coats were made and delivered while we were still at Greenwich, and to make quite sure that the sartorial standard was acceptable we had to

parade in front of the captain of Greenwich and he made the decision whether the fit was satisfactory. As a midshipman, dirks were provided by the Australian Government, but on promotion to sub lieutenant you had to buy your own sword from Gieves.

The pattern for training acting sub lieutenants in those days was a six month course at Greenwich then a series of courses at Portsmouth. These specialist courses could be undertaken in any order, but they all had to be completed. There was gunnery at HMS *Excellent*, Whale Island, torpedoes and electrics at HMS *Vernon* and navigation at Nav House. Finally we were accommodated at Portsmouth Barracks so that we could undergo the signal and the divisional courses.

The gunnery school was very much a spit and polish establishment and on occasions the sense of humour of the people in charge was not very great. I remember that when a group had finished their examinations a certain amount of liberty was permitted at the final guest night dinner. George Knox went down to the small farm they had at Whale Island and borrowed a draught horse and took it into the anteroom after dinner. That was not appreciated in any way whatsoever. I think they might have achieved better results had the instructors had a slightly different approach. I recall another incident. A sub lieutenant under training was detailed off to be officer of the guard for divisions each morning. It was my turn and I was getting ready with the guard to march down to the parade ground. I was wearing my sword and it was hanging down by my side as I was putting on my gloves. Over the ground came a very stentorian voice from an instructor. This gunnery lieutenant subsequently became a full admiral. "Officer of the Guard, what do you think you are, a wretched paymaster?" My apologies to the Supply Branch.

We underwent all the courses I have mentioned and at the end of 1934 our group of five returned to Australia in the Orient Liner RMS *Oronsay*. After our time in the Med Fleet and on sub's courses we enjoyed this trip back to Australia to the full. On reflection, I suppose I might have worked a bit harder during sub's courses and got better results, but this was my first visit to England and I found it completely fascinating.

After our return to Australia in early 1935 I had some leave and then joined HMAS *Camberra* with the duties of sub of the gunroom. Life was very different then to service life today and we were kept very busy. Hands turned to at 0600 and you were expected to be present. The wardroom had formal dinners each weeknight which involved wearing mess undress with stiff shirts. The officers of the watch in harbour wore frock coat and sword belt. At Sunday divisions all officers wore frock coat with swords. However there were plenty of opportunities for games, and in those days there was a make and mend practically every Wednesday afternoon. Relationships between officers and sailors were more formal than in later years. Time at sea was not as great and the increased harbour time meant that the ship's appearance was undoubtedly very smart at all times. I recall that at one time the ships' sides of both the *Australia* and the *Camberra* were painted not in ordinary paint but in enamel and you can well guess at the results. An enamel ship's side was absolutely dazzling.

The captain of *Canberra* was Captain H.T.C. Walker RN. He later became Admiral Sir Harold Walker. He had lost the bottom part of his right arm in action and as he was naturally right handed, his writing with his left hand was almost indecipherable. He was a fine Captain with high standards.

As well as being sub of the gunroom I was also training for my watchkeeping ticket. The midshipmen in the gunroom gave me no trouble. There was David Stevenson, later CNS, and some of his term. It all seemed to go on an even keel. There was also a gunroom in the *Australia* at this time and there was always great rivalry between the gunrooms as there was between the ships.

There was one unusual occurrence while I was sub of the gunroom. This was the award of the King's Medal. The Governor General, who was then Sir Isaac Isaacs, was to come on board *Canberra* and the midshipmen from both *Canberra* and *Australia* were to parade on the quarterdeck for the presentation of the medal. Prior to falling in on the quarterdeck all the midshipmen were down in the *Canberra's* gunroom. Just before it was time to go up to the quarterdeck word was received that the Governor General might possibly come down to the gunroom after the presentation. The gunroom was in a pretty untidy state and so all hands turned to and in a matter of minutes the place was presentable. Unfortunately, in the squaring off that had to be done, the cap of Midshipman Stuart St Vincent Welsh, who was to receive the King's Medal, got stowed away and when it was time to muster for the presentation he could not find his cap. Nobody else could either. So it meant that somebody had to be a substitute for the presentation and Midshipman Clive Hudson was chosen. All seemed to be going satisfactorily but unfortunately the military secretary to the Governor General, then Captain (later Rear Admiral Sir Leighton) Bracegirdle RAN knew Midshipman Hudson. He asked some questions which forced us to reveal the whole plot. In a way it was all very amusing although a lot of people didn't think so at the time. The snotty's nurse on *Canberra* asked me if I thought it was some plot to stop St Vincent Welsh from getting the medal. It was nothing like that. It just happened in the rush and flurry to square off the gunroom. Welsh got his medal eventually. A little later the incident formed the basis of a story in the Strand magazine.

I would not like to give the impression that it was all scrubbing and polishing in harbour with little regard for professional training at sea. When HMAS *Australia* was in the Mediterranean in 1935-36 she, and later on the other two RAN cruisers who joined up with the Med Fleet, achieved very fine records. In the case of *Australia*, she was a member of the First Cruiser Squadron and there were a considerable number of ships in this squadron at Alexandria. This was at the time of the Italian invasion into Ethiopia and of course at the other end of the Mediterranean there was the Spanish Civil War. Pulling regattas were regarded throughout the Fleet as something very worthwhile and if you could win the Cock at a pulling regatta your ship was rather special. The *Australia* was in the Mediterranean for two of the cruiser squadron pulling regattas and she won the regatta on both occasions. She was a very fine ship.



Sub Lieutenant Smith onboard HMAS CANBERRA (1935)..

In early 1936 I was appointed to HMAS *Australia* which as mentioned was serving in the Mediterranean. I had to take a draft from Sydney to Alexandria to join the ship. The draft of which I was in charge consisted of about twenty sailors of various branches. We embarked in the passenger liner *Esperance Bay* in Sydney and sailed via the Indian Ocean and Suez Canal to Port Said, where we disembarked and proceeded by train to Alexandria. The sailors became very popular with the rest of the passengers and everybody had a very happy trip.

I joined *Australia* about the beginning of March and about mid-March I shipped my second stripe. The captain was Captain Forster, who earlier on had been captain of the Naval College. My duties in the *Australia* were the usual seaman officer's duties; divisional officer, officer of the watch and so on. I enjoyed my time there; it was very impressive to watch this very big Mediterranean Fleet operating at sea.

The *Australia* returned home later in 1936 and resumed the normal routine on the Australia Station. I had applied to do an observer's course as a pilot's course was not open to RAN officers at that time. At the end of 1936 I was informed that I would be going to the UK early in 1937 to undergo the 'O' course. I left Australia in about April 1937 in RMS *Maloja* and arrived in England at a most exciting time with the build up to the coronation year.

IV

Perhaps it would be appropriate to talk about the observer/pilot situation in the RAN at that time. From the end of World War I until 1947 the organisation of naval aviation in the RAN was unsatisfactory. The Air Force never wanted the Navy to have a Fleet Air Arm. Operations were based to a degree on the type of organisation that existed in World War I in the Royal Naval Air Service at one stage and in the Royal Naval Fleet Air Arm in later years. There appeared to be a certain amount of lethargy on the part of some senior RAN officers towards having a well organised Fleet Air Arm and the naval involvement in the organisation passed through several changes. At one stage some RAN officers did a flying course at Point Cook, but none of them ever remained as pilots for long. Perhaps the most notable one was a chap by the name of Jeff Hall who, I was told, said that he would fly out from England to Australia and he would do it in six weeks. I'm not quite sure, but he may be the only person among the pioneers who took the time flying from England to Australia that he said he would. The scheme did not last for very long. Some naval officers were trained to be observers because of an arrangement, reached between the Naval Board and the Air Board, that the Air Force would provide the pilots and the maintenance people and the Navy would provide the observers and later on the air gunners. The RAN Air Arm was something that never seemed to achieve any great enthusiasm from the Naval Board of those years. So in the '30s, if you wanted to specialise in naval flying, you became an observer.

The RAN had HMAS *Albatross* in the early '30s and she had amphibian aircraft, an early type of Seagull. It probably seemed suitable at the time, but although *Albatross* was a seaplane carrier, her aircraft were not catapulted off, they had to be hoisted over the side by crane and recovered by crane after they had done their flying. She operated rarely with other units of the fleet and always seemed to be an outsider.

In the 1930s there were principally four types of aircraft in the RN Fleet Air Arm. There was a small single seat biplane fighter called a Flycatcher, and there was a two seater biplane called an Osprey. The Swordfish was still coming into service in 1937. It was replacing two aircraft. One was the Fairy 3F and the other one was called a Ripon. The fourth type was an amphibian, the Walrus or the Seagull which were allocated to cruisers and were catapulted from the ship. There was an Osprey in the fighter squadron in the *Glorious* when I joined the ship in 1938 after my observer's course. The observer had to operate the radio and do the navigation, but the navigation was never very complicated because the little Ospreys and Flycatchers had a very limited range.

The Swordfish had a crew of three, the pilot, the observer and the air gunner. The pilot's duties were obvious. The air gunner fired a Lewis gun covering from each beam through the stern when necessary, however his principal duty was operating the radio set. The observer was the jack of all the other trades carried out in this carrier-borne aircraft. He was the navigator and later on when radar sets were fitted he was also the radar operator. The Swordfish was supposed to be capable of high level bombing. It could stagger up to 10,000 feet and this was the maximum height for high level bombing. The observer was the bomb aimer. He was kept busy. Later on, some Swordfish had long range tanks fitted. The long range tank completely filled up the space in the rear cockpit that was normally occupied by the observer so the air gunner was left out of the team and the observer had the radio to operate as well. This made him even busier.

The observers' course was about seven months and for that time we were borne on the books of HMS *Excellent* but accommodated at RAF Lee on Solent. All our flying was done from Lee on Solent and our ground instruction was done there. There were nine people on my course and the nine included two RAF officers. The reason for this is not clear as the RAF had no particular type of aircraft in which a person trained for naval observer's duties could be usefully employed. It was a most interesting course but it had its ups and downs. Our early flights from Lee on Solent were done in an aircraft called a Shark which was being superseded by the Swordfish. Of the first three flights that I did two ended in forced landings owing to oil trouble so that did not give one great confidence regarding naval aviation material. However the Swordfish was quite different, it was a wonderful aircraft.

I mentioned that 1937 was the coronation year for King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. In 1937 the world depression had all but disappeared. The sun was shining again and things were much better. There was a large naval review at Spithead at which many naval vessels of other nations were present. Another chap and I were lucky enough to get some good seats in Hyde Park to

watch the coronation procession and an unforgettable memory was that in the procession were the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty in naval full dress on horseback, a very versatile service.

On completion of the observers' course I was appointed to HMS *Victory* for a few weeks in a holding billet to cover the period between the end of the observers' course and taking up an appointment in HMS *Glorious* which was finishing a refit in Portsmouth dockyard. After a fairly short workup off Portsmouth, *Glorious* proceeded to the Mediterranean at the beginning of 1938. The workup was quite short because the ship had left her squadrons at RAF Halfar at Malta. It was interesting that, in those days, observers were appointed to the carrier and attached to a squadron. This meant that observers were available for ship's duties except when required for flying or squadron ground training. When the squadrons were disembarked to Halfar, which was normally the case when the ship arrived at Malta, the observers remained onboard and visited Halfar as required according to the squadron training program. The system worked satisfactorily in the circumstances at the time and certainly enabled observers to remain familiar with their normal professional duties as opposed to specialist aviation duties. The RN pilots of that time held both naval and air force commissions and this was necessary as the squadron maintenance personnel were all RAF. This arrangement was not entirely satisfactory. I remember one case where an RN pilot was a lieutenant commander and had commanded a squadron, but the Air Board did not see fit to promote him beyond flying officer.

This unsatisfactory situation resulted from a compromise reached at the end of World War I when there was no great general enthusiasm in the Royal Navy to hold onto the Royal Naval Air Service which was then a force of considerable size. The RNAS comprised hundreds of aircraft and thousands of men. The Board of Admiralty reached a compromise with the Air Board, which for obvious reasons wanted to get control of the Royal Naval Air Service. The arrangement was that the RAF provided the majority of pilots for ship-borne aircraft and the RN provided some. The Royal Navy, recognising the nature of work involving naval ships and operations over the sea provided the observers and the air gunners. The RAF provided the maintenance personnel required.

The RAF personnel fitted in quite well. In the case of the RAF pilots, there were a few people who had gone through Cranwell, but the majority were short service commission officers. The RN pilots were all permanent commission. On the whole, it all worked smoothly. Occasionally there would be a RAF pilot who was a bit unhappy with his lot and he would say that if he had wanted to fly from ships he would have joined the Fleet Air Arm and not the RAF. But that happened very seldom.

Again the ground crews fitted in well. There were some very good people among them. I remember the flight sergeant in 825 squadron onboard *Glorious*. He was a magnificent chap. He was a great leader of men and a very knowledgeable rigger and fitter.

I was attached to 825 Squadron which was equipped with Swordfish. From the ship's point of view I was an assistant divisional officer and I was the ship's sports officer which involved quite a lot of work. In the following year, 1939, I was asked to be the Fleet water polo officer in addition to my ship's duties. Naturally this took a certain amount of time. Being the ship's sports officer and the fleet water polo officer meant that, unless there was some specific ship's duty to undertake, most afternoons I went ashore to watch some games that had been organised or to play in them. I had a very understanding Commander in *Glorious* by the name of Evans-Lombe who later became a successful Vice Admiral. I think he got a bit fed up with my continually asking for permission to go ashore early in connection with some game, so he told me that he never expected to see me on board in the afternoon unless I was on duty. That suited me very well.

Glorious was a converted battle cruiser and *Furious* was the same. The conversion resulted in the flightdeck ending well short of the stem of the ship and underneath the forward end of the flight deck there were two great hangar doors. When these were open there was sufficient space between the forward end of the hangar and the ship's stem for the little Flycatchers to take off. For the other aircraft, she had the flightdeck going right to the stern. The ship had well fitted hangars that extended to both sides of the ship. Later on many carriers had an open passage between the side of the hangar and the ship's side. In *Glorious* to go forward or aft on the upper deck you had to walk through the hangar.

Glorious was reasonably comfortable, and for her time she was adequate as a carrier. It was not until around about the end of 1938 when the new *Ark Royal* came along that one realised just how many improvements had been made in carrier design.

The Commanding Officer of *Glorious*, who took over at the beginning of 1938, was Captain A.L. St G. Lyster RN and he later became Vice Admiral Sir Lumley Lyster. For a period during World War II Admiral Lyster and his staff were responsible for carriers working up in the Clyde in Scotland. Admiral Lyster's predecessor as captain of the *Glorious* was Captain Fraser who later became Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fraser of North Cape. Admiral Lyster had strong views on the Fleet Air Arm. One evening in Alexandria I was with a group of officers on the quarterdeck talking to the Captain who said that if he had his time over again he would join the Fleet Air Arm. Somebody remarked that that seemed to be an unusual remark coming from an ex-gunnery officer. Captain Lyster's reply was "Yes, but I mean it". It was an insight into his enthusiasm for the operations of his ship and her aircraft.

Glorious carried two Swordfish squadrons and a fighter squadron. To amplify my earlier remarks – the Swordfish was a biplane, fabric covered wings and fuselage and this did make them look much more frail than they actually were. They had a fixed undercarriage and had open cockpits which could be very draughty on occasion. The Swordfish had a wonderful Pegasus radial engine and in action you could get several cylinders shot out and the engine would still keep running. The aircraft had a cruising speed of 90 knots.

At the beginning of 1939 the international situation was getting a bit touchy and 825 Squadron disembarked from *Glorious* at Alexandria and we went to an airfield called Dekheila which was about ten miles outside Alexandria. We did our usual training ashore and there were a couple of bonuses. I remember one morning at dawn we flew up the Nile from Alexandria to Cairo – it was one of the most beautiful flights I have ever done in an aircraft. While we were disembarked it was not terribly far from the airfield to the sporting club at Alexandria and so there was swimming, squash, tennis, all readily available. It was a very pleasant disembarked period. Incidentally, Alexandria Harbour really comprises two harbours, the inner and the outer. The inner is not very big, but the outer harbour is quite sizeable and it could accommodate quite a number of ships at moorings.

At the time there was a feeling of international unrest resulting from the cessation of the Spanish Civil War and the so called peace in Ethiopia. The Italians were building up their Services with Mussolini becoming increasingly bellicose in his speeches. At the western end of the Mediterranean it had become known that the Germans had used the Spanish Civil War as a means of testing out some of their weapons of war, and of course Hitler was rampaging. So there was a feeling of unease. In 1937, coronation year, the feeling had been that all was reasonably right; but times were changing. One had the feeling that war was not really imminent but there was this feeling of disquiet; this feeling that things were going to happen.

Of course, not everyone accepted that war was inevitable. Some people really did believe that perhaps Chamberlain and others could avert a war. But I think the feeling in the British Services at the beginning of 1939 was that a war was likely to happen.

I left *Glorious* in August 1939 as the Naval Board had appointed me to a meteorological course in England to be followed by my return to Australia. I went from Port Said to London in a P&O ship and arrived at Tilbury dock on 3 September 1939. I reported to Australia House where I was told to report to RN Officers' Appointments at the Admiralty. I went there and that evening I was in a train going north to Scotland and onto Scapa Flow to join 821 Squadron in *Ark Royal*. So no Met course, no return to Australia, but off to war in the *Ark Royal*.

V

I think the declaration of war was for many people a feeling of relief. They had seen what happened in Czechoslovakia and by the 3rd September the Germans had gone into Poland. A large part of the relief was probably due to the fact that the uncertainty had gone. For those who had gone through World War I it must have been a frightful feeling that they were going to go through it all again – but it seemed to be inevitable and unavoidable.

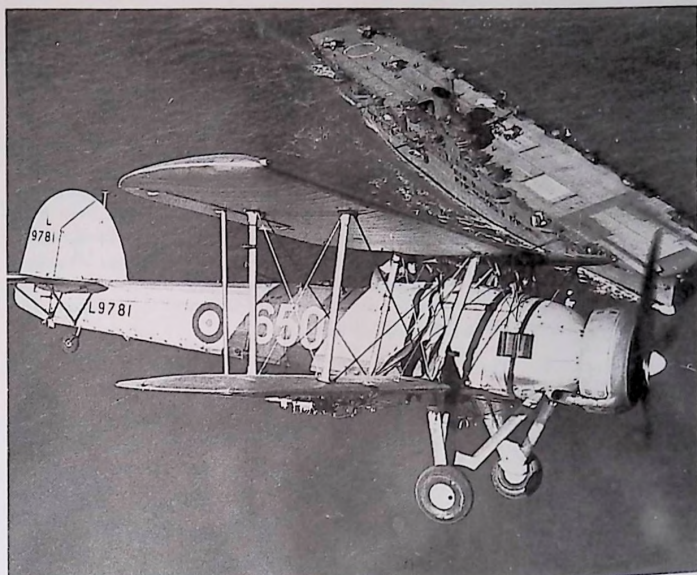
The period from early September 1939 was relatively quiet. Shortly after I joined *Ark Royal* the Home Fleet carried out a sortie towards the Skagerrak, but apart from being bombed unsuccessfully, nothing happened. There were no German ships in the vicinity. A little later the *Ark Royal* was dispatched to the South Atlantic with the battle cruiser *Renown* in company. These two ships were to form yet another force to take part in the hunt for the German *Graf Spee*. The *Ark Royal's* aircraft flew quite a lot but had no success in finding the German ship and eventually Commodore Harwood's cruisers chased her into the River Plate and that led to the end of the *Graf Spee*. The *Ark Royal* during this search was based on Freetown, a place which had very little to recommend it. After the *Graf Spee* episode *Ark Royal* returned to Portsmouth for a short refit and then joined the Home Fleet at Scapa Flow. 821 Squadron was disembarked from *Ark Royal* because of the German invasion into Norway and 821's space in the *Ark Royal* was required for a Skua (fighter and dive bomber) squadron. 821 moved to a place called Evanton which was alongside Cromarty Firth. The squadron was only there for a very short time before moving north to the naval air station at Hatston in the Orkneys.

Prior to the outbreak of war there had been extensive changes in the organisation of the Fleet Air Arm. At the beginning of 1939 complete control of the Fleet Air Arm was being transferred to the Admiralty. It was a good thing that this transfer occurred, but it was a most unfortunate time because it meant that the RN Fleet Air Arm had to continue with aircraft of limited capability such as the Swordfish and unsuitable fighters. The RN Fleet Air Arm did not really get the aircraft it deserved until American types such as the Wildcats, Corsairs and Avengers were made available. Prior to these American aircraft becoming available the RN Fleet Air Arm achieved many great things by sheer courage and determination.

Another problem the RN had when it took complete control of the Fleet Air Arm was availability of pilots. Some RAF pilots changed over and just before the beginning of the war came the introduction of the RN (A) Branch as it was called, the short service naval fleet air arm aircrew scheme and when the war began came the introduction of the RNVR(A). The brackets signified that there was an A inside the curl on the top rank stripe which meant that you were in the Fleet Air Arm. So the FAA managed to get by with the introduction of the RN(A) and the RNVR(A) categories.

As earlier stated, 821 Squadron moved to Naval Air Station Hatston in the Orkneys and the main task was anti-submarine patrols day and night. The purpose of these patrols was to force U boats to travel further north in the North Sea before altering course to the west to get into the Atlantic, and also to protect the waters around the north of Scotland, the Orkneys and the Shetlands.

An unexpected task arose when information was received that the German battlecruiser *Scharnhorst* with a sizeable screen was sailing south down the Norwegian coast and 821 aircraft were ordered to attack. We had six Swordfish available with long-range tanks fitted and this meant that we had to leave the air gunner behind and this gave the observer some extra work to do. The Force was under my command and we flew across the North Sea and then



A Swordfish torpedo bomber overflies HMS ARK ROYAL (1940).

turned north off the Norwegian Coast. A little later we sighted the German Force. The Swordfish carried out a torpedo attack but no hits were scored. We lost two aircraft and then turned for home. On reflection such a small force had little chance of much success against opposition of the size that we faced. We did not have sufficient fuel to return direct to the Orkneys so we flew to the Shetlands which were nearer and fuelled there before returning to Hatston.

The attack on *Scharnhorst* was a rather frightening experience but on the other hand in a situation like that there is no option and you have to press on. I think that that probably sums it up. It is very alarming when you are on a committed course heading towards the target. You are very low over the water because of the limitations as to the height you can drop a torpedo so that it will run and until you get within a range where you can drop the torpedo and then get out of it, you are in some respects a sitting duck. That does not make life very pleasant.

Later on the senior pilot and I each received a Mention-in-Despatches for the operation but it was a great pity we could not have scored some hits.

I next applied to transfer to a Fulmar fighter squadron and in August 1940 I was appointed to HMS *Raven*, a naval air station at Eastleigh, a short distance from Southampton. I joined 760 Squadron to await the formation of 807 Squadron. 760 Squadron was a second line squadron formed to let aircrew keep their hands at flying while they were awaiting an appointment to a front-line squadron. In September I went to London for weekend leave and on the Saturday night when I returned to my hotel the manager said that there had been a message that I was to return to Eastleigh immediately. Bombing had stopped any trains down to Southampton, but I was fortunate enough to get a taxi who was willing to drive me to the air station, a distance of some 85 miles. In due course, I submitted a travelling claim and after a time the Admiralty ruled that it was an officer's responsibility to provide his own means of transport when returning from leave, emergency or not. As a matter of interest, 760 Squadron was never used in the Battle of Britain.

Towards the end of September 1940, 807 Squadron formed at a naval air station at Worthy Down near Winchester. The aircrew were a mixture of regulars, (A) branch and RNVR(A). The workup continued without any major catastrophes, however in November, one Fulmar, the Squadron CO, myself and some maintenance sailors proceeded to Belfast. The plan was that we should embark in HMS *Pegasus*, formerly the *Ark Royal*. She was of merchant ship design and had been used pre-war for catapult trials. The plan was that the ship would sail with a westbound Atlantic convoy and then change to an east bound convoy with the duty of protecting the convoy against any bombing attacks by the large German Fockler Wolf Condor aircraft. We did the first sortie and all was quiet.

Another pilot and observer took over and while their convoy was at sea a Condor did appear. The Fulmar was quickly manned, engines started and the aircraft was run back on the catapult. Then the order to fire the catapult was given but nothing happened because no one had put a cordite charge in the catapult firing chamber. In the meantime 807 Squadron had moved to HMS *Heron*, a naval air station at Yeovilton, to complete the workup.

Early in 1941, 807 Squadron was ordered to embark in the carrier *Furious*. The purpose was for the ship to take the squadron to Lagos where the aircraft would disembark and carry out searches for German raiders. This lasted about three weeks. We saw no raiders and an annoying happening for me was that despite taking quinine, etcetera I caught malaria and was not able to get rid of it for several years. The squadron re-embarked in *Furious* for passage to Gibraltar, where it transferred to the *Ark Royal* which was part of Force H.

The Fairey Fulmar was a two seat fighter aircraft with .303 guns in the wings. It had no great speed and it was not very manoeuvrable. This goes back to the unsatisfactory position regarding the higher organisation of the Fleet Air Arm a few years earlier and the resulting ill effect it had on the type of aircraft which were provided. The Fulmar was not a good fighter aircraft. When the Spitfire was converted for use on carriers it started off with a certain disadvantage in that the propeller blades were too long and when the aircraft's arrester hook caught in an arrester wire it would tip the aircraft forward over its

under-carriage and quite often the propeller blade tips would knock the flight deck. Once the propeller was modified, the Seafire became a very adequate carrier aircraft but it had never really been designed as such and therefore was not in the same class as an aircraft like the American Corsair. The aircraft direction facilities we had in those days were interesting. *Ark Royal* had no air warning radar and so fighter direction was achieved by having in company a cruiser which did have such radar. The cruiser would pass any hostile aircraft detections by radio to the carrier, where a course to close the enemy, height to fly at and enemy's course and speed were estimated and passed to the fighters. Naturally there was room for error and it generally proved worthwhile to keep your own rough plot in the aircraft of where you were.

There was a major excitement in May 1941 when a large convoy was to be escorted to Malta which was suffering severe privations at the time. The general plan was that the battle ships, cruisers and carrier would escort the convoy to the vicinity of Cape Bon leaving the escorting destroyers to continue on from there. I was flying combat air patrol with Lieutenant Nigel Hallet when we were ordered to attack a force of enemy bombers heading for the convoy. Our Fulmar suffered quite a lot of damage and it was necessary to ditch. The destroyer *Cossack*, which was one of the screen, picked us up and we heard later that some of the *Cossack* sailors were all for dealing harshly with us as, owing to our recently acquired sun tan, they thought we were Italians. So Hallet and I remained in the *Cossack* until the ship reached Malta with the remains of the convoy. We spent a few days at Halfar as there was nothing for us to do on the destroyer. We rejoined *Cossack* for the run back to Gibraltar.

The technique for ditching an aircraft was to work out the best direction to land having regard to both the swell and the wind direction. You then made your approach as close to the stall as you could, still keeping control of the aircraft, and let the aircraft settle down gently making sure that you were in a nose up position. Having achieved a satisfactory ditching you released the rubber dinghy which was self-inflatable and climbed into it and waited to be picked up. One of the nuisances we encountered was that while the aircraft was descending a number of ships on our own side fired anti-aircraft guns at us. Aircraft recognition was not very good in some ships.

Shortly after returning to Gibraltar, *Ark Royal* was engaged as part of the force in the hunt for *Bismarck*. It was one of *Ark Royal's* Swordfish that fired a torpedo that hit just forward of the rudder of *Bismarck* and limited her manoeuvrability, thus enabling the rest of the British force to close in.

Just prior to the successful torpedo attack on *Bismarck* a great friend of mine, Jim Stewart-Moore, led his squadron in very bad weather and by mistake attacked HMS *Sheffield*. Luckily no one was injured and no damage done. Fortunately there was no requirement for *Ark Royal's* fighters to take to the air during the *Bismarck* action which was just as well as the sea conditions were very marginal for operating fighters.

There was another excitement in September 1941, another convoy to be escorted to Malta. The procedure was similar to that for the May convoy even



A Fulmar fighter from 807 Squadron taking off from HMS ARK ROYAL.

to the fact that the Fulmar in which I was flying with the Squadron CO Lieutenant Commander Sholto-Douglas was shot down whilst attacking enemy bombers. A destroyer picked us up but this time we were transferred back to the *Ark Royal* without visiting Malta. In November 1941 Force H had to escort a carrier which was ferrying Spitfires to Malta. The plan was that when the carrier was within aircraft range of Malta the Spitfires would take off to fly to the island and the Force would reverse course. All went according to plan until the *Ark Royal* was about 30 miles east of Gibraltar where she was torpedoed and this was the end of a very gallant ship. There was nothing dramatic about leaving the *Ark*, a destroyer came along side and getting aboard was no problem. At the end of 1941 I was awarded a DSC for service in 807 Squadron. It was an interesting thing that a few weeks before the *Ark Royal* was torpedoed, I had been transferred to 825 Squadron thus returning to the Squadron I had served in when I had joined the *Glorious* in 1938.

When the *Ark Royal's* ship's company arrived back in the UK, 825 Squadron was ordered to reform under the previous CO, Lieutenant Commander Eugene Esmonde, and he invited me to join the squadron as the senior observer again. However, Australia House had received instructions for me to return to Australia and so 825 Squadron was not for me. This was extremely fortunate for me because 825 Squadron attacked the *Scharnhorst*,

Gneisenau and *Prinz Eugen* in their dash up the Channel and Esmonde, with whom I normally flew, received a posthumous VC. In fact 13 out of the 18 aircrew were killed in that attack.

VI

In December 1941, I was on my way back from the UK in a merchant ship when Japan entered the war. Before then I had been in the Mediterranean and for a few weeks in the UK so that I really was not in the Pacific picture. My understanding is that it was appreciated in various quarters that there was a very good chance of Japan entering the war. You have to remember the situation in the UK at that time. At the end of 1941 the British were being desperately pressed in Britain and Africa. They had to plan for a second front at some time, it could not be put off for ever. In the meantime there was a question of priorities. So I think that probably in the UK at that time there was not the same significance or importance given to the possibility of Japan beginning a large war in the Pacific as was felt in Australia and other countries.

During the voyage home I had time to reflect on some of the naval actions that had occurred in the Atlantic and Mediterranean during 1940 and 1941. Firstly the sinking of HMS *Hood*. She was sunk north west of the Shetlands whilst on patrol to stop German ships which were expected to try and break out of the North Sea into the Atlantic. The sinking of *Hood* caused much feeling at the time. She was a famous ship but I think that after a while it became accepted by a number of people that she was relatively an old ship and had not got the modern damage control that the later large warships had. It was undoubtedly a great shock although perhaps the loss of the *Hood* was balanced to some degree by the sinking of the *Bismarck*.

Another significant action and one that meant a lot to the Fleet Air Arm was the raid on Taranto. *Ark Royal* was in Force H based at Gibraltar at the western end of the Mediterranean while *Illustrious* was at Alexandria at the eastern end, so it was the squadrons from *Illustrious* that carried out the attack. It was not only a very courageous but also a very astute move to attack the Italian Fleet at Taranto. The defence was formidable. Taranto, as well as having a number of the Italian ships with their anti-aircraft guns, had many anti-aircraft guns defending the harbour. There were also quite a number of barrage balloons so it was a hazardous task, particularly when one remembers that the aircraft had to come down quite low to release their weapons and then get out of the maelstrom as best they could. I think that the attack probably established more than anything else one of the real values of a Fleet Air Arm. The Japanese and the Americans were very interested in the tactics which were employed at Taranto.

When I arrived back in Australia in February 1942, I had been away from home for over five years and in that time had spent a certain amount of time in the United Kingdom under wartime conditions. I had learnt to appreciate the rationing system and it was quite a severe system that was in force. There was also the black-out which was very rigidly enforced. When I arrived back in Sydney I was amazed that it seemed to be 'business as usual'.

Things tightened up later on but there was an enormous difference between the life in war-time London and war-time Sydney. The German bombing had not made things any easier at all in England of course but I was quite surprised at the difference between the standard of life in the two countries. In December 1941 so many things associated with war seemed so many thousands of miles away, so remote.

The loss of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, followed closely by the fall of Singapore, had a significant effect on the Australian population. There was naturally enough a feeling of being let down. The Australian public had been told that Singapore was impregnable and yet the Japanese within a very short time had swept down through Malaya and had taken Singapore. The loss of the two great war ships came as a great shock to the RN and the public. By and large up to that time the RN had had a hard but fairly successful war; it had had a number of losses but in the main it remained on top. The *Ark Royal* was destined for the East had she not been sunk and it is interesting conjecture as to what might have been the position had the *Ark Royal* been in company. The sinkings of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* did upset peoples confidence and then there were the various reports made by Australian Army officers regarding the quality of the defence of Singapore and that did not help at all. I think that the first ray of brightness that came along was the Battle of the Coral Sea.

Things had not been going all that well for the RAN either. There was the loss of HMAS *Perth* on 1 March 1942 and one of my term, Peter Hancox, went down with the ship. He was Gunnery Officer and an outstanding officer. I do not want to be too critical in any way, but having returned from the European theatre where the war was being fought in a highly professional manner by both sides, in the Pacific theatre it seemed to me that there were a lot of lessons to be learnt and, in mentioning the Battle of Savo Island I make the point that some of the lessons learnt from the action might have been learnt before the action took place.

The loss of the *Sydney* on 19 November 1941 was another blow. It does not seem that a satisfactory solution has yet been found. There is a theory about her being sunk by a Japanese submarine, but I do not think there is anything at all in that. Perhaps it was just an error of judgement by the Captain in coming close to the *Kormoran* and to have very little way on his ship which made her rather a sitting duck. There appeared to be no need for him to employ the tactics which he did but it is easy to be wise after the event and none of us really know what the circumstances were at the time.

At the end of February 1942 after taking some leave, I was appointed to the *Australia*, additional for liaison duties in the American cruiser USS *Chicago*. This was quite an interesting experience and I enjoyed it greatly. I was made very welcome by the *Chicago*'s ship's company and it was a very good opportunity for me to become familiar with the USN's different approaches to many professional matters.

All was going along very well as far as I was concerned until a replacement observer was required for the *Canberra*'s Seagull aircraft. I left *Chicago* and joined *Canberra* in Sydney, just in time for the attack by the

Japanese midget submarines in May of 1942. *Canberra* was at number one buoy in Farm Cove and it was the Captain's decision for the ship to remain completely darkened while the attack was going on. It was a very wise move in the situation pertaining at that time. Shortly afterwards *Canberra* sailed from Brisbane to Auckland to form part of the covering force for the US marines landing at Guadalcanal, and subsequently she became a casualty in the Battle of Savo Island on 9 August 1941. I have nothing to add to the many accounts which have been written and I believe that a number of very useful, although expensive, lessons were learnt from the action.

My next appointment was rather unusual. It was on 14 September 1942 to HMAS *Assault* which had only very recently been commissioned. *Assault* was to be a combined operations training establishment where the employment, handling of landing craft etc and the tactics of landing on the beaches were taught. At that early stage there was no proper landing craft available and so some very comfortable motor cruisers had been requisitioned. *Assault* was situated at Nelson Bay in Port Stephens on the Central Coast of New South Wales. Pending the construction of accommodation buildings and workshops ashore HMAS *Westralia* anchored in the bay and proved very useful pending the completion of the shore facilities. This rather idyllic existence ended in early December when I was appointed to *Penguin* to take charge of a draft and travel to England via New Zealand to join *Shropshire*, which the Admiralty had given to the Australian Naval Board to replace *Canberra*. We sailed as far as Auckland in the *Queen Mary* and then had to wait several days before sailing in the merchantman *Rmutaka* for the UK via the Panama Canal. It was a pleasant trip which included some days sight seeing in New York whilst we were waiting for a UK bound convoy. We arrived at Avonmouth in the West country and then travelled by rail to Chatham to join *Shropshire*.

VII

I had been appointed to *Shropshire* as the observer for her aircraft, but on arrival at Chatham I found that the catapult had been removed and replaced by a couple of Oerlikon mountings. As there was no requirement for an observer, I requested to be appointed to the RN Fleet Air Arm. This was approved and I joined the aircraft carrier HMS *Tracker* on 21 July 1943. I was appointed as Operations Officer in the rank of acting lieutenant commander. *Tracker* was one of the escort carriers more popularly known as Woolworth carriers; single screw, merchant ship hull, to which such items such as hangar, flight deck, catapult, arrester wires, radar and an island had been fitted. She had been built in Portland, Oregon USA and sailed to the UK to have some additional fittings before being operated as an RN carrier. She had a complement of nine aircraft which initially were Swordfish and Seafires. The latter were not good for operating from a small carrier and later both types were replaced by Avengers and Wildcats which were far more suitable.

For the remainder of the year *Tracker* formed part of Atlantic convoy escorts. We had no submarine kills. The nearest we got to that was the other way around when a torpedo just missed *Tracker* off Newfoundland. The weather was quite bad at the time, a nasty Atlantic gale, and we were far more concerned

that the aircraft did not break their lashings and get damaged than we were about the possibility of being torpedoed. In February 1944 *Tracker* sailed from Scapa Flow to form part of an escort for a convoy bound for Murmansk. The weather was atrocious and flying was very limited.

One of the worst problems was keeping the flight deck relatively free of ice so that aircraft could operate. There were not many merchant ships lost either going or returning and on the way home *Tracker's* aircraft possibly sank two U-boats. That was the end of my time in *Tracker* as I was appointed for air planning duties on the staff of the Flag Officer British Assault Area (FOBAA), for Operation NEPTUNE which was the naval part of Operation OVERLORD – the invasion of Normandy.

I joined FOBAA's staff in April 1944 and worked at St James' House in London. My task at that stage consisted principally of getting to know the NEPTUNE plan thoroughly and also those parts of the RAF plan which would concern the Royal Navy. There were a considerable number of meetings, single and interservice, to be attended. In early June the staff moved from London to Portsmouth and embarked on a cross channel steamer which was to be our temporary headquarters. Along with many other ships we were off Normandy in the early hours of 6 June 1944. Several days later the coast inshore in the British assault area had been cleared and the staff moved ashore where a suitable manor house had been requisitioned. The majority of the staff lived in tents in the garden and it was really quite pleasant. Quite an extraordinary thing happened in the early days of the campaign – our Army Liaison Officer had a jeep allocated to him and at that period it was possible to travel to a position not very far from the front line and have a first hand view of the tank battle.

As well as air planning, I was on the Duty Staff Officer's roster and altogether everything seemed to turn out quite well from the naval aspect. I had a close working arrangement with the RAF Group Captain in command of the nearby GCI and also with the Senior Air Staff Officer of the RAF 2nd Tactical Air Force. Both of these officers were extremely helpful if any aid was needed. The main naval requirement was the protection of shipping in the Channel and off the beaches.

In September 1944, I was recalled to England to work in the Admiralty assisting in the planing for the shore facilities required in Australia for those units of the RN Fleet Air Arm which were to be part of the British Pacific Fleet. This was preliminary to my joining the Vice Admiral(Q)'s staff in Melbourne for air planing duties. I perhaps should explain that the (Q) had been borrowed from the Army and covered naval logistics in all its aspects.

The planing time before and after Normandy provided the opportunity for me to meet, court and marry Miss Nanette Susan Harrison and for that reason alone I shall always be most thankful that the Normandy appointment came my way.

There was an electrical officer in the *Shropshire* in 1943 by the name Jim Baker, a Reserve officer and he knew an Australian in London by the name of Sidney Cotton to whom he introduced me. Nanette also knew Sidney Cotton



As Operations Officer onboard HMS TRACKER (1943).

and one day I met her at his flat. Sidney had a luxurious flat in Curzon Street overlooking Park Lane. Sidney Cotton was a most interesting person. In the 1920s and 1930s there was a piece of aircrew apparel in use called a Sidcot. It was a type of waterproofed overall and it was called the Sidcot because the inventor was Sidney Cotton. His people had a property on the Darling Downs. Sidney enlisted in the Royal Naval Air Service in the UK towards the end of World War I. After the war he continued flying and did quite a lot of survey work in Labrador and in Newfoundland. He was very much an independent individual in his way. He became quite wealthy and owned a Hudson aircraft. He was also he was a photographic enthusiast. Just before World War II began there was an air display at Templehoff aerodrome in Berlin and Sidney went over to it. Some German officers were admiring his aircraft and Sidney offered to take them for a flight around Berlin if they could get a clearance. The Germans got the clearance and off they went. Little did the German officers know that Sidney Cotton had a couple of cameras installed in his aircraft and as he was flying the German officers around Berlin, the cameras were busy. Another claim that Sidney had to fame was that he began the photographic reconnaissance unit in the RAF.

Nanette had been in the British WAAF but had been taken ill and had been discharged. She got a job with a solicitor in London. As I have mentioned we met at Sidney Cotton's and we saw more and more of each other. However in the end it was almost a record wedding for the short time that it took to plan and execute. We became engaged in September 1944 and then I was told the



Our Wedding Day.

Admiralty on 23rd October that I would be leaving for Australia in about ten days time. I phoned Nanette and asked her if we could get married the following Saturday. Quite apart from the wish of having the marriage ceremony I could see that after the war, if there was a problem about getting a passage between England and Australia, the wife of a Serviceman would have some priority and indeed that is the way it worked out. So we got married at five days notice had a weekend for a honeymoon and after being married for ten days I left the UK to travel to Australia. I did not see Nanette again until I went to England in late 1945 to flesh out the draft plan for the RAN Fleet Air Arm.

VIII

In November 1944 three RN Fleet Air Arm officers, who were destined for the staff of Flag Officer Naval Air Pacific (FONAP) in Sydney with myself as a fourth member, travelled across the Atlantic in the *Queen Elizabeth*. Then we travelled across the United States by train to San Francisco and finally on to Australia by means of various aircraft. VA(Q)'s headquarters was sited in Albert Park Melbourne. By agreement with the RAAF we were able to plan on using the airfields at Nowra and Schofields and the airstrip at Jervis Bay. One Mobile Naval Air Base (MONAB) which was named HMS *Nabington* was to be based at Nowra with the Jervis Bay strip as a satellite, while another MONAB, HMS *Nabarron* was to be based at Schofields. The RAN and the Commonwealth Department of Works were of the greatest help. So often it seemed that we were likely to run out of time to produce much needed requirements but the valuable help we received from Navy Office and the Department of Works was very substantial and assisted us enormously.

When VJ Day seemed to be in the offing the Director of Plans at Navy Office, Commander G.G.O. Gatacre, told me that they had been working on post-war plans for the RAN and these included two carriers, two carrier air groups plus the shore organisation and facilities required. I was asked to produce a draft plan. It could only be a first draft as so many details were not available and, in any event, well beyond the ability of one planner. The plan was drawn up and passed to Navy Office. The next thing that happened was that my appointment to VA(Q)'s staff ended on 20 October 1945. In a way this really was the first step towards the creation of the RAN Fleet Air Arm as we knew it from 1947 onwards. After leaving the staff of VA(Q) I was appointed to *Cerberus* additional for passage to the UK and to *Cerberus II* additional to date 27 October 1945. This time the passage was not made in any merchantman but in a Lancastrian aircraft and while it was only reasonably comfortable it was certainly quick. My return to London was made all the more enjoyable by the re-union with Nanette after being apart for twelve months.

The reason for my appointment to Australia House was to enable me to fill in as many gaps as possible in the draft plan. The Admiralty provided me with a desk in the Directorate of Air Organisation and Training and for the following year, during which I pestered very many people, everyone could not have been more helpful. The procedure we adopted was for me to send out periodical information to Navy Office and if my information was not clear or reasonably complete then I would be told and I would follow that up. It became apparent that the next step towards the formation of the RAN Fleet Air Arm was to form an air planning staff in Navy Office.

Towards the end of 1946 the Naval Board sought Admiralty agreement to the loan of three RN officers. There was to be an experienced Fleet Air Arm captain to head the staff, an Air Engineer officer and a Supply officer who had knowledge from an air stores user aspect. Later a civilian officer of the Admiralty Director of Stores who had considerable knowledge of air stores from the procurement and depot handling angles was also made available. The staff was to begin work in Melbourne in early 1947 and on 27 October 1946 I was appointed to *Cerberus* additional for Navy Office as the fourth member of this

planning staff. My tasks were dealing with organisation, personnel training, other than air maintenance personnel, and a host of other matters. Captain (later Vice Admiral Sir Arthur) Anstice, later Vice Admiral Sir Edmund Anstice, Commander(E) (later Admiral Sir Arthur) Turner who was an air engineer specialist, and Commander(S) B.J.J.P. Robinson were the RN officers made available.

There were two principal objectives for this naval aviation planning staff. One was to produce a plan for the creation of an RAN Fleet Air Arm and the other one was to have discussions with an RAAF team. The two teams were to produce a joint report for the Naval and Air Boards and then for submission to Cabinet. The report, in its essence was, if the Government should approve the RAN obtaining two aircraft carriers, which Service should provide the air component and the shore support? I think it would be fair to say that the RAAF generally was strongly against the RAN having a Fleet Air Arm. The leader of the RAAF team was Group-Captain (later Air Marshal Sir) Valston Hancock and his personal view was that he was not sure that Australia could afford aircraft carriers but if it could, then the air component should be provided by the Navy. His view was not a popular one with the Air Force.

In May 1947 the Chifley Government approved the formation of an RAN Fleet Air Arm and the provision of two carriers manned by the RAN. The First Naval Member, Admiral Sir Louis Hamilton, who was on loan from the RN, was a tremendous force in enabling the satisfactory outcome for the RAN. The Navy was very fortunate in the timing of the creation of this new arm of the RAN. A small group of RAN officers had qualified or were training as aircrew. A number of ex-RAAF, ex-RN, ex-RNZN aircrew were keen to join as were some of the ex-RN air maintenance personnel. Furthermore a sizeable number of RAN sailors were eager to transfer to a Fleet Air Arm category. Sea Fury and Firefly aircraft and spares were available. Two Majestic Class carriers could be bought within a reasonable time. Nowra and Schofield airfields could be used and perhaps most importantly the Admiralty was ready to provide whatever assistance it could. The naval air planning staff's task as such was completed. Captain Anstice joined the Naval Board as Fourth Naval member with the rank of Commodore, responsible for Fleet Air Arm matters. Commander Turner became the Director of Aircraft Maintenance and Repair and Commander Robinson became Director of Air Supply.

In November 1947 I was relieved as Director of Air Warfare Organisation and Training and was appointed to *Cerberus II* for the staff of the Naval Liaison Officer in London. I was to be Air Staff Officer and this involved a multitude of duties. We had to assemble the RAN air crews gathering for the formation of the Squadrons. We had RAN Engine Room Artificers converting to aircraft artificers at the Naval Air Station Arbroath in Scotland. We had RAN sailors converting to skilled air mechanics, air mechanics, aircraft handlers, safety equipment workers and so on and they were at various RN air stations scattered around the UK. I was the Australian Divisional Officer for all these personnel and it involved quite a lot of travelling in addition to my other work. In the meantime, in Australia, Nowra was preparing to commission as HMAS

Albatross and many other support organisations and facilities were coming into being. I was promoted to Commander in December 1947.

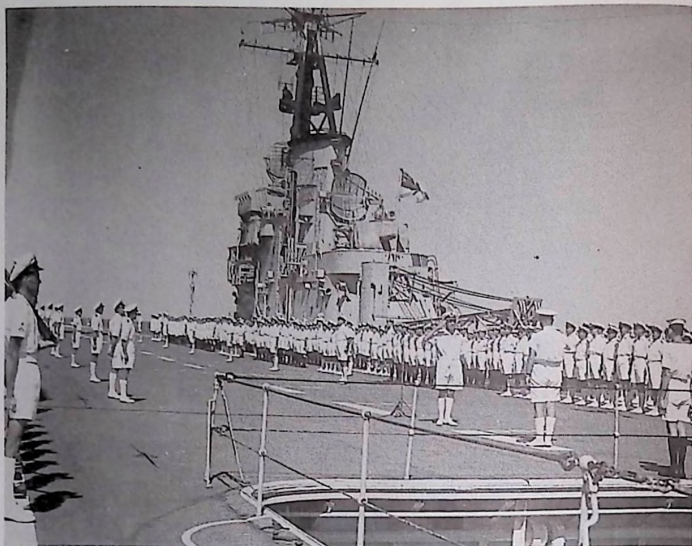
In 1948 one of the principal objectives was achieved with the commissioning of HMAS *Sydney*, with Captain (later Vice Admiral Sir Roy) Dowling in command. Throughout 1949 matters were beginning to settle into shape and in November I was informed that I was to join *Sydney* as Executive Officer on 9 January 1950. Incidentally, on being relieved at Australia House my duties were divided between an Air Crew Officer, an Air Engineer Officer and a civilian officer from the Directorate of Naval and Air Stores in order to deal with the rapidly expanding amount of business.

IX

As I have already mentioned I worked at the Admiralty throughout 1946, worked at Navy Office throughout 1947 and then at Australia House 1948-49. I returned to Australia at the end of 1949 with Nanette and our eldest son in RMS *Orion* and after a short leave period to settle in the family, joined *Sydney* as Executive Officer in January 1950 relieving Commander (later Rear Admiral) Becher. It was interesting that the Flag Officer Commanding HM Australian Fleet was Rear Admiral J.A.S. Eccles RN who had been the Executive Officer of *Ark Royal* when I was serving in that ship at the end of 1939 - early 1940. He was no stranger to carrier operations and later he became Admiral Sir John Eccles, Commander-in-Chief of the RN Home Fleet. Captain Dowling was still the captain of *Sydney* when I joined. She was an efficient aircraft carrier and I would say she was as smart as any of the RN carriers in which I had served.

Quite an amusing thing occurred in the early 1950s. It so happened that some ships including *Sydney* and the New Zealand cruiser *Bellona* were steaming towards Tasmania. During the fleet visit to Hobart a pulling regatta was to be held and *Bellona* had a whaler which they thought was something absolutely special. On the passage south down the New South Wales coast *Bellona* had the whaler on her quarter deck so they could apply some finishing touches. *Sydney* was in company and the task group was doing various exercises. One of these exercises was for the *Sydney*'s Sea Fury aircraft to carry out a rocket attack on a target being towed by *Bellona*. Unfortunately, as the Sea Fury formation was overflying the ships, a rocket detached from one of the aircraft and like a homing pigeon headed straight for the whaler on the *Bellona*'s quarter deck. Some people in the *Bellona* thought that the attack had been deliberate so that they would not do well in the pulling regatta but their feelings were assuaged to some extent when it was found that the pilot of the Sea Fury was a New Zealander.

In mid-1950 *Sydney* went to the UK to pick up the 21st Air Group. Captain D.H. Harries had taken over command and he was a first class captain. Many people did not really appreciate his qualities. He was a very shy man, but understood people far better than they realised and always had the well being of his ship in mind.



Reporting HMAS SYDNEY Divisions to Captain D.H. Harries RAN (1951).

In the first half of 1951 *Sydney* did the normal Australian station routine and then went to Korea in September. For the Korean War, three squadrons were embarked which tended to crowd the ship somewhat but all seemed to fall into a routine. The Air Group comprised mainly very experienced aircrew and they did particularly well. I think a great tribute must be paid to the Air Group Commander who was Lieutenant Commander (later Vice Admiral Sir) Michael Fell.

The usual pattern of operations was to sail from Kure, go to the west coast, do four days operations and then steam south to the tanker to replenish, go back again and do another four days, and then return to Kure. After a time the aircrew and all concerned seemed to get used to this pattern and it worked out quite satisfactorily. The winter weather in Korea was severe although it was not as bad as the winter weather on the Murmansk run. Typhoon Ruth was something extraordinary and we were very lucky to lose only one aircraft.

Everyone who served in *Sydney* during that first deployment to Korea will remember Typhoon Ruth. Normally the ship went into Kure for replenishment after operations on the west coast of Korea but on this occasion the ship went into Sasebo. The warning was given that there was a typhoon in the offing. As there were quite a number of ships in harbour Captain Harries

made the decision that he would prefer to get out to sea and combat the typhoon there rather than remain in Sasebo. By staying in harbour there was the chance that some ship might lose her moorings and drift down and damage *Sydney*. So we put to sea.

Two destroyers accompanied *Sydney* and it was quite an experience. Speaking from memory the flight deck of the *Sydney* was sixty feet above sea level and the seas were coming up level with the flight deck. *Sydney* had a small motor powered dinghy which was normally stowed in crutches on the starboard side midships level with the flight deck. One of the waves lifted the boat out of its crutches and it disappeared. One *Sea Fury* was lost. The lashings were not good enough, and it ended up in a gun sponson and had to be ditched. One of the continuing problems that I found was that, with the extremely high seas, the ship took a lot of water in the air intakes of the ventilation system. The intakes were flush with the side of the ship and a little way along the intake, there was an electric motor to circulate the air. There were a number of electrical fires from sea water entering the ventilation intakes and shorting out the fan motors. Some of the fans could be shut off, but some had to be kept going. Most of these electrical fires were no problem, but you could never be quite sure that one would not become dangerous.

I admired Captain Harries' technique for handling the ship in these very heavy seas. He took the sea very fine on the starboard bow so the waves would roll down the starboard side and he just kept sufficient speed on the ship to maintain steerage way. I think those tactics reduced damage to a minimum.

I remember that *Sydney* had experienced heavy weather when the ship was in the UK in 1950 picking up the Air Group. The squadrons had assembled at Arbroath on the east coast of Scotland and there was to be a short workup before we came back to Australia. The workup took place in the North Sea and all went well. From there the ship sailed around the north of Scotland past Cape Wrath and down the west coast before calling at Portsmouth and setting course for Australia. Going around Cape Wrath the ship encountered quite a severe Atlantic gale. On that occasion the captain put the stem of the ship into the sea. That did not work out very well as the force of the sea buckled part of the stem, but the technique used in Typhoon Ruth of taking the seas very fine on the starboard bow was very satisfactory. The two destroyers had a most unpleasant time in the mountainous seas.

We did our deployment in Korea and, as I mentioned earlier, the *Sydney* and particularly her air crew were very efficient. An example of that efficiency was that *Sydney* set a new record for the number of sorties flown in a certain period from a light fleet carrier in the Korean War. On our return from Korea we were given a tremendous reception including a march through Sydney. There is no comparison with the attitude then to that of many of the public during the Vietnam War. The great majority of the Australian public were right behind the Australian effort in the Korean War. It was an odd sort of war in a way – a United Nations war which was relatively restricted in its geographical area and was a long way away from Australian shores.

On 25 April 1952 I was appointed to *Albatross II* in charge of the advance party which was to take over RAAF Schofields and prepare it for commissioning as a Naval Air Station. Not only was it to be an air station it was also to be the location of the headquarters of Captain (Air) Australia. The air station side of the organisation was to include an aircraft repair yard. I was in charge of the advance party and my immediate superior was the Commanding Officer of *Albatross*, Captain George Beale DSO RN. It was a very interesting job. We had the Air Force winding down and we were winding up. *Albatross II* became HMAS *Nirimba* in 1952. It was an extraordinary job for me, the like of which I had never had any previous experience. So I was very pleasantly surprised when Captain Beale wrote on my flimsy "entirely to my satisfaction. This officer has considerable knowledge, ability, power of application and capacity for getting things done." This was very flattering in view of my complete lack of experience at taking over an establishment from another Service and starting up a naval air station. In December 1952 Captain Denis Sanderson DSC RN arrived to assume the appointment of both Captain (Air) Australia and Commanding Officer HMAS *Nirimba* and my appointment became Chief Staff Officer to Captain (Air) and Executive Officer of *Nirimba*. This continued until 21 July 1953 when my appointment to *Nirimba* was terminated and I joined Navy Office as the Director of Air Warfare Organisation and Training. It is pleasing to see how *Nirimba* has prospered over the years, so we must have given them a reasonably good beginning.

Two things happened at *Nirimba* not so very long after commissioning. One was that it was considered that NAS Nowra plus private contractors could cope with the aircraft repair yard side, so that was abolished. Later it was decided there should be only one carrier air group instead of two and this meant that there was really no flying task for *Nirimba*, merely ground training. These two changes made a very great difference to the task which *Nirimba* was required to carry out. Finally, with these reductions, the Captain (Air) structure became superfluous.

The Director of Air Warfare, Organisation and Training (DAWOT) worked for the Fourth Naval Member. Captain Anstice was the first Fourth Naval Member and he was succeeded by Captain Guy Willoughby. Captain Willoughby was first Commander (Flying) and then Commander (Air) when I was in 825 Squadron in the *Glorious* in 1938-39. Captain Willoughby was succeeded by Commodore Price and he was followed by Commodore Russell. Commodore Russell was the fourth naval member during my time as DAWOT.

My Deputy was Commander (later Rear Admiral) C.K. Roberts RN. He enjoyed his time in Australia so much that when he retired from the RN he and his family came out to live in Australia and they settled on the NSW south coast. The total staff would have been about five including myself.

Along with the decisions to cancel the aircraft repair yard and cut out a carrier air group, another important decision was that *Melbourne* should have a number of alterations made before being commissioned into the RAN. The angle deck, the mirror landing sight, a steam catapult and some other internal modifications were installed. This meant *Melbourne* was going to be behind



Greeting Captain George Beale (centre) on one of his visits to Schofields (1952).

schedule in arriving in Australia, however the Admiralty stepped in to the breach and lent the aircraft carrier *Vengeance* to the RAN. So we had *Vengeance* for a time and when *Melbourne* did commission in 1955, with only the one air group, there was no real requirement for *Sydney* as an aircraft carrier and so she became a training ship. During the Vietnam war she played a most useful role as a troop and equipment carrier.

The decisions to acquire Sea Venoms and Gannets as the replacement aircraft for the Sea Furies and Fireflies do not feature prominently in my memory. I think the reason was that the RAN's thinking had not swung as much towards American equipment as it did at a later stage and of course the RN were going to operate Gannets and Venoms. The transition from the Fireflies and Sea Furies worked out smoothly and in many ways it seemed to be a natural course to follow.

X

My next appointment was to HMAS *Quadrant*. If you passed your annual aircrew medical exam you still got flying pay even though you were captain of a ship. I mention this point as I was appointed to *Quadrant* in command and as Captain (F) of the First Frigate Squadron on 28 June 1955. I had been promoted to captain on 31 December 1953. The appointment as Fox 1, as it was commonly known, was very interesting in a way in that it was my first appointment away from the Fleet Air Arm for sixteen years, and furthermore it was my first appointment to a frigate or destroyer since I had done my four months training as a midshipman in 1933. Naturally I was rather apprehensive about just how well I could do the job and get along with the ship's company and also about my ability in such things as ship handling and practicing anti-submarine doctrine and many other matters. Happily, all went well. *Quadrant* was awarded the Duke of Gloucester Cup at the end of 1955.

On 10 April 1956 I transferred to *Queenborough*. She had more modern weaponry than the *Quadrant*, and *Quadrant* needed a fairly long refit. I continued to enjoy the appointment of Fox 1 and again by very good fortune *Queenborough* was awarded the Duke of Gloucester Cup at the end of 1956. During my 18 months as Fox 1 there was plenty of sea time – a six months deployment to the RN Far East Fleet, two large maritime exercises and many smaller ones, all of which made it a most interesting period.

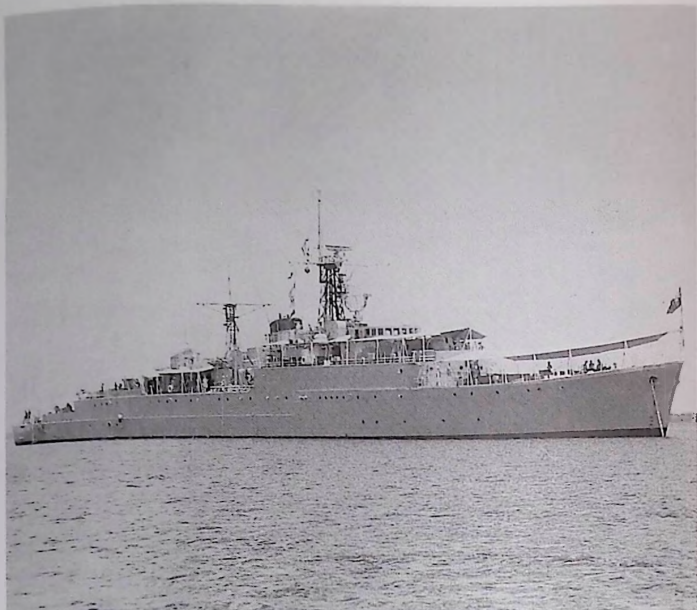
I seem to have moved ahead without mentioning my expanding family. Michael the eldest was born in London in 1948, the second son, Mark, was born in Sydney in 1952 and my third son Piers was born in Melbourne in 1955.

My next appointment was to HMAS *Albatross* in command and as Resident Naval Officer Jervis Bay to date 14 January 1957. This appointment was very special to me by virtue of the fact that I had much to do with the planning of Nowra as the base for use by RN aircraft of the British Pacific Fleet in 1944-45. It was very satisfying to come back as Captain of the RAN Air Station 12 years later. *Albatross* was an extremely active establishment. In addition to the front line squadron training when they were disembarked, there was the training of the second line squadrons, with some of the training being carried out at the Jervis Bay airstrip. There was training for observers, aircraft handlers, safety equipment workers and air mechanics. The Australian Joint Anti-Submarine School was a lodger unit on the air station.

I had some unusual duties to perform during my time as Commanding Officer *Albatross*. The New South Wales Government had dismissed the Council of the Shoalhaven Shire and had installed an administrator. This action did not find favour with a number of people in the Shire and the result was that when a situation arose where the Shire President would normally open a function the Captain of *Albatross* was usually invited to do so. This unusual situation had some advantages in that it enabled *Albatross* to come much closer to the Shire than previously had been the case. It also resulted in the very kind action by the people of the Shire giving my wife and myself a civic farewell when we left *Albatross* in November 1959. Presumably it was the ever increasing friendship between those at *Albatross* and the people of the Shire which caused a



As FOX 1 being transferred between ships of the First Frigate Squadron (1955).



HMAS QUADRANT.

number of ex-Fleet Air Arm people to settle in the Nowra area when their naval engagements expired. I should add that throughout the years, the business community was generally well aware when it was pay week at *Albatross*.

I found great satisfaction in *Albatross* during my almost three years in command. There was much to be done by everyone who served there, and it was done. In 1959, the Flag Officer East Australia Area, Rear Admiral D.H. Harries, carried out the annual Admiral's Inspection and in the general comments section of his written report were the words "a shining example of the Service at its best".

I recall that we had an unusual routine on Friday afternoon. There was no flying, in order that the aircraft could be serviced ready for an early start on Monday. We also secured early in the hope that those driving to Sydney would not drive so fast and thus reduce accidents, and thirdly each department was given an area of the station to look after the lawns and gardens. This led to mass gardening on Friday afternoons. All of these three measures were successful.

On taking command of *Albatross* I was aware that a morale problem existed. There did not seem to be general cohesion among the ship's company, there was no common cause, and inadequate esprit de corp, which in a flying establishment you need if you are to achieve satisfactory results. I instigated a number of changes which helped to rectify this problem.

The White Ensign Club in Nowra was a wonderful idea as a recreational centre in the town for *Albatross* sailors. There was a very good and energetic Board formed of local residents, with the captain of the air station as an ex-officio member. However, despite the Board's good endeavours, the club did not function as well as it should have done. One reason for this is that many servicemen like to have a bet or a flutter in a small way on almost anything and the White Ensign Club did not have any poker machines. A number of the sailors enjoyed playing the machines and as my predecessor opposed their installation at the White Ensign Club, sailors went around the corner to the Shoalhaven Ex-Servicemen's Club and played the machines there.

I was quite happy for poker machines to be installed in the White Ensign Club, the number of sailors using the club increased and the profits from the poker machines enabled us to make some very worthwhile improvements. For example, some of the money from the poker machines helped us to set up the *Albatross* Sailing Club on the banks of the Shoalhaven River.

It is inevitable that in the business of flying training there will be a number of accidents and unfortunately some of them are going to be fatal. *Albatross* was no exception and had a number of fatal accidents during the fifties. The carrier air group had to make their flying as close as possible to what it would be when embarked in the carrier and this involved extremely skilful flying at times. The second line squadrons also operated at a high level of skill in preparation for carrier flying. Commander (Air) Danny Buchanan was one of the pilots killed while flying at night time.

There was one theory that he became disorientated and there was another that his altimeter gradually became unreliable without Danny becoming aware of it. The actual cause could not be pinpointed. The death of Danny Buchanan was a great loss to the Fleet Air Arm.

One significant change to the organisation at *Albatross* during my time as captain was the introduction of centralised maintenance, wished on the establishment by Navy Office. It was not a product of our own thinking and I was never really greatly taken by it. Ever since I started flying in the Fleet Air Arm there seemed to be a much greater advantage in squadron maintenance personnel looking after the aircraft of their own squadron. Centralised maintenance was almost a garage system and the personal attachment between the people in the squadron and the squadron's aircraft was slight. It was not popular with the operators or the maintainers.

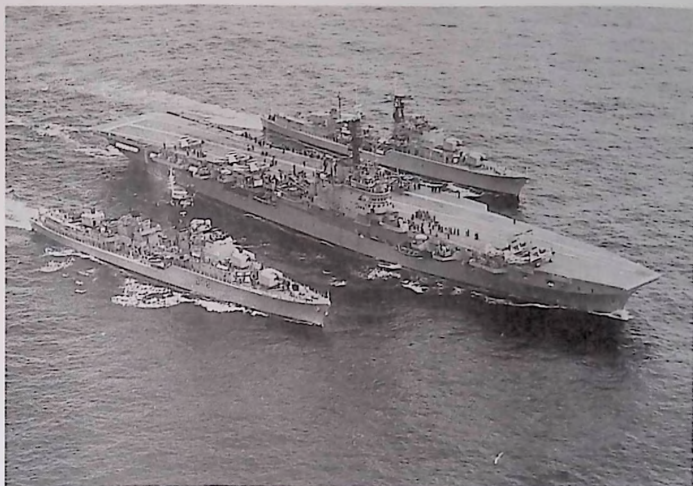
During my time at *Albatross* the RAN College moved from Victoria back to Jervis Bay. I was appalled by the way that the old college was going down hill in its role as a tourist resort and I was very glad to see the college return in 1958. Captain Bill Dovers was the first captain of the College on its return and we accommodated him at *Albatross* while he did the planning for the transfer back from *Cerberus*. It was a very happy day for me personally when the College returned to Jervis Bay.

I left *Albatross* at the end of 1959 and together with my family travelled to the UK in the SS *Dominion Monarch*. On 5 January 1960 I enrolled at the Imperial Defence College, later to be known as the Royal College of Defence Studies. This was a unique experience in many ways, one resulting from the variety of the students at the College. The students came from all three Services and from the civil or public services. They also came from many different nations, the UK, the Dominions, Nigeria, United States of America and so on. It was really quite unusual in the variety and the background of the students and also notable was the quality of the directing staff and the lecturers. I remember that we had time to read and the library was really first class. Another outstanding part of the course was the dividing of students into parties to visit either Europe, North America, Africa or the Far East. These tours took about five weeks at the end of the August/September period of each year. I was fortunate to be included in the North American party and the itinerary included establishments which one would seldom normally visit. In the United States we visited the Pentagon, the State Department, the Headquarters of Strategic Air Command and also NORAD; also there were visits to similar organisations in Canada. Again the lecturers at all these places were of high quality. The course at the IDC provided a rare opportunity and one which I greatly appreciated.

There were five other Australians on the IDC course which I did. They were Brigadier Cape, Air Commodore Kingwell, Mr Bob Furlonger from Foreign Affairs, Brigadier Evans and Air Commodore Parsons.

We had time for social activities as well as work. There was usually a movie each Wednesday evening at the College in Belgrave Square to which students could invite wives and friends. There was an occasional cocktail party for some visiting celebrity. In summer time a bus was chartered and those who wanted went down to Royal Ascot. In addition to the overseas tours there were also tours within England. There was one very interesting tour around the midlands visiting Manchester, Birmingham and such places. The IDC was a course of excellent value.

The IDC course ended at the end of 1960 and my next appointment was happily at sea again. It was to be in command of HMAS *Melbourne* and as Chief Staff Officer to the Flag Officer Commanding the Australian Fleet. This was to date 8 January 1961. My appointment to *Melbourne* was to last 18 months. I would have liked it to have been longer but as I was promoted at the end of 18 months, naturally I was happy to settle for this period. The Flag Officer Commanding the Australian Fleet for the first 12 months was Rear Admiral W.H. Harrington and for my final six months was Rear Admiral A.W.R. McNicoll. It naturally served me in good stead having served in aircraft carriers



HMAS MELBOURNE with the Daring Class destroyers VOYAGER and VENDETTA alongside.

from the rank of lieutenant on. The year 1961 began with a workup and after a short interval the ship proceeded north for international visits and exercises. These went off successfully although at the end of the last exercise *Melbourne* developed some shaft trouble which was rectified in Hong Kong. I mention this because both *Sydney* and *Melbourne* in their turn had to do a lot of steaming, quite often at high speed, and both ships stood up to this very well indeed.

In 1962 there was another trip for *Melbourne* up north with the same sort of similar visits to foreign ports and international exercises. The itinerary included a visit to Japan. If anyone wants the testing experience of remaining on full alert throughout the entire night, then taking an aircraft carrier at night through the Shimonoseki Strait is worth trying. It was also necessary to take *Melbourne* through the Inland Sea of Japan at night and this was quite an exciting passage owing to the large number of fishing boats who were not showing lights.

My command time in *Melbourne* was running out and at Townsville on the southward passage to Sydney, Captain (later Vice Admiral Sir Richard) Peck took command on 16 June 1962. This ended my direct connection with the RAN Fleet Air Arm which had continued with only two breaks – my time as Fox 1 in 1956, and my year at the IDC in 1960. These were the only two breaks I had from RAN naval aviation since I had written the draft plan for the Australian Fleet Air Arm in 1945.

XI

On 6 July 1962 I was appointed as Second Naval Member of the Australian Naval Board and as Chief of Personnel. I was promoted to Acting Rear Admiral when I took up the appointment and relieved Rear Admiral G.G.O. Gatacre. The First Naval Member was Vice Admiral Sir Hastings Harrington, the Third was Rear Admiral K. Urquhart, the Fourth was Rear Admiral P. Perry and the Secretary was Mr T.J. Hawkins. The Honourable John Gordon was Minister for the Navy and held that portfolio from 1958 to 1963. Incidentally I feel that I should mention the many kindnesses that I received from Mr Tom Hawkins. He was a most experienced and knowledgeable man concerning many aspects of Naval, Defence and Government administration. He did not make friends easily, but in my case, his assistance to me, particularly during my early days as Second Naval Member, was very great. In the fifties the Fourth Naval Member was responsible for Supply as well as the Fleet Air Arm, then a change was made and the Fourth became responsible for Supply and Works, with the various parts of the Fleet Air Arm being divided among the concerned Board members. I was awarded the CBE in 1963.

A matter of the greatest importance which occurred during the time I was Second Naval Member was the *Melbourne/Voyager* collision. Much has already been written and said about this most unhappy event. I will make only two points. Firstly, I believe it was a fact that the Prime Minister, the Honourable R.G. Menzies, initially believed that the Navy had an act similar to that of the Air Force whereby a serious accident could be investigated by a judge assisted by two Service assessors. If the Navy had indeed had such an act, then the two Royal Commissions with all that that involved, would not have been necessary. The second point is that I had learnt during my time in aircraft carriers that when the wind was light and variable, and the carrier was searching for the best flying course then the carrier should station the rescue destroyer, the plane guard, astern where she was completely out of the carrier's way. When the flying course was found the destroyer could then take up her flying off or landing on station. On one occasion when I was Captain of *Melbourne*, bad weather was hampering the work up of the squadrons. The schedule for night deck landings was becoming well adrift. One night there was quite an easterly swell off Jervis Bay with a southwesterly wind; these conditions prevented any flying operations outside Jervis Bay. I stationed the rescue destroyer in the northeast corner of the bay with orders to be ready to get underway immediately if required. The flying course was southwesterly and we proceeded with the training. The point was that I had no attendant destroyer to worry about but she was there if needed. This particular night's flying involved steaming within the confines of the Bay which made it an interesting exercise.

Mr Sam Landau was appointed Secretary of the Department in 1964 and a more loyal friend the RAN never had. He had previously been working in the Department of Defence, and consequently was familiar with many practices and procedures when he came to the Department of Navy. At this time, Mr Fred Chaney was Minister and he took great interest in the Service. I remember that Mr Chaney once told the story that when he was awarded the Navy portfolio the Prime Minister, Mr Menzies, said to him, never think that you can

run your Department from the end of the telephone and obviously Mr Chaney never forgot that advice.

Several changes were made to the Naval Board by 1965, Vice Admiral McNicoll was First Naval Member, Rear Admiral J.S. Mesley was Second, Rear Admiral F.L. George was Third, and Rear Admiral Smith was Fourth Naval Member. Incidentally, a curious situation concerned the position of the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff in those days. DCNS, although not formally a member of the Board, attended all Board meetings and his views were always welcomed. I was Fourth Naval Member and Chief of Supply throughout 1965 and during this period initiated a proposal which involved restructuring the three civilian supply directorates, namely Naval and Air Stores, Victualling and Armament Supply. The concept naturally required an initial examination, and this was endorsed by the Secretary and approved by the Minister. The idea was that the three directorates, instead of being almost entirely independent and separately compartmented, should cooperate to a greater extent and all three be placed under a Director General of Supply. The examination showed that the proposal had promise and the new organisation was brought into being and did have successful results over the years. The Director of Naval Works was also responsible to the Fourth Naval Member and it was absorbing to have a hand in the planning of some facilities which would serve the Navy for many years in the future.

On 22 December 1965, the Naval Board, having received the approval of the Governor General, appointed me to be the Flag Officer Commanding Her Majesty's Australian Fleet, to date 30 January 1966. Accompanying the document proclaiming this appointment was another signed by the Governor General authorising me to convene courts martial for the trial of any person borne on the books of any of HMA Ships.

I relieved Rear Admiral T.K. Morrison on 28 January 1966 with *Melbourne* as my flagship. So began a period which was one of the most interesting and enjoyable in my life. In March 1966 an RAN Task Group had exercises off the New South Wales east coast with the United States Naval ASW Group 1 which included USS *Hornet*. It almost seemed an embarrassment of riches to have a carrier the size of the *Hornet* in an ASW Group. On 24 March *Melbourne*, with *Yarra*, *Stuart* and *Supply*, left Sydney and sailed north for exercises with other navies.

A most amusing and extraordinary incident occurred on arrival at Singapore. *Ark Royal* was wearing the flag of the Flag Officer Second-in-Command RN Far East Fleet, Rear Admiral Charles Mills. *Ark Royal* was already-berthed and as the *Melbourne* passed her in the harbour, normally the junior ship would have saluted the senior. As these two ships passed, there was complete silence. When I called on Commander Far East Fleet, who was then Vice Admiral Sir Frank Twiss, he asked about this matter and I explained that Charles Mills and I were the same seniority both as Rear Admirals and as Captains. I foresaw earlier that some problem of this nature might arise and I had signalled the Naval Board seeking enlightenment. The reply referred to some old discussion between the Naval Board and the Admiralty and it had been agreed that in such a situation, relative seniority as Commanders should be considered. The Board also informed me fortunately that I had been senior to Mills as a Commander. I showed Admiral Twiss my information and a signal

was sent around the Far East Station to the effect that although Mills and Smith were the same seniority as Rear Admiral, Smith was to be regarded as the senior whilst he was on the Far East Station. At that time the Admiralty was having some trouble regarding the future of the RN Fleet Air Arm and Admiral Twiss and I had some very interesting conversations concerning aspects which might help in securing the future of Air Arms as we both had great faith in their future. From the point of view of subsequent events, the RN fared much better than we did in the RAN.

After Singapore the ship visited Hong Kong and then came exercise SEA IMP with the RN, USN and RAN forces. The admirals present were Rear Admiral Phil Gilkeson USN, Rear Admiral Charles Mills RN and Rear Admiral Smith RAN. Each Admiral became Officer-in-Tactical Command for a period and it was interesting to see how each of them carried out the duties involved.

When I was onboard *Melbourne* I had a small staff who were separate from the ship's officers. It was not a complete staff by any means as there were other staff officers at FOCAF's shore headquarters on Garden Island in Sydney. This practice worked satisfactorily having regard to the circumstances which existed at this time. A fleet benefits by having an admiral afloat.

An unusual occasion was the visit of the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force Training Squadron to Sydney in August 1966. My Japanese guests were enjoying the lunch I was giving them in the flagship so much that I began to have fears that they would not be back in their own ships in time for the "at home" which they were giving that afternoon. However, all was well, but not by very much. In August 1966, there was a never to be forgotten sight and that was the Chilean Sail Training Ship *Esmeralda* moving up Sydney Harbour with all sails set and yards manned.

An Australian Maritime Exercise was held in October 1966 with sixteen RN units, three USN, one RNZN and eight RAN. The most striking aspect of the exercise was the comparative ease with which units of these different navies worked together. Such unity is only achieved with practice.

In January 1967 I handed the Fleet over to Rear Admiral Peek and joined Navy Office as the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff. The Naval Board at this time comprised, First Naval Member Vice Admiral Sir Alan McNicoll, Second was Rear Admiral J. S. Mesley, Third was Rear Admiral F.W. Purves and the Fourth was Rear Admiral W.D.H. Graham. Later in the year Rear Admiral H.D. Stevenson replaced J.S. Mesley. The Minister was the Honourable C.R. Kelly and his wisdom, common sense and humour were qualities which were greatly valued.

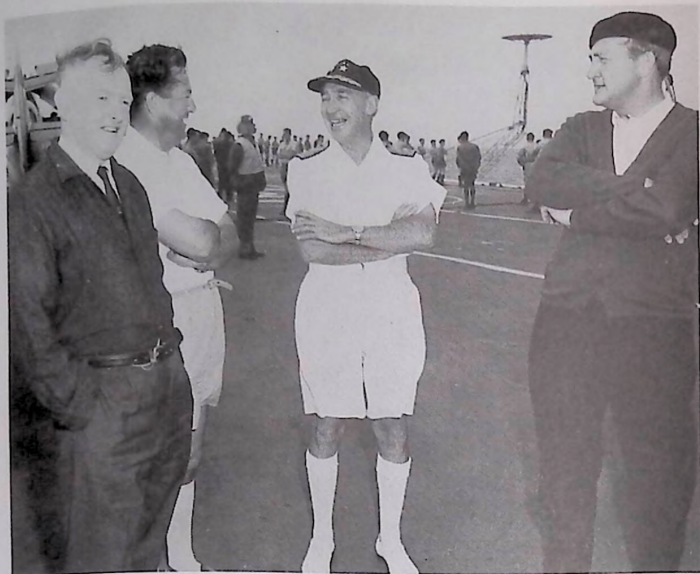
One of the items during this period which required indepth discussion was the possible replacement of *Melbourne*. There were no cut and dried solutions and the matter dragged on for years. Much later there was the possibility of the RAN acquiring the RN carrier *Invincible*, but as it will be recalled, the Falklands War quashed this hope. Almost from its inception, the



As a newly promoted Rear Admiral with Nanette (1962).

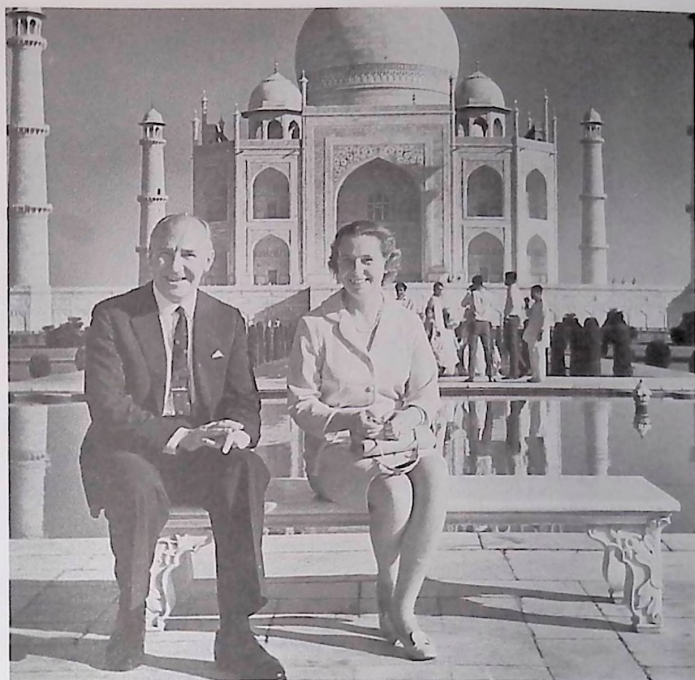
Fleet Air Arm has had some problem or crisis to overcome and perhaps the fact that they were overcome added to its quality and strength.

On 15 November 1967 an appointment was issued stating that I would be promoted to the rank of Vice Admiral and appointed First Naval Member of the Commonwealth Naval Board of Administration for three years to date 3 April 1968. I had had great fortune in three ways. Firstly by being selected as CNS, secondly having had experience as Second and Fourth Naval Member, and thirdly moving into the CNS position from that of DCNS and thus being informed on most of the current matters. The three years mentioned in my appointment was reduced to two and a half years owing to subsequent events. The other members of the Naval Board during the period were, Minister for the Navy the Honourable C.R. Kelly, later replaced by the Honourable D.J. (later Sir James) Killen, Second Naval Member Rear Admiral R.I. Peek, Third member Rear Admiral F.W. Purves and later Rear Admiral B.J. Castles, and Fourth Member was Rear Admiral W.D.H. Graham. DCNS was Rear Admiral H.D. Stevenson and the Secretary was Mr Sam Landau. In 1968 I was proud to be awarded the CB.



A Parliamentary Committee onboard HMAS MELBOURNE. From the left is Mr Frank Crean, Senator Reg Witbers and Mr Tom Uren (1972).

The most serious matter which arose during my appointment as CNS was the collision between the *Melbourne* and USS *Frank E. Evans* which occurred on 3 June 1969. After all these years, I think there are only a couple of points on which I would like to comment. Firstly, in a telephone conversation with Admiral Tom Moorer, USN Chief of Naval Operations, shortly after the accident, we agreed that the first step should be a joint RAN/USN Board of Inquiry. I am still of the opinion that initially this was the best action to be taken. I must also add that I have never had any doubt regarding the great ability and the contribution made by the RAN members involved with this Board of Inquiry. There were several points which were not entirely satisfactory in the Board's report but in the circumstances of it being in the nature of an ad hoc international committee, the Board could not be recalled by the Naval Board. Nevertheless Captain J.P. Stevenson was fully entitled to have every opportunity to have his case absolutely clearly understood and there was only one way to my mind in which this could be done and that was by court martial. I requested FOCAF, who was Rear Admiral G.J.B. Crabb, to convene a court martial. This was done and Captain Stevenson was honourably acquitted which was undoubtedly justified.



With Nanette at the Taj Mahal.

In August 1969 I visited Vietnam and I was particularly impressed with the work of the RAN Helicopter Flight Vietnam and also the RAN Clearance Diving Team. Many tributes were paid to both these units and I felt proud to belong to the same Service. Also in 1969 I was awarded the KBE. The Indian Government invited my wife, my Staff Officer, Captain Geoff Britten, and myself to pay a two week visit to India. The visit took place in October 1970. The itinerary was most carefully arranged and we visited a number of military installations plus a few other places such as the Taj Mahal. The visit ranged from Kashmir in the north to Cochin in the south. The British influence was still quite evident and obviously this had been to the benefit of the Indian Services. It was a fascinating visit in every respect.



Visiting the RAN Helicopter Flight at Vung Tau (1969).

XII

On 25 August 1970 the Naval Board promulgated a signal that I was to become Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 23 November and that Rear Admiral Peek was to become Chief of Naval Staff and First Naval Member on the same date. My promotion to Admiral was effective from the date of my appointment and thus after 43 years I was finishing my direct connection with the RAN. In March 1971 there were two important meetings to be held in London with the Defence Minister, the Honourable J.G. Gorton, heading the Australian delegation. One conference was a SEATO meeting and the other dealt with the Five Power Defence Arrangements. The organisation for the conferences was excellent. Dinners were held at Windsor Castle for delegates to each conference. When His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh welcomed me for the second time in two weeks I suggested that perhaps he had better send me a mess bill. The work of the conferences proceeded without any great

excitement probably as the nations concerned realised the value of both organisations at that time. ANZAC Day occurred during the time of the conference and impressive ceremonies were held both in Westminster Abbey and at the Cenotaph.

A SEATO military advisers conference was held in Bangkok in September of 1971 but the lessening importance of the SEATO organisation was becoming apparent. With the reduction of SEATO, the United States, Australia and New Zealand military representative conference was instituted in March 1972 in Hawaii. The host was the United States Commander in Chief Pacific, Admiral John McCain USN. This was a most useful conference, there were only the three nations represented and the exchanges involved certain information being passed which would not otherwise have occurred at a much larger conference. SEATO continued and in 1972 Australia hosted a SEATO Military Advisers meeting in Canberra. It followed the pattern of previous meetings without any great excitement.

In September 1972 I visited Japan as the guest of the Japanese Self-Defence Force. It was a most enlightening visit and I learnt a lot about the views held in that Force. I recall that some members of the Defence Force held the view that in some respects their defence policies were inclined to be too restrictive. I addressed the National Staff College and the questions asked also revealed a sound knowledge of Pacific strategy. On the way back to Australia I visited Indonesia where Mr Bob Furlonger was the Australian Ambassador. I had an unusually long talk with General Soharito and the visit provided me with an opportunity to renew my acquaintance with the Defence Minister General Panggabean. I found warm friendship and never in my many conversations did I find the slightest antagonism towards Australia.

All through the years which I have been mentioning, the Vietnam War had been continuing. My own views had changed during this time and my thinking was that the Australian contribution should be wound down. This view was strengthened during one of my visits to Vietnam when the United States Commander, very diplomatically, told me in effect, he was having to fight the war with one hand behind his back.

In 1972 the Australia elections were held, with victory to the Labor Party. Mr Lance Barnard became Minister for Defence and took the greatest interest in his portfolio and worked very hard at it. After a short period, the ministerial directive which led to the examination of the Defence organisation and resulted in the Tange Report, was issued. Some reorganisation was required and my view was that the report was a very worthwhile forward step, but I did have included in the opening pages of the report words to the effect that experience might well show that further steps would be necessary. Over the years, further steps have been taken, however I am now out of touch and in no position to comment on them except perhaps in one respect. From what I understand, there has been a denigration in the authority of each Chief of Staff. Looking back in history there would seem to be a strong case for extreme caution to be exercised in such a move.



As Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee at the opening of a SEATO Military Advisors' Meeting in Canberra (1972).

In May 1975, the first meeting of the Council of the Order of Australia was held and I was proud to attend. I was even prouder to be named as a Companion in the Military Division in the first list of awards to be promulgated.

I have always had a strong interest in sport and in 1975 I became patron of the HMAS *Harman* Rugby League Football Club. The following year I became patron of the ACT Rugby League Association and also in 1976 patron of the ACT Tennis Association. For some years I have been patron of the ACT division of the Navy League and of the Reserve Cadets and I have been very happy to have held these positions. Additionally, I have been proud to have been patron of the Australian Fleet Air Arm Association and to have been elected a life member of the Australian Naval Institute and the RAN Sailing Association.

On 23 November 1975 I retired from the appointment of Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee and from the Royal Australian Navy after almost forty nine years service. I received many kind wishes on my retirement but I would particularly like to mention two. In a note, Sir Arthur Tange, who had been Secretary of the Department of Defence during all my time as Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, wrote:

public service officers in this Department who have looked to you as readily as to me in the past five years, will miss profoundly your steady and unprejudiced judgement and unwillingness to be swayed by special pleading from any quarter. You have won enormous respect from us all. I shall always value our official association as something unique in my career.

The Minister for Defence, the Honourable D.J. Killen, issued a most eulogistic press release and also sent me the following telegram:

you have finished a most distinguished career and all who have had the privilege of working with you greatly admire and respect you. For my part I will recall with pride our association together. My very best wishes to you both in your retirement. Affectionately, Jim Killen.

I mentioned Mr Killen's eulogistic release and he included two points which may be of interest. He mentioned that I was the first and only graduate of the Royal Australian Naval College to attain the rank of Admiral and my forty nine years service was, as far as he was aware, a record unequalled by any other Australian service officer.

I have reached the end of my story. This is by no means a complete biography, but rather certain memories I have of my almost 49 years wearing the uniform of the Royal Australian Navy. On only a few issues have I expressed an opinion because in most cases there has been too much water under the bridge. Probably I have failed to mention some people whom I should have mentioned but all memories are fallible. Finally, I am grateful to all those who contributed to make my life so full of interest and especially to those I have been privileged to have as friends.



