

# GOING TO SEA IN THE 1970'S

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My comments in blue,

Into the 1970's – mixture of Sea and shore

To recap slightly:- I had resigned from BP and signed on in the Royal Australian Navy – as a Lieutenant with six years seniority, on a short service commission of 7 years. We had an adopted son, packed up our goods and chattels which were to come out by a container ship, the **Moreton Bay**, sold the car, and proceeded to Southampton, to join the Achille Lauro.

The fellow passengers, at this stage of the voyage were all British, including 4 joining the RN, and 2 joining the Australian Army, plus another 2 who were already members of the Defence Forces returning home to Australia. A mixed bunch; of Executive, Engineer, Air Engineer Officers, and an Eye Surgeon who was in the Naval Reserves.



The Achille Lauro leaving Sydney. Note backwards Funnels

We sailed on time and because the Suez Canal was still shut, we made a zig zag route southwards, first to Valetta, Malta, where of course Maltese emigrants joined us. Then to Messina. Likewise some Sicilians, on to Naples, again some more Italians. Here we had a break, and took Adam for his first helicopter ride out to the Isle of Capri. Then up to Genoa for the last of our passengers.

Then out of the Mediterranean to the Canary Islands for bunkers, then straight to Capetown. We, the service and diplomatic corps personnel were all travelling first class, and although not the last ship of immigrants to arrive in Australia we were possibly in the last 10 ships, the total number of immigrants though, on that ship did not make up for the loss of people kill on the roads that year!

From Capetown a composite great circle to Fremantle, passing close to the French weather station on l'île de Amsterdam. At Fremantle where some of the passengers left us, on to Melbourne, where, my at that time, oldest friend, we had grown up together in Reading, came down to the ship and took us to his home, sadly he died nearly 10 years ago now.



From Melbourne and to Sydney. We were met? By a civilian Department of Navy person who only had a utility at his disposal, ( 3 seats and an open back) for and ourselves and another couple with two children. We had been booked into a hotel in Kings Cross!!!

For only one night, which was a Friday night, August 4<sup>th</sup> 1969.

Neither ourselves or the other couple had ever been to Sydney before, it was a "Bank Holiday" on the Monday and we couldn't get any money out. Needless to say we were not

impressed. We needed housing not too far from commuting to the dockyard, since both our ships were berthed there. After two nights the Navy stopped paying and we had to pay!!!

I had been appointed to HMAS **Supply** and my friend to HMAS **Sydney** – “the VungTau Ferry” Our first task was to find a flat or house to live in, which I did, sharing a large flat, with next door neighbours of a particular strict religious group the Mormons, but they were very kind and helped us, at the back of the house was a troglodyte who seem to work nights, very rarely saw him. We found telephone “jacks” in all the rooms, we found out later that the house had been used by ladies of the night who moved the telephone around as the room became occupied!!!

Down to the dockyard to show my face onboard HMS **Supply** which was the RAN’s fleet tanker, originally built for the RAN but the RFA had it first as the **Tide Austral**, I had first seen her years before, when she was on passage to Australia , at Port Said, with a cluster of



HMAS Duchess, HMAS Supply & HMAS Sydney ( in her Vung Tau role)

Minesweeper. Surprise, surprise, I wasn’t expected until September. So my friend another Lieutenant – ex Blue Star Line -and I were sent to HMS **Cerberus** in Victoria to join up with a group of Australian Sub Lieutenants who had just arrived back from the RN. We basically did a rerun of the RNR ‘P ’ courses. This bunch of likely lads, most of them achieved fame and fortune, with 4 becoming Admirals and two Commodores and one went to manage a skiing resort in America!

HMAS **Supply**, was a 18000 dwt ship, with a dry cargo hold up forward, a similar ship in the Merchant Navy would have had a crew of around the 45 mark; however in the RAN we had something in the region of 205 souls onboard including 20 boy seaman under training. The name **Supply** came from Captain Phillips’ first fleet, when the 170 tons brig, actually took Captain Phillip RN into Port Jackson as the first of the fleet to arrive there. And the tanker was the only second one to have this name.

I had purchased a “Pregnant Crab” car, an Austin 2000, which was the last car we had had in the UK, it being easier for Mary to drive and to be able to concentrate on where in Sydney she was going. However I took the car and with Walter, drove to HMAS **Cerberus** in Victoria to the east of Melbourne, down the Hume Highway, which was not the dual carriage way it is now. We stopped at Yass for the night, and were most surprised to find the car covered in frost at 6 am. It was winter time in the Southern Hemisphere after all.



HMAS Cerberus - Main Training Base

HMAS **Cerberus** was the RAN’s main training base, like all the RN schools in Portsmouth and Devonport rolled into one, so you had sailors under instruction as well as junior officers, being brought up to speed in the RAN way of doing things. I had to attend a Confidential Books course in Melbourne, so I was taken daily by car to the Army Barracks in Melbourne.

My job on HMAS **Supply** was as the CB Officer, my cabin had nine wall safes on the bulkheads.

After a Mess night at Cerberus, I had gone quietly to bed in my cabin, when at about 2 am the door opened and in came one of the Sub Lieutenants, he walked over to a chair near the window, lifted the seat and proceeded to pee into the chair. He was sleep walking, his father, buried at sea was an Admiral, and he became a Rear Admiral himself. We have had a laugh about subsequently.

HMAS **Supply** having completed a mini refit was ready for sea and a 'work up' which took place in the Tasman sea off Jervis Bay, where the Naval College is situated. We RAS -ed the flagship HMAS **Melbourne** the aircraft carrier, and other frigates as well.

We changed our Captain, (a very talented miniature painter, I have three of his books) and the Commander the X/O who was a long course Physical Training Instructor, I had never come across a commissioned PTI before, let alone a Commander. They were succeeded by two ex- flyboys, one a 'jet jockey' who flew "Sea Vixen" off HMAS **Melbourne** and the other who had flown propeller aircraft, "Fireflies", off HMAS **Sydney** in the Korean War, they didn't get on!

We then took part in multi naval exercises, heading to the northern hemisphere via the inside route of the Great Barrier Reef and

Thursday Island, through the Lombok Strait and to Singapore. There we met up with the Navies of USN, RN, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore, and some similar grouping of aircraft and submarines who were supposed to attack us. So we were torpedoed, bombed, and shot at, all in the course of the exercise!

While in Singapore, another Lieutenant and myself "volunteered" to organise a "run ashore" for the wardroom, including the Captain! We went into Singapore from where we were berthed at Sembawang, some 20 miles from the centre of the city. Because the other Lieutenant was a Mason, we went to a Masonic Temple, and chatted up an elderly Chinese gentleman, who gave us a couple of restaurants to try, we did not want any touristy type restaurant, but the genuine Chinese one. After checking these out we decided on one in Orchard Road – the main shopping centre, but this was three floors up. When we entered we could see that it was well patronised, no Europeans that I could see, and even had a mini floor show. We explained that we were 14 officers wanting to experience a genuine Chinese banquet, they were not to serve any alcohol even if asked, only Chinese green tea!

The day came, and with six ancient Mercedes taxis took us all the way to Orchard street, there was some grumbling about only Green Tea, but the floor show made up for that. After the meal it was decided that a "run" to Bugis Street was in order. (Now I know that the old Bugis Street that you know and loved was shut down by the authorities,) but it has raised its head in the last few years, when I was last there. [A bit of History of Bugis Street HERE.](#)

Anyhow we were seated at a table in the middle of Bugis Street, with all the action going on around us. Our Captain a four ring Captain no less, had never been to a scene like this in his life before, and would not believe that the patrons of the street and cafés were transvestites! I must admit some of them were gorgeous looking females?, but they were ? boys.

Later while still operating out of Singapore, we had anchored off, Palau Tioman, this where the film South Pacific was filmed. To have a Banyan on the beach, a motor boat was lowered manned by a Midshipman to take Officers and sailors ashore. Beer flowed, steaks were cooked and swimming in the warm blue sea took place.

Now our gallant XO had a few bebies under his belt and he decided to go for a swim, so he stripped off and into the water. When he came out of the sea, it was time to return, but he would not put a vestige of clothing on. The Midshipman, in charge of the boat, asked him to



Aircraft Carrier - HMAS Melbourne

put some shorts on but he refused, we arrived back alongside the accommodation ladder, and as etiquette demanded, that the most senior person gets out the boat first, this he did, stark naked, up the accommodation ladder, the Officer of the day wouldn't meet him!, along the deck to the amidships accommodation to his cabin. To this day I don't think the Captain knows that this happened, I do; I was there!.

Whilst the ship was overseas, Mary had moved into a Navy Flat at Coogee, also in the building was an old ship mate with his American wife and son, we had sailed on the British **Resolution**, when I was 2/O and he was 3/O, he had joined the RAN before me. Then after the ship came back from the northern hemisphere, we moved again to house this time, and applied for another adoption, in which we were successful, a daughter this time.

After a quick trip across the Tasman to Wellington across the finger wharf was the **Achille Lauro**.

Shortly after this the Naval Board directed me to leave HMAS **Supply** and to go to Darwin in command of HMAS **Attack** and the Northern Territory Patrol Boat Squadron. First I had to undergo some training at HMS **Waterhen** the shore base in Sydney for all the minor warships of the RAN, such as Minesweepers, Patrol Boats, Survey vessels, and a Boom Defence vessel, Torpedo Recovery Vessels, and a very swish cabin cruiser! Bought I believe for the Naval Hydrographer.

I flew up to Darwin courtesy TAA (Trans Tasman Airlines) no longer with us, nor is Ansett Airways, they both would take off for the same destination about 15 minutes apart! Crazy.

Joined HMS **Attack**, but lived in the Army Mess at Larrakia Barracks!, before Mary and the children arrived and a house was provided (more of this later) Whilst in the Mess one night, I recognised a laugh near the bar, and went to investigate. It was the Anaesthetist from Darwin General Hospital, we knew that we knew each other, went back through shipping companies, 2/M, Mate & Masters exams, no joy, then to our High School, we had both been in 4<sup>th</sup> grade at Reading Grammar, he served his time in Ellermans, got his tickets, married an Australian girl, a nurse in West Australia, who put him through Medical School, and he had qualified as a Doctor. Our paths crossed quite often after that, he was also a RANR doctor reaching the rank of Commander at HMAS **Waterhen**,, but fell down some concrete steps in Crete and received a debilitating brain injury, and sadly died, some years ago.

The "**Attack**" class were built in the late 1960's and although HMAS **Advance** was the first to be launched, HMAS **Attack** was the first to be Commissioned. For this reason they were called the "**Attack**" class. They had a few problems; Mechanically it took a couple of years to sort out the clutch problem, they were not good sea boats, The tops of the propellers extended below the hull – as you will see – and had a limited range, and the slowest speed on one engine alone was 7 knots; top speed with both engines was around the 25 knots mark. There were 20 built between, 1967 and 1969, with Patrol Boat bases at Sydney, Darwin and Cairns, some were later given to Papua Guinea, and to Indonesia.

After receiving the hand over from the previous commander, I set out on my first patrol of the Arafura Sea. I actually had as my bailiwick; The Indian Ocean, The Timor Sea, The Arafura Sea, the Coral Sea, the Gulf of Carpentaria, and the Pacific Ocean – not all at once though. The first excursion was to the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf, to an Aboriginal settlement at Port Keats.

This was some ten miles away up a creek from where we had anchored. The ship's boat, aka a "tinny" was launched and myself and two sailors headed up the creek. We found the settlement, which had been built by the Methodist Church, it comprised on a single road with breeze block two room dwelling plus a concrete pad in front, on either side of this unmade road. The occupants of these dwellings had not long been part of the nomadic group moving around the Northern Territory and they didn't quite know how to approach living in one spot. Food and other equipment was supplied by a converted landing barge of Mr Perkins of Darwin, which ran up the beach in front of the settlement. On our way back our outboard motor ceased to run, and although in sight of my ship we couldn't do anything about it, and an incoming tide. Then out of the mangroves came a craft, about as big as a

suburban bathtub with five people in it and a small outboard, they gave us a tow to the ship, and I gave them a carton of cigarettes.

After my first patrol, I was instructed by the Northern Territory Operations Officer (NTOO) to go around the top of Australia into the Gulf of Carpentaria calling at a couple of small islands and ports.

After heading into a sea and wind for a couple of days, before even getting to the entrance to the Gulf, then making a quick inspection of the eastern side of Groote island, even on one engine, the fuel level was getting low,



In passing; on the beach, near to another Aboriginal settlement, there were about 6 or 7 run-a-bouts laying on the beach, when I enquired why they said, "The Outboard motors were all broken down (ie no maintenance on them) and the runabouts also required some immediate refurbishing!) The Australian Taxpayer had provided these so that the settlement could start a fishing industry for themselves, but no one monitored this equipment given free and gratis to them.

The nearest place for fuel was on Groote Island, Mr Perkins barges called there frequently. So at slow speed, echo sounder going, radar fixes every five minutes I nosed into towards where there was a small jetty.

Disaster! All of a sudden heavy vibrations, echo sounder showing still a few feet under the boat. But one of our propeller tips had snagged a reef. Withdraw rapidly as possible, Anchored.

Donned my bathers, took a deep breath, and dived down to inspect the propellers. I had bent the top six inches on the starboard four bladed propeller So, back to Darwin, slowly.

If a Naval ship has an incident, there has to be an Inquiry. This was duly held, but I never heard anymore about it, though I doubt if it got me any "Brownie" points at that time.

Fortunately HMAS **Attack** was due for a refit in Sydney, in those days there were no such facilities in Darwin, they came much later when the third generation Patrol boats were station there for Border Control.

We set off across the "Top End" rounding Cape York, refuelling at Thursday Island, down through the Great Barrier Reef to Cairns for a stop over of a couple of days, then Gladstone, a quick detour into South Molle Island, onto Brisbane, up the Brisbane River to tie up at Eagle Farm again for fuel. From there it was only 24 hours to get to Sydney, and Cockatoo Island Dockyard, which had a slipway ready for us.



HMAS **Attack**, with me driving going down Sydney Harbour 1973

There the propeller problem was solved, two new engines and modified clutches installed; commuting daily to the dockyard from our home in Ryde.

Mary and the children then flew up to Darwin, while I took HMAS **Attack** back the way we had come – I requested to sail round into the Bass Strait across the Australian Bight and up the West coast to Darwin a distance of about 7000 miles, but this request was denied. We were bigger than the **Endeavour** or the original HMS **Supply**. Although it was achieved in 1988, some 16 years after I put a sailing plan to the Admiral's staff.

I had been promoted to Lieutenant Commander by now, and had the satisfaction of being "Piped aboard the Flag Ship" HMAS **Melbourne**, when the Admiral Commanding the Australian Fleet called a conference of all his Commanding Officers in Sydney at that time. Rear Admiral Dovers. A real ego booster.

So back the way we had come up the East coast of Australia, through the Great Barrier Reef, and across the "Top End" to Darwin. There we had new faces around us, my XO was sent to a frigate in Sydney and a new one joined, a rather remote man, nor really a small ship man at all, he later became a Member of Parliament in New South Wales.

One of the joiners was a "Three Badge Able Seaman", (ie he had 3 gold inverted chevrons on his left arm, indicating he had been in the Navy for at least 12 years). He was considerably older than most of the ships company, had been a Leading Seaman, but fell foul of the law at some stage. He was a good practical seaman, and could turn his hand in the Galley if we caught any fish on our travels, a bit more later!

During my time in command we travelled as far west and south as Port Hedland in West Australia, out to Ashmore Reef, a remote automatic weather station in the Timor Sea. Also we went "overseas", to what was Indonesia, to Kupang, where Lieutenant William Bligh RN made his epic landing, then on to Dili which was Portuguese territory from 1520 to 1975 and now in East Timor. [Some history](#) HERE

In Kupang, I had to visit the local dignitaries, complete in N10's (White Tunic Top and long Trousers) Sword and medals, being driven from the Mayor/ Governor, to the Senior Officers of the three services based there. Politely taking, tea or coffee, with each stop.

That finished I went back to the port, only to find that my ship had gone, from where I had left her. The harbourmaster had decided to put a merchant ship on the berth, and my XO was steaming up and down the harbour till I returned. The return hospitality to these persons, this time with their wives started to arrive, Muslims all expecting free drinks on board. Eventually it was all sorted out.



From Kupang we went around the north of the island, heading for Dili, the passage was some what quicker than anticipated, so I had to anchor off a river Mores mouth to the east of Dili

At dawn, we could see heads appearing above the sand dunes, eventually as small boat came out with an Army Sergeant who enquired why we were there, and would I like to visit the Army headquarters ashore! So I launched our boat and took two of my sailors with me.

Over the other or landward side of the sand dunes, were a platoon of Portuguese army soldiers. Remember in the 1970's the Indonesian and Portuguese were eyeballing each other off, and there were patrols along the borders, with rifles actually loaded.

We left our boat up on the beach, and were whisked off in a German Unimog, 4 wheel drive truck straight up the mountains, to where the Army Major had his Headquarters. I was shown around this, and saluted the raising of the flag, saw the stables and the mountain ponies.

They were a Cavalry regiment. On my return to the beach, some of the officers left at the same time as us in the Unimog, they on their ponies, and they were waiting for us at the beach!

I had breakfast of red wine and herrings !! and then taken to a Cock fight, which the local indigenous people were having. A bit bloodthirsty! The Army Major asked if we would take one of his radio technicians back to Dili for him, since it took two and half days driving to the 6 hours it would take for us to get there. He was seasick and vowed never to go on another ship – ever.

On arrival, went through the same routine of official visits and a return bout of a cocktail party on the upper deck of my ship, this time the only difficulty was exchanging conversation, because my Portuguese was zilch. We were taken up into the mountains to see where the Coffee plantations were and the big concrete pads where the beans were laid out for drying. Later that day we had dinner at the Naval Commanders house – they had a Naval Radio Station there – at which one of the guests was the local Catholic Bishop, to whom I tried to tell a “Shaggy Dog” story in French!, don’t think he got the point of the story.

We made our way back to Darwin where we were to have an “Admiral’s Inspection” duly taken by the most senior Naval Officer in the north of Australia, his title was Naval Officer Commanding the Northern Territory or NOCNA for short.

Again in our best finery and the ship gleaming, he was welcomed aboard, he also in his No.10’s, first he inspected the ships company, then went ashore to change into shorts and bush jacket and to return to inspect the ship.

Now unbeknown to me or any others, that “Ferdie” who had purchased a bottle of “Duty Free” rum in Dili, quite legitimately; had it on a string outside of a scuttle keeping it cool in the sea! During the inspection he kept on getting in the way of NOCNA, offering him tea or coffee as we went through the ship, up and down ladders etc. NOCNA then left to make his way back to HMAS **Melville**, the Naval base in Darwin. By this time the Coxswain had found the bottle of rum nearly empty, “Ferdie” had been having a nip every few minutes during the inspection. So I turned to my XO, told him to charge him with being drunk on duty; and put him on my defaulters list, while I got back into my No.10’s and went to apologise to NOCNA at the base.

On return, I formally saw “Ferdie” as a defaulter, found him guilty and set the punishment at \$200.00 fine over two pays and a fortnight’s stoppage of leave.

Now the justice of this, we were going out on a ten day patrol in a days time, so when we returned that stoppage would be finished, and in the mail was a cheque for \$300 tax rebate!!! “Ferdie” never took umbrage and until I left the ship he would always have sweets for the children when they visited the ship.

The first house that we lived in was a “Darwin” house , built in the 1930’s the only internal walls that went up to the ceiling were the Kitchen, Bathroom and Toilet, all the others stopped at about 2 feet from the ceiling. All outside walls were either louvre-d glass or an open doorway. We were just above the harbour and could look down onto the jetty. The second house, dictated by the powers that be in Canberra, was away from the harbour in a new development, still built on stilts as was the old one.

We had left Darwin when Cyclone Tracy flattened the city on Christmas Day 1974; our old house overlooking the port, survived, the brand new house didn’t, all that was left was the decking and first floor.

On another patrol, this time over to Gove and some Aboriginal settlements in the Gulf of Carpentaria, I decided on, when going back to Darwin, to make a passage through the ‘Hole in the Wall’ which we did at



about 20 knots, which caused a few pursed lips onboard!!!

By this time it was time to have a practice shoot with our main armament the Bofors 40/60. This was supposed to be done every six months and recorded in the Monthly; "Report of Proceedings"; that every Commanding Officer had to write to his Admiral and to Canberra. Mine will still be in some dusty filing cabinet somewhere, or it may have been digitised by now!

So I found a small uninhabited island, anchored, cleared away the gun formed up the guns crew, brought up ammunition. Sent the boat into the island, with a pot of white paint, to mark a large rock on the foreshore.

Guns Crew closed up and made ready to fire, when the boat returned. Just as the order to fire was given, a Sea Eagle landed on the rock!, the first round missed the rock, but upset the Sea Eagle. The second round hit the beach and ran up the sand, the third round missed the rock the beach but set the grass on fire. The Gunnery exercise ceased, and it became a help in a civilian assistance to local authority exercise, where we put a pump and buckets ashore. Two for the price of one.

I had been in command for eighteen months of HMAS **Attack**, and was then posted to HMAS **Melville** as the Northern Territory Operations Officer.

I was posted ashore, to work in an office, for the first time in my working life!; although I could walk from our house, across the Darwin Cathedral's car park to Naval Headquarters, I was provided with a blue Holden car for my travels in and around the local area.

My office was in the old courtroom, with a large walk in safe for the CB's (Confidential Books)



this remained standing after Cyclone Tracy, but the courtroom walls had come down, over the years the

cement had dried out) I was also the Chairman of the Northern Territory Intelligence group, which had as members; The Federal Police, The Customs, The Northern Territory Police, The Three Services, and the Senior Customs Officer, and from memory also the



Darwin after Cyclone Tracy 1974  
Our own house was in a similar state

Department of Agriculture Fishing Inspector. So we could keep an eye on all the very vulnerable coast line on the North of Australia. At that time in 1972; we had had only a few "Boat People" arriving in the territorial waters, along with illegal fishermen.

On one occasion we had information that a fishing boat was due to arrive in Darwin, loaded with illegal drugs. A senior Customs Officer from Canberra, with 10 or so acolytes turned up, positioning them and policemen along both sides of the Harbour entrance. Closer in, the area around the port was heaving with various policemen. I placed two Patrol Boats far out to sea in case the fishing boat was going to abort the mission. Australia was claiming a 200 mile economic zone, but we were working on the international 12 mile zone. One boat was out near Bathurst Island and the other just in the 12 mile zone, closing slowly, in case it turned back to sea. As we set all this up, the RAAF commanding Officer, a Group Captain, decided to put up a helicopter, with himself in it. They flew across the entrance to the harbour and he "buzzed" the fishing boat, which alerted the crew, who while still steaming for the jetties, and then began throwing overboard suitcases of the drugs. Fortunately, we had customs harbour launches which picked up the suitcases, and the police arrested the crew when they got alongside.



One of my tasks was to fly around the "Top End" in either a RAAF Caribou – in which the Pilot a Wing Commander got lost and landed at the wrong cattle station. Another was in a small charter aircraft, buzzing along at 100 feet above the waves. The point of these flights was to visit properties and settlements to see if they had noticed anything strange happening in their part of the Territory, like boats or planes landing where they shouldn't. I have to add that there were a number of small airstrips, some dating back to WWII, that an unscrupulous person might make use of.

On another trip, because, I took a Fishing Inspector to sea with me on HMAS **Attack**, from time to time, they reciprocated and invited me to go on an expedition way out in Arnhem Land, having to pass through a place called Humpty Doo. Then out beyond, the East Alligator River, where it was thought there were illegal Poachers; catching Barramundi ( which commands a good price in restaurants in Sydney, Melbourne, and other cities too)

The Poachers used to set a fine mesh net across the river for the ebb tide and catch some of the young growing fish as well as the commercial size ones. We set off in a convoy of five, 4 wheel drive vehicles, going over ground that had never seen any vehicle, let alone a 4 wheel drive, at quite high speeds, dodging scrub and palm trees.

We came to the seaward end of the river and stopped, there had been a recent camp, with a fire, around it were small Barramundi, not big enough to sell. The silence of the "bush" in day time, you could hear an outboard up to 40 kms away. This gave us a clue as to where their motor boat was. So we launched our boat, of course the quietness was a double edged sword, if we could hear them, they would stop their engines and could hear us too. We didn't catch them that time.



The noise at night of the local fauna was very busy. We camped out in tents, complete with mosquito nets, and at that time I smoked a pipe, which gave me a good fug in the tent. In the morning went to have a bathe in the river, and my fellow campers all rocked with laughter. You couldn't put a pin prick on my back with the mosquito bites there!!!! They lasted until we got back to Darwin.

In later years, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we visited Humpty Doo, it is now a thriving community, where there used to be just a whitewashed Pub, with no air-conditioning. There is a supermarket, medical centre, café and houses, as well acres and acres of Mango trees supplying the southern market.

Our time in Darwin was coming to an end, technically I had spent two years there, we didn't get any leave whilst up in Darwin, so with the amount of leave now available, it was decided to go from Darwin to the UK, the grandparents had not seen our adopted daughter at that time.

This was another saga. I had paid BOAC, our fares, some three months in advance. We had packed up, quitted the Naval House, sent the car south, and staying with my friend the Harbourmaster and his family. The travel agent rang us the day before we were due to leave and said that we were to be off-loaded. I responded by saying "No Way!" that we had only limited time to go to the UK, we were living out of suitcases at a friend's house. I stated "They could off-load anyone else but this family"; who were going on that DC10, to the UK via Bangkok, New Delhi and Bahrein. The aircraft had come from Sydney, it arrived late, there were no saucers for the cups of coffee or tea, no duty free spirits or cigarettes and the whole trip was sloppily organised. In New Delhi, all the through passengers were strip searched!!!! Even the children. We had to be split up as a family, Adam and I at one end of the plane and Mary and Sarah on the opposite side right forward.

On arrival at the UK; I wrote a strong letter to BOAC, the upshot of it was when we returned to Darwin, this time on a 747, there was a star against our name on the passenger list, which the

flight purser had. I enquired what that was for. He replied, "It signifies that under no circumstance are you to be off loaded"

We had to come back to Darwin, in order to catch a flight to Sydney, this flight the Navy were paying for.

I joined the HMAS **Sydney** in Brisbane, she was on her last Vung Tau Ferry run, bringing vehicles and equipment back along with army personnel. I had never sailed with an Army Major, and his Army staff before, nor had I sailed with two "Sin Bosuns" or "God Botherers" in the sailors slang. They were aboard for the army troops, one Catholic and one Methodist.

I only had one watch, the 4- 8 coming down from Brisbane, the only time that I kept watch on a moving vessel whilst outside the main hull. (The Navigating Bridge on an Aircraft Carrier is offset to the starboard side.)

After off-loading more vehicles and equipment and all the army personnel, we were left alongside Garden Island, moving berths from time to time to allow other ships of the fleet access to the fuelling point.

Canberra decided, eventually that she was beyond her use by date, so we then took off any equipment that could be useful, on HMAS **Melbourne** for instance, pumped the fuel ashore and made her ready for laying up on dolphins on the north side of the harbour adjacent to Tarronga Zoo. Where she lay for another 9 months before going to China for scrap.

I had a move then, ashore again to become the Assistant Chief Of Staff, to Rear Admiral Dovers, although my immediate boss was the Chief of Staff, Commodore "Red" Merson, a man larger than life and a voice to go with it.



HMAS Sydney sailing for Viet Nam 1970/71/72



There were two Rear Admirals in Sydney one in charge of the Fleet his initials were FOCAF (Flag Officer Commanding the Australian Fleet), and all the vessels came under his umbrella, and the other was FOCEA (Flag Officer Commanding East Australia) his responsibility was all the shore bases on the East Coast of Australia, plus the Civilian Department of Navy activities. I worked for the later.

One of the questions I had to solve, came about by a fairly prosperous purveyor of carpets, at a cocktail party asking the Admiral, why didn't the "Noon" Gun fire anymore? On Fort Denison (aka "Pinchcut Island"). So the resolution to this question filtered down to me. I arranged to visit this little island off Garden Island Dockyard; did some foraging in files and books.

On the Island was a large but very obsolete cannon one of three from memory, but this one faced Circular Quay, which had before WWII be used to coincide with the lowering of the large black ball at the Observatory to indicate "Noon" to all the ships in the harbour, so they could check their chronometers. The firing of this cannon could be heard as far away as Parramatta, nearly 20 kilometres away as the crow flies.

Since WWII, there had a great deal of development all around Circular Quay, plus the Opera House with many, many sheets of glass and twenty stories high. This little island was not that far off these buildings, and it was my recommendation the firing of a cannon at noon should

not be reinstated since ships no longer used this method to check their chronometers but used radio signals instead!.

A similar type of query came from the Trial Bay Council, this was up on the north coast of New South Wales; there an old Sydney Ferry was going to the scrap yard under tow, when she broke away and drifted on to the beach near Trial Bay, and the council wanted us to blow the wreck up! This time I was with the Senior Department of Transport, Captain Taylor in Sydney, we flew up there, and inspected the wreck. Unfortunately the wreck was close by where a single point mooring for tankers was situated, with the metal pipeline coming out the sea across the beach over a hump of a sand dune in to the large cylindrical petrol tanks.

I could see that an explosion big enough to blow apart this wreck could in all probability also crack this pipeline somewhere on its passage from sea to shore. Our joint recommendation was to leave as is and allow the children to play around the wreck. It has eventually rusted all away.

One morning just as I arrived at my desk; I received a telephone call from Singapore, from one of our ships up there on exercise. One of their Leading Seaman had been involved in a serious accident and was in hospital. It was thought that if his wife was there it would make a difference in his recovery.

I contacted the Naval Social Worker, who jumped into her car and headed to the western suburbs of Sydney, where she found the wife, arranged baby sitters for two little children, rang me to say that the wife did not have a passport. I contacted the Emigration department to see if we could get a passport in a hurry, we had a naval photographer on standby, and booked a seat on Singapore Airlines for 2 pm. The Social Worker, packed the wife's bag for her, brought the wife to the photographer, then to the Sydney passport office and stayed with her until she boarded the flight to Singapore. Another job done. That was the kind of task that were done on a daily basis.

Then at Christmas 1974, came Cyclone Tracy that basically obliterated Darwin, the Navy went into assistance mode. Ships were loaded with building materials, ships companies called back from leave and headed for Darwin. "Meanwhile back at the Ranch", I was called back to my office, and we set up an Operations Room, to co-ordinate equipment and material going north, and sorting out the refugees coming south by plane, Hercules 130's and 747's (sometimes with 400 persons onboard!) was down the "hole" for 3 days, only going across the road to HMAS **Kuttabul's** mess for food.

During the cyclone, my old ship the HMAS **Attack** was driven ashore in the harbour, but was recovered and repaired later, and latter still was given to Indonesia. HMAS **Arrow** was driven, by the cyclone, under a wharf and was a complete wreck. Sadly with the loss of two men. My friend the Harbourmaster had a tragedy, whilst he was down on the wharf, his wife hear a shout for help, went outside and was decapitated by a flying sheet of corrugated iron.

During my time on the Staff, I moonlighted, one as a de-facto Tug master, at weekends, this was because the harbour tugs of Fenwick's had only Harbour & River certificates, and tugs which were required to go to Botany Bay to assist in berthing tankers and Container ships, had to make a passage of around 10 miles from the entrance of Sydney to the Entrance to Botany Bay, and they needed a Master's Foreign Going certificate for this. It meant usually of getting up at 4 am going down to one of the northern shore ferry jetties to be picked up. The other task was something I had started in Darwin, teaching coastal navigation, for aspiring "Yachtie's", this was at night school in Mosman.



HMAS **Attack** driven ashore by Cyclone Tracy 1974

I also at around this time applied to join the Master Mariners of Australia – Sydney Branch, where I became the Branch Secretary for six years. During which time I met and dined with 4 New South Wales Governors, an Air Vice Marshall, two Rear Admirals, and a Judge.

My next posting was as the XO (Executive Officer) of HMAS **Waterhen**, the shore base further up Sydney Harbour, to the west of the Harbour Bridge. This was the home of the small ships of the Royal Australian Navy, and the "Class Authority" of the Patrol Boats and Minesweepers.

While there, I was involved in two court martials; one as a member of the Board; which comprised of a "four ring" Captain, two Lieutenant Commanders and a Supply Commander. The verdict had already been made up in his mind by the Captain – "Guilty", it didn't really make any difference if we disagreed.

The second, I was the prime witness, so with full uniform, and sword, I was called to give evidence, which I did. I had been the original officer laying the charge against a Chief Petty Officer, who, as his right, opted for a court martial, as against summary justice. When the charge was read out at the Court Martial, it was not the charge that I had laid against him, he was discharged, not guilty. I agreed with the result, the charge of which he was guilty was never read out at the Court Martial.

I had two other "hats" as well as being the XO at HMAS **Waterhen**, I was the Liaison Officer for the New South Wales Naval Reserves which did training there. Also I was the Deputy Director of the Industrial Mobilisation Course. This was a course of civilian high up managers across a range of industries, and service personnel. We travelled around Australia, from Weipa in the north of Queensland to Port Augusta in South Australia and all parts in between, sometimes in a RAAF Hercules 130, and sometime in normal commercial airlines.

The object of the course was to show, both the industry managers and the service officers what kind of industry was available in Australia, what were its strengths and weakness'. Once a fortnight we had a lecture in the "Victoria" Army Barracks in Sydney – I am the only Naval Officer, that I know of; who had the key to a lecture room in the Army Barracks. Then later in the week we would visit a site of that particular industry lecture. For example a BHP representative would give a lecture on the steel industry, we would then go to Woolongong and the Steel Works there for a day. Fly up Mount Isa and go down the deep mine there. Spend a day with the Army out at Holsworthy, the Army's training school in New South Wales.

At HMAS **Waterhen**, I had access to a number of craft, one of which was a very fancy Bertram cabin cruiser, with twin Caterpillar engines, they were always breaking down in the harbour and I would have to get back to base on one engine.

Queen Elizabeth was to visit Sydney, aboard the Royal Yacht **Britannia**, she was accompanied by a RAN Frigate, HMAS **Torrens**. I had taken a Torpedo Recovery Vessel this time, with families from the base down the harbour to watch the entry of the Royal Yacht.

At this time we had an American Lieutenant USN on exchange, his wife was from the deep south, in through the heads came the RY **Britannia** there was a great gaggle of small and large yachts to meet the Royal Yacht at the Heads. When the Royal Yacht managed to pass this fleet of private boats, and came into view, she was pointed out to the American wife, who exclaimed "Oh I thought it would be an itty bitty thing not a big ship", in a southern drawl.

Not long after this Canberra decided to move me once again, this time I swapped positions with another "Old and Bold", he to my job at HMAS **Waterhen**, and me to become the Naval Recruiting Officer for New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, with offices 23



floors, up in a high rise office block in Sydney, and offices in Newcastle, Woolongong and Canberra as well.

This was before computers, so everything was documented on cards and filed away.

The three services were all in the same place, along with civilian Psychologists, and Doctors and a Navy Department co-ordinator. My staff was a Lieutenant **RAN** 5 male and one female CPO's, with three Leading WRANS as they were then. Plus a Petty Officer in each outstation. The complex was two levels, the upper one where Medical, Psychological, and aptitude tests were under taken, after which they came down to the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor for interviews by myself, or the senior staff. We saw some 350 boys and girls every week. Also visited the Universities; High Schools; and Career exhibitions around the State and Canberra.

It was a full on job, and very interesting, you had to be diplomatic from time to time, and advise a potential candidate that he or she had failed, the eye sight test – only one girl in my two years there – or that someone had failed the aptitude tests. This sometimes caused an irate father to ring and try to alter the decision, by threatening to speak to his member of Parliament ( yes I had those usually from the more affluent suburbs of Sydney)

I did have one occasion , which caused some amusement in the office, my boss in Canberra, a "fly boy" Commander, would not agree to putting up to the Naval Board a change in the period a sailor had to sign on for, at that time 7 years. The Army and RAAF, had reduced their initial period of service to 4 years, so we were losing potential sailors to the other two services. At the end of the telephone conversation, I threw the phone right across my office in disgust.

All good things had to come to an end, whilst on leave in Noosa, I received a telephone call from that same person to say that I had to retire from the RAN in less than two weeks, because I would be 45 by then. I had asked to remain in my position as the Naval Recruitment Officer, and this sometimes was allowed, but not this time however.

I had been in the RAN, 10 years 1 month and 4 days. I then wrote somewhere between 120 to 150 letters for interviews for a job. Eventually becoming, for a short time the Operations Manager of a Wholesale Wine and Spirit Merchant in Sydney. A short time, because it went belly up ten months after I joined.

Back to the Maritime world the, I was then employed by Caleb Brett a British firm of Marine Surveyors to look after their interests above the Victorian state border. Although we had a laboratory, with staff at Botany Bay, I found I preferred to work in a large organisation, so that only lasted a year before I went onto different pastures for the next 19 years.



A few plaques from work !