



Naval Memoirs
of
Leading Writer Alan (Tim) Hooley, PM 4211,
R.A.N.R.

20 January 1942 - 21 October 1946

Naval Memoirs of Alan (Tim) Hooley, Leading Writer, PM 4211

+++++

MY INCENTIVE

When I was sixteen, my favourite uncle and 'big brother', 'Bill' McGregor, with whom I lived, had joined a special group of 500 Australian sailors who were sent to England to be trained as officers in the Royal Navy. 'Bill' was the first sailor of this group to be killed, when on fire duty during a bombing raid at the Portsmouth Naval Base in April 1941. It was at that point I decided that, when I became old enough to enlist in the Services, I would apply to join the Royal Australian Navy.

In December 1941, I approached the Recruiting Office situated in the Olderfleet Building in Collins Street and lodged my application. I applied to join as a Writer. However, I was informed that the Writer quota was presently full but that I could join as an Ordinary Seaman Second Class. On signing the necessary papers and after a medical examination, I was told to go home and wait for my call-up.

I then went on Christmas leave from my employment and proceeded, with a couple of scouting mates, to take a bike ride along the Murray River. Returning home on 17 January 1942 (my eighteenth birthday), I received a message stating that I was to report immediately to the Navy Recruiting Office and that a Writer vacancy was now available should I still wish to join in that category.

LIFE BEGINS AS A 'MATELOT'

My life as a sailor began on 20 January 1942, when I reported to the Master-at-Arms, HMAS LONSDALE (Port Melbourne Naval Depot). Having been kitted out in a 'Pusser's' (regulation) uniform, I found myself sitting at a desk with a typewriter attending to the Executive Officer's correspondence. After six weeks, I was drafted to HMAS CERBERUS (Flinders Naval Depot) for new entry training. At that stage, there were around 14,000 personnel at the Depot in various stages of learning naval discipline, at the same time studying to become signalmen, coders, stokers, supply assistants and several other classifications.

On completion of an intensive training programme, which included marching endlessly around the Parade Ground (usually with a 303 rifle slung over one's shoulder), gas mask drill, swimming, gymnastics and lots of other exercises not at all related to my future duties as a Probationary Writer, I finally completed the short intensive course and found myself drafted to Captain's Office.

A Writer's place of duty is normally in either Captain's Office or Ship's Office. The former is the office where the Commanding Officer's secretarial requirements are met and service records etc. of the naval personnel are maintained. The Ship's Office covers all financial matters, including the regular payment of the Crew, acting as an agency for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and paying accounts for supplies etc.

My first day in Captain's Office was quite unusual. The Chief Petty Officer Writer (CPO) handed me a great bunch of new entry forms from which I was required to enter the details of the new entrants on their Service Certificates. This assignment kept me occupied for the whole day.

On completion of the task, I proudly handed the Certificates to the CPO, whereupon he severely reprimanded me for not recording the dates on the certificates in accordance with R.A.N. procedures. No one had told or instructed me to exclude the abbreviations - 'st', 'nd', 'rd', 'th' - in writing dates. As punishment (although I certainly did not deserve it), I was required to take another batch of Certificates and rewrite them all again before leaving the Office. I finished the task in the early hours of the morning. There were no biros in those days, only pen and ink and blotting paper and certainly no computers.

MY FIRST DRAFT

A few days after that episode, I received my first active draft - the Degaussing (anti-magnetic mine) Range located on Shark Island in Sydney Harbour. The Range was attached to HMAS KUTTABUL (Garden Island), named after the ferry that was sunk by the Japanese midget submarine on 31 May 1942, killing 21 sailors. The ferry was used as sleeping accommodation for those sailors on duty.

The conditions of living whilst being attached to HMAS KUTTABUL meant that the sailors lived ashore unless they were on duty watch. In return, they received four shillings and six pence per day (45 cents) to pay for their accommodation and food. Having just arrived in Sydney, I had nowhere to live and so I presented myself to 'Johnnies' - a building located near Wynyard Station, which catered exclusively for sailors who were on leave or temporarily without a home.

For the next week, I felt like a scared rabbit. As one who had never ventured into the wide wide world, staying at 'Johnnies' was a revelation. We slept on palliases in dormitories, each occupied by around twenty sailors. There was a 'snake pit' in the basement which served liquor and, at night time, to hear the sound of drunken sailors, sometimes in a fighting mood, was quite frightening. Later they would stagger into the dormitory and wake up all those who were attempting to catch a bit of sleep.

The week passed quickly and, by this time, I had obtained accommodation, with another sailor, in Elizabeth Bay. Each morning at dawn, a speed boat would collect us at the Elizabeth Bay wharf and take us to Shark Island where, with three other Writers, two officers, two signalmen and two seamen, we spent the day taking readings, drawing graphs and doing calculations of the magnetism of ships being tested on the Degaussing Range. Once established, anti magnetic coils on the ship were charged, which were expected to neutralise its magnetic attraction for any mines which might be encountered.

Our duties were technically demanding, but they were not the type in which a Writer was expected to be normally engaged. Consequently, after three months, when I was due to be advanced from Probationary Writer to Writer, the Paymaster Captain would not allow the promotion to be granted, as he considered that I was not familiar with a Writer's normal duties. I considered his decision to be grossly unfair. As a result, the meagre pay which I was receiving - four shillings and sixpence per day (45 cents) plus shore allowance of four shillings and sixpence - continued, making it quite difficult economically to allow for any luxuries.

However, the canteens which were then operating around Sydney by the Churches, Salvation Army and others for Australian and American servicemen were a great help in balancing the budget. For example, at the Catholic United Servicemen's Association canteen, a generous two- course meal could be obtained for one shilling (ten cents).

The answer in gaining promotion lay in having a working knowledge of Captain's Office and Ship's Office. Accordingly, after completing my day's work on Shark Island, I would proceed to Garden Island where, with the generous assistance of two Writers who worked in each office, I diligently studied King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions (KR & AI), which is somewhat equivalent to the size of the book, *'War and Peace'*. I also learnt about service records, rough and fair ledgers and the many other facets associated with the normal duties of a Writer.

Finally, after three months of intensive and constant study, I must have impressed Paymaster Captain Trivett, as he personally congratulated me on my tenacity and gave instructions that I be immediately transferred to Ship's Office and advanced to Writer with back pay of one shilling and six pence (15 cents) per day.

This study period later served me well, as I had gained a solid knowledge of both Captain's Office and Ship's Office operations, which gave me a considerable edge over other Writers when it came to being selected for service in a sea-going ship, as I was soon to discover.

As the Junior Writer in Ship's Office, it was my responsibility to buy the lunch-time fruit for Paymaster Captain Trivett, together with Paymaster Commander Eric Kingsford-Smith (the brother of Charles Kingsford-Smith) and two other officers at the Circular Quay wharf, where we assembled each morning to take the ferry across to Garden Island. As the officers' daily requirements were two pieces of fruit each, I was expected to purchase eight pieces for a sum not exceeding one shilling (10 cents). It was always a daily battle of bargaining with the stall-holder to supply me with the stipulated number and keep within the budget. Quite often, I found myself supplementing this meagre sum.

THE ROUGH AND FAIR LEDGERS

As Rough and Fair Ledgers are now a thing of the past, I should explain their purpose. The use of computers in compiling pay records was, of course, quite unknown. Both Rough and Fair Ledgers contained identical pay records of the ship's company, and all entries made were manually calculated, the columns added and cross checked. Both ledgers were operated independently and, prior to each pay day, the amount to be paid to each sailor had to be verified by both ledger keepers. There were 42 columns per folio and each folio measured 30 inches x 19 inches (660 mm x 480 mm). Every three months, the Fair Ledger had to be forwarded to Navy Office and the pay records, allowances, date of joining, seniority, etc. etc. of the ship's company rewritten - quite a laborious task. Woe betide the Writer who made a mistake in making an entry in the Fair Ledger.

LIFE AT SEA

Shortly after transferring to Garden Island, HMAS WESTRALIA was tied up at the wharf to commence the lengthy process of being re-commissioned as a Landing Ship Infantry (LSI). Prior to being acquired by the Royal Australian Navy in 1939 and commissioned as an Armed Merchant Cruiser on 17 January 1940 (my birthday), the ship had been an interstate passenger liner. The ship comprised a complement of 600 officers and ratings, with the capability of carrying around 1,200 Army personnel and their equipment and twenty landing craft.

During the conversion period, I had the opportunity of viewing the work in progress during my lunch break, when, with other Writers, we regularly wandered over to the wharf to see the workmen pulling out magnificent timber panelling in the passage ways and replacing them with painted corrugated iron sheeting. The explanation for this mass destruction was that the ship, being a LSI, would be a prime target for the Japanese bombers and anything which was considered to be burnable in the ship had to be removed.

Notwithstanding this deterrent, I took a liking to the ship. An opportunity arose when I had the good fortune of being granted an interview with the Drafting Officer to state my request. Several days later, much to my surprise, a signal was received stating that I had been drafted to the ship, which I joined on 27 May 1943.

Arriving on board, I reported to Ship's Office, which was headed by a Petty Officer Writer. The P.O. Writer controlled the Rough Ledger and I looked after the Fair Ledger. Each fortnight was pay day for the Crew, who each received a pay packet, which was calculated to the nearest ten shillings under. The odd shillings and pence remaining to their credit would then accumulate until the next pay day. When at sea, the ship was self sufficient financially, as the money so received by the sailors would, in most cases, be deposited in the Bank to be held until the next shore leave. The Bank, in turn, would then advance the necessary funds for the next pay day and so the money kept revolving.

Every night, the duty Writer would be summoned to the Quarter-Deck, where he would be handed a draft of the next day's 'Routine Orders', for typing twenty-four copies to be distributed throughout the ship to key personnel and placed on notice boards. Using fresh carbon paper, It was quite a laborious task, as one could only type a maximum of six copies a time. This procedure certainly taught us to be accurate in our typing, as correcting mistakes was always a messy procedure.

TIM ONE and TIM TWO

It was shortly after joining HMAS WESTRALIA that I acquired the nickname 'Tim'. Much to my surprise, I found that there was another Hooley on board - Able Seaman Henry Hooley, whose nickname was 'Tim'. Tim was a permanent sailor, who had been serving in the R.A.N. since 1923 and he was the ship's tailor in his spare time, making sailor's 'tiddley' uniforms - the word 'tiddley' being defined as 'not quite regulation' and much smarter than the 'Pusser's' outfit. On meeting Tim, we established that we came from the same family tree and that we were distant cousins. And so my nickname became 'Tim Two'.

WHO LIKES ICE-CREAM ?

Shortly after being commissioned as a LSI, HMAS WESTRALIA had become a unit of the United States Seventh Fleet. When training exercises were being held, the Crew had to remain at Action Stations whilst the exercises were in progress, resulting in much loss of sleep. The advantage was that, as the ship was now under American command, Australian rations were discarded and replaced with American tucker - e.g. grapefruit segments for breakfast, roast turkey and cranberry sauce, ice cream with our sweets and, of course, spam.

The ship's cooks did a remarkable job. At times when Army personnel were on board, generally for seven to ten days, the cooks had to prepare around 5,400 meals each day (1,800 meals three times a day). The meals were dished out on metal trays, divided into six compartments, and we ate in the ship's cafeteria, which could accommodate around 350 personnel at any one time.

To ensure a fast traffic flow of personnel in these circumstances, the long stools were removed and the tables were lifted on poles, so that we were required to eat our food standing. Not very satisfactory, but practical, as this method deterred us from lingering after we had consumed our meal.

One amusing (? life threatening) incident occurred in August 1943, whilst the ship was sailing through the Coral Sea, known to be a hunting ground for the Japanese submarines. The ship was carrying 1,200 American Marines bound for New Guinea. Unfortunately, the ship's galley ran out of ice-cream and, as it did not have ice-cream making facilities, the cooks had to rely entirely on American Supply Bases for replenishment. This situation caused consternation amongst the Marines and something had to be done to rectify this sorry state of affairs !!!

The ship was being escorted by a United States Destroyer, which had the facilities to make the confectionery. Much to the surprise of our Crew, both ships stopped in mid ocean, whilst one of our landing craft was lowered over the side and proceeded over to the Destroyer to collect canisters of ice-cream to bring back to feed the Marines and us. Quite a risky affair, considering the likelihood of a submarine lurking in the vicinity.

At this point, I must mention the conditions under which the Army personnel with their personal equipment, were expected to survive whilst being accommodated in HMAS WESTRALIA. Their crowded living and sleeping quarters were located in the bowels of the ship - E and F Decks - which were both below the water line. This meant, of course, that there were no scuttles (portholes) which could be opened to allow fresh air to circulate, the only ventilation being air forced through a series of metal shafts. Threetier hessian bunks were provided for sleeping. With such a large number of personnel, the atmosphere on those decks was quite heavy.

In the tropics, which was most of the time, it was inevitable that relief from the stifling conditions should be sought on the upper decks. Many of the Crew slung their hammocks on the open deck or just 'crashed' on the deck itself, and I was one of them. This situation was fine, as long there were no Army personnel around but immediately they came on board, the decks at night became extremely crowded.

OUR FIRST LOOK AT THE ENEMY

In October 1943, the ship ventured up the coast of north New Guinea and sailed into Oro Bay, which had been coming under heavy Japanese air attack. Our Captain, Commander Alfred Knight, who was awarded the D.S.C. in World War One for a daring feat in bottling up German U-Boats at Ostende, was a real 'blood and guts' sailor for whom the crew had tremendous respect. True to form, an Order of the Day was issued from the Bridge which read - *I look to our armament to bag more than a fair share in the event of enemy aircraft having the audacity to attempt an attack on HMAS WESTRALIA.*

The Japanese must have intercepted the message, as their aircraft kept away from our ship, although they were sighted in the distance!!!

ARAWA, NEW BRITAIN - 15 DECEMBER 1943

In December 1943, the ship, as Australia's first LSI, participated with the U.S. Seventh Fleet in its first landing operation carried out at Arawa, New Britain. Our First Lieutenant, Lieutenant W.N. Swan, in his book *'Spearheads of Invasion'*, describes the action in the following words - *the deathly silence of the approach to shore was shattered by the voices of men and the rattle of winches, by the clattering of derricks and the sound of running feet. On the compass platform, Commander Knight, who was also Commander of Task Group 76.1, stood scanning the shore and waiting for his ship's company to complete their task. His confidence in them was absolute and they performed magnificently.*

As the ship approached its position for disembarking the Army personnel and their equipment, prior to commencement of the successful landing operation, the Cruisers and Destroyers, supported by Liberator bombers, had opened fire and heavily bombarded the beaches and surrounding areas.

BETWEEN LANDING OPERATIONS

In between all the seven landing operations in which the ship was to participate, the Crew was heavily engaged in intense training exercises with American Marines and Australian Army personnel. These exercises consisted of teaching them the art of embarking and disembarking from the ship in full battle gear via scrambling nets, and being taken to shore in landing craft (of which the ship carried twenty) for mock battles, all in pitch darkness.

As well, the ship was kept very busy moving reinforcements and their equipment from the northern Australian ports of Cairns and Townsville, and from locations along the north coast of New Guinea, and further north, to the forward zones in preparation for the next major

offensive. Shortly after being commissioned as a LSI, the ship made a surprise visit to Melbourne to pick up 1,200 American Marines, who had been brought to Melbourne for recreational leave after heavy fighting on Guadalcanal. I certainly caused some excitement for my grandmother, with whom I lived, when I arrived home unannounced.

A CLOSE ENCOUNTER

During January and early February 1944, HMAS WESTRALIA was engaged moving Army personnel and their equipment from Milne Bay to Aitape, Lae, Finschhafen and other bases further up the coast of New Guinea. Swimming was always on the agenda whenever the ship had the occasion of visiting Goodenough Island. The ship would tie up at the wharf, which made an excellent diving platform for all those sailors wishing to enjoy this form of exercise and relaxation.

During her return voyage to Milne Bay on 28 January 1944, the ship suffered her first actual attack by Japanese aircraft. Without any warning a bomber emerged from a cloud and dived on the ship. It dropped its bomb, which exploded only a few feet from the port side, showering metal splinters over the upper deck. One of the guns' crews, manning an Oerlikon anti-aircraft gun, stood up on hearing the aircraft dive and a red-hot piece of bomb tore into his arm. The sailor, who was the only casualty, was seriously wounded.

HOLLANDIA, DUTCH NEW GUINEA - 22 APRIL 1944

Following further training exercises with other ships of the Fleet and American servicemen, the ship took part in its second landing operation in April 1944 at Hollandia, in what was then Dutch New Guinea. This operation was a far larger one than the first, and we were joined by HMAS MANOORA and HMAS KANIMBLA, also LSIs.

Apart from the enormous bombardment of the coast line, which took place pre-dawn by the Fleet's battle cruisers, including the heavy cruiser HMAS AUSTRALIA, the operation proceeded without interference by Japanese aircraft, although there was considerable resistance encountered when our troops landed. The Japanese airfields had been heavily bombarded for several days prior to the landing.

HOMEWARD BOUND

In February 1944, much to the delight of the Crew, the ship had received orders to proceed to Sydney for minor repairs. Unfortunately, the visit was far too short, only ten days, and our sailors who lived interstate were denied the opportunity of returning to their homes.

The next opportunity came in May 1944, as the result of an accident which occurred at Hollandia whilst the ship was loading a heavy landing craft inboard during heavy rain. The cable holding the craft slipped and the mainmast of the ship took the full weight, causing it to crumple on to the poop deck and so putting our ability to load equipment inoperative.

Naturally, the Crew was delighted as it would be necessary for the ship to return to Sydney for extensive repairs to be carried out. Arriving seven days later, the ship's company were all granted leave to enable the interstaters to return to their home States for an extended break whilst the repairs were being carried out on Cockatoo Island.

A WELCOME DIVERSION

Five weeks later, when the repairs had been completed, the ship duly returned to the tropics. Shortly thereafter, it was bound for Torokina on the island of Bougainville, where it remained intermittently for several weeks, providing intensive training for the American troops. We were very fortunate that the comedian, Bob Hope, was visiting the Base at the time, to provide entertainment to the American troops.

It seemed as if the chances of our Crew seeing any of the shows were slender, as there were over 60,000 American personnel on the island. However, due to the effort of a sympathetic American officer, a group of sailors from our ship was invited to attend one of Bob Hope's concerts and I was lucky to be included in the party.

Bob Hope was supported by Francis Langford and Jerry Colonna and others. I still recall his opening remarks. He explained that his sponsors, Pepsodent Toothpaste Company, had been most anxious for him to make the tour while he still had his own teeth.

The show, held in a clearing carved out of the dense tropical undergrowth, was jammed full of American Army personnel. I well remember having a vantage point when three of us climbed up a convenient tree on the perimeter and hung on precariously to witness the show. It was all a pleasant diversion, held in very grim surroundings, as the Japanese were only twelve miles distant.

LEYTE ISLAND, PHILIPPINES - 20 OCTOBER 1944

The next landing operation did not take place until October 1944, when the U.S Seventh Fleet, comprising aircraft carriers, battleships, cruisers and destroyers, proceeded to do battle with the Japanese at Leyte in the Philippines. This operation became the largest to date in which our ship had participated.

The campaign to free the Philippines was about to become one of the greatest operations in United States history. The training of ground troops, the huge build-up of supplies and the assembly of a mighty naval force, all protected by air cover, augured well for a successful outcome for General Douglas MacArthur, who commanded the expedition in the Flagship USS BLUE RIDGE.

The convoy, which took seven days to arrive at its destination, was covered by a ring of battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers and destroyers. Admiral Barbey USN, known as 'Dan Dan the Amphibious Man', knew how vitally important it was to ensure that the LSIs were adequately protected in these operations at all times, and not once did he let us down. It gave our whole crew a very comfortable feeling.

Arriving at Panaon Island, which lies on the southern tip of Leyte, at dawn, we were surprised by the lack of gunfire from our escorts. Prior reconnoitring had revealed that Japanese troops were not in the immediate vicinity, having concentrated their number around Tacloban, the capital of Leyte.

Instead, we were greeted by excited Filipinos, in scores of native canoes, who were all laughing hilariously and shouting their greetings to us. It was a most incredible sight. It transpired that the few Japanese who had remained on the island had all been killed by the Filipino guerillas when it was known that the Allies were about to land.

Whilst the disembarking of the troops and their supplies went according to schedule, there were a few anxious moments when Japanese aircraft attempted to attack us. However, our guns' crews and those from other ships kept them at a safe distance, except for one which came too close for comfort just as our ship was about to depart. It dropped its bomb, which fortunately missed, and we made off to the open sea.

On this occasion, we were extremely lucky to be on our way back to New Guinea, as we were not aware that the Japanese Fleet was only twelve hours distant and sailing into our direct path. Next morning, the naval forces of the Japanese and the Allies became engaged in the Battle of Leyte, when the Australian cruiser HMAS AUSTRALIA was hit by a Japanese kamikaze aircraft. Thirty officers and ratings, including its Commanding Officer, Captain Dechaineux RAN, were killed in the battle, and sixty four officers and ratings wounded.

TAKING A SHOWER

One of the many problems which the ship had to overcome was the lack of water. A water desalinisation plant had been installed, but its output was limited considering the large number of personnel in the ship. Accordingly, the hours during which fresh water could be used were very restricted. Each day, fresh water use would be limited to 10 minutes at 0700 hrs and again at 1600 hrs. At other times, it was available through drinking taps, which could only be used for that purpose. Being in the tropics, with its constant humidity, we were always looking to have a shower to refresh ourselves.

When the time came for the fresh water to be turned on, the naked bodies of the sailors would all be lined up by the shower rooms. There would be two, maybe three, shower heads in a small room which could, in a very tight squeeze, accommodate a dozen sailors, all pressing to stand under the shower heads at the same time to wet and soap themselves. Pity the last sailor who would be covered in soapy lather when the water was turned off.

Nearly all the Crew had a bucket, which they would furiously fill whilst the fresh water was turned on. This meagre supply provided them with the means to 'dhoby' (wash) their clothes and, if they were unlucky to miss out on the showers, to use for washing themselves.

There were other shower rooms which dispensed salt water and where salt water soap could be used, but they were a poor substitute and not looked upon at all favourably by the Crew.

LINGAYEN GULF, LUZON - 9 JANUARY 1945

On 21 December 1944, HMAS WESTRALIA sailed into Seeadler Harbour and anchored off Lorengau, the principal town of Manus Island in the Admiralties. There we were to spend a very pleasant and relaxing Christmas period before departing on 31 December 1944 with the assembled convoy destined for Lingayen Gulf on the northern island of the Philippines. The ultimate aim of this massive operation was to be the capture of Manila. In total, there were over 955 ships involved in this operation, comprising three Task Forces.

A BRUSH WITH THE KAMIKAZES

After entering the China Sea on 8 January 1945, life on board took a different twist, as the convoy was now in range of Japanese aircraft, including the kamikaze planes and torpedo bombers. Late in the afternoon, a U.S. Aircraft Carrier, USS KITKAN, was struck by a kamikaze and fifteen minutes later our ship became a target for another suicide aircraft.

The plane appeared to be intent on hitting our bridge but, as our guns' crews kept firing, it must have been hit several times, as it suddenly swerved in direction and two bombs fell from it, bursting either side of our ship. The plane then hit the sea under the ship's stern and was blown to pieces, showering bits of metal all over the poop deck and surrounding areas. On the stern of the ship was the name WESTRALIA in thick metal letters. As the plane hit the water, its port wing dislodged the letter L on the stern, only eight feet from where our 7,000 pounds of depth charges were positioned.

It was quite a remarkable escape!!!. Due to the explosion, the ship's steering gear was damaged and the ship wandered out of convoy. For the next thirty minutes, during which time the ship would not answer the wheel, temporary repairs were hastily carried out. Had the gear been more severely damaged, the result would have been disastrous as the Task Force could not stop for one ship and we would have been left as a sitting duck for the Japanese bombers.

The next morning, on 9 January 1945, the three Task Forces arrived in Lingayen Gulf. Enemy aircraft arrived at dawn and, undoubtedly, we were going to have a very busy day. Of the Australian ships involved in this massive operation, the heavy cruiser HMAS AUSTRALIA took the brunt of the attacks, having been hit by kamikazes four times on 5, 6, 8 and now 9 January, resulting in the loss of 39 lives.

With the occasional interruption by the kamikazes, which inflicted damage on several American ships, the disembarking of Army personnel and their equipment continued during the day. At dusk, the ship cleared Lingayen Gulf and headed south for Leyte and eventual return to Morotai, before proceeding to Brisbane, in February 1945, to embark reinforcements.

DENNIS (? DENISE) THE PIG

It was in Brisbane that we lost the ship's mascot, 'Dennis' (or was it 'Denise' ?) the Pig, which had been presented to the crew by a group of happy Filipinos at the Leyte Operation in October 1944. The Quarantine authorities had discovered it and its days were numbered. The pig was destroyed, much to the disappointment of the Crew, because though we were now able to steer a straight course across the after well-deck without tripping over Dennis, we all missed the uplifting influence of the laughter caused by his (her) absurd behaviour.

TARAKAN ISLAND, BORNEO - 1 MAY 1945

Arriving at Morotai on 19 April 1945, the ship prepared for its next landing operation, which was to take place at Tarakan Island, Borneo, on 1 May 1945 with troops from the A.I.F. (2/24th Battalion).

After preliminary bombardment by our escorting cruisers and destroyers, the disembarking of the troops and their equipment was about to commence. However, prior to the landing craft leaving the ship for shore, the Liberator bombers roared in, dropping sticks of bombs on the foreshore and in the water to counter any possible mines.

The aerial bombardment was spectacular, culminating in a bomb hitting an enemy ammunition dump about two miles from where HMAS WESTRALIA was anchored. The resulting explosion and pressure waves were enormous and quite deafening. The remainder of the day continued without incident, although we heard that stiff resistance was being met on shore.

IN A LIGHTER VEIN

Whenever the opportunity arose, the Crew always looked forward to some form of relaxation, whether it be deck hockey, boxing bouts, gymnastics or, when in harbour, playing football, soccer and cricket with crews of other ships, or with Army and Air Force personnel.

At other times, we would indulge in more passive activities, such as playing cards, 'dhobying' (washing clothes), enjoying 'Tombola' in the cafeteria during the dog watch, reading books borrowed from our shipmates, watching the very occasional film, writing letters or just trying to catch up on lost sleep, etc. etc.

If one was lucky to be selected as a 'disk jockey', and I was one of them, you could play records on the ship's turntable during lunch break and the first dog watch (1600 to 1800), when the ship was in non-operational mode. The music would be piped throughout the ship for the Crew's enjoyment. Unfortunately, the record library was very limited and, in any one session, Glen Miller's 'In the Mood', Woody Herman's 'Golden Wedding' and the Andrews Sisters 'Rum and Coca Cola' could always be heard. The 'disk jockey' received a nominal fee for his efforts from the ship's Canteen Fund.

Having returned to Morotai after taking reinforcements to Tarakan, the Crew decided to put on a concert. With permission having been obtained from the Captain, a concert committee was formed and I was appointed as one of the script writers.

The Committee planned an ambitious programme and the concert was to be called 'WESTRALIA HAT-TRICK REVUE'. There were twenty items, including a 'Beauty Contest', novelty musical items, sketches, pianoforte solos, singing recitals etc. The Crew considered it an outstanding success and it lifted our morale considerably.

BRUNEI, BORNEO - 10 JUNE 1945

Our next landing operation took place at Brunei, Borneo, on 10 June 1945. The cruisers and destroyers again carried out their preliminary bombardments and the Liberators dropped their bombs on enemy positions before the Australian troops landed on the beaches. Unlike previous operations, everything appeared to proceed smoothly, except for some pockets of resistance encountered during the day as our landing craft approached the beaches.

“PERMISSION TO CEASE SHAVING, SIR ?”

Growing a beard is a unique naval tradition which cannot be imitated by members of the Australian Army or the R.A.A.F.

Where does one start? Yes, I know that you stop shaving but, before doing so, there is a disciplined procedure that must be followed and which is clearly stated in KRAI, the Navy's bible. The regulation states, in part - *The Captain is to permit all officers and men of the ship to wear beards and moustaches if they so desire. When permission is given, the use of the razor is to be discontinued entirely, as a moustache is not to be worn without the beard, nor the beard without the moustache. etc.etc..*

Before proceeding along that path, a sailor wishing to 'cease shaving' has to submit a written request through his Divisional Officer (D.O.) to appear before the Executive Officer (E.O.) for *permission to cease shaving*. Once approved, the sailor's leave is automatically stopped for three weeks so as to determine whether the beard has grown sufficiently. After that time has expired, the sailor is again paraded before the E.O., and if he is satisfied with the requestman's attempt to grow, he will allow him to continue for a minimum further period of three months.

Naval Regulations state that, unless such permission is granted, one is required to be clean shaven daily, no later than 0800.

After three months have passed and should the sailor wish to discontinue his beard, again a written request has to be submitted through his D.O. to be paraded before the E.O. for *permission to resume shaving*.

When HMAS WESTRALIA was to be deployed from Australian waters, the E.O. would be bombarded with requests to grow a 'set'. and, at any one time, around a hundred sailors would be sporting beards in various stages of development.

During the period I served in WESTRALIA, I grew two beards. The first one was rather weak and, although I was pleased to have passed the initial inspection, I was glad to remove it after three months had expired. The second one, grown some months later, was far more respectable and I kept it until returning to Sydney, when my then girlfriend had indicated that she did not approve of my facial growth.

BALIK-PAPAN, BORNEO - 1 JULY 1945

Our seventh and final landing prior to the end of WW2 was carried out at Balikpapan, Borneo on 1 July 1945. On this occasion, stiff opposition was encountered from the Japanese and, all day, mortar fire was directed at our landing craft as they approached the shore. Luckily, there were no casualties. In all seven landing operations, our ship was used as a casualty clearing ship for the wounded troops.

The Sick-Bay staff, under the brilliant leadership of our Surgeon Lieutenant-Commander James Guest (he was only aged in his late 20s,) worked tirelessly. Stretcher parties had to be always ready to receive the casualties as the landing craft approached the ship and to ensure that the patients were carefully hauled on deck. Once on board, they were quickly assessed and transferred to the ship's Sick-bay, where an operating theatre, X-ray machine, dispensary and a dressing station were located. At Brunei Bay and Balikpapan, particularly, the facilities were strained to the limit.

MY DEPARTURE FROM HMAS WESTRALIA

Arriving back at Morotai, I received word that I had been promoted to Leading Writer, back-dated to 1 April 1945. This was long overdue good news, as I had passed the examination back in August 1943. My pay was increased from six shillings (60 cents) a day to nine shillings (90 cents) a day, back dated three months. A signal was also received that I had been drafted to HMAS LONSDALE, the naval base at Port Melbourne, to join the Demobilisation Staff in preparation for the demobilising of the Reserve naval personnel once the war ended.

Although I was glad to return home after being absent for nearly five years, I knew that I would be missing the camaraderie and companionship of my fellow sailors and my 'oppo' (opposite number), with whom I had shared the good times and the bad times, sometimes quite perilous, sometimes quite hilarious, during the two and a half years served in HMAS WESTRALIA.

With a Crew of 600, sharing life on the mess decks with your shipmates was, at times, quite cramped and one quickly learned the meaning of the word 'tolerance'. In the truest sense, it was a very bonding experience which I will always treasure.

When the ship arrived in Brisbane on 2 August 1945, I bid farewell to my fellow sailors and boarded the train for the long journey home to Melbourne, where, on arrival, I was immediately granted three weeks leave, which I thoroughly enjoyed. While on leave, news came through that Japan had surrendered and peace had been declared - it was quite a joyous occasion.

DEMOBILISATION ON THE HORIZON

At the end of a very restful break, and feeling much refreshed, I reported to the Ship's Office at HMAS LONSDALE, which would be the pay centre for the many Victorian sailors expected to re-enter civvy street in the foreseeable future.

There, I encountered WRANS (female Writers) for the first time. Having been starved of female company for the past two and a half years, I found the experience to be a very enjoyable one.

One incident worthy of mention whilst I was serving in HMAS LONSDALE relates to an altercation, which occurred in the Ship's Galley with the Executive Officer, Commander 'Bill' Twist RANR, who was renowned for his over-bearing manner. The incident took place about three months after I had arrived at the Depot. Living out allowance did not apply and we were all required to sleep and eat in the Depot, unless we had been granted over-night or extended leave ashore.

With demobilisation gaining pace, the work load of the Ship's Office Writers had become quite heavy. At lunch time, the Ship's Company was required to muster on parade and queue-up for their meals, which were served cafeteria style from the Ship's Galley. As we were anxious to have a quick meal and return to our desks, this arrangement caused us considerable frustration and delay, as we were placed last in the queue. To speed up the procedure, each day around six of us would sneak into the Galley before the parade took place and so jump the line-up. All was fine until the Executive Officer spotted us when he demanded to know who was the Senior Writer. I replied that I was and I endeavoured to explain the reason for us being there. He refused to listen to me and thereupon yelled at me in a manner to which I took great exception. On returning to Ship's Office, I reported the incident to my Divisional Officer, Paymaster-Lieutenant Griffiths RAN, who gave me a sympathetic hearing.

I then returned to my desk and wrote out a request which read -

Request to see the Captain through the Executive Officer through my Divisional Officer to state a complaint against the Executive Officer.

It was quite a daring exercise, almost amounting to mutiny.

It was quite a daring exercise, almost amounting to mutiny.

I handed it to my Divisional Officer who passed it to our Paymaster- Commander Lou Irving RAN, a very fatherly figure who fully understood the circumstances of my request. I have a thought that he was quite aware of Commander Twist's bullying ways.

On receiving the note, Commander Irving immediately left his office and disappeared in the direction of the Executive Officer's office. One hour later, he returned with my request note in his hand, which he passed to me. He then announced - *Hooley, you can tear up your request. From henceforth the Writers are now on 'lodge and comp'*. In effect, this meant that we were placed on a living out allowance of four shillings and six pence a day (45 cents). This was wonderful news, which truly vindicated the stand which I had taken, but which I never wished to repeat. My fellow Writers were quite overjoyed and I was warmly congratulated on my determination and audacity

After serving around twelve months at HMAS LONSDALE, the majority of sailors who had joined the R.A.N. for the duration of the war had now been discharged back into civilian life and I had obtained the necessary number of points to also look forward to a life in the outside world.

My return to civvy street, however, was delayed for six weeks. As a result of a medical examination prior to discharge, I spent the next three weeks at HMAS CERBERUS Hospital following a hernia operation, and a further three weeks at a R.A.N. Convalescent Home in St Kilda (on today's standards, one would be out in a couple of days). Eventually, D-Day arrived and I stepped ashore on 21 October 1946.

To sum it all up, the four years and nine months I spent as a sailor in the Royal Australian Navy was a phase of my life which I will always hold very dearly. The bonds which held us all together in those dark days of World War 2 and the memories that go with them are as strong today as they ever were.

+++++