

WINNING AT SEA

The Story of Women at Sea in the RAN



© Commonwealth of Australia 2013

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Department of Defence.

ISBN: 978-0-9874958-9-1

Designed by Defence Publishing Services - DPS:AUG001-13





Governor General's Foreword

Her Excellency the Honourable Quentin Bryce AC CVO



This collection of personal stories presents a kaleidoscope of experiences and reflections to encapsulate the role of women in the Royal Australian Navy of 2013. As we mark the centenary of the RAN's fleet arrival in Sydney Harbour, we should register with pride, and not a little excitement, the advancement of women in this significant aspect of our national life.

I have enormous affection for our service women. From my girlhood heroines of World War II – including brave, daring, smart WRANs – to the young women in today's Navy who practise a huge range of professional skills, they are truly inspiring. Each generation has opened up opportunities in the Defence Force as gender barriers in our wider society have been dismantled.

As Governor-General, I have been fortunate to have four women naval officers as Aides-de-Camp. They were exceptional colleagues: professional, committed, engaged. I was impressed by the knowledge and experience they had already acquired, and by their career confidence and ambition to take advantage of further learning and work opportunities to become the best they could be.

Each of the stories told here is unique, yet there are common threads – exhilaration, dedication, a hunger for hard work and the rewards it brings. In the words of Captain Michelle Miller, “the fact that I was a woman amongst the first to do these things in our Navy was a novelty (and sometimes pressure) that I felt diminished with every step forward I took”.

To all the contributors, Bravo Zulu! I congratulate the RAN on producing this book, and I commend it as a tribute to the rise and rise of our naval women.

**Her Excellency the Honourable Quentin Bryce AC CVO
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia**

‘ Each generation has opened up opportunities in the Defence Force as gender barriers in our wider society have been dismantled. ’



Chief of Navy's Foreword

Vice Admiral Ray Griggs AO CSC RAN



Since my career in the Navy began in 1978, women have been a growing and better integrated part of the Navy. Today, in 2013, women play vital roles in all parts of the Navy – they are an irreplaceable part of the team.

The steady integration of women into the Navy has not been without significant challenges, some of which have left what I think is a skewed public perception of what life is actually like for a woman in the Navy. This book has numerous accounts by Navy women, describing in their own words their experiences of life at sea in the Navy. I think in their accounts there is a more balanced and comprehensive picture of women's careers in the Navy. While Navy must always have the integrity to acknowledge and learn from mistakes, we must not shy away from describing the Navy's now long-standing and positive approach to women.

For most people in the Australian Navy today, women have simply always been a part of their experience of naval service. The contribution of women has been overwhelmingly positive: they have served at sea and ashore; on active service in operations and deployed all around Australia and the world; as sailors, engineers, aircrew, submariners and technicians; in charge of departments and in 24 seagoing commands of our ships. This organic growth of women's roles in the Navy is the basis for continued increases in participation into the future.

I would like to thank all the authors, to whom I am very grateful for their courage to give such personal accounts of their seagoing Navy careers. I think they and all their fellow sailors are the best possible advertisements for Navy. Whether they are men or women, the fighting sailors in the Royal Australian Navy have done much, over many years, for the security and prosperity of this great nation. It is with great pride in all the officers and sailors of the Royal Australian Navy that I commend this book to you.

Vice Admiral Ray Griggs AO CSC RAN
Chief of Navy

'...women play vital roles in all parts of the Navy – they are an irreplaceable part of the team.'



Editors Note

Lieutenant Tony White

Like many members of the Royal Australian Navy, I sometimes get asked about, or hear jokes about, the role of women in our armed forces - questions or jokes that are often based on 19th century-style stereotypes rather than any reality that has occurred in my lifetime.

As a Naval Officer who was inspired to join the Navy by my sister's trail blazing Naval service and then went through Initial Officer Training under a female Commanding Officer and who now serves in a Navy where some outstanding women have served as Commanding Officers of our largest warships, there has never been a shortage of examples I can refer to that assist those who don't yet understand the contribution women make to the modern RAN.

I hope this book will assist many others to understand this contribution and as the memory of male-only ships fades, the contribution of women to the RAN may become less and less remarkable. In the meantime the stories told by the women in this book stand as testimony to the fact that women can not only thrive in the Navy but that the Navy cannot thrive without them.

Lieutenant Tony White



The Journey – 1980 to 2013

Commander Wendy Gould, RAN

Much has been documented about the service of women in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) and then in the early RAN years following disestablishment of the WRANS in 1985.

Viewing this history through the eyes of the women involved provides a rare insight into what has been, for Navy, a journey spanning more than three decades and one which continues today.

The integration of women at sea began well before the disestablishment of the WRANS in 1985. The first training cruise that included women was conducted onboard HMAS *Jervis Bay* in May 1980. Six female Midshipmen participated in this four day training cruise, alongside their male classmates of Class 2/1979 and then in 1983 women members of the Supplementary List (SL) Class of August 1982 became the first to participate in an overseas trip when they visited Fiji in April 1983 as part of their training cruise.

With the repeal of the Naval Forces (Women's Services) Regulations on 7 June 1985, however, the WRANS as a separate service ceased to exist and all women joining the RAN after September 1984 were informed that they might be liable for sea service. This marked the start of Navy's journey towards the full integration of women in the maritime environment.

Initially, after the WRANS was disestablished, women were only allowed to serve in HMA Ships *Jervis Bay*, *Cook*, *Moresby* and *Stalwart*. Then a Lieutenant, Ljiljana Bradley served as the Weapons Electrical Engineering Officer (WEEO) in HMAS *Cook* in 1987-89 and now leads

a key element of Navy's Engineering Reform Program. Janine Narbutas, at the time a Sub-Lieutenant, joined HMAS *Cook* in 1987 and was the first woman to be awarded a Bridge Watchkeeping Certificate (now called a Bridge Warfare Certificate) in March 1988. Also among the first were, then Midshipman Wendy Gould (HMAS *Cook*), Midshipman Heather Willis (nee Duffy) (HMAS *Moresby*), Lieutenant Commander Carolyn Kajewski (nee Haxton) and Commander Joh Reinks (Rogers) (HMAS *Jervis Bay*) in 1988.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, women occupied a number of key shore-based appointments in the Navy. In 1988, Commander Liz Cole became the first female Commanding Officer (CO) of a naval shore establishment. In 1992-93, Captain Carolyn Brand, Mine Warfare specialist officer, was appointed as the first female in Command of the Australian Mine Warfare Force and Commanding Officer HMAS *Waterhen*. In 2001 Commander Sue Jones was appointed in Command of Harold E Holt, the Naval Communications Station in Exmouth, WA.

In 1991, opportunities for women to serve at sea were expanded. In 1997, Captain Jennifer Daetz, the Navy's first female Hydrographic Officer, then a Lieutenant, became the first female to assume Command at sea in the Survey Motor Launch HMAS *Shepparton*. As a Commander, she served in command of HS *Red*

Crew and HMAS *Cairns* and is now serving as Deputy Hydrographer for the RAN. In 2000, Commander Jan Noonan, became the first woman to command a ship assigned to active service. As Commanding Officer HMAS *Labuan* deployed to East Timor, Commander Noonan (then a Lieutenant promoted to Lieutenant Commander whilst in Command) led her crew through intense and demanding operations in East Timor in support of the United Nations (UN).

As women progressed through the ranks, more opportunities presented and, in 1996, then Lieutenant Allison Norris, successfully completed her Principal Warfare Officer (PWO) training with Lieutenant Michele Miller following in 1997. Women were also able to serve as pilots and observers and in Submarines for the first time from the mid 1990s. In 1998, Lieutenant Natalee Johnston (nee McDougall) became the first female to graduate from pilot training. She later served as the Training Officer and Flight Commander in HMAS *Kanimbla* (817 Squadron) and is currently serving as the Navy's Fleet Aviation Safety Officer. In the submarine fleet, in mid 2000, the first three women, Sub-Lieutenant Louisa Young and Lieutenants Johanna Harrap and Emily Moss, were awarded their submarine qualification.

The next milestone for women was the appointment of the RAN's first female Commanding Officer of a Surface Combatant. In 2007, Captain Michele Miller assumed

command of the ANZAC Class Frigate HMAS *Perth* and later became the first women appointed to the role of Commander Sea Training Group (responsible for the maintenance of training standards across the Fleet). In July 2008, and by this time a Commander, Allison Norris was appointed as Commanding Officer HMAS *Melbourne*. In recognition of her performance, Commander Norris was promoted to the rank of Captain in January 2012 and is currently serving in her second seagoing Command role onboard HMAS *Success*, the Navy's Auxiliary Oil Replenishment (AOR) ship.

In total, women have served in 24 sea Command positions in Navy. In 2013, Commander Cath Hayes assumed command of HMAS *Toowoomba*, with Commanders Belinda Wood and Anita Sellick selected for command of HMA Ships *Anzac* and *Choules* respectively; and Lieutenant Commander Wendy Stewart selected to command HS White Crew. As the participation levels of women increase, so will the number of women in these key positions increase.

Equally important in the history of women at sea, is the contribution made by thousands of women in the non-commissioned ranks. Since the lifting of restrictions on seagoing roles at sea for women in the early 1990s (which included Submarines), women have served as boatswains, combat system operators, communications and information systems sailors, aviation technicians, physical training instructors, cryptologic linguist and system sailors as well as logisticians, medical/dental and technical trade roles, to name a few.

Working alongside their male counterparts, these women [and men] represent the engine room of the Navy, often

working in areas where few women had previously been allowed to work. Able Seaman Rachel Irving was the first of twelve female sailors to commence submarine training and, in 2000, Chief Petty Officer Donna Hayward became the first female aviation technician promoted to senior sailor. Since then, many women have achieved the highest levels in the non-commissioned ranks, some of whom have continued to expand their careers to the officer ranks. Lieutenant Commander Angella Hillis is one such officer. Having joined as a sailor in 1978, Angella successfully progressed through all the ranks to Warrant Officer in the clerical branch as a Writer and is now serving in the Strategic Command Headquarters as a Lieutenant Commander. In 2013, the last remaining restricted sailor category, Clearance Diver, was opened to women and the first has already begun her intensive training.

To say that the path to full integration of women into the Navy has been smooth sailing would be untrue. Because of the unique environment in which the Navy operates, requiring its people to routinely serve for lengthy periods at sea away from family, the men and women of the Navy need to demonstrate high levels of professionalism, teamwork, courage, resilience and support for one another. The early days of integration were punctuated by challenges and difficulties associated with the integration of women, particularly in the older ships where the accommodation was configured to suit single gender crews. As evidenced by many of the stories in this book, a lack of suitable uniforms for women was a key challenge.

The modifications required to achieve integration of

women into the seagoing environment, however, were not limited to materiel changes. Modifications to the training environment and the Navy culture were also needed for integration to succeed and for the needs of both men and women to be met. In relation to culture, the DDG (Don't Do Girls) days are well and truly behind us. Good Working Relations (GWR), an initiative focussed on improving the culture of the Navy in the early 1990s, was borne out of incidents onboard HMAS *Swan* and was the first step towards cultural reform for Navy. New Generation Navy (NGN), an initiative launched in 2009, has continued down the path towards cultural reform within the Navy. Now in its fifth year, the benefits of NGN are being realised as evidenced by a range of indicators which objectively measure the improvement in culture through regular climate surveys over a number of years.

Today, women represent 18.4% of the Permanent Navy (up from 6.6% in June 1982) with, over 32% of those women serving in ships, Fleet Headquarters and operational Headquarters in support of maritime operations, and overseas on operational deployments, representing a substantial contribution to Navy capability. Navy is committed to increasing the participation of women in the future and to providing opportunities for both men and women to enjoy challenging, exciting and successful careers in all fields into the future.

For now, the following stories provide a keyhole look at the last three decades through the eyes of those who can best tell the story, our serving women.

Commander Wendy Gould, RAN

Navy Women's Strategic Adviser

Contents

The First CO Captain Jenny Daetz	??	Joined Despite The Garbage Bags Petty Officer Kylie Faulks	??
The Supply Officer Commander Lisa Batchler	??	The Chief Greenie Chief Petty Officer ET Amanda Kurts	??
The XO Deb Harris	??	A Foreign Concept Lieutenant Sarah Tame	??
The Actress Leading Seaman Tegan Hamilton	??	My Parents Thought I Was Slightly Insane Chief Petty Officer Kerry Rayner	??
On The Road To Command Lieutenant Alexia Di Liberto	??	The Other Two Services Stood No Chance Commander Peta Blake	??
I Had No Intention Of Going To Sea Katrina Blazey	??	Those were the Days Chief Petty Officer Judy Lambert	??
The Icebreaker Lieutenant Commander Jo Haynes	??	You Can Drive A Team With Compassion Sub Lieutenant Mel Pring	??
Action Stations Lieutenant Kelly Haywood	??	The Lawyer Commander Letitia "Tish" Van Stralen	??
The Impossible Became Doable Joh Rienks	??	The Best Possible Support Captain Wendy Malcolm	??
Do Not Run Aground Commander Melanie Verho	??	Cry Havoc Commander Stacey Porter	??
Look Around Ladies Carol Hay	??	The Freshest Face Able Seaman Melissa Gay	??
Ready To Defend The Flag Lieutenant Commander Angella Hillis	??	No Longer Frightened Commander Belinda Wood	??
ANZAC Day in Mogadishu Lieutenant Di Buckingham	??	The CSO Leading Seaman Nat Irvine	??

Bursting To Get Onto The Plane Leading Seaman Kimberley Spurr	??	Girl In The Bilge Able Seaman Sarah Battenally	??
The New Mum Able Seaman Elyssia Shearman	??	The Journey Has Not Been Easy Commander Cath Hayes	??
Goodbye Typing Pool Lieutenant Commander Christine Reghenzani	??	I've Not Looked Back Commander Wendy Gould	??
I Felt Sorry For The Male Crew Members Chief Petty Officer Kathryn Holmes	??	The Privilege Of Leading Others Captain Michelle Miller	??
The Medico Petty Officer J'Arne Dance	??	Like Any Good Mother Commander Gemma Pumphrey	??
The Multi-Tasker Petty Officer Bianca Ridley	??	I Proved It Is Achievable Warrant Officer Cheryl Fogg	??
The Stoker Chief Petty Officer Julianne Cocks	??	The Traveller Lieutenant Commander Jodie Wilkinson	??
Sea Service Set Me Up For Life Captain Katherine Richards	??	The FWOSN Warrant Officer Deb Butterworth	??
All I Ever Wanted To Do Chief Petty Officer Rachael Brookshaw	??	Pirate Watches Petty Officer Evelyn Villalon	??
Back To The Middle East Petty Officer Shannon Evans	??	The Cool World Lieutenant Louisa Young	??
Serving With The New Generation Leading Seaman Alee-Marie Scarfone	??	Stories Of Command Captain Allison Norris	??
A Family Affair Able Seaman Anne Becker	??	Walking Tall Commander Jan Noonan	??
I Would Have My Bags Packed Tomorrow Able Seaman Natalie Brennan	??	The Beginning Nancy Bentley	??



Commanding a navy ship, and women, into the 21st century . . . Lieutenant Jenny Daetz

Modern explorer's maiden voyage

FORMER Penrith girl Jenny Daetz has made head way in a man's world by becoming the first woman to command a Royal Australian Navy ship.

As commander of HMAS Shepparton, her maiden voyage retraced the steps of explorer Matthew Flinders, who circum-navigated Australia in the Investigator during the 1802 voyage of discovery.

The trip was a quest for safe sea channels in areas long believed too treacherous for commercial ships.

"A lot of worries were running through my mind because the potential of running aground was great," Lieutenant Daetz, 29, said.

‘Idea of being at sea attractive’

"It's a big responsibility—commanding a ship for the first time."

She returned from the naval operation to the south-east of Papua New Guinea last month.

HMAS Shepparton and another ship have been surveying the inshore route at Ava Point with PNG Hydrographer as part of RAN's rolling

survey scheme — Hydroscheme.

Although not from a naval background, she was "somehow attracted to the idea of being at sea".

She volunteered for the seamen branch and has been there ever since.

Despite dreams of captaining a warship, Lt Daetz has settled into the role of a modern-day explorer on the navy's hydrographic mapping fleet.

She attended Caroline Chis olm Girls High School, Regentville, before joining the navy in 1986 as an administrative officer and moved to survey duties with the Hydrographic Service in 1989 on HMAS Moresby.

She was second in command of Shepparton in 1993 before going to the UK for specialist studies.



NO 27 RN LONG HYDROGRAPHIC COURSE
1 JUN - 1 JUL 94

Lt Morrison Lt Brace Lt James Lt Abdul
Lt Schaap Lt Hansen Maj Putter Lt Cdr Faulkner Lt Cdr Tipu



The First CO

Captain Jenny Daetz

My interest in the Navy was sparked at a careers day whilst I was in Year 9 where the idea of running off to join the Navy after Year 10 instead of two more years at school was very appealing. However following a long discussion with the recruiters, and to my mother's relief, I reluctantly agreed to complete my schooling. This however made me even more determined to join immediately after year 12 and on St Valentine's Day 1986, at the age of 17, I joined HMAS *Creswell* – one of seven women in an intake of 42 midshipmen in my intake. Having joined the same year the law was changed regarding employment of women, there was confusion as to whether we were Admin Officers or Exec Officers on a wet list or dry list. Regardless, I did not hesitate to volunteer when the call went out for women to commence seaman officer training.

We had joined a Navy where the vast majority of Officers and Sailors were holding tightly onto the mentality that Navy ships were no place for a woman. It was simply a case of fit in or fail. To fit in, not only meant we had to prove we were competent, but in some cases it felt like we had to be better. Fortunately in the 1990's there were indications that attitudes were slowly changing. Early in my career, with the help of one of my Commanding Officers who had the moral courage to speak up, I realised I did not have to compromise my personal values in order to fit in. I did not have to be one of the boys.

When I achieved my Bridge Watchkeeping Certificate I had my heart set on being a navigator, but in 1989 my posting options were restricted to HMA Ships *Stalwart* (about to be decommissioned) *Jervis Bay* and *Moresby*. I was fortunate to have a career discussion with the Commanding Officer of *Moresby* that mapped out a ten-year plan culminating in Command of a Survey Motor Launch (about to be commissioned). I strongly believe that I would not be where I am today without the liberal thinking of the leadership of the Hydrographic Branch in the late 1980's. As a result I chose to specialise as a

hydrographic surveyor, collecting the data the navigator needs. Is it any wonder then that the Hydrographic Fleet boasts a number of firsts when it comes to the employment of women at sea.

On reflection, I have thoroughly enjoyed my sea time, especially the challenges of Command. In 1997, as the first woman to be appointed in Command of an RAN ship, I recognised the significance not least of which was the uncertainty of whether Navy was really ready to accept a woman in Command at sea. But I also could not see what all the fuss was about, as my career had progressed in parallel with my peers and I

'...I realised I did not have to compromise my personal values in order to fit in. I did not have to be one of the boys.'



had done just as much to prove I was ready. My first deployment in Command of HMAS *Shepparton* was to Papua New Guinea, which was good in that the media could not reach me until I returned; so I was afforded the opportunity to just get on with the job. The support and acceptance I received from the ships company, especially the senior sailors, is what I believe helped make it a reality and encouraged me to strive for two further Commands; firstly of a Hydrographic Ship and then HMAS *Cairns*. I'd like to think that my small part helped pave the way for Navy to integrate women into seagoing roles, especially in opening up subsequent war fighting positions including combatant ships.

The Supply Officer

Commander Lisa Batchler

In the late 1980s, ADFA was a new concept - a novelty almost. The idea of a university degree, while getting paid, and the prospect of an exciting job at the end of study was appealing – that and the fact that another kid in my class at school dared me try it out. Coming from Tasmania, there was only one real option for university study, and that involved moving away from home, so if I had to move, why not make the move all the way to Canberra and see where the Navy life took me?

I spent my last night of freedom bunking in with a girl signing up to the Army; she became a classmate and friend – one who I still see today (yes, she is still serving). The first few weeks were a culture shock like I had never experienced before, nor have since that time. As the year progressed and the program settled down, I began to find my feet and for the most part, enjoyed my time there.

I couldn't believe my luck – a posting to a warship and an operational deployment to the Red Sea as a SBLT (and a female at that) was like hitting the jackpot. It was 1992 during the first Gulf War and Navy was just starting to expand the concept of women at sea in warships, having proven the concept in support ships and hydrographic vessels over the past few years. There were three of us posted to HMAS *Canberra* – a doctor, a junior seaman officer and me (the junior Supply Officer). We departed Perth in early October 1992, having conducted our workup and evaluation on the trip over from Sydney in appalling weather conditions. The trip was an amazing experience – we visited places I had only ever read about, and saw some amazing things. Professionally, the deployment taught me lessons about being a Supply Officer, that I have been grateful for many times since. In between our time on station,

'...we were somewhat of a novelty given that the USN had not embraced the concept of women in warships.'



enforcing the UN sanctions and conducting boarding operations, we visited French and American ships, watched Tomahawk missiles being launched and learned how to wear an abaya and headscarf over our uniforms when conducting business ashore in Saudi Arabia. We transited the Suez Canal, spent Christmas in Naples and saw the Sphinx and the pyramids in Egypt. We visited Jordan, and took a day trip to the rock city of Petra and cruised on the Nile. It wasn't all fun and games though – there were some who just weren't onboard with the concept of women at sea, and that made for some tough days. Thankfully they were in the minority, and the comradeship and support from most of our close-knit crew and the inclusive approach of the Captain usually made up for those unpleasant experiences. During our time in the Red Sea, two of us cross-decked to a United States Spruance class destroyer, USS *Caron*, and spent three days living in the sickbay and learning about how the USN ships operate. Of course, we were somewhat of a novelty given that the USN had not embraced the concept of women in warships.

Despite two subsequent sea postings – HMAS *Adelaide* in 1993 and a supply Charge position in HMAS *Sydney* between 2000 which included guard ship duties for the Sydney Olympics in 2000 and a deployment to the Gulf just after 9/11, I think my fondest memories are from my time on that first deployment aboard HMAS *Canberra*. It was there I made lifelong friends, many of whom I am still in touch with today.





The XO

Lieutenant Commander Deb Harris

My first year after school I joined the Navy as a Supplementary List Officer (SLOC) feeling the need for a challenge. Prior to that, my family's only connection to the military had been with my Dad, a civilian welder, who was involved in the construction of the Fremantle Attack Class Patrol Boats in the 1960's and as it happens, my last and proudest role in the Navy would be serving on one of these vessels some 12 years later.

The year 1986 was a transition for the Navy as roles for female members was expanded and the Australian Defence Force Academy was opened in Canberra. The 7 females who joined me as part of the 42 members of SLOC 1/86 intake were first accommodated together on the top wing of Flinders Deck. It was a special time as we traversed this world of change; one day our uniform was a white dress and we were given special leave and



allowances to buy petticoats, to the next wearing male bell bottom trousers because nothing for females had yet been created.

In the spirit of change we were shortly integrated into the four wings of the Officer under Training accommodation and quickly experienced the pride and connection that comes from such camaraderie with our class. A year after joining the RAN as an Administration Officer, it was with this same spirit for challenge that I raised my hand to become a Seaman Officer and join the cohort of females who would take these first steps.

I joined the crew of HMAS *Jervis Bay*, the RAN's training ship, proudly achieved my Bridge Watching Keeping Certificate but then took a role in the Fleet/Maritime Operations Centre given the limited sea going vessels that could accommodate females at the time. In that role and given my experience at sea (albeit brief) I felt I was able to make an important contribution including the deployment of our first ships to the Gulf War.

The next five or so years continued to be a significant time of change for the RAN with many new opportunities opening up for females at sea along the way. It was again in the spirit of a challenge that in 1996 I joined

the Fremantle Class Patrol Boat, HMAS *Ipswich* as the Executive Officer. I was really excited by the contribution I could make to the protection of our marine wildlife through the fishery surveillance patrols that were a considerable part of the role.

It wasn't long into six-week patrol before our first boarding of a Foreign Fishing Vessel (FFV) in the Gulf of Carpentaria. We wondered if there would be a reaction to a female leading the boarding party given the culture of those onboard the fishing vessel, but nothing was made of this - these operations were conducted with absolute respect for our team and for the crew of the fishing vessels. Indeed, the only difference I could call out was the need for me to ensure the webbing for my 9mm pistol did not sit on my broader female hips so as to trigger the auto-release of the magazine during boarding ops.

Some 15 years after leaving the RAN, times have continued to change and I can't imagine how different life as a boarding party now is for all. The spirit of change and challenge in the Navy wasn't always easy, but it also wasn't hard given the support of many great people along the way.

The Actress

Leading Seaman Tegan Hamilton

For me 2003, ended in the bright lights of HSC level Music and Drama, amateur musical theatre on the weekends, and a belief that I was ready to take the entertainment industry head on. Following this line of thinking, I applied for a TAFE course the next year to expand my knowledge in Theatre performance and practices. Living in Sydney at the time, I felt that just by being in such a central hub for entertainment, I would be 'discovered' any day.

However there was a much more logical part of me that knew I needed a backup plan, so the next year, when I applied for a competitive course in Film and Television production, I decided on the spur of the moment to apply for the Navy as well. I grew up as a competitive swimmer, had always loved the ocean and desperately wanted to travel, so in my 18-year-old mind, a career change from waitress/wannabe performer to sailor made sense! My application was accepted and I had just completed my Job Options Evaluation day when I got the phone call accepting me into the TAFE course. My reply was fast in coming with no small amount of satisfaction, "Sorry, you called too late. I'm joining the Navy."

As I sit here in my first shore posting since I joined HMAS *Darwin* in 2006, trying to decide which parts of my six and a half years at sea to recount, the standout memories always seem to be people and places. I have been very lucky in that in every posting and crew change, I have experienced a vast array of different personalities and backgrounds brought together into crews that were similar in that were always made up of good people.

I joined HMAS *Darwin* in Perth two weeks after completing my basic course, shortly before she relocated to Sydney. She was scheduled to conduct a South East Asian Deployment and the prospect of travelling

overseas was as enticing as anything I had ever felt. Working under a sport-loving Commanding Officer who infamously crooned Elvis Presley tunes in a very convincing imitation during port visits and knew every individual under his command personally, we headed for Singapore. Throughout the trip I developed a keen interest in aircraft control and spent my spare time on watch questioning the resident controller about his experiences and what I would have to know to do the course.

The following year I was to be posted to HMAS *Success* and I convinced my Chief to send me on a Procedural Aircraft Controller course first. Sitting in a classroom full



‘I...loved the ocean and desperately wanted to travel, so in my 18-year-old mind, a career change from waitress/wannabe performer to sailor made sense!’

of senior Able Seamen, my Seaman epaulettes felt like a neon sign for inadequacy - and apparently they were. I remember being told in my weekly reviews that I was on the back foot for being so junior and that I needed to work harder to be seen as an equal with my fellow students. At the end of the four-week period, only one of the five students passed the course. The Chief who had

been in charge of my division at recruit school attended the ceremony to see me receive my controller number.

Whilst in HMAS *Success* I completed Exercise Rim of the Pacific (Hawaii), and then headed back to the Air Control School to attempt the Anti Surface/Anti Submarine Aircraft Controller course. This time my lack of warfare exposure did see me at too much of a disadvantage and while I later returned and successfully completed the course on my second attempt, I was not allowed to feel disheartened. Instead, the staff commended me on my efforts and organised to have me posted to a warship to gain the needed experience, and so I once again found myself in HMAS *Darwin*. Over the next four years I completed another South East Asian Deployment, during which I met my husband; a North East Asian Deployment and another Exercise Rim of the Pacific. I have had the opportunity to play sports against foreign nations, participate in volunteer work such as visiting with Cancer patients in Malaysia, and walk the Kokoda trail as part of an organised expedition with 16 of my shipmates. It's a far cry from where I started, but I wouldn't change it for the world.



On The Road To Command

Lieutenant Alexia Di Liberto

I joined the RAN in January 2004 as a Combat Information Systems Sailor. After training I joined HMAS *Newcastle* where I participated in Operations Catalyst, Slipper, Resolute and Quickstep throughout 2005 and 2006. In 2007 I was promoted to Able Seaman and joined HMAS *Diamantina* where I was promoted to Leading Seaman in 2008 and remained serving in *Diamantina* where I participated in the South East Asia Deployment and Exercise KAKADU 08. The operational experience and the time at sea gave me an appetite for leadership and so in 2009 I was off to the Royal Australian Naval College at to change over to a Maritime Warfare Officer.

By 2010 I had started my Junior Warfare Application Course (JWAC) at HMAS Watson. The Navy's Warfare Office training then saw me spend time on HMA Ships *Diamantina*, *Ballarat* and *Manoora*. My next round of training was spent with the ARDENT 6 Patrol Boat crew and it was an operational phase as we were responsible for Border Protection duties around Christmas Island and Ashmore Reef. I then gained my Limited Navigation Watch-keeping Certificate and became well prepared for Fleet Board, which I successfully passed in March 2011.

In October 2011, after my Phase IV warfare training, I conducted an exchange posting with the Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN) on HMNZS *Canterbury* where, in June 2012 I was awarded my Bridge Warfare Certificate (BWC). In 2013 I joined HMAS *Tobruk* as a fully qualified Officer Of the Watch where I participated in exercises all around New Zealand and as far away as New Caledonia. I joined the Navy having very little knowledge of sea time or what to experience, I was very naïve and saw this as being an opportunity to mature and gain some worldly experience - and that I did. From my very first week at sea I knew that being on the water was exactly where I wanted to be in life, I was drawn to the gorgeous sunrises and majestic sunsets, not to mention the



comradeship that I experienced being at sea and part of a “family/team”.

When I had the opportunity to be part of the HMAS *Diamantina* crew as the LSCIS I jumped on it. The idea of being the Senior Communicator on board at such a youthful age appealed to me. My two-year posting on board brought many challenges including, learning a new system, integrating with a small crew and providing an outstanding communications product to the Command team. These were all challenges that were overcome. Working with a small team was fantastic, it was more like a family, we all knew each other very well and provided support to one another during the South East Asia Deployment and Exercise KAKADU in 2008. The biggest challenge was overcoming some of the negative attitudes I faced when the CO allowed me to gain work experience on the Bridge as the Conning Officer, this was to give me a taste of what being a Maritime Warfare Officer (MWO) would entail. Once it was explained to these particular people that I wanted to gain my Commission as a MWO their attitudes changed dramatically, they became helpful and provided valuable advice to me.



‘...I knew that being on the water was exactly where I wanted to be in life...’

In July 2009 I applied for my Commission and started training as an MWO. This major event in my life at 26 years of age meant that I had to learn an entire new job, new attitude and surroundings – going from “below decks” to “above decks”. As it turns out I was a natural born leader, my training kept me going and motivated me to succeed.

In 2010/11 during my time as a Phase III, I was sent to Cairns for experience on board an Armidale Class Patrol Boat. Once again I was back with a small crew, the comradeship and *esprit de corps* amongst the crew was second to none. When the time came we all knuckled down and did the job however when the job was done, we were all happy in each other’s company to share a beverage or two.

The highlight here happened on my last berthing at Darwin Naval Base (prior to returning to Cairns), the Commanding Officer gave me the opportunity to berth the ship; it was amazing to be able to perform such a duty. I did it right and it was an experience I’ll never forget. A memory that has given me aspirations to one day be the Commanding Officer of a Patrol Boat.

I Had No Intention Of Going To Sea

Commander Katrina Blazey

It's the smell of spray starch that still takes me straight back – every single time. Even now, 27 years after I joined the Navy and when I am ironing, the smell of starch takes me right back to my cabin on Jervis Deck, Collins House at RANC over-looking the tennis court. That, and the smell of shoe polish – (but I polish my shoes these days even less than I use starch when ironing!).

When I joined as an Administration Officer in 1986 I had no intention of going to sea – it seemed beyond my comprehension. This, despite the fact my father was a serving Naval officer who had spent a significant part of my childhood at sea. I think I saw it as something that women just 'didn't do' other than as a part of their initial training (which might explain my circa 1986 comments in the attached press clipping). It certainly wasn't why I joined. I was surprised when I arrived at Naval College to find other young women I joined with had considered it a career plan. My recollection is that we were given the 'option' of going to sea; only two did.

When it came to actually going to sea I approached Training Cruise with equal parts of excitement and trepidation - as the look on my face in the photos probably shows. Once I was at sea I recall absolute and total exhaustion more than anything else. Looking back I am not convinced the training was that hard – but it was constant and the watch keeping, steep learning curve and fear of being in the wrong place at the wrong time overcame any sense of reality. I felt like I had entered an alternate universe. There was one daily signal from the outside world with news and sports results and life onboard just felt a million miles from anything I

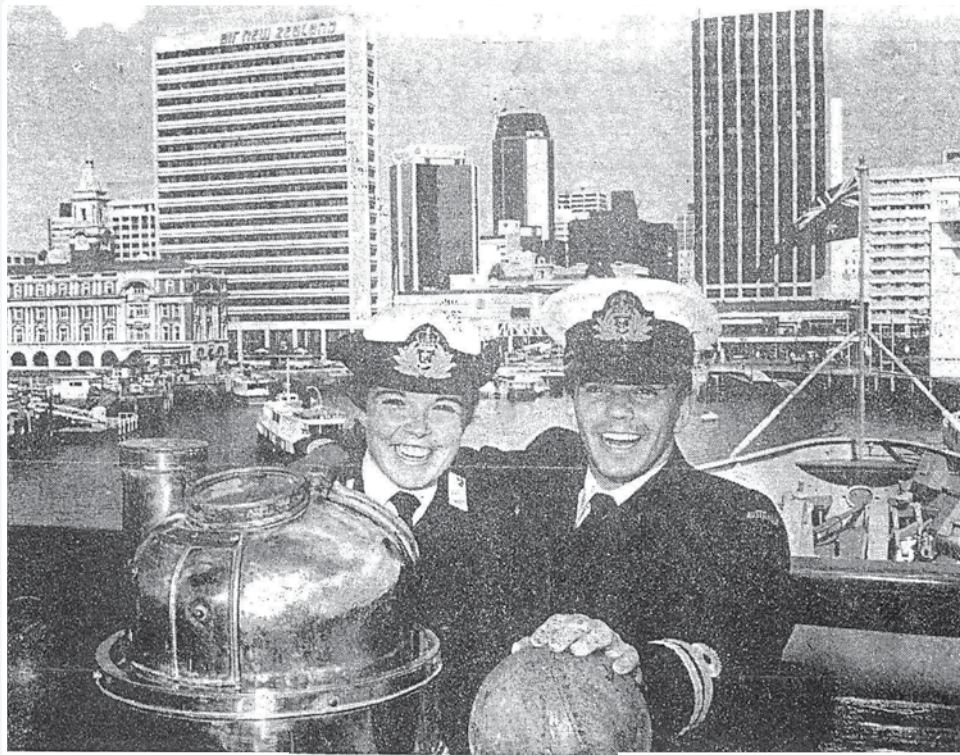
could understand. I guess I just felt lost. But I do recall approaching it all with, what I thought, was a sense of humour and good will – maybe I was too tired to feel anything else.

Having survived training cruise and graduated I was surprised to find myself at sea twice more in my career. In one of my first postings, as Staff Officer 723 Squadron at HMAS *Albatross* we had a number of female aircraft maintainers – something that was, in those days, trailblazing. When the ships flight deployed in HMAS *Tobruk* on Australia Day 1988 there was an assumption they would also deploy which was enlightening. There was also need for a senior female to embark with them; there were no female senior sailors onboard as I recall. So being the only female officer in the Squadron (no female aircrew in those days either) off I went. This time I was marginally less tired but no less overwhelmed by

**'Once I was at sea
I recall absolute and
total exhaustion more
than anything else.'**

the sense of dislocation I felt; the ships routines were something that so many sailors took for granted and I wondered how they learnt them. I do remember being so impressed by the officers and sailors I worked with who just took it all in their stride – their sense of humour and the pride in their roles was contagious. The six weeks at sea flew by and by the end of that time I think I may have been starting to understand life at sea a little better.

And so I returned to sea the final time in 1991 as Divisional Staff while I was posted on the staff at Royal Australian Naval College. I recall less about this trip other than it seemed I finally understood the routines and the jargon and that this time life at sea was less overwhelming. Despite that it was still something I think I may have struggled with and I never sought it out despite the Navy offering. I am forever grateful for the exposure I did have to life at sea – and forever admiring of the women who did make the choice to go to sea and who went on to have incredible careers doing so. I have the utmost respect for all those at sea – women and men who juggle lives at home and competing career priorities and who have excelled in a domain that I never truly understood but always admired.



It's a sailor's life for she

A career in the armed forces doesn't mean guns and frontline combat to 19-year-old Australian naval cadet Katrina Blazey.

"Heavy combat roles are just impractical," she says. "Women are just not physical enough to do that sort of work."

Midshipman Blazey, with fellow cadet Lieutenant Romeo Carinci, is one of 20 women naval personnel and cadets on the crew of HMAS Jervis Bay visiting Auckland during a four-week training cruise to introduce 50 naval newcomers to life at sea.

Jervis Bay has no guns or weapon pits. It is simply an old car-ferry painted military grey with separate cabins and ensuite facilities.

Ms Blazey's father is a commanding officer with the Australian Navy in Canberra.

Last February the former Sydney student signed up for nine years and since then has learned to march, to recognise ships and weapons and is familiar with naval customs, traditions and history.

Jervis Bay is the second Australian naval vessel capable of accommodating women and the mixed cadet exercises have now become accepted naval practice.

"The guys say equal pay, equal work," says Ms Blazey. "But women just can't go round lifting heavy boats. We all get treated the same though and it is certainly a great experience."

The Jervis Bay has 10 women on its permanent crew, two are officers and one is the ship's doctor.

—JEANETTE O'SHEA





The Icebreaker

Lieutenant Commander Jo Haynes

After growing up near the beach in Perth's northern suburbs, I joined Training Ship *Marmion* Navy Cadet Unit at the age of eleven. My experiences over several years in the Navy cadets, including visits and training camps held at establishments such HMAS *Stirling*, inspired me to join the permanent Navy at the age of 17. As I wished to gain a university education, I was drawn to the Australian Defence Force Academy avenue of entry and in January 1998, I left Western Australia for Canberra to embark on the beginning of my career as a Navy Officer.

Having joined the Navy as a Maritime Warfare Officer (MWO), my early sea experience following graduation from the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) in 2001 involved several phases of training as an Officer of the Watch in a variety of platforms including HMA Ships *Success*, *Norman* and *Melbourne*. I was awarded my Bridge Warfare Certificate during my time in HMAS *Melbourne* following a six-month deployment to the Persian Gulf in 2002-3.

Given that I enjoyed studying Oceanography at ADFA, and wished to use the knowledge gained from my science degree, I decided to specialise as a Meteorology and Oceanography (METOC) Officer. METOC Officers are a specialisation of the MWO community and provide meteorological and oceanographic forecasts and tactical support to all facets of warfare. As a METOC Officer for the past eight years, my experiences have been interesting and varied. They include the completion of further tertiary studies, time spent as a maritime and aviation forecaster in the tri-service operational environment, deployments ashore and at sea as part of a Mobile METOC Team in support of exercises and operations, and project work involving close liaison with scientific agencies.

One of the most memorable postings of my career was the eighteen-month period spent studying for my Masters of Science (MSc) in Physical Oceanography at the United States Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, California in 2009-10. During my tenure at NPS, I conducted thesis research in the area of polar oceanography. A highlight of this research was the unique opportunity to participate in a two week scientific cruise to the Arctic Ocean onboard the light icebreaker Canadian Coast Guard Ship (CCGS) *Sir Wilfrid Laurier* during the northern hemisphere summer of 2010. Ocean scientists from various universities conduct research onboard the ship every year by measuring the physical and biological properties of the water column and the sea floor. The cruise departed from Victoria, Canada, and travelled north through the Bering Strait and into the marginal ice zone of the Arctic Ocean, before ending in Barrow, Alaska. A brief but fascinating side visit was made to Little Diomed Island in the Bering Strait, which is inhabited by the native Inupiat people, who rely heavily on subsistence hunting and fishing.

Over a period that has spanned fifteen years so far, I have spent time at sea and qualified as a Maritime Warfare Officer, spent several years studying to gain

three tertiary education qualifications, specialised as a Maritime Geospatial Officer in the area of Meteorology and Oceanography, and had an abundance of travel and other experiences that only the Navy could offer. Each posting has presented different challenges, unique opportunities and lasting memories. I have met some amazing people along the way and formed lifelong friendships. I am looking forward to seeing what the next chapter of my Navy career holds in store.



Action Stations

Lieutenant Kelly Haywood

Fresh from graduating high school (without the grades I needed to commence my childhood dream of becoming a physiotherapist), my year off to 'find myself', lasted only a few months when talking to my family about the possibilities of a military career. The lure of adventure, travel, new friendships, unknown possibilities and even a disciplined lifestyle appealed to me. Before I knew it, at 18 I was at Recruit School, and as I was awakened to my first Early Morning Activity in the middle of a recruit school winter, I questioned how convincing the lure of adventure really was.

After joining the Navy from Tasmania at 18, I waited longer than the rest of my classmates to get to sea. Not only was I the last to be posted, I also joined the crew of HMAS *Kanimbla* who were in an Extended Maintenance Availability in Newcastle. I would wait another year before I experienced seagoing days, but in some ways; this made my first time at sea far less daunting. I got to know the ship and crew before we sailed and the times I had ashore and at sea onboard were some of the best memories of my life. A remarkable crew, Exercise Tandem Thrust and a deployment to the Solomon Islands brought an end to my amphibious days before I joined my first Anzac frigate where I would spend the majority of my Naval career. I posted to HMAS *Anzac* for a year in 2001; experiencing Operation RELEX II and posted to HMAS *Stuart* in 2003 as a Leading Seaman. In addition to numerous international exercises, I was lucky enough to deploy with HMAS *Stuart* on Operation Catalyst in 2004. During this deployment, our Task Group underwent simultaneous terrorist attacks in the Northern Arabian Gulf. This was my first real "Action

Stations" and the first time I experienced terrorism in its rawest form.

In 2005, I changed career streams to and retrained as an officer and a Supply Officer at that. I underwent training in HMAS *Success* and went on to complete my Deputy Supply Officer sea time in HMAS *Toowoomba* in 2011; where I was once again lucky enough to deploy to Operations Slipper in the Middle East. I believe the experiences I gained at sea as a sailor; helped prepare me for the responsibilities associated with my DSO time and to date was my career highlight.

There are quirky things about life at sea. As one of only two female officers sharing two toilets and four showers with over 20 men; toilet etiquette often become a strong debating point on a six month deployment, but apart from ongoing challenges of missing home, my seagoing experiences have been predominantly positive; I have been lucky in that I have always found it easy to integrate to life at sea. Shipmates become like family and create friendships that will last a lifetime.



'...toilet etiquette often become a strong debating point on a six month deployment...'



The Impossible Became Doable

Commander Joh Rienks

Writing about women at sea is more than a neat little history project. It is about how Navy can change as an institution and as a social group, particularly how leadership impacts both. And it is leaders who decide not just '*what to change*' but '*what to change to*'. I wonder if the '*what to change to*' is actually the greater challenge. With this in mind, I think this is a great opportunity to reflect on how any change can be made on and in the Navy.

In 1981, it was an absolute impossibility for women to work at sea. It was the prevailing national law. My experience at sea covers 1986-1993 and came only after Defence was required to comply with employment changes in anti-discrimination and equality.

Early on, these policy changes were not important to me. I was still recovering from the range of social and training scripts I had grown up with and had further reinforced at HMAS *Creswell*. Some of these scripts sought to substantiate the overall irrelevance of women in the military because:

- » Women did not have the physical strength of men on average, therefore could not cope with physical demands of seagoing employment,
- » Women only joined Navy to find a husband,
- » Women were not suited to military conflict as the female brain has poor spatial evaluative capability and cannot cope with stress,
- » Women would distract male co-combatants in fire-fights, plus
- » Female hormonal synchronising occurs in groups and would be disruptive at sea.

I would love to say that I didn't believe these notions but they had an impact on me and on the culture and systems around me. Nevertheless, when the 'impossible' became 'doable' and then an imperative, I was delighted to get a posting to sea. There had been a lot of effort by many people to shape the posting. I raced off to tell anyone who would listen just how progressive the Navy could be. Some were excited, others more considered. One Admiral was very forthright with his opinion. He told me of his deep personal concern that women at sea would disrupt the cohesion that he valued and had striven for at sea when in command. That discussion certainly made me stop and think. This Admiral was a 'white man'; what if others agreed? Even worse, what if this was true?

Thankfully, these self-destructive thoughts were pushed aside by the system rush to get women physically located in ships as Seaman officers. Tailored pre-deployment training was swiftly arranged for Carolyn Haxton and I, as we had had none of the standard preparations. The weeks spent at Navigation Faculty were a real blur; learning astro-navigation from a PWO Long N nearly killed me and didn't do the instructor much good either. But enough training sunk in to allow me to comprehend what went on during a bridge watch.

On the more mundane level, Carolyn and I had to buy our own (male) uniforms, as there was no allowance for ship friendly kit such as trousers or shorts. This is a minor example of gap that appeared in the systems and structural aspects of change. On the wider scale, I was told not to expect a full career at sea as the range of platforms suitable for women were very restricted, essentially four ships only and these were either designated training or marine science. The APWO and diving officers' courses I had sweated over were irrelevant.

'One Commanding Officer welcomed me as a person but told me that he wasn't keen having his command as a social experiment.'

However, if the long-term prospects were uncertain, at least I could enjoy the direct experience of finally getting to sea and being part of a huge adventure. Without doubt, the command teams supported my efforts and were very generous in providing the training I had missed. I found the navigators and OOWs' especially took care to encourage success on the bridge. It seemed to become a competition to qualify the females as an indicator of a ship's proficiency.

I only occasionally felt an intruder. These incidents rubbed against my drive to be accepted as a competent and capable person and mainly arose away from the bridge. One Commanding Officer welcomed me as a person but told me that he wasn't keen having his command as a social experiment. This was serious and I conceded that when one could expect only a couple of opportunities in command, any risk would be unwelcome. At the time, though, I was disappointed as it marked me as the outsider, someone to be tolerated in the role of Navigator. This highlighted that it was really up to me to make seetime work, not just for myself but also for other people impacted by the policy change. Other reminders of difference were more banal; one more hygienically minded Executive Officer hated sharing the officer toilet with a mysterious pink box and worried



that the ship drains would clog with long hair. Standard procedures in port visits had to change, as many service clubs had not considered the feminisation of a ship's company. So it wasn't just the Navy that was adjusting.

But this was just noise in the background. After all, my goal had been to prove that I could work at sea. By this stage, I felt competent as a general Seaman Officer, no better or worse than my male counterparts. I felt 'ownership' of my situation, capable of making a seagoing posting work.

This only left me disenchanted that there was no next step, no system of postings to look forward to. Indeed, the only posting pathways I could sketch were to return to instructor Navigations Faculty or as Training

Officer *Jervis Bay*. Career wise, the best odds lay in hydrography; an area which I had previously found as enjoyable as poking my eye out with a pencil. The final exasperation came when a patrol boat command was offered to me on the day my second child was due.

So my review of my sea-time is that it was both a real pleasure and a source of frustration. There was no explicit or timely planning for all the necessary intersecting structures and systems. Much of this lay in my own lack of savvy to ask the right questions, to have a goal beyond simply proving myself and to identify people who could help. But maybe there is a reminder that such cultural changes need a clear desired end state that everyone sees. That is what I mean by knowing '*what to change to*'.

Do Not Run Aground

Commander Melanie Verho

My high school years involved playing a lot of sport and being in many extra curricular activities. As the end of my secondary education drew closer, I wasn't ready to give up being part of a team and enjoying life's adventures so I looked for something that was more than an 'ordinary job'.



It didn't take me long to realise that the military offered what I was looking for, however I was having trouble choosing between the Navy and Army. Tours of visiting warships to my home state sealed it for me and I decided that I wanted to go to sea. Looking back I don't think I really had a concept of exactly what I wanted to do – except go to sea. In my youthful excitement I thought I'd do a bit of training and go straight to sea but somehow I ended up at the Australian Defence Force Academy for three years before commencing Seaman Officer training in 1993.

My first experience at sea was in 1991 in the training ship HMAS *Jervis Bay*. My thoughts at the time were that it was really big; I could never find my way around and we weren't allowed lights (white lights that is) in the majority of the ship at night. I wasn't really sure what I was meant to be looking for - standing on the bridge wing in the howling wind and pouring rain off southern NZ; nor why I had to wear steel capped boots with my white 'bowling dress' and stockings to be fallen in on the forecastle when we departed harbour. The 'bowling dress' was the standard summer uniform for female officers with pants only worn for ceremonial occasions and as women at sea was still a relatively new concept, I suppose no one really thought it might be more practical to wear pants.

In the years that followed all these things began to make

sense (except for the bowling dress) and the years flew past with various sea posting scattered between courses and shore postings. Serving in over a dozen ships (many which are now dive wrecks or razor blades) across seven different classes, I've sailed through the South West Pacific, South and North East Asia and to many ports in Australia. I've been sea sick – lots, wet – often, homesick – sometimes and frightened – occasionally; but have had some fabulous times and wonderful experience – and I kept coming back for more.

My first command was the Landing Craft Heavy HMAS *Labuan* through 2005-2006. With no prior amphibious experience the notion of driving a ship up on to the beach or into the rear of another larger ship was both foreign and daunting. 10+ years of training had taught me 'do not run aground' and 'do not run into other ships' – and now I had to do both with precision. The highlight of this command was our short notice deployment to East Timor (OP ASTUTE) in 2006. *Labuan* was due to enter a 'dead ship' leave period. About an hour before berthing I received a call advising we were going too. Storing food, ammunition etc., in record time, *Labuan* departed a few hours later and spent the next 4-6 weeks running between Darwin and Dili delivering personnel and gear and emptying the big ships of equipment required ashore in Dili. For my first command and the entire Ship's

‘...I suppose no one really thought it might be more practical to wear pants.’

Company, it was a thrill to be operationally deployed.

I was both honoured and excited to be selected for a second command – this time of the Armidale Class Patrol Boat Crew ATTACK FIVE. Since assuming command in late 2011 the majority of our sea time has been spent participating in Border Protection activities under OP RESOLUTE.

Memorable moments include the rescue of a man lost overboard from a vessel in distress still alive after about 12 hours in the water; and the evacuation of 74 persons – including a 20-day-old baby - as their vessel was taking on water and at risk of capsizing in severe weather. With no life jackets small enough for the newborn, we wrapped him in pieces of foam from a lifejacket, tucked him in a backpack and safety recovered him to our platform on the chest of one of our sailors. Often dealing with arduous circumstances in severe weather conditions, the extraordinary skills and determination of my crew is inspirational and will be one of my most enduring memories of my Patrol Boat command.



Look Around Ladies

Lieutenant Commander Carol Hay

My school friends and I were chatting our way through Year 9 Career Counselling when an advertisement for the Navy caused much laughter and derision. “Who on earth would want to join the Navy?” was the common cry. Well, apparently I would. So as soon as soon as Year 12 finished, I found myself on a plane out of Adelaide bound for Canberra and of the Australian Defence Force Academy. I was seventeen years old, I really knew very little about the career that lay ahead of me and the life that I had signed up to. I had no military family members and I did not know one person who had joined the Defence Forces, but I knew I wanted to be at sea onboard a Navy warship one day.

During the first few years of my Naval career, my time at sea was mostly spent surrounded by ADFA classmates and junior sailors. Throughout our single service experience, large packs of ADFA Midshipmen were bundled on and off those various ships that could accommodate us, and given short glimpses of the areas onboard that would one day become our lifeblood – and for those of us who were designated “Executive officer” these areas were the bridge, ops room and wardroom. For the most part, even though we all did the same tasks, the female Midshipmen were a huge novelty, and we were quite aware that our presence onboard was not yet considered ‘normal’. For many, we were the first women they had ever shared the waves with and navigating the acceptable behaviour pathway was challenging.

This wasn't helped by the kind of welcome we received during some of our ship visits. I will never forget our tour of an Oberon class submarine, where our entire group was greeted with the words “Look around ladies, this is the first, and last time you will ever see the inside of a Royal Australian Navy submarine.” This gruff Chief Petty Officer was very obviously unhappy to have women



onboard his boat. He might be particularly unimpressed to know that amongst the 30 plus young women he spoke to that day, two of them went on to become the Navy's first female Surface Warfare Officers some nine years later.

The other thing that set us apart was our uniform, or more specifically, the lack of uniform options for women. We were only issued with our white ‘bowling’ dress,

which we wore with skin coloured stockings and white lace up shoes – not a practical outfit for getting around a ship and in particular for going up and down ladders. I'm sure the cries of “ladies first” up a ladder were not due solely to chivalry. It took some time for us to be allowed to wear trousers or shorts, and initially we just wore men's rigs, which were not exactly cut for the female shape. The most amusing part of it all was that we were only allowed to wear shorts when the ship was out of

‘We were only issued with our white ‘bowling’ dress...I’m sure the cries of “ladies first” up a ladder were not due solely to chivalry.’



sight of land, clearing into trousers for anytime that the public could catch a glimpse of us. Perhaps the thought of showing a female knee was still somewhat racy, even in the early 1990s?

Once ADFA was done with, our next sea time came in much smaller groups as we were scattered throughout the fleet for Seaman Officer Training. I was lucky enough to serve in three different classes of ship spending three months each in HMA Ships *Moresby*, *Swan* and *Success*. Of the three, *Swan* was the only one without permanent female sailors and I joined it during a widely reported sexual harassment investigation. However, I found it very supportive and did not feel discriminated against or intimidated. I took the view that anyone who had issues with women at sea had personal character flaws that would eventually result in their professional demise. *Swan* was my first warship, and I found it invigorating to be on the bridge and part of a warfare team in action. It was at this point that I set myself a few goals – I wanted to both decommission and commission

a ship and I wanted to serve at sea as a Principal Warfare Officer. I was extremely lucky and honoured to do all three.

I achieved these goals because I was lucky enough to serve onboard a ship with senior officers who took their junior warfare officers under their wings, and were excellent role models in not only how to be warfare officers, but how to be effective leaders of men and women.

Throughout these postings, I think the most valuable lessons I learnt were to work hard and to ignore pettiness. While there were some ‘dinosaurs’ that still felt that women should not be at sea, the majority of colleagues I encountered were more interested in the quality of your work, and generally once they realised that you could do the job as well as the next person, they got on with business. Those that didn’t, I was relatively nonplussed by. While their attitude may have been archaic and annoying, it was somewhat easy to

ignore with a band of big brothers who were supportive and equally unimpressed by gender discrimination.

My first operational service role was aboard HMAS *Darwin* in the East Timor conflict. While this was an extremely important role I was lucky enough to fly out of Dili back to Adelaide to marry my fiancé (an Army officer also deployed to East Timor at the time). Within 4 days of our wedding we were both back in Dili, and I had to ship hop through a progression of Australian and international vessels to find my way back to my warship on tasking along the northwest coast of East Timor. Apart from a quick ship visit to say goodbye, I did not see my new husband again for some three months – and he still owes me a proper honeymoon that does not involve camouflage uniforms

Years later it was pointed out to me that this experience meant I was the first female Warfare Officer to see operational service for Australia, a fact of which I am very proud but I am sure I was the first of many to come.

Ready To Defend The Flag

Lieutenant Commander Angella Hillis

Growing up as the middle child of seven children in country QLD, I had always thought about what might be possible for me to achieve. So at 17, I asked my parents to sign me over to the Navy. Why the Navy? Well, I liked the uniform, enjoyed office work and, when interviewed in Brisbane, was told that women would be at sea within two years. Great, I wanted to travel and see the world. I remember experiencing weeks of anxiety while my parents decided on whether this was a good decision or not for me. Eventually, they agreed on the condition that should the Navy not be my 'cup of tea' or vice versa, I would return home.

On the 24th of July 1978, after tearful farewells from my family, I took the first step on an incredible journey that still excites me some 35 years on. This first step included the obligatory introduction of being shouted at by a scary Warrant Officer Wran and her staff (all females) and a terrible sense of homesickness settling in before we even reached HMAS *Cerberus*. After two weeks, I realised that the introduction was pretty tame compared to having hail smack into the back of your stockinged legs while marching in the freezing 'hell' I felt I had to endure. WRANS did not wear trousers nor did they double (run) while in squad, so you can imagine the pace we were marching at to try to get out of the freezing conditions (and in my head to march right out of those entrance gates with the three-headed dog over them and keep going back to the normal weather and my life in country QLD). After the WRANS were integrated into the RAN, female sailors began serving at sea. What an exciting time it was. I had waited seven years for this opportunity only to have it knocked back due to my being a senior sailor without previous experience at sea as a junior sailor. This was a blow to my dreams of serving at sea and being an equal among my peers. I had to wait another ten years before being given the opportunity

to post to sea in HMAS *Newcastle* as the Captain's Secretary (Chief Petty Officer Writer). Finally!

This posting coincided with the remodelled messing on *Newcastle* to accommodate up to 32 female sailors for the first time. Settling in while the ship was alongside was daunting with so much to learn. I will always be grateful for the extremely patient and welcoming crew, particularly the Chief's Mess who took me under their wing. Being the only female Chief onboard, they were

'...small percentage of males who believed women should not be at sea as it was the domain of men only. I could never quite understand this sentiment...'

keen to ensure I was educated on the expectations of a seagoing senior sailor. Most of us were married and around the same age. I recall my first night sleeping onboard (the night before we sailed) and being told to 'Take a Quell and leave your red light on to get used to it'. So off to my bunk I went and followed this advice. Imagine my surprise when at 0300 I woke up, fell onto the deck and did not have a clue where I was. How was I going to cope with this when the ship started moving? Cope we first-timers did and over the next two years grew more as sailors. There was a number of relationships form among the crew (we would have been dumb to think they would not), which were handled with sensitivity and according to the guidelines of the day. Notwithstanding, we also had that small percentage of males who believed women should not be at sea as it was the domain of men only. I could never quite understand this sentiment, particularly from those men who were at sea for the first time, too. A strong and understanding Command team assisted in the relatively smooth transition into a mixed gender crew. This had such a positive influence on me; *Newcastle* will always hold a special place in my memory.



Fast forward nine years and I found myself back at sea as Ships Warrant Officer in HMAS *Ballarat* from 2004 to 2006. All of the reservations from when I first went to sea in 1995 came flooding back, particularly as I placed high expectations on myself on what I would bring to the position. Completion of patrols, exercises and a minor refit were followed by a shift into high tempo preparations for a deployment to the Gulf. This was a wet, sick and tired time for all as we went through our paces and learnt valuable lessons from the team that trained us. We were ready to 'Defend the Flag' when we sailed from Sydney and six months later returned knowing we had delivered the best we could. The heartbeat of a ship is strongest when the team is proud, busy and delivering what is required. You can feel and see the pride in all of a ship's crew when you watch them return home to loved ones, particularly those sailors who have become a parent while away.



ANZAC Day in Mogadishu

Lieutenant Di Buckingham

It seemed inevitable that I would have a career associated with the sea, growing up going to sea with my father who was a professional southern rock lobster fisherman in SA. I also remember watching my cousin getting dressed in his uniform to attend Navy Cadets and then I would listen to his adventures every time he came home on leave from the Navy. So as soon as Navy Cadets started accepting girls I joined at the age of 13, it didn't take me long after that to decide that I wanted a Navy career. I arrived at recruit school on the 7th Jan 1986; again there were few surprises as I had been here previously on Navy Cadet annual camps.



The transition into Navy life was reasonably easy for me after 4 years in Navy Cadets which assisted in assuring I became a leading recruit or a red roper as we were known as we wore red lanyards. Having joined the Navy as a WRAN in 1986 I was one of the first of a new breed of female sailors. It was at this time that the conditions of serving for women were changed to include a sea service obligation, prior to this WRANS were not required to undertake sea service. This was exciting news to me as I had joined the Navy to go to sea and as such looked forward to my first sea posting. I didn't have to wait long as I was posted to HMAS *Jervis Bay* in January 1989. My time onboard *Jervis Bay* failed to be the sea adventure I was looking forward to as the ship went into refit at Cockatoo Island and remained there for nine months as a result of on going strikes.

Then in Dec 1991 (until Jun 1994) I was posted to HMAS *Tobruk* and that is when my real sea adventures started. The ship participated in numerous amphibious exercises in the northern waters of Australia, which enabled me to undertake various auxiliary roles that included marshalling helicopters, stern door marriages and diving attendant. I enjoyed all aspect of my role onboard although it was

very physically demanding on occasions, as a victualler my role was to store and manage all food and clothing requirements for the ship. I remember one day stacking 6 tonnes (in 20kg bags) of potatoes in a fridge in preparation for our deployment to Somalia. Deploying to Somalia for Operation Solace on Boxing Day 1992 was one of the scariest things I have ever done, I believe this was one of the earliest operations where women were deployed. Celebrating ANZAC day on the out skirts of Mogadishu was an experience I will never forget and I was lucky enough to share it with Leanne Dunn a fellow Mount Gambier cadets member!

Six years later, in 1999, I returned to HMAS *Tobruk* as a Petty Officer and once again I was off on an operational deployment; this time it was East Timor as part of the INTERFET force providing stability to the newly independent country. It was during this deployment that I was involved in the first beach landing since WWII when we landed troops in Suai. I am not sure what it is but when I returned to sea onboard HMAS *Manoora* in 2001 as a Chief Petty Officer I was once again preparing for an operational deployment, this time it was the Arabian Gulf. This was the pinnacle of my career in logistics.



I was the Stores Accounting Officer of a Major Fleet Unit going on a 6 month operational deployment. I was responsible for ensuring the ship had enough stores onboard to be self sufficient for 6 months. I worked relentlessly to achieve this and this was recognised by Command through the award of a Commanding Officers' Commendation.

On promotion to Warrant Officer I believed my sea going days were over, however with the creation of the Ship's Warrant Officer position aboard Major Fleet Units I was once again provided with another opportunity to return to sea. I was selected as the Ship's Warrant Officer in HMAS *Sydney* in 2007 and this posting provided me an opportunity to become a member of the Command Team with a plethora of issues for me to resolve.

'It was difficult for me to establish social groups which can make you feel very isolated even when your surrounded by hundreds of people.'

I would have to say this was my hardest posting to sea not from a work perspective but from a social interaction perspective. I had felt the isolation when I was the Chief Petty Officer on *Manoora* as I was the only female Senior Sailor aboard at the time. Once again as the Ship's Warrant Officer I was the only female in my mess but I also no longer belonged to a Department. It was difficult for me to establish social groups which can make you feel very isolated even when your surrounded by hundreds of people.

The good news is though that I am once again ready to return to sea in my new rank, as I have not ticked off living in the wardroom, yet!

Joined Despite The Garbage Bags

Petty Officer Kylie Faulks

People always ask – why would a girl growing up in a small country town of around 2000 people and at least 8 hours drive to the nearest beach decide to join the Navy. To be honest, I am not really sure of the answer either! Growing up my favourite show was JAG so I guess that had some sort of influence over me! I have no family history with the Military and had never seen an Australian Navy ship until the day I joined over 11 years ago.

My first memory of the whole process was travelling to a recruiting centre in Lismore, NSW where they made me sit and watch a video on life at sea. I still recall seeing all of these men walking around the ship carrying garbage bags for when they were seasick and thought this was just a made up video! Well 11 years on and it is still reality! From there I decided to take the plunge and register for the application process. After getting through the interviews and fitness testing, it was off to “Sunny Cerberus” late at night, on a bus full of people I had just spent the last 24 hours with in Sydney Recruiting, where we got to learn each others first names, only to arrive at Recruit School and be referred to as your surname.

Having never seen a Navy Ship until I joined the Navy, reality soon set in as I ventured off for my first day to join HMAS *Sydney*. Most of my time onboard was spent in refit and a small amount of time in and out of Jervis Bay. From there I was promoted and went back to the delightful weather of Melbourne to join HMAS *Perth*. This saw some great challenges of commissioning a ship and setting up the Ship’s Office and dealing with seasickness across the infamous Great Australian Bight. Memories instantly came flooding back of that initial recruiting video and all those men spewing in the black garbage bags.



After *Perth*, my next adventure at sea was in HMAS *Sirius*, which was like living on a cruise ship compared to a warship. With a small crew, we were required to do a lot more ancillary duties than what I would do as a Petty Officer Maritime Logistics - Personnel on a frigate. I soon learnt that I couldn’t tie knots and the best way for me was to tie lots, along with connecting up tugs and being in charge of Standing Sea Fire Party. Many adventures were certainly had during the two years in HMAS *Sirius* – including crossing the line for the first time then becoming the Queen!

‘...I was often seen as a “Mum” figure for the junior female sailors who came to me with many issues and a sister to the boys in the mess.’



Having only one other female Senior Sailor onboard I was often seen as a “Mum” figure for the junior female sailors who came to me with many issues and a sister to the boys in the mess. It made me realise that even though as females we are predominantly in a male’s world, there are often times when we are relied upon. My latest adventure is in HMAS *Toowoomba*, I am hoping this posting is as rewarding as all my previous positions at sea.

I have enjoyed my time in the Navy as a female and found that regardless of rank and position onboard I have always had a lot of respect and been able to adapt to all situations and surroundings. A lot of my family continually ask what it is like to be in a “male” world but to be honest I rarely even look at the Navy and Defence Force in that light.



The Chief Greenie

Chief Petty Officer Amanda Kurts

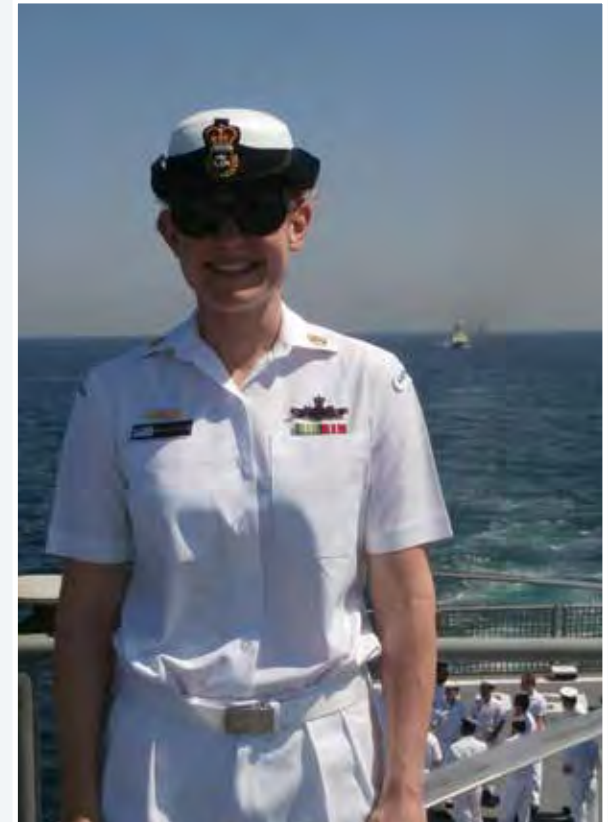
I was in Albany West Australia, I was 18 years of age, I was fast approaching the end of a Certificate of Electronics at TAFE, I had no significant plans for my future and I was sitting at the dining table eating breakfast with my Dad when I saw a recruitment ad in the newspaper for the Defence Force. All three services were advertised so I asked him which one would be the best for me to join. Being an ex-Army reservist he gave me a sufficiently descriptive explanation of things I would be required to do “out bush” in the Army. He then made some interesting remarks about the Air Force and flyboys in blue. So it really only left me one choice. The Navy.

I applied for the Navy and was initially knocked back based on a case of childhood asthma. I told my Dad that was it; I wasn't going to push the application any further. He encouraged me to complete the additional testing required to prove that my asthma had cleared and that I would be medically fit to join the Navy. By early 1997 my application was approved and in April 1997 I officially joined the Navy.

As an Electronics Technician working in an office environment, my posting to HMAS *Canberra* in late 2002 came as a great relief. I was really looking forward to getting some more sea service under my belt and really wanted to get my hands dirty working in electronics equipment again. With every new sea posting comes endless possibilities, new friends, new places to travel, new people to work with. I got everything that I had hoped for in the three years I served in HMAS *Canberra*. I was even fortunate enough to be part of her decommissioning in November 2005 when the Hoodoo Gurus came to perform “A Thousand Miles Away” on our flight deck and again later at the ship's decommissioning ball. Not every day was roses and fairy tales. I worked hard and for long hours and often under great pressure when mission critical equipment was broken.

‘With every new sea posting comes endless possibilities, new friends, new places to travel, new people to work with.’

Being part of the military means that you just have to get on and do what is required to get the job done. Though it was not like I was ever on the ship experiencing hardship all on my own. Working as part of a tight-knit crew (with little space to call your own) meant that everything you experienced was shared with at least one other person. I made lifelong friends in those years in HMAS *Canberra*, Girl friends that I was privileged to live with, work with and travel the world with. Border protection roles, international Defence exercises and goodwill visits were also part of my experiences on that ship. I was even lucky enough to meet the man who would later become my husband!





‘...I am honoured to be able to say that I have served my country and had a great time doing it.’

My most recent and most memorable sea service has been my posting to HMAS *Toowoomba* and her 2012/2013 deployment to Operation SLIPPER to conduct Maritime Security Operations in support of the war in Afghanistan. After a three-year hiatus from the Navy I returned with renewed enthusiasm in 2010. In April 2012 I was promoted to Chief Petty Officer and commenced a posting on-board *Toowoomba*. I felt so privileged to be part of a team of people who were all working together to achieve the same goal. Whilst the six-month deployment was long and there were times when I so much wanted to be at home, I was able to

briefly visit places that I would never have gone if it were not for the Navy. Salalah, Muscat, Dubai, Karachi, Abu Dhabi, Mombasa, Seychelles and Colombo were all part of the experience. My focus for this posting was so different to my previous sea postings. It was not about proving my technical expertise it was about being a great manager of people and of technicians. After more than 13 years’ service in the Navy I had never felt more empowered and more armed with information than at this point. I worked extremely hard to get to where I am and I am honoured to be able to say that I have served my country and had a great time doing it.

A Foreign Concept

Lieutenant Sarah Tame

I knew exactly what I wanted to do since I was 10 years old – join the Navy just like my Aunt. Growing up in Toowoomba there really wasn't much opportunity to be on the water and the idea of joining the military was a foreign concept at my all girls' high school. However, I never wavered in my desire to join, and as soon as I graduated from Year 12 I did; six months shy of my 18th birthday.

My first day wasn't a great start to a military career as I arrived late and things went downhill from there. I couldn't understand why walking around barefoot was taboo, and calling a person Sir and Ma'am seemed unnatural. I called my mum that night in tears saying, "What have I done!" It was unlike anything I had imagined for the past seven years. But my mum told me that things would get better and I have never looked back from that night.

I have now been in the Navy almost 10 years and love it. The best experience was deploying to the Middle East onboard HMAS *Toowoomba*, where I was awarded my Bridge Warfare Certificate. Never had I imagined that I would be capable of conducting helicopter operations,

tactical manoeuvres and operating with foreign warships all at the same time. One particularly highlight was acting as plane guard for the USS *Ronald Reagan* for a week. This involved stationing the ship in a particular spot relative to the *Ronald Reagan*, which was no easy task to achieve as she could increase to 40 knots and turn in the opposite direction in a matter of seconds. After each four-hour watch during this week I felt immense pride that I had conducted operations successfully, and also immense relief!

After gaining my core qualifications, I specialised as a Hydrographic Surveyor. Whilst life at sea is a little less busy now (and perhaps a little more hazardous due to crocodiles) I still love the fact that I get to go to places

very few people have been and work and live with some of the best people. The Navy has always been challenging and I cannot say that I have loved absolutely every minute; time away from loved ones is never easy. But there has never been a day in which I couldn't get through with the help of the men and women I have served with. Whilst I am proud to be a woman in the military, I am more proud to be a member of the Royal Australian Navy.

'...my mum told me that things would get better...'







My Parents Thought I Was Slightly Insane

Chief Petty Officer Kerry Rayner

I come from a Defence Force Family. My Grandfather served in the Australian Army, my Father and brother served in both the Australian Army and RAAF and my mother in the RAF. And then I went and married a Navy Chef. Consequently, he was posted to HMAS *Cerberus* and off we went. The RAN had just changed its policy on entry requirements to “less than 35 years of age with no prior service”. I was already living in Married Quarters on the base so I jumped on the bandwagon.

My parents thought I was slightly insane to commence my naval career on 15 January 1995; celebrating my 32nd birthday in Recruit School.

In January 1997, I joined HMAS *Anzac* as an Able Seaman Writer and had my first overseas deployment. It was amazing. There were 15 females sharing the mess deck, we made a pact that in each port we had to get dressed like girls and go out to dinner at least once. This raised a few eyebrows from the males on board who had only seen us in baggy grey overalls.

In November 2002, I joined HMAS *Kanimbla* as the Leading Seaman Naval Police Coxswain. In January 2003, we were deployed to the Arabian Gulf to be part of the International Coalition Against Terrorism (ICAT). The work began to get the crew to the operational level required. This was an exhausting period of time where days blended into each other. At 0300, 18 March 2003, the coalition forces commenced a land bombardment on the coastline of Iraq and the US Navy were firing missiles over the top of us. We watched the ‘fireworks’ as the LCM8s advanced towards the beach in the pre-dawn light. It was surreal, like watching a WWII movie.

I have since deployed to sea as part of Operation Resolute for Border Protection tasks and in Multi-National Task forces and exercises.

The one piece of advice, I have given to all females joining for their first sea posting: There will be a time when you feel emotional and overwhelmed. You will find that you want to burst into tears. But then you will find that once you get it out, you will pick yourself up and get on with the job.

‘There were 15 females sharing the mess deck, we made a pact that in each port we had to get dressed like girls and go out to dinner at least once.’



The Other Two Services Stood No Chance

Commander Peta Blake

Having been lucky enough to grow up near the foreshore of Sydney Harbour, watching the flying boats take off and land and the Navy ships coming and going, I was only ever interested in joining the Navy – the other two services stood no chance, particularly in view of the posting locations! And so I joined the Navy immediately following my graduation as a dentist.

I was initially posted to HMAS *Kuttabul*, and couldn't believe my luck when towards the end of my first year of service, as a junior lieutenant in 1985, I was posted to HMAS *Jervis Bay*, thus becoming the first female dental officer to serve at sea in the Royal Australian Navy.

As HMAS *Jervis Bay* was a training ship, and given the relatively peaceful world situation at the time, we did not do a major deployment, but heading to New Zealand was exciting enough in the circumstances. There were two other female officers, and perhaps eight female sailors, in the entire crew – it was very early days for females at sea, and we were seriously outnumbered. It was a training cruise in more ways than one – a very steep learning curve for everyone involved!

Certainly doing dentistry on a moving ship was a new challenge, with one leg propped under the portable chair to stop it collapsing, the other braced against the instrument trolley to stop it rolling away across the Sick Bay. Perhaps not surprisingly, getting the sailors to actually attend their appointments was another challenge and so, like many other dental officers at sea, I became an expert at multitasking – dentist, Wardroom mess auditor, assistant sick bay attendant, and so the list went on. Perhaps one of the main roles was in public relations

– at cocktail parties and other functions in the various ports we visited, the other female members of the ship's company and I were deluged by people fascinated that we were there, and asking endless questions about our experiences as some of the first women at sea in the RAN.

Happily I can say that, for my short time at sea, my experiences were overwhelmingly good and very rewarding. The majority of the ship's company were supportive, friendly and helpful, and many seemed

genuinely happy to have women at sea. There were only a few individuals who were openly resentful, or who thought we were cramping their style at parties, or in the line book! Perhaps I was partly protected by my position– after all, no one wants to upset the dental officer too much (we have ways of getting even!), but for me it was a privilege to see the hands on training, belong to a ship's company at sea, rather than just watch them coming and going from the surgery at Garden Island, and to be a part of the very first days of women at sea in the RAN.



'...doing dentistry on a moving ship was a new challenge, with one leg propped under the portable chair to stop it collapsing, the other braced against the instrument trolley to stop it rolling away...'





Those Were The Days

Chief Petty Officer Judy Lambert

Every Friday night I would watch a group of Junior Recruits pass my house to where their sponsor lived. They seemed to have so much fun together; I decided that was the life for me. Don't worry they all tried to talk me out of it, but at 17, with lots of encouragement from family and friends, I was off to sunny HMAS *Cerberus*. I had definitely joined a boy's club - 36 years later I am still hanging in there. Joining the Navy in 1977 when women were unable to go to sea did not preclude me from taking up every opportunity to get a searide.

My first experience was when RAN Ships called in to Darwin NT (1979) I think it was HMAS *Perth* and *Hobart*. I was off for the day in a pair of borrowed overalls and the highlight – getting “tea bagged” on a jack stay transfer. I had not laughed so much in all my life, better than an amusement ride. I was hooked. I then started nagging my supervisor at Darwin Naval Base till I got a ride on a patrol boat. They were looking for a ‘greenie’ or Electronic Technician to go out for maintenance trials and my hand was up like a shot. Shorts, T-shirt and my brown plastic sandals, those were the days.

In the 80's women were finally being posted to sea. Mind you – we had to change our names from WRANS to Seaman before it could happen and of course my hand was straight up again, only to be told I was too old and they wanted junior females for the first trials. My response was to volunteer for Submarines... lots of laughs all round but my boss did process the official request that I lodged. I am not sure what I would have done if it had been approved.

I had lots of opportunities to go out on the Fremantle Class Patrol Boats whilst I was in charge of the workshop at FIMA Darwin from Oct 1995 to March 1999, often “crashing” in the Senior Sailors Mess. Not a very

big bench but I was getting rocked to sleep. Every one keeps telling me “that's all that greenies do – sleep”. I never had any problems and was always treated with respect with the obligatory (harmless) frivolities and ribald comments. Don't worry I gave as good as I got. Best memory - cooking bacon and eggs on one trip, when everyone was seasick – even the cook. I ended up using all the bread when every one started smelling toast – the Cook was not happy when he found out. There was a “hit” out on the person who ordered clear garbage bags (apparently they were cheaper) instead of the normal black ones – not pleasant, especially when they were used as seasick bags.

My latest exploit was when Warrant Officer Jeannie Roberts and I went off to HMAS *Success* for a few weeks. This was a reality check. Life was taken very seriously and I am certain the morale was not as good as the “old days”. It was my first taste of a “big” ship and it just highlighted how critical it was for all members of a mess to get on and how important it was for departments to keep an eye out for their sailors. With smaller boats you have no choice but to get on – you live in each other's pockets. We were in the Senior Sailors Mess with about 10 others and as last in, we got the



top bunks – which I didn't mind. Making sure everything was tied down when you left the mess every time was getting to me but it eventually became habit and I did get used to sharing with all the other girls. I don't know how they managed to get all their civilian clothes, shoes and accessories in such a small area, but they were very well organised.

I have loved my time in the Navy and have continued my commitment in the Reserves. The Navy is still my main job - albeit part time. And even though I am older and wiser, it doesn't stop me wishing things had worked out differently and that I went to sea and travelled the world on the grey funnel line.

You Can Drive A Team With Compassion

Sub Lieutenant Mel Pring

Having joined the Army, through the Australian Defence Force Academy in 2008, straight out of high school I was bright eyed and bushy tailed for a career in Defence. I transferred to the RAN at the end of 2009 after I received an injury playing soccer for ADFA. The role of a Maritime Warfare Officer was alluring as a demanding job mentally and less arduous physically which would assist in prolonging my post soccer injury Service career.

I graduated from the Academy in 2010 and commenced my Naval Officer training. No matter how hard you study in the classroom or how closely you pay attention to the “warries” told, nothing will prepare a trainee more for their role than practical experience. However, completing what was supposed to be the first practical phase of Maritime Warfare Officer training - on board a ship confined to dry dock, I didn’t have the best start to my sea-going career. This was to change the following year when I commenced the second practical phase of training in Darwin as a member of Patrol Boat Crew *Assail One*.

I had no idea what to expect from my time in Patrol Boats. In the grand scheme of things I was there to gain my qualifications and recommendation to sit the Fleet Board. My time with this outstanding crew turned out to be so much more than just ticking the box to move on up. We started our rotation with a short work-up, which was challenging in its’ own right, but also highlighted to me the position I was in; one of three officers embarked, the only member of the crew with no sea time to my name, and one of two females, the other being a Leading Seaman with a wealth of experience and knowledge.

We deployed for OP RESOLUTE, the nation’s Border Protection operation, and I was excited to finally spend some quality time at sea doing my job and applying



‘I grew up very quickly; as an officer and a woman; the welfare of my sailors was in the forefront of my mind.’

my training. Our second day on patrol was a day I will never forget. *Assail One*, on board HMAS *Maitland*, conducted a Search and Rescue that saved the lives of 130 people. On this day I was responsible to the CO for the administration of the ship; making sure the troops were fed and hydrated, keeping count of the people being pulled out of the water and at the end of the day maintaining the navigational safety of the ship to allow the CO and XO a chance to rest. I grew up very quickly; as an officer and a woman; the welfare of my sailors was in the forefront of my mind. For example, the response I received from my crew when they saw myself and another sailor in the galley preparing lunch to make sure the troops could keep working through the rescue wasn’t one of surprise but extreme gratitude. I learnt that you can drive a team with compassion, and that people will work themselves until they have nothing more to give if they respect you and know that you have their backs.

From that day my focus shifted from completing my training goals, to being an integral part of a crew and command team who needed me as much as I needed them. We all have a role to play, and experience or lack thereof, gender, age; all the things that make us different and set us apart, are no longer daunting to me. I can now put my hand on my heart and attest to the old adage that your crew is your family.

The Lawyer

Commander Letitia “Tish” Van Stralen

In my fourth year of studying law at Queensland University of Technology I decided a future of working in an office wasn't quite the adventure I was looking for. The courtroom, while no doubt exciting at times, was not the lifestyle I was looking for. I visited some friends in the Navy in Nowra in 1994 and they took me on a tour of the local area that included HMAS *Creswell*.

I was amazed at the beautiful location and the ‘warries’ they told me of their Naval service. I fell in love with the place and the idea of going to sea and being part of the Navy. Only a few months later I was at HMAS *Creswell* enjoying the surroundings at ridiculous times of the morning and while that water looked beautiful, it was exceptionally cold for a girl who spent many years living in Queensland.

After training as a Seaman Officer at HMAS *Watson* I spent time in HMAS *Swan*, *Tobruk*, *Sydney*, *Darwin* and *Newcastle* and was awarded my Bridge Watchkeeping Certificate. Driving a warship was a far cry from the legal world and I enjoyed it immensely. The exhilaration of being in charge and ‘throwing’ a warship around the ocean was amazing, and often addictive. Being at sea was a mixture of feelings; freedom, being part of a team and a feeling of adventure. As an Officer of the Watch it was often exciting, yet sometimes stressful and tiring. It was always satisfying to have a good watch. All in all it is an amazing experience.

In 1998 I was offered the opportunity to transfer to being a Legal Officer in the Navy; a great opportunity to use my law degree and set a new course in my career. After a few months ashore I was unsettled and missing my sea time. Being a lawyer at that time wasn't quite what I was looking for. It didn't take too much convincing to



get me back to sea. This time I was offered an amazing opportunity to be an Assistant Principal Warfare Officer in HMAS *Brisbane* – a DDG!! What did DDG stand for? ‘Don't Do Girls’? (Actually it was a designation for ‘guided missile destroyer’ - ships that were not designed for female sailors/officers because of the open mess decks and the fact they were built in the 1960s). Being one of four females who were posted to a DDG during that period was a wonderful experience, and one that I often reflect upon when people talk of the potential challenges of women at sea.

The Destroyers were the last of the ‘gun boats’ armed with two 5-inch guns, two steam turbines and a ship's

company of up to 333 men. HMAS *Brisbane*, ‘the steel cat’ was filled with often-robust characters that had served in DDGs their whole career. Having females onboard was a little confronting for some given the culture of many decades of male only crews. While that may have been the case, and there may well have been some different views, I always felt accepted and part of the crew by contributing to the operation of the ship.

There were many great experiences onboard the ship, however one incident always springs to mind: after arriving alongside Fleet Base East from a short deployment and venturing to a local establishment, my now husband was warned off by some Brisbane sailors to ‘keep away’ from me as I was ‘one of theirs’. Fortunately he wasn't fazed by the comment and he stuck around. For me it signified being part of HMAS *Brisbane* and accepted into what had been the last male bastion of the surface fleet.

I became a Legal Officer in 2003, I miss my sea time and I value the experience I gained from being at sea. In particular I am very proud to have served in a DDG. Not only because I was one of the few females to serve in that class of ship, but also because I had the opportunity to serve with a professional group of officers and sailors in a unique sea going environment. An amazing experience.



The Best Possible Support

Captain Wendy Malcolm

As a young girl growing up in country Victoria, my opportunities in a small hometown were limited to say the least. I could either go work in the local factory or get a job in the bank and I really didn't want to do either. At aged 17, I walked into a recruitment centre one day and they were very supportive of the many different career options I could explore. The Australian Defence Force Academy had just opened up and I thought joining the Navy and seeing the world sounded like a pretty exciting way to start life. Twenty-five years later it is still exciting and still challenging.

ADFA led to joining HMAS *Darwin* in 1993 as the first female Deputy Supply Officer and it was very daunting for me. I arrived onboard with one other woman in amongst a crew of 190 and felt like a fish out of water. I didn't know one end of a ship from another and was literally terrified of getting lost in the bowels of the ship. My first few weeks were spent in a ship's operational work-up period and were a blur of learning how to fight fires, undertake helicopter control training and understand my role in managing the pay, catering, stores and finances for a very complex Guided Missile Frigate. It was challenging and exhausting to say the least.

The first few months went past very rapidly and with so much to learn and so I didn't really have time to reflect on being one of the only women onboard. I was too busy! We deployed to Hawaii for EXERCISE RIMPAC in mid 1994 where we engaged in a multi-national training exercise that was a fabulous experience. My posting to HMAS *Darwin* gave me a great grounding for my career.

Some years later I took up the position as Supply Officer in HMAS *Newcastle* and was responsible for the department delivering all logistics outcomes for the ship.

We deployed through South East Asia to Guam and the Philippines and undertook a number of exercises with other Navies. This time there were many women onboard and I enjoyed having the opportunity to mentor and encourage them. In late 1999, we were deployed to East Timor in support of the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) effort. I found myself in the Oecussi Enclave where we helped rebuild the local hospital and local schools. I was somewhat less useful wielding a hammer and a paintbrush but we all played a part and meeting the local children and their families was memorable and inspiring.

'I didn't know one end of a ship from another and was literally terrified of getting lost in the bowels of the ship.'

Understanding teamwork and building relationships at sea helped prepare me to take on the role of Commanding Officer Joint Logistics Unit (West) in 2009 where I was responsible for an integrated workforce of Navy, Army, Air Force, public servants and contractors to provide all logistics, warehousing and distribution services for ADF units in Western Australia. My command responsibilities included responsibility for everything from nuts and bolts, ships engines, submarine stores, army trucks and thousands of weapons.

My current challenge is as the Director at the ANZAC Systems Program Office where I am responsible for keeping the fleet of eight ANZAC frigates operationally ready, safe and sustainable. With an annual budget of over \$200M I manage maintenance availabilities, urgent defect rectification and integration of new weapons, sensors and communication systems into our warships and a large staff of Navy, public servants and contractors spread across the nation. My time at sea has helped me to ensure I provide the best possible support for our Navy's men and women at sea in our ANZAC Class ships.

Cry Havoc

Commander Stacey Porter

Back in the dark ages, the 80s, I spent my university years dissecting bodies and analysing blood types because my aim was to be a Forensic Scientist. Unfortunately, Forensic Science was not as sexy as it is now and, after completing an Honours Year, I found myself looking at a career in pathology laboratories instead.

Faced with putting drops in test tubes for years to come I did what every like-minded uni student faced with unemployment did, I decided to backpack around the world. After 14 months and now working at a pizza place I considered my lot in life and took advice from my younger brother, then an Able Seaman based at Humpty Doo in the Northern Territory. I joined the Navy! Thus I found myself with 19 other Direct Entry Officers doing Early Morning Activities (physical training to the uninitiated) on a Monday morning on the 20th August 1990. At least I made it past stand-easy (morning tea), unlike one of our number who had quit by then.

Being a 'schoolie' training officer, jobs at sea are few and far between, so I was thrilled when the poster rang me up to see if I wanted to take on the job of Training Manager in HMAS *Kanimbla* at short notice. I looked at my daughters, Ally and Georgia, then aged six and three, and decided to consult my husband; thankfully Steve was of immense support (like so many of our families are) and declared he would be a stay-at-home dad so I could have the opportunity of a lifetime. Mum was off to sea!

Early in 2006, *Kanimbla* was involved in work up to conduct an Overall Readiness Evaluation. It was after pulling into Sydney Harbour after passing the ORE that we learned that weekend leave was cancelled and we were off to East Timor in support of Operation Anode,

the ADF's contribution to the maintenance of peace and stability in East Timor. In the early phases we provided a wide range of support options to the Joint Task Force Commander at the Headquarters in Dili. Later we undertook humanitarian tasks such as force protection, rebuilding and 'kindergarten kops' at two Dili convents where 7,000 people were taking refuge. Mother's Day that year was celebrated with a nice glass of red cordial that is.

I relished my role as Training Manager but by far the most exciting job I did in HMAS *Kanimbla* was as a Helicopter



Control Officer. *Kanimbla* could conduct multi-spot helo operations with two landing spots aft and one on the forecastle. In 2006 we were assigned to Operation Quickstep, the ADF's contribution to ensure the safety of Australians and approved Foreign Nationals in Fiji, I was in control of five air-borne Blackhawks. Being a female was certainly no impediment to being a HCO at all. It required calm considered concentration and adherence to established voice procedures. The dulcet female tone didn't harm either! Being a HCO was thrilling and extremely satisfying but my job was tinged with tragedy when Blackhawk 221 crashed on deck during the Operation with the loss of two lives. Coming so close after the NIAS accident, the Blackhawk crash hit the ship's crew extremely hard, but they were a stoic bunch. With determination, reverence and respect we carried on with our task, maintaining station and focus. Looking back, I am extremely proud to have been a member of that crew and relish the experiences I had. I am now Commanding Officer Navy Headquarters Tasmania and am the first female to have that role. Today I get many requests to speak about my career and women in the RAN, many have come to hear about my experiences afloat and my time spent on the ship whose catch-cry was 'Cry Havoc'.

The Freshest Face

Able Seaman Melissa Gay

Watching footage of the ADF on TV and even in the old war movies that I watched with my Dad are the partly reason I am here now. I was raised in country Victoria in the small town of Stawell. I joined at 18 and unfortunately due to some personal issues got stalled in getting to sea. But I am here now. The Navy was something that I wanted to join from a young age based on the traditions the Navy holds as well as knowing I am part of a family that strives to not only “Win in the Maritime Environment” but also to help those in need. The support of my family was a large factor to me joining and the joy I feel when around, on or in the water is an added bonus.

So this is my first time at sea and yes it has only been two days but I can already see the way people are falling into their routines. The cooks in the Galley making sure we are fed, The Stokers working to keep us going, those on watches in the Ops Room looking for anything of significance out there, The communicators carrying out their watches, the Stewards working in the Wardroom. Each and every section of the ship is getting in their routine, although you can tell the difference between those who have been to sea before and those like me who haven't.

‘The Navy was something that I wanted to join from a young age based on the traditions the Navy holds...’



I am in a good Mess, all the other girls are very welcoming and are always helping out with little hints about what I should try to do so as to not disturb them as well as giving me directions if I don't know where to go. It is good as I am not the only one in our mess who is out at sea for the first time - it makes it all the less daunting and helps calm the nerves when we first set out.

I have done two watches so far and I was a member of the Slipping party when we left Eden. This led to a Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat ride back to the ship before climbing the ladder back on board. The adrenaline I felt kicking in as I got back on board will most likely fuel me for another hour or so till I get to bed. All this in only two days!! I can't wait to see what the rest of my time out at sea brings.

No Longer Frightened

Commander Belinda Wood

“Wet, homesick and the pride of the fleet” – was the recruitment campaign that struck my interest in the Navy. I come from an Army family; both my father and brother were serving at the time, but I deliberately chose not to carry my house on my back and dig my own toilet so Army was not an attractive option. I had always loved the water (from the beach side at least) and I fell into an opportunity which presented itself in 1992. At the age of 17 years and 2 months I joined the RAN, undertook studies at the Australian Defence Force Academy before commencing my career as a Seaman Officer. Ever since then I have been fortunate enough to be afforded priceless opportunities including Combat Operations, Minor War Vessel Command, Major Fleet Unit Charge and recently, selection for Major Fleet Unit Command.

One of my first and enduring memories of life at sea in the RAN was conducting navigation training in and around the Whitsunday Islands; a beautiful location providing a perfect opportunity for my passion of photography – well that was ruined by burying my head in a pelorus for hours on end and I have never been able to look at that beautiful area in the same way since. One thing the Navy has managed to do though over the last 22 years is provide an alternate perspective on almost everything. My career, predominantly at sea, has enriched my life through a variety of experiences including conducting offensive operations in the 2003 Iraq War, Command of a Fremantle Class Patrol Boat on Operations CRANBERRY, RELEX and RESOLUTE, and multiple deployments to the Middle East Area of Operations as Second in Command in HMAS *Stuart*.

The greatest influences throughout my career have been the people that I have had the honour of working with and for and the difficult postings that have taught me the skills that I possess today. Command of my own Patrol Boat and 24 people as a Lieutenant at the age of 29 was the steepest learning curve I had encountered in my career by that stage. It was also the least enjoyable



professional experience, but, being thrown in the deep end into junior command and making several mistakes during that tenure was the fastest way that I learned leadership and personnel management.

Second in Command of the ANZAC Class Frigate HMAS *Stuart* was also a challenging period in my sea career. Multiple deployments to the Middle East Area of Operations, with personnel and materiel constraints,

provided for some less than pleasurable experiences but again taught me a lot about command of personnel and operations. The deployments, coupled with some very able and willing amateur photographers onboard, provided a canvas for me to practice my passion of photography.

Serving at sea in any role, but particularly as a Principal Warfare Officer, as an Executive Officer and in Command is not always pleasant and demands a very supportive family.

Women, like their male counterparts, are however provided every opportunity for a seagoing career and indeed thrive in the sea going environment. There is no glass ceiling in the RAN but every informed decision comes with consequences – positive and negative.

A career at sea, regardless of gender, presents challenges and opportunities; it is how you approach and deal with these challenges that determine the richness of the experience. I have been very fortunate and intend continuing my seagoing career as Commanding Officer HMAS *Anzac* in 2014-2016.

A career at sea, regardless of gender, presents challenges and opportunities; it is how you approach and deal with these challenges that determine the richness of the experience.



The CSO

Leading Seaman Nat Irvine

I finished Basic Combat Systems Operator training at HMAS *Watson* on a Friday, by the Monday I was on a Middle East sustainment flight heading to a place I'd only ever seen on the news to join my first ship HMAS *Ballarat*. That was the start of six years straight at Sea with four different ship postings.

I find it hard to choose one particular highlight. I've loved every minute of being at sea. I've always been busy and enjoying the best of what the Navy has to offer. In 2007 we deployed in HMAS *Ballarat* to Operation Resolute and sailed around Australia stopping in every state. 2008 saw me complete the Anti Submarine/Anti Surface Aircraft Controllers course at HMAS *Watson* that led to a posting to HMAS *Warramunga* and deployment to the Middle East in 2009. I returned from that trip and went straight back into work-ups with HMAS *Parramatta* and returned to the Middle East for the best part of 2010. We then spent 5 months in 2011 in South East Asia exercising with our neighbours to the North.

It's not all fun and games; it's a lot of hard work as well. The hours on watch can be physically and emotionally draining. Being away all the time has taken its toll on relationships but I chose this life. I wouldn't change any of it, and the people I've met along the way have become family. I never once have felt disadvantaged being a female at sea; it is what you make it. We are all trained the same, and have the same opportunities. I have learnt if you don't allow yourself to be treated differently; you will earn the respect of your peers and be treated accordingly.



‘Being away all the time has taken its toll on relationships but I chose this life. I wouldn’t change any of it...’

Bursting To Get Onto The Plane

Leading Seaman Kimberley Spurr

I grew up in Tasmania and could not think of what I wanted to do when I left school but I knew I wanted something different. I saw an ad on TV and that was it - as soon as I turned 16 and 9 months I had my interview. Four days after I turned 17, I was off to join the Navy, it was 21st May 2001. My parents were upset as I was the baby of the family but I was bursting to get onto the plane – I couldn't understand why they were so upset! I was going on a big adventure and starting a new life.

When I got to Recruit School I was so nervous but at the same time I couldn't wait to get started. I completed my Recruit School training then went on to Category Training as a Steward. After completion of my course I was posted to HMAS *Kuttabul*. There I worked for a few months and after I turned 18 I had a jolly in HMAS *Tobruk* for Operation Relex II. I remember being completely overwhelmed with all the new information to learn and take in but it was a great experience. We were up around Christmas Island and Cocos Island – the water there was so beautiful and clear. When we had a Saturday Sea the crew would be fishing and even have a swim.

In 2003 I was posted to HMAS *Manoora* and my first port visit was Hobart! I was able to catch up with my parents and show my shipmates around Hobart. I completed major deployments to the Middle East and the Solomon Islands – we were away from home from the start of May to the end of November that year. We left Sydney and two weeks later we berthed in Kuwait. It was beyond any heat I have ever experienced. We unloaded equipment and troops then departed for Townsville. This was a quick stop to load up/store ship and make our way to Solomon Islands for our next task. This trip was extremely memorable due to the tempo of work we were doing. I was working 12-hour watches as part of the Flight Deck Team. We were providing stores/



equipment/personnel to many different stations around the Solomon Islands. On a few occasions I was even able to go up in the helicopter, which was amazing.

We were able to visit Florida Island (an island in the Solomons) on 2 occasions for a few hours and have a swim and a good local feed. Our mission for this deployment was to capture Harold Keke and his followers, which was successful.

The only thing I found difficult on *Manoora* was there were still a few of the old style DDG sailors onboard

who still weren't overly happy with women serving at sea. I didn't have any issues as such but these few men would not have much to do with the females unless that particular female was quite overbearing (which I definitely wasn't – I was very shy and quiet at that age).

In 2005 I retrained as a Writer and then another opportunity to go to sea came up with a posting to HMAS *Darwin*, for the next two years.

The first port visit again was Hobart, although this time my parents had already moved to Queensland so I offered to do duty to give others a chance at exploring Tasmania.

A posting followed to HS WHITE and I loved my sea time in the Hydrographic Ships. The routines were good and the experience was very enjoyable, however deploying in the Hydrographic Ships was very challenging at times due to the ongoing Border Protection work.

The high tempo of this work kept us flat out on most trips. It was an eye opener and it has made me very grateful for all that I have and all that I have achieved.

Overall I have had a great career and whilst not every job has been enjoyable I have more positives than negatives. The Navy has shaped who I am today and I am very grateful for that.

The New Mum

Able Seaman Elyssia Shearman

I grew up in the small country town of Leeton, NSW. I loved the open air and simplicity that my hometown offered, however I often found myself dreaming of bigger things. I'd thought about attending a university but where to start? What to study? I was only 17 and didn't really know what I wanted to spend the rest of my life doing. Then one day I watched a TV commercial for the Australian Army and decided to have a look at the Defence Jobs website.



I've been quite fortunate in my short time with the RAN. I have served in a few different platforms, the highlights being a Gulf deployment on an ANZAC frigate and Border Protection in an Armidale Class Patrol Boat. My first billeted position out of training was as a part of the ARDENT 2 patrol boat crew. I loved the newfound responsibilities and challenges this faced me with and living in Cairns, QLD was amazing. Unfortunately after about twelve months I grew homesick for the friends and lifestyle I had made back in WA whilst undertaking training on the frigates and I decided that I couldn't continue with the ACPB's work routines. I didn't enjoy being out of Cairns so much, or spending so much time in Darwin, NT. Early 2011 I packed my bags and headed back to Perth, WA.

Shortly after my arrival I discovered that I was pregnant. After a short stint ashore followed by my maternity leave, I am back at work posted to HMAS *Toowoomba* and I am very excited to be deploying back to the Middle East, although undertaking this trip as a mother will be very different from the 17 year old care-free trainee that left the wharf back in 2009. I know this trip will be hard. I will be facing a whole new array of challenges both personally and professionally, however I know that this will help me grow as a person. I believe to be the best person you can you need to make sacrifices and challenge yourself.

I hope that when my daughter is older, she will understand and be proud of the things I have done with the RAN.

'I hope that when my daughter is older, she will understand and be proud of the things I have done with the RAN.'



Goodbye Typing Pool

Lieutenant Commander Christine Reghenzani

I left school after completing year 10 and started working for the Queensland Public Service in the Toowoomba State Government Insurance Office. For a 15 year old, I had a lot of responsibility as the job involved taking workers compensation statements as well as taking shorthand and typing letters. However, a couple of years later there was an organisational restructure and the females who did not have a year 12 education were relegated to a typing pool. (This included women in their fifties who had been working in the Public Service for decades.) There had to be something better!

A group of my friends were talking about joining the Navy. I was the only one that followed through. I recall one of my work colleagues saying, 'You'll be back in a few weeks'. That wasn't the case. I loved my new life from the moment I joined the other Queensland recruits and the train left Brisbane railway station.

Four decades later and I've seen many changes and been given many opportunities during my time in the Navy.

Being a pre-1984 female, I was not required to go to sea. Although I was a volunteer, I never had the opportunity of a sea posting. However, I did experience many sea rides. I had two amazing trips on Fremantle Class Patrol Boats during 2001 and 2003 when serving as the inaugural Staff Officer Personnel and Training for the Patrol Boat Force Element Group. The first trip was an Christmas Patrol in HMAS *Gladstone*. Christmas Day plans to have a pre-arranged BBQ lunch at Bathurst Island were thwarted when the call came through to change course and pursue a foreign fishing vessel. Nevertheless, the chefo put on an amazing lunch for the crew. The second trip was in HMAS *Launceston* when she did her Round Australia trip. I was able to join for the Darwin to Perth leg. I remember waking up during the second night and

thinking 'Why is it so quiet?' Ah ha, no engine sounds. We were dead in the water; a problem with the steering. I watched in awe as the Marine Technicians pulled out their box of bits (just-in-case old spares) and went to work. Their skills made it possible for the ship to make her own way to Perth where a replacement part awaited.

My connection with Patrol Boats continued when I assumed the position of Executive Officer (XO) HMAS *Cairns* in 2006. During my watch, four of the five Cairns based FCPB decommissioned with great fanfare. Having 15 home-ported ships at HMAS *Cairns* and many visiting ships was a challenging task for such a small base. I was privileged to serve with Lieutenant Commander Tana Oreb who was the Port Services Manager and also Commander Jenny Daetz (now Captain) who was the HMAS *Cairns* Commanding Officer from 2007. Two of the most memorable tasks were supervising a \$75m redevelopment of the Base and supporting the cast and crew of *Sea Patrol*. Initially the ship's company was organised to talk to the show's writers so they could develop realistic scripts for the show. Then the cast were given a mini Navy orientation. Over several days they were instructed in a range of skills from saluting to use of force. Most of the alongside scenes for the show were

filmed at HMAS *Cairns*. Despite the challenges of the base redevelopment, the ship's company never lost sight of our real purpose, which was providing support to the home-ported ships.

Apart from being on the shore side of numerous port visits, I have enjoyed living all around Australia. Two short overseas postings were a highlight, including a three-month study course in Beijing as a Lieutenant Commander. From my experience, opportunities abound for a female in the Navy. I'm no longer that young woman who ended up in a typing pool because she only had a year 10 education. Through opportunities in my naval career, I now have several degrees and have enjoyed a truly unique lifestyle.



I Felt Sorry For The Male Crew Members

Chief Petty Officer Kathryn Holmes

I joined the Navy in 1989 after a friend suggested I try it - not long after she had applied for the RAAF! Coming from a small country town it seemed like a good opportunity to get out and see the world. I can't remember much about the recruitment process - it was so long ago but one thing I do remember was that female sailors weren't going to sea back then. This changed for me in 1993 when I was loan posted to Fremantle Class Patrol Boat HMAS *Ipswich* and by the time I was posted to the Adelaide Class Frigate HMAS *Canberra* in 1994 it was commonplace.

Even though when I first joined female sailors weren't expected to go to sea, when the time came it felt like a natural progression in my career. Not long after I finished my category training the RAN was called upon to send ships to the Arabian Gulf. Some of the sailors I had joined the Navy with were deploying in those ships. I was apprehensive for them and did not know if I could do the same. Little did I know that within three years I would be off to sea in a warship and during my second sea posting, I too would be deploying to the Middle East.

I was one of 25 female sailors to join HMAS *Canberra* in January 1994. We were the first female sailors to sail in *Canberra*. Due to my recent trip in *Ipswich* I was amongst only a handful of those ladies who had been to sea. Knowing some of the crew already made it easier to ask questions to manage my expectations. I did feel sorry for the male crew members as they had been drilled for months prior not to touch the females. This was very evident during meals for the first two weeks when the males would sit on one side of the Junior Sailors café and females on the other. This was reinforced when any of the females passed a male in the passageway they would flatten themselves virtually into bulkhead. Once the ship sailed for shake down,

and the female sailors proved that they were very capable in their roles, the male sailors relaxed a little and the crew moulded into a cohesive unit that found all crew members looking out for each other in that first deployment.

Jump forward 15 years when I was a Chief Petty Officer in another Adelaide Class Frigate, as the Stores Accounting Officer (SAO) in HMAS *Sydney*. I reflect how times have changed; females now can make up to one third of a ships company, females are commonplace as Heads of Department. I am currently at sea as SAO in HMAS *Success* with Captain Allison Norris. I have enjoyed each and every posting at sea and the unique challenges that each posting has brought.



‘Even though when I first joined female sailors weren't expected to go to sea, when the time came it felt like a natural progression in my career.’





The Medico

PO J'Arne Dance

I was 25 when I joined the navy; I had originally joined the Army in 1997, but sustained an injury during recruit school and was discharged. Following my discharge I spent several years working as a waitress and managed to do a trip on the STS *Young Endeavour*, which introduced me to member of the RAN and allowed me to discuss different career choices with them. I made the decision that I still wanted a career in the Defence Force, and could now, after my experiences on *Young Endeavour*, see a career in the RAN. I am a big believer in that things happen for a reason, and being discharged from the Army, although devastating at the time, has allowed me to have a wonderful and fulfilling career in the Navy.

As a medical sailor, I believe that we have a unique position on the ship. Although we belong to the Maritime Logistics (Supply) department, there are usually only two medical sailors on the ship, and we need to have a good working relationship with all departments and command. I have had three sea posting over my career, at different levels of medical care. My first posting was as a Seaman Medic, getting life at sea experience in HMAS *Newcastle*. Then as Leading Seaman assisting the other embarked medical staff with the running of the sickbay in the amphibious ship HMAS *Manoora*.

My last posting was as the Senior Medical Sailor, Clinical Manager onboard the Anzac frigates HMAS *Parramatta* and *Ballarat* from 2011 to 2013. I found this position to be very challenging and rewarding and while our training is extensive, there are parts of the job that come with experience and can't be taught. Taking the position as the Clinical Manager meant stepping up and taking on the responsibility for the medical care of all the sailors onboard. The challenges of taking patient histories and discussing medical care and treatment either via phone

or email to the Fleet Medical Officer ashore, presents significant challengers not faced by other health care providers ashore. There is a fine line that needs to be walked, often when discussing a treatment plan with the Medical Officer you need to take into consideration the ships program and mission, and then you have to be careful in what you tell Command about the patient's condition so as not to breach medical confidentiality. During my two years as the Clinical Manager, I found

‘Taking the position as the Clinical Manager meant stepping up and taking on the responsibility for the medical care of all the sailors onboard.’

myself going directly to the Commanding Officer to discuss my requirements for treating a sailor, and discussing options to land the member at the next opportunity, and at times asking for the ship to turn around in Sydney Harbour to return a sailor who had injured themselves as we had left the harbour, knowing that I was asking to delay the ship's program, but needing to get the best treatment for a sailor. There were also the times when it was not possible to land a sailor for a day or so, and having to provide extended care for them. This was always a stressful time for me and I am sure that the CO and the XO always dreaded seeing me come up to the bridge as it was rarely with good news! My postings to *Parramatta* and *Ballarat* included deployments to Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia, these deployments were great experience and as they were significant deployments I had the added assistance of having a Medical Officer posted onboard.

I am very much looking forward to future postings to sea, and a long career in the Navy.

The Multi-Tasker

Petty Officer Bianca Ridley

Growing up in rural Victoria the only time I ever got to see the ocean was on an annual holiday we took from our hometown of Linton to Warrnambool. I remember getting caught in a wave on one of our trips and I've barely been in the ocean since. It may seem strange then that I would decide to join the Navy and build my life around the ocean. I always tell people though that I joined the Navy to travel on the ocean not in it!

My grandfather served as a Stoker during the first and second World Wars, my cousin joined in the early 90's and my brother joined in 2000. I had never really thought about joining the Navy until my brother and cousin started coming home on leave, telling stories of all the things they had seen and done. I was working in Human Resources at the time and whilst I enjoyed my job, it was the same thing day in day out. A little adventure was just what I needed so in October of 2001 I took the bus from Melbourne out to Cerberus as a recruit Marine Technician. I would soon find out that I was the only female MT in the whole intake.

I started my seagoing career out of Cairns in HMAS *Shepparton*, a Paluma Class survey vessel and then moved on to Leeuwin Class Hydrographic Survey boats with HS White. I loved both ships right from the very start. Small boats and small crews mean big workloads and big responsibilities. A multi-taskers dream! In the early part of my career I did over three years at sea conducting survey operations. When my shore time was due I posted south and over the next four years worked at HMAS *Creswell* School of Survivability and Ship Safety and HMAS *Cerberus* Engineering Faculty. It was during that time that I had my two beautiful kids.

I returned to Cairns and before long I was filling a



position back in HS vessels. A short term posting that ended up lasting just short of three years. While I was anxious about returning to sea after having my kids I was also excited. The tempo in HS vessels had changed dramatically in the time I had been away. They had gone from doing their core job as survey ships to assisting with Border Protection operations. It was my first posting at sea as a Leading Seaman and it brought with it its own

challenges. In a short period of time I had to find my feet on the platform again, familiarising myself with its systems and leading the department as the troops first point of call. I stumbled a few times on that first trip but I worked my butt off and was thankfully surrounded by a great bunch of guys who helped me find my feet.

As well as assisting in all the routines that the day-to-day running of the ship involved, we also had our hands full with Border Protection tasking. Whilst I wasn't involved directly with the boarding operations I volunteered to assist the ships Medic. I remember the first time that we were setting up to embark personnel I was nervous, not knowing what to expect or how I would react to seeing small kids the same age as mine. It was heartbreaking at times but we got the job done. Over and over again. It was the most personally rewarding and fulfilling time I've spent at sea.

I've recently been promoted to Petty Officer and my next seagoing adventure will be as a member of Minor War Vessel Sea Training Unit (Cairns). I can't wait to get back to sea and especially in a position where I get to train and mentor my peers. As the only female member of the team I'm sure it will bring with it its own challenges but I can't wait to see where it will take me.

The Stoker

Chief Petty Officer Julianne Cocks

Having grown up on a farm in the Adelaide Hills I enjoyed working on cars and machines alongside my Dad from an early age. So it came as no surprise when at 18 years old, I decided to join the Navy as a Marine Technician. My main reason for joining was that I could be working on some really big engines on a Navy Ship. This is obviously not a common choice for young women in any day or age, but my passion for machines and how they ticked couldn't prepare me for the obstacles that I would face as a minority in a male dominated world.

I did surprisingly well in my initial training as a "stoker" but I struggled to understand some of my male counterparts when they commented; "women shouldn't be in the Navy, and they definitely shouldn't be stokers". I found this mind-set confusing as none of these guys had ever worked in a time where women were turned away from typical male roles. And yet, many had the opinion that women weren't meant to be engineers and that's the way it should stay. Strangely, I found the older generation of sailors who had served without women at sea, welcomed the presence and contribution of women in every role.

My first few years in the Navy were lonely ones; I was a very self-confident practical woman but remained very shy in social groups. As a Seaman, I was posted to HMAS Sydney in 2000 and worked within the same section as a gentleman that joined the same day as me, was in the same recruit-school class and in the same initial training class. This man was quite simply a golden boy. He was treated like a sporting hero, offered the best courses and hardly lifted a finger. Meanwhile, I plodded along and enjoyed working on all sorts of equipment and continued to take on more and more work as directed by my Petty Officer and Chief.

In 2001, as an Able Seaman, I had been working for

several days on a large job when my Petty Officer came to check out my work. We had never really talked one-on-one before, so I was taken aback when he said "This looks too good of a job; I might have to take the credit for it". I actually thought he was serious for a heartbeat or two, but saw his smile and realised he was paying me a big complement. That massive icebreaker flowed into a respectful two-way understanding that we both had more to learn about women in the Navy workplace.

I found myself telling him how I never understood the reason why the morning musters were spent talking about sport and what they did on the weekends, I just wanted to get on with work and feel the job satisfaction of having achieved something for the day. My PO gave me some insight into his management style and realised he had unintentionally left me out of conversations as he had never had a woman working for him.

From that one moment I noticed a gradual change in not only how my Petty Officer and Chief Petty Officer behaved but myself as well. I found the whole section began to work more as team, the "Golden boy" was finally being put to work and the talk of sports and weekends was reduced to a five minute chat after the work for the day was discussed. The biggest transformation was in me, I learnt to ask for help with

big tasks and understood that the men I worked with were just a social bunch that liked a good laugh (mainly at each other).

Many years later I worked hard and rose through the ranks to become the only second female Chief Stoker in the RAN. I was still a minority, but I was respected and appreciated by my peers and all those that I worked with. To date I have experienced sea postings to HMAS Tobruk, Sydney, Canberra, Darwin and Newcastle. I have been operationally deployed to the Arabian Gulf in 2001, 2003 and 2013, and served several postings as an instructor to the Combat Systems Maintenance School.



Sea Service Set Me Up For Life

Captain Katherine Richards

You know you are a woman of a “certain age” when over 500 of your subordinates were not even born when you first started going to sea. Such was the startling statistic that confronted me as the Commanding Officer of HMAS *Cerberus*; when I first sat down to write an article on my sea service and myself.

However, when I now look back over nearly 25 years of service, I can say with all honesty that I would not be where I am today, either professionally or personally, if I had not dedicated my twenties and early thirties to the Engineering Charge Program and the pursuit of excellence at sea. My sea service effectively set me up for life. It instilled in me the qualities and values that I hold dear. It taught me about what truly matters in life – teamwork, a sense of purpose, doing things right and doing the right things. But more to the point, it helped me to figure out how to focus on these things and champion them. As a result of my sea service I have been able to distil what my purpose is in life, namely:

‘My sea service gave me the strength of character and insights that I need to Command nearly two thousand men and women today.’

to leave the Navy in a better place and to love and nurture my husband and beautiful children every day.

On reflection, it was not an easy journey. It was, at times, a lonely quest, simply by virtue of being the “first one”. I had been the only mechanical engineering graduate from my year at ADFA - so many young men and women just did not make it through the tough and unrelenting four-

year ADFA training pipeline. Graduation, in itself, was a major achievement. That said, the work experience years at ADFA were essentially the “wonder years” when it came to being at sea – no responsibility and no worries. I recall the first time I stood a watch on the top plates of a DDG – thinking all the while I was going to die of heat exhaustion. I just kept thinking over and over again,



‘...at just 54 kg wringing wet, I also had to confront my own physical frailties, a weak stomach and atrocious seasickness.’

“What had I got myself in for?”

Once formally under training for my Certificate of Competence, I came face to face with the harsh realities of maintaining and operating a sophisticated engineering plant. I learned, invariably the hard way, the golden rules of marine engineering. Rule 1.) Keep your ship clean and your bilges dry. Rule 2.) Do the right planned maintenance at the right time and you will not have Urgent Defects and Rule 3.) Ship's run on emotion – not fuel or food – it is all about the people – pay attention to them – constantly. Three simple rules, which still resonate in my professional life to this day.

But at just 54 kg wringing wet, I also had to confront my own physical frailties, a weak stomach and atrocious seasickness. I realised very early on that these would be my constant companions and if I wanted to stay the course, I would have to learn to deal with them and develop strategies to overcome them. The secret to my success at sea would therefore come down to my resilience and applying my golden rules – every single day.

In the years that followed my entry into the trained

force, operational deployments to the Southern Ocean, the Solomon Islands and the Persian Gulf all came my way along with more work ups, maintenance periods and exercises than I can remember. Life was very, very busy and at times I would wonder, late at night, if I could continue to hold it all together. But one man, my husband Bernard, was always by my side and never failed to support me and care for me. I could not have done what I did without him.

But perhaps the best legacy of my sea years is the great circle of mates that I developed. To this day we stay in touch and I continue to share with them the highs and lows of my life and now my Command journey. There are always lots of laughs, the odd tear, but above all else a common understanding and bond that only sea service can forge.

And so on reflection I feel incredibly fortunate to have had the experiences that I have had. For those experiences, both the good and the bad have made me who I am. My sea service gave me the strength of character and insights that I need to Command nearly two thousand men and women today.

For that alone, I will always be incredibly grateful.



All I Ever Wanted To Do

Chief Petty Officer Rachael Brookshaw

My parents have told me, that from a young age, all I ever wanted to do was join the Navy. I'm not sure when I came to the decision, but after months of convincing, at the age of 16 and 6 months, mum took me Recruiting in St Kilda Road, Melbourne and I sat my entry exams. I can still remember how many people sat the exams for each service and how many were accepted. My career started that day, even though, I would have to wait another 13 months before I made the bus trip to HMAS *Cerberus* and become a Recruit. I was 17 and 7 months.

Having joined the Navy in an era when Women did not serve at sea, I was extremely excited when my Warrant Officer told me I had a posting and I was going to sea. I joined HMAS *Tobruk*, while it was in a maintenance period, which proved to be an exciting time and a great way to learn about my new ship. Our male counterparts readily accepted us and we were able to prove that we were more than up to the tasks at hand. During 1992, HMAS *Tobruk* was involved in many ceremonies to mark the 50th Anniversary of World War II. The most memorable was a memorial held with survivors of HMAS *Canberra I*, in the Solomon Islands. Another highlight, while posted to HMAS *Tobruk*, was our tasking to Operation Solace, Somalia, in 1993. This was a six-month deployment and an opportunity to support the Army in their endeavours ashore.

HMAS *Success* was my next position at sea and included participation in RIMPAC 98 in Hawaii. This proved to be both rewarding and difficult as I was away from my 3 year old daughter and husband. As a mum leaving your child is difficult, but with the support of my husband, family and fellow crew I was able to balance my roles as a sailor and mother. Later in 2004 I had



'...with the support of my husband, family and fellow crew I was able to balance my roles as a sailor and mother.'

the privilege of being a Commissioning crewmember of HMAS *Ballarat*. This proved to be a challenge within itself; bringing a ship from a shell to a prepared warship was interesting. As a member of the Logistics section of the ship, we were posted before any other members of the crew and watched the ship in the final stages of the build.

A posting as the Stores Accounting Officer onboard HMAS *Parramatta* in 2008, led to a deployment to the Middle East over the Christmas period of 2008/09. Being a female Senior Sailor onboard a ship was a new role as a mentor for the more junior members of crew. It also provided me with the unique experience of being able to validate my role as a sailor, who is also a mother.

I am currently serving onboard HMAS *Darwin* and am looking forward to the opportunities and experiences that this posting will provide. Each posting to a ship I have had during my career has been an experience with many highlights and few low lights. The support of family, fellow crew and the extended Navy family are what empowers me to complete the job I signed up for all those years ago, as a young 17 year old.





Back To The Middle East

Petty Officer Shannon Evans

After a rich naval history within my family for generations, it was inevitable that I would also join. Only eight months after my own brother, I joined in September 2000 as a fresh face 17 year old. I grew up in Tasmania, quite sheltered, the Navy presented a vast array of experiences and challenges that afforded me a terrific opportunity to shape my own personality and leadership style today. Still going and still challenged 13 years on.

Initially I joined as a Combat Systems Operator and I consider my self very fortunate to have picked the job I did, not knowing too much about it, other than what I heard during a navy road show came to my high school. I remember thinking at the time CSO had the slight edge and impressed me greatly. Though completely different to the romantic picture I had in my head, I loved the job immediately and did so for ten and a half years, during this period I served in HMAS *Manoora*, *Kanimbla*, *Sydney* and *Newcastle*. Still enjoying my job, I decided to change category for an extra challenge to the newly reformed Electronic Warfare Category. Initially I worked within the Electronic Warfare section of the School of Maritime Warfare, This presented it's own challenges which were always going to occur with the formation of a new category, fortunately I worked with some amazing professionals and feel very proud of being a part of the School at that time. I joined HMAS *Melbourne* in January 2013, taking over from a great friend for many years Petty Officer Mel Clements. This is my first sea posting as a Petty Officer, my first posting as an EWM and the first time that I have been responsible for shaping and building my own team. As luck would have it, my team maybe somewhat junior but love their jobs and never fail to give their best. I have learnt so much this year already, it seemed that work-ups were just upon us,

though January only seemed like yesterday in reality May through July flew and now we are readying our ship for rotation 32 to the Middle East.

At times it can be easy to overlook what I love about the Navy, but on reflection, I can look back at every posting I have ever had and say with no reservation that I have had some wonderful mentors and tutors who were passionate about what they do, my job is ever

'...in the Navy you have good and not so good days...'

changing and affords me the chance to learn something new everyday, as do the people I continue to work with, superior and subordinate. Progressing through ranks has given me the experience and opportunities to cultivate my own confidence and leadership qualities and I definitely believe that the initiatives put in place to improve the Navy's culture have made the navy an organisation that has instilled personal and collective pride throughout our Navy. Like life itself, in the Navy you have good and not so good days, but the only ones that have left a lasting impression are the good ones.



Serving With The New Generation

Leading Seaman Alee-Marie Scarfone

After leaving school I still had no idea what I wanted out of a career but I did know your average 9 to 5 job was not for me. A trip to Newcastle recruiting gave me all the answers I was looking for and before I could think twice I was on a plane from Sydney to HMAS *Cerberus*.

I feel fortunate to have joined the Navy when I did. It was a time of change and growth for the military and the world was a little less complicated. I spent what felt like a very cold winter at HMAS *Cerberus* in 1999 getting my introduction to Navy life. This was followed by a much warmer training period at HMAS *Watson* where I conducted my category training as a Combat Systems Operator. After completing my category training and a short posting ashore, I was posted to my first ship HMAS *Newcastle*. I was fortunate enough to experience a great amount of travel throughout South East Asia and Australia whilst onboard and to also conduct operational deployments in the Solomon Islands and Ashmore Reef. During Operation Relex at Ashmore reef the ship awoke one morning to the horrible news of the terrorist attack on the world trade centre. The whole world and especially the Navy would not be the same again. As the tempo picked up for the Navy and commitments became greater, I headed back to HMAS *Watson* to continue my training. This included volunteering to become an Anti Submarine Aircraft Controller. This course was an amazing challenge and one I am still very proud and happy I did today. I returned to sea in HMAS *Newcastle* in 2005 for a second time and deployed to the Middle East for Operation Slipper.

I was lucky enough to be blessed with the birth of my beautiful daughter in 2007 and I chose to take a break

from the Navy to make motherhood my number one priority. As the years passed and my daughter grew I realised again why I had chosen this career above all others many years ago. I made the decision to re-join and continue on with the career I had started. I have now been back in for a year and I am currently serving in HMAS *Melbourne* conducting Operation Slipper I the Middle East.

‘As the years passed and my daughter grew I realised again why I had chosen this career above all others many years ago.’

From 1999-2013 I have been lucky enough to experience a touch of where the Navy came from; serving with sailors who came from male only crews, women who originally served as WRAN's or who were the first females to be integrated into all male crews. I was privileged enough to be involved in the process of change and its trials and success. I have always felt

that the Navy has been a major advocate on an equal and fair opportunity for women within its ranks. It has been a great achievement to see the evolution of the Navy upon my return and serve with a new generation of RAN sailors that find it out of place to hear stories of the Navy operating in any other fashion than it does today.







A Family Affair

Able Seaman Anne Becker

Growing up in regional country Queensland, I heard about the Navy through my mother and grandmother, as my aunty, uncle and cousin were serving members in the Royal Australian Navy. At sixteen I thought about joining the RAN, as I wanted to be just like my aunty, but chose to complete my studies first.

I started working at the local supermarket, followed by the local hotel-motel where I completed my Certificate III in Hospitality and realised I was born to be in the hospitality industry. Time passed and before I knew it I was 26 and still had the dream of joining the Navy. It was then and there that I decided to I was going to join the Navy as a steward. The process of joining did take a while as I had a tattoo that had to be removed before I could be recruited. After 12 months of endless



‘Even though I was a mature adult I still felt sad that I was leaving my family and friends but excited that finally my dream was coming true.’

laser removal and travelling six and a half hours for each session I was given a recruitment date. My family had travelled to Brisbane to say goodbye with my younger siblings not quite understanding where or why I was leaving. Even though I was a mature adult I still felt sad that I was leaving my family and friends but excited that finally my dream was coming true. Once at HMAS *Cerberus* I was lined up in front of “Moran Division” and told to form a squad. I had no idea what the recruit instructors were talking about so I just stood there. Let’s just say it didn’t take long for me to understand commands in the RAN!



I Would Have My Bags Packed Tomorrow

Able Seaman Natalie Brennan

After finishing my degree in Communications and Media at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, I moved to Sydney to be part of the city life and follow my dreams. After a few years I realised that I had grown and changed and along with it my dreams had too. I wanted more adventure and excitement and when my younger brother came home telling me stories of his time in the Navy and at sea, I marched myself down to a recruiting office and never looked back.

As I walked across the gangway of HMAS *Darwin* in 2010, a brand new Able Seaman straight from HMAS *Coonawarra*; I could have never predicted the adventure and excitement that lay ahead of me. I landed on my feet straight away and couldn't have asked for a more supportive and welcoming crew whom over the next 18 months became not only my work mates teaching and challenging me every step of the way, but also some of my closest friends. We shared many highs and lows and formed bonds that I believe are unique to life at sea.

The first six months of my posting was dedicated to hard work and training. After what I thought was a gruelling 'Work Up', which the more senior sailors were proud to inform me was nothing like the 'old days', I was greatly rewarded with my first 'Up top' trip visiting beautiful countries such as Japan and Guam. I have always felt quite blessed to be given the opportunity to see some unique parts of the world whilst doing a job I am very proud of.

I grew both professionally and personally whilst posted to *Darwin* and know that I would not be the sailor or person I am today if I was not pushed and driven by the fantastic group of work mates that surrounded me. I was

a very keen member of the Ships Medical Emergency Team guided by some very talented Medics and senior members of the Team. We were faced with many 'Safe Guard' incidents and overcame them as part of an efficient team. If there was a flight embarked you could always find me helping out with the crew as part of the Flight deck team. During my time at sea I learnt a lot not

'I would not be the sailor or person I am today if I was not pushed and driven by the fantastic group of work mates that surrounded me.'

only about the Navy and my job, but also about myself. How I would react in confronting and difficult situations? Whether I had it in me to step up and be a leader if needed? Or was I willing to push my self and give 100 per cent to my job every day?

After sadly leaving *Darwin* and posting back up North to *Coonawarra* I was quick to learn that going to sea was not the only exciting opportunity the Navy had in stall for me. Six short months later I found myself completing a Force Preparation course at Robertson Barracks to provide me with the training and skills required for my eight month deployment to the Middle East as part of the Force Support Unit for Operation Slipper. At first this was all very overwhelming and at times downright daunting. Working with the Army and RAAF had its similarities but our languages and quirks just weren't quite the same. For instance, one day a soldier called out 'No duff' I was really worried there was no desert left, when I realised they weren't referring to the soft serve machine but in fact a 'Safe Guard' incident.

So as my very steep learning curve began so to did my next adventure. What I would never expect was that over the next eight months I would work with some of the

most professional people I have ever met in a Tri Service environment directly supporting thousands of troops in the Middle East and coming out the other side with life long friends.

In my time overseas I travelled to the American Base in Kandahar Afghanistan. As I travelled in a RAAF C130 fresh from my respite leave in America I had to pinch my self and say "was I actually in Las Vegas yesterday?" While I was in Afghanistan I was shown around the impressive Kandahar flight line, which boasts to be the busiest single runway in the world. Every 30 seconds there is an aircraft taking off or landing. With a cheesy grin I sat in a Dutch fighter jet and had my photo taken. Some days I couldn't contain my excitement as I travelled in a Bushmaster to support some of the Forward Operating Bases that were mentoring the Afghanistan National Army. I always shamelessly asked to sit up the front like a big kid and because of situations like this, I was continuously ask how on earth a sailor ended up in the Middle East with no ocean in sight.

I would put my experience in the Middle East down as the most rewarding experience I have ever had. I would strongly recommend it to any sailor that asked, however in the same breath if you asked me to go back to sea I would have my bags packed tomorrow ready to walk across the gangway.



Girl In The Bilge

Able Seaman Sarah Battenally

Up until now I have no idea where the time has gone, I remember casually telling my friends “Hey I just joined the navy for six years” and watching the shock on their faces: “What are you going to do in six years?”

I am going to try my best to be a kick-ass diesel mechanic. So that's why I enlisted as a Marine Technician. Now I notice that it would probably be unusual to most people but I'd been fixated on pulling apart bikes, lawn mowers and pocket rockets since early high school and somehow managed to get myself a job at a Garage during school holidays and weekends.

I kept at it, all the way up to grinding out oil galleries and setting valve clearances on supercharger cams for Summernats cars, with little regard to my parents' best efforts from a young age to encourage me towards being more 'feminine'. I don't even know how I fell into mechanics but I wouldn't have it any other way. I do remember my boss at the garage telling me 'you would be stupid not to do what you like'. Now over four years since I enlisted, I've climbed in and out of (and spent a lot of time under!) HMAS *Kanimbla's* huge main ALCO diesel engines with pistons the size of me!

As part of a team, I completed an emergency change out of a LM2500 gas turbine in HMAS *Darwin* and fixed and maintained a mountain of different plant machinery here and there along the way. I've managed to serve on three platforms and spent over three years at sea! If you ask me - I've been pretty lucky. The questions I get asked a lot are, do you find the work hard? Truthfully, sometimes I do, but it's like a dog with a bone I can't walk away till I know it's done and done properly, like anybody who takes pride in his or her job.

Physically it can be demanding and I wonder sometimes, if the boys are just keeping their chin up because I am, and neither of us wants to be the first to give in! But I do make a lot of time to train hard just so I can pull my own weight. The other is question I get is, “How is it, working as the only female in your department?” The only analogy I can use to explain it is, it's like having a lot of brothers, sometimes you butt heads, but most of the time they're looking out for you. I'm just getting the hang of it - but it's about being a bigger sister too.

'I can't walk away till I know it's done and done properly, like anybody who takes pride in his or her job.'



The Journey Has Not Been Easy

Commander Cath Hayes

When I was 17 years old I told my school friends I was going to join the Navy and one of them asked - 'but don't you want to get married and have children?' From this statement I guess it is fair to say that in 1990 joining the Navy was a little bit out of the ordinary for a girl from the outer North Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, but I was not looking for a job that was ordinary. Upon leaving High School I really wanted to get a tertiary education, but more importantly I was looking for a career that would be challenging and exciting. The military seemed to fit the all of the criteria.

I initially considered joining the Army and even spent a weekend running around Pukapunyal as part of a 'Be a Digger for the Weekend' recruiting initiative. When I arrived home all excited my mum suggested that I might want join the Navy instead, because not only would I get to travel the world but also 'they have nicer uniforms'. After reading the Navy recruiting advertisement I decided that it looked like the place for me and so I applied to join the Navy. To be perfectly honest I had no idea what was in store for me when I joined the Navy and I guess that in itself was challenging and exciting. I joined as a Seaman Officer, I knew I was going to learn to drive a ship and get an opportunity to travel the world, and that sounded 'pretty cool' to me.

At the recruiting centre no one talked to me about a career that would lead to me becoming a Principal Warfare Officer and controlling the weapon systems of a Frigate, or becoming the Commanding Officer of a ship and being responsible for the whole platform, the ship's company and everything the ship does. So here I am 22 years later and I have served at sea as a Bridge Watchkeeper in HMAS *Darwin*, the Navigation Officer of HMAS *Geelong*, a Principal Warfare Officer in Adelaide Class Frigates HMAS *Melbourne* and *Sydney* and as



'The amazing thing about the Navy is that at no point in time are you alone in what you do.'

the Operations Officer of HMAS *Kanimbla*. In 2006/07 I had the honour to be appointed as the Commanding Officer of *Attack 5*, the crew of an *Armidale* Class Patrol Boat, and until two weeks ago that was by far the most challenging and rewarding sea posting I had had.

At the time of writing this article I have been in Command of ANZAC Class Frigate HMAS *Toowoomba* for two weeks. This is an appointment that is the pinnacle of all of the sea going postings for a Seaman Officer (now known as a Maritime Warfare Officer). In the last six months I have been asked over and over again if I was excited about taking Command, and after some considerable thought the best way to describe the feeling is a combination between WOW and OMG. The comparison between Command of a Patrol Boat and Command of a Frigate is a bit like the difference between Commanding and leading a football team and then being given Command and leadership of the whole football club. The one element that I am certain does not differ between the two is the quality of the people that make up the Ship's Company. My best experiences at sea have always been as part of a great Ship's Company with a true team focus, a team that can rally to overcome individual and collective weaknesses, failure, hardship



and loss. For me, the Command and leadership of these personnel represents the greatest challenge and greatest reward of being a Commanding Officer.

It is fair to say that I am truly passionate about the Navy; I love being at sea working with a great team of personnel, and the unique opportunities it brings. I am not afraid to admit that at times the journey has not been easy. I have had occasion to question myself and doubt my own ability, my mental and physical endurance has been tested to its limits and once or twice beyond those limits with a less than optimal outcome. But, through all of this I have learnt a great deal about myself and grown from the experience. The amazing thing about the Navy is that at no point in time are you alone in what you do. I have made enduring friendships, and shared the experience of hardship and tragic loss with shipmates that will forever remain an enduring and unbreakable bond.

All in all after some 22 years in the Navy I can certainly say that I got a lot more than I bargained for the day I joined. It has been truly exciting and challenging, and yes it is still *'pretty cool'*.



I've Not Looked Back

Commander Wendy Gould

“...*My name is Leading Wran Kingman, you will call me Leader....this is Chief Petty Officer Christensen, you will call her Chief...*” these were the words being bellowed at us as we attempted to eat our lunch of soggy sandwiches on the bus from Tullamarine Airport to HMAS *Cerberus*. It was like everyone was speaking another language. I found myself thinking, “What the hell have I done?”

Having worked in a bank for three years, I had thought the Navy was my ticket to freedom. How wrong could I be? We were the second female class of recruits to undergo training ‘with the men’ at Recruit School. However, what this meant in reality was, women in separate classrooms with female instructors, undergoing separate training, living in separate accommodation but sharing ‘smoko breaks’ in the common areas. It was 1982. There was no requirement for me to serve at sea.

Unbeknown to us, on day one, word had spread of the new ‘WRANS’ arrival. Clad in our ‘just out of the plastic’ blue Burberrys (which are NOT of the English design) and White Dunlop Volleys and stockings, we marched, in a fashion, to our first meal, only to be met by a cacophony of cheers, jeers, howls, barks and whistles from about 800 men. We quickly ate our first meal in the allotted 15-minute timeframe, and then scurried back to our accommodation hoping never to eat in the mess again.

The accommodation was austere; six to a cabin; vinyl mattresses on hospital-like beds (although we slept on the floor to save time in the mornings) and milk secretly stored on the external window sill to keep it cold for brews and for fear that the dreaded WO WRAN Simpson might find it during white glove rounds (which she did). The memories formed during this time, especially during

the late night chatter reminiscent of the “Waltons”, are lifelong.

I had joined the Navy to see the world and my first posting was to a typing pool in Canberra (yay) but, fortunately, after two postings, I found myself being persuaded to become an officer. I left school at 14, so becoming an officer was not even within my dreams. But someone saw in me what I didn’t see in myself and gave me the opportunity and since then, I’ve not looked back.

The Navy was full of firsts back then. After completing my HSC, officer training and Supply Officer training, I joined HMAS *Cook* as one of the first women to be posted to a ship other than a training ship although HMAS *Cook* was definitely no warship. Rather, an oceanographic ship renowned for breaking down. But it didn’t matter to me, I was on a ship and it went to sea. I was one of only four women in a ship’s company of 122. What I remember most about my time in *Cook* were the people. Everyone treated me like their daughter or little sister and always looked out for me. This was my new family and I can’t say I had too much trouble settling in. The year was 1988 – the same year *Cook* was the review ship for the Navy’s Bicentennial Fleet Review and I was part of it. I thought this was the ant’s pants!

My second sea posting wasn’t until 1995. I was crash posted to HMAS *Sydney* as the Deputy Supply Officer because one of my classmates had gone AWOL. There were more women this time. 2 Forward Mess had 33 women; there was only one female senior sailor and about half a dozen female officers in the Wardroom. Having more women certainly had an effect on the experience – it seemed more in balance. I recall one officer saying he liked having women at sea because he enjoyed the smell of perfume!!

One of the many highlights of my time in HMAS *Sydney* was the ‘father-son’ cruise (renamed families’ cruises because no-one knew what to call them anymore). My dad was so proud and excited by the opportunity to go to sea but this soon subsided with the onset of seasickness. With some TLC offered by a very caring bunch of Senior Sailors’, however, dad was back on deck and enjoying life at sea for the next four days. I think, prior to that, he had been happy that his daughter had a ‘good office job’.

Fast forward and it’s 2009 – 21 years since my first sea posting. Two children (Nick and Isaac) later and a six-year break from Navy (because it’s very hard managing two seagoing careers in the family), I joined HMAS *Newcastle* to finish what I started. The Navy had welcomed me back with open arms and provided the

opportunity for me to complete my Charge posting; a key milestone in a Supply Officer's career. I was not the first mum to serve at sea but was only one of two mums onboard who celebrated Mother's Day away from our kids. Without a doubt the highlight of this posting was the unexpected deviation from our passage plan (i.e. Japan to Canada) to facilitate a medivac into Dutch Harbour, Alaska. Dutch Harbour is the location where the series "Deadliest Catch" is filmed. So, after a passage through the Aleutian Islands, we arrived just off Dutch Harbour at about 7:00 o'clock in the morning. As the music "North to Alaska" echoed throughout the ship, there was an air of excitement onboard however once the medivac was completed, we continued south to Canada.

It's difficult to condense the experiences of 31 years into a single article. Each, in itself, a chapter in what has been an amazing adventure and one I hope to continue for at least a few years to come. As a young girl living in country Queensland about to join the Navy, I would not have believed I would experience the things that I have in the Navy; that I could make so many friends; see so many places; and find the courage to do things I never thought possible. I certainly didn't appreciate the significance of what I was doing in the context of social change. Yet, if asked to do it again, the answer would be a resounding yes. I now have two nieces in the Navy and, although I can't take the credit for their career choices, I hope my experience has played a small part in their decisions and helped to shape the Navy they will continue to serve for years to come.

'I was not the first mum to serve at sea but was only one of two mums onboard who celebrated Mother's Day away from our kids.'



The Privilege Of Leading Others

Captain Michelle Miller

I come from a family with a long and proud history of service to our country, but in a green uniform. In 1987 when it finally dawned upon me that I had a leaning toward serving in the military (and that a fine arts degree wasn't really going to get me too far), my Dad was frank in his assessment of life in the Army (at that time) for women. So, with dreams of travel and not working at a desk, the Navy seemed immensely attractive. I didn't think I was smart enough to be an engineer or a pilot; I thought logistics had something to do with a desk; so going to sea on a Bridge and taking charge of stuff seemed a much better idea. Thankfully I had four years at the Australian Defence Force Academy before I found out about what it meant to watchkeep one-in-three at sea

If you'd asked me when I joined or in my early years whether I could ever envisage myself in charge of the Bridge of a warship, or controlling F/A-18 fighter jets from the operations room of a Frigate, or firing missiles, shooting large calibre guns and boarding ships, I would have likely told you they were 'boy' things to do. But by the end of ten years in the Navy I'd done all that, and subsequently went on to command a Patrol Boat, be the second-in-command of a Frigate operating off Iraq



during terrorist suicide boat attacks, and then command HMAS *Perth* from 2007 to 2008. And I'd do it again given a chance. The fact that I was a woman amongst the first of those to do these things in our Navy was a novelty (and sometimes pressure) that I felt diminished with every step forward I took.

Life at sea is unique, and when you have the privilege of leading others in that environment, it leaves an indelible mark on your personality. Amongst a ship's company, no matter whether 24 or 240, you can't be anyone but yourself but at the same time, you can't be entirely yourself and indulge selfish moments. A sailor will spot insincerity and indecisiveness in very short order, and it's humbling (and sometimes alarming) to see elements of your personality play out in the behaviour of your people. A ship's company wants to trust and follow their Captain, and it takes every moment of your time in command to live up to that expectation and serve them. In my first command, a patrol boat, I didn't intrinsically understand this. I saw command more in supervisory and organisational terms; and so the practicalities of real leadership were learned through my mistakes and the work needed to repair the trust of my people.

Being an Executive Officer after having had command was a complementary experience for me, and by watching my own Captain at that time I learned an enormous amount about what good leadership could do for the capability of a ship. So by the time I was the Commanding Officer of *Perth* I felt I was ready, both professionally and personally, to dedicate all I had to those people. There are regrets for some things I didn't do or could have done better, but the small successes and friendships mount far greater impressions for me.

I'm now a mother of a very young daughter. I understand that I wouldn't have had command at the age of 37 if I'd had children prior, so I feel blessed now to have been able to have both. I think that I could have been a better Commanding Officer now that I've experienced being a parent, but similarly I know I'm a better parent for having been a leader at sea (and all that watchkeeping training early in my career really paid off in the first year). My daughter is likely never to really believe what her Mum did, and I truly hope for her that in 17 years time for her as she embarks on her own career, that it's all very commonplace to have women leading our Navy, our Defence Force and our Country (again.)





Like Any Good Mother

Commander Gemma Pumphrey

Growing up in country Western Australia, with a childhood that revolved around riding ponies and 'collecting' pet sheep from our farm, joining the Navy was the furthest thing from my mind. However, my beloved grandfather who often retold stories of his naval service in World War Two sparked my interest. After a year of academic drudgery at University, I decided that there must be more to life than catching the same train, with the same people who looked like they must have a boring city job. I was after a life of travel and adventure, and joining the Navy seemed like an obvious choice.

Joining the Navy in the early 1990s, I was amongst the early group of women to go to sea; firstly on Patrol Boats (HMAS *Fremantle* 1993-94), then Guided Missile Frigates (HMAS *Sydney*, *Newcastle* and *Adelaide* 1995-1998). As a young Seaman Officer at this time, women at sea were not a common occurrence and I was, for the most part, blissfully unaware of the critical importance of this time in the RAN's history. However, early on in my career I remember being both amused and partly annoyed, when showing a solicitor around our Patrol Boat, he questioned if I only came on the ship when it came alongside. He was quite astonished when I told him that I did in fact go to sea and my job was 'driving the ship'. Proudly, I would often use the term 'driving warships' to describe my job!

Although I spent a number of years at sea, including time as a Principle Warfare Office in HMAS *Canberra* during Operation Slipper (Middle East Area of Operations), arguably my most challenging and also rewarding posting to date has been as the Second in Command and Executive Officer (XO) of HMAS *Newcastle* from 2009-2011. Returning to sea, after a number years ashore, it was interesting to observe how things had

'...as a junior Seaman Officer I would often use the term 'driving warships' to describe my job!'

changed, but really how much had stayed the same. Fundamentally sailors and junior officers have not changed; they were still hard working, dedicated to their ship and looking for the next adventure (much as I was at that age). But as an XO, I looked through a very different lens to that of my junior officer days. My days of being a brash Junior Officer who 'drove the ship' had tempered over time, and I was more comfortable with the view that as XO, I now looked after 'parks and gardens', taking great delight in evening rounds and damage control exercises (something I hated as junior officer). My love of driving our ship at speed still held the same thrill, it was a rare opportunity for the XO. I felt the most important

aspect of the XO, was the interaction with the ships company. With a crew of approximately 200, there are a number of leadership challenges for the XO, most of which revolve maintaining the balance between good order and discipline, and a happy crew and positive culture. I'm not sure if what I was doing was right, but our very memorable group of Chiefs, often referred to me as 'Mummy', which I took as a compliment. And like any good mother, as the XO, while at times I found the people aspect of the job very draining, this was by far outweighed by the rewards in the successes of our ships company. Achieving our Unit Readiness Workup and excelling in Damage Control (*Newcastle* was awarded the Wormald Shield for Damage Control Excellence for 2010), reinforces the absolute satisfaction of being a member of a high performing team. Also I was thrilled to see a number of Junior Officers awarded their Bridge Warfare Certificate (their ticket to 'drive the ship'), which as I well know requires a lot of hard work and dedication on the part of the individual. There were many other fantastic aspects of being an XO, but at the end of the day for me, the ability of our crew to take our fine warship to sea, is what it is all about.

I Proved It Is Achievable

Warrant Officer Cheryl Fogg

I joined the Navy in 1996, from a small country town in NSW. A town that was and still is traditionally Army due the proximity to Kapooka, however I loved the look of the white uniform and I loved the sense of adventure and opportunity the Navy could offer me. So I signed my life away and joined the Navy, a decision I have not regretted.

Growing up in a small country town with the closest beach a four drive away and the only exposure I had had to a population over 8000 was an occasional trip to Sydney, (via train) to compete in swimming events. When the day finally came to go to Recruit School, I thought I would be boarding a train to make the long uncomfortable journey to HMAS *Cerberus*, little did I know I was about to board a plane for the very first time. This was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to me, and from that day forward I have always thought the Navy was the most amazing decision I had ever made.

After Recruit School, category school was an experience, conducting training at one of the most beautiful places in Sydney, Watsons Bay; I could not believe how lucky these Navy people were, and now I was one of them. During Category training my aim was always to qualify and get to sea, when asked which ship I wanted I indicated I wanted HMAS *Sydney*, and my wish came true. I joined HMAS *Sydney* in 1998 ready and willing to see the world and demonstrate my trade skills as a Combat Systems Operator. During my time on *Sydney* I experienced a South East Asian deployment, visiting a vast array of countries including Korea and Japan. This absolutely blew my mind that a girl from the country is now sailing the seas and visiting countries I had only



read about. During my time on *Sydney* however the Navy experienced tragedy with the fire on *Westralia* and the conflict in East Timor. This made serving my country very real for me. After *Sydney* I was posted to the RAAF Electronic Warfare Squadron as one of the first Navy members in this joint squadron. The experience and skills learnt during this posting prepared me for the challenge of deploying in HMAS *Newcastle* to the Middle East in 2003. The deployment had many highs and lows for me, as we were exposed to a culture that needed improvement in its respect for women, but also provided the professional challenge of working with many other Navies for the common goal of peace in the Middle East.

After my time on *Newcastle*, I was promoted to Petty Officer and posted to the west to join HMAS *Darwin* during her relocation to the east coast. This was a troubling time for the Navy as the relocation of the FFG fleet to the east coast caused many people to discharge, as they did not want to relocate their families. But as always the Navy finds a way, and the Ship went as scheduled. After *Darwin* I was selected for accelerated promotion to Chief Petty Officer, and joined HMAS *Toowoomba* in the west to deploy to the Middle East again. This time it was different; I was the first female Combat Systems Manger ever to take a ship through a workup and into an operational area. I had the eyes of the entire category on me, half willing me to succeed - half hoping I would fail. Thankfully I succeeded and paved the way for other females to follow this path, I proved it is achievable.

After my deployment on *Toowoomba*, I was also selected to deploy as the Chief Petty Officer OPS for Combine Maritime Forces located in Bahrain. This ended up being a nine month deployment in the Combined Maritime Forces headquarters which was an inspirational and rewarding work environment, working with 25 nations, 25 different cultures and living in a culturally diverse country, all provided an exciting experience that I was honoured to have.





The Traveller

Lieutenant Commander Jodie Wilkinson

I joined the Royal Australian Air Force in 1991. I was young and had joined the services for the lifestyle and to travel. I received back-to-back postings and was looking at another 2 years on top of the 4 years I'd already spent in Canberra. After making friends with some Navy people and learning more about it, I decided to join the Navy.

Life at sea can sometimes be so exciting and diverse that you experience in one year more than some people experience in an entire lifetime. I joined the Navy to travel more and have since visited more places nationally and internationally, than I ever imagined I would. As a result I've developed a passion for international private travel when I'm not travelling with Navy. Being at sea can also be challenging. You are away from your friends and loved ones who are back at home getting on with their lives. However, you bond with those in the Wardroom and can have fun with them and in turn make new friends. Some of the most amazing and interesting experiences I encountered were as the Deputy Supply Officer in HMAS *Tobruk*.

Upon joining in early 2005 we sailed to the Middle East Area of Operation to sea transport the Al Muthanna Task Group to Kuwait in support of Operation CATALYST. As you can imagine, preparing a ship to go into a hostile environment was a big task and we only had a month to achieve it.

We sailed non-stop for 23 days and arriving in Kuwait we quickly offloaded our cargo and 26 hours later sailed for Dubai. Dubai was an amazing port to visit where I went four wheel driving in sand dunes, camel riding, shopping, Wild Wadi fun park and cocktails at the Burj Al Arab seven star hotel.

After Dubai, we set sail for Cochin, India. India was an

excellent experience as the customs and culture are very different to ours. In Cochin the people are friendly and the driving is crazy. It is quite normal to cross to the wrong side of the road to overtake a vehicle, regardless of how busy the roads are and what is coming the other way. This was quite scary at times!

In early 2006 we sailed from Sydney for Nias (Indonesia) to play our part in the one-year anniversary of the 'Shark 02' Sea King helicopter crash. *Tobruk* acted as a floating hotel and transport so that the families of those killed and several VIPs including Minister Bruce Billson could attend the crash site for the memorial service. It was quite a logistical feat noting how isolated the crash site is. I felt proud to watch the crew of *Tobruk* support Operation PERINGATAN and show such compassion and kindness when escorting the families and VIPs around a very tricky to navigate ship.

Later on our way to Singapore for a recreational visit at approximately 8am I began to experience pain. We were at sea and one day out of Singapore and we didn't have a doctor on board. It was actually quite frightening to be at sea experiencing this sort of pain and not know what was happening to you. The Ships Medical Emergency Team and the senior medical sailor on board who are trained to deal with such emergencies treated me. Evidently I was experiencing my first (and hopefully last) kidney stone!



The FWOSN

Warrant Officer Deb Butterworth

In 1984 my parents moved my family ALL the way across Australia, from Melbourne to Perth, I thought this was the end of the world. I wanted to escape, I started trying to conjure a plan to get back “East.” One day I wandered into the Perth recruiting office where I meet a gruff Chief who told me “you have no hope in getting a posting back to Perth”, I thought, I am in, where do I sign? So I joined in September 1989, after having lots of fun doing my HSC, and gee did my marks represent that! I originally applied as a Supply Officer, however due to an underwhelming HSC result I joined as a WRAN Stores Naval.

My career as a WRSN started as my HSC had finished, I was posted off course to HMAS *Kuttabul* and after a few months there I got into an altercation with another sailor in the workplace. When my Warrant Officer found out he said to me “you need to get to sea and sort yourself out, I have just the job for you, no-one else wants it!”. I could not believe it, I was off to sea, my friends thought I was crazy to be a WRAN (yes SMN now) and off to the Navy’s training ship HMAS *Jervis Bay*. I still smile today when I remember the Warrant Officer marching me down the wharf to post in (I am sure he thought that I would not turn up otherwise). I immediately loved being at sea, even with daily seasickness.

The first year onboard *Jervis Bay* was the standard routine for a training ship, a new bunch of Midshipmen every few weeks and lots of visits to close-by neighbours such as New Zealand. Watching the Midshipmen in *Jervis Bay*. I was pleased to be in sailor’s shoes.

In December 1992 the Commanding Officer called a “clear lower deck” and informed us all that in five days we would sail for Somalia in support of a United States led operation, he stated that Sea Training Group would come with us to Townsville to put us through our paces,



**‘... I was stubborn
I had a long-term goal,
I was going to be
the FWOSN.’**

this did not sound too bad. The more seasoned around me said there would be no fun for the next few weeks, boy were they right. This was my first exposure to a work-up and I loved it. I met the infamous Fleet Warrant Officer from my category and said to myself, one day I am going to do that job! I shared this thought at the time with my PO and he said, “I doubt that!” But I was stubborn and I had a long-term goal, I was going to be the FWOSN.

I was fortunate enough to participate in two deployments in *Jervis Bay* to Somalia and then post off to HMAS *Success*. This seagoing addiction has driven my career; as soon as I would be posted ashore I would contact the poster and nag them to get me back to sea. Other than *Jervis Bay* and *Success*, I have been fortunate enough to serve in two Adelaide Class Frigates, one Kanimbla Class Amphibious Ship and one Anzac Class frigate.

Yes I did make it to the FWOSN job, a fantastic job that I loved for two years.

Now I am fortunate enough to once more be at sea, this time however a new challenge as the Ship’s Warrant Officer in *Success*, this time I was the Warrant Officer marching down the wharf.





Pirate Watches

Petty Officer Evelyn Villalon

I was doing work experience in a Canberra hospital when I was introduced to an ex-Navy Medic. After talking with him about his experiences in the Navy and the work he did, I decided I wanted to join the Navy as a Medical Assistant.

At the time I found this a daunting decision because I have no family that had ever been members of the Defence Force, but family were extremely proud of the decision I made and remain extremely proud of the job that I do. As a first generation Australian, my family love how we have made Australia our true home.

I completed three months initial training as a recruit sailor at HMAS *Cerberus* in 2003 which included learning Navy traditions, how to march, become proficient in using a weapon, general seamanship skills as well as learning how to fight fires and stop floods on ships.

This only partially prepared me for my time in East Timor where I provided medical care to Timorese people that were being detained. This was a very different experience for me as we were supporting our land forces at all hours of the day. In the middle of the night yelling and screaming would wake us as our patrol forces were returning with people of interest. Some of the men we treated were violent and whilst I conducted medical examinations I would have a soldier by my side for protection and on many of these occasions I found that their presence was very reassuring.

I was on another occasion chosen to be a part of an Australian Defence Force medical contingent to join USS *Mercy*, the United States Navy hospital ship. At that time the ship was deployed to Pacific Partnership, which provides humanitarian and community aid to South

Pacific islands and South East Asian Countries. During the deployment we were based in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, where we saw over 1000 locals a day from the various towns. On a number of other occasions I assisted teams onboard by helping build simple housing and medical structures in remote villages.

In 2012 I was asked to join HMAS *Anzac* at short notice prior to deploying for Operation Slipper in the Middle East. I hit the deck running with four hours to prepare and join the ship to sail that afternoon. The very next day, we exercised a simulated emergency onboard where I needed to manage and treat 28 casualties.

This truly is the highlight of my Navy career thus far. Although movies romanticise the concept of pirates, in the real world they pose a real threat to seafarers. Pirates sometimes are unable to discriminate between a merchant vessel and a warship. Every night we would be in pirate watches, protecting our ship and our shipmates. This occurred whilst we were tracking the pirates down, protecting innocent mariners and responding to any distress calls from other ships in the area.

Our main task was to provide assistance to any ship in need and our boarding parties provided the capability required for us to do this. The Navy's boarding parties are in the thick of it when responding to acts of piracy and when coming across pirates. This team is made up of men and women alike with medical personnel able

to volunteer for the role. Not only were the threats very real when patrolling the ocean but were also present when we would pull into various ports to replenish ships provisions. We were always busy protecting our ship and ourselves.

At present, I serve in HMAS *Stuart*, which is an ANZAC class frigate. Onboard the ship I am responsible for the management of all things medical. This includes training all personnel in first aid, specialist training and management of the ships medical emergency team and leading two advance medical assistants. It is my job as the highest trained medical sailor onboard to ensure we are meeting all fleet standards of medical care.

It is true that so far during all my experiences and the positions that I have held, women were always in the minority. I am proud and pleased to say that this has never been an issue in the work that I conducted and there are still many other roles and opportunities for me in the ADF.



The Cool World

Lieutenant Louisa Young

Travel, adventure and excitement - the reasons I joined the Navy at the age of 19. Desperate for something more than the small town I grew up in could provide, the Navy was the perfect vehicle to escape. I joined HMAS Creswell in 1995 for my New Entry Officer's Course and it was not long after my arrival that I caught the 'submarine bug'. At that time however, women could not serve in the submarine squadron although the introduction of the Collins Class submarines would change that and I wanted to be a part of it.

Three years later, as a young, enthusiastic SBLT, I got my chance. I had achieved my bridge watching certificate in HMAS Westralia and was looking to specialise. The Submarine Squadron had just opened its doors to females and after undergoing the Enhanced Selection Process to determine my suitability for submarine life, I commenced my Submarine Officer's Training Course (SMOTC) in 1999. For months, I learnt about the complex systems that make up a submarine, conducted hours and hours of emergency drills in the submarine simulator and conducted pressurised escape training at the Submarine Escape Training Facility (SETF). All the while I was desperate to get to sea in a submarine.

After completing my SMOTC, I joined my first submarine, HMAS Farncomb, in January 2000 (Commanding Officer LCDR Gregory Sammut, RAN) as a Part Three trainee and I experienced my first dive and sub-surface sea-time not long after. Coming from a tanker where living quarters were spacious and comfortable to the exact opposite in a submarine, where space and privacy is extremely limited, was an interesting transition but I loved every moment of it. Task book in hand, and with

the help of an extremely supportive crew, I got to know my submarine back to front, inside and out. As a non-technical person I surprised myself at how well I came to understand the submarine's engineering and safety systems in addition to my primary role as an Operations Room watch keeper. This intimate knowledge of the submarine and the ability to respond appropriately in an emergency situation is a necessity for all 'dolphin wearers' to keep our submarine and fellow submariners safe. Farncomb deployed from Fleet Base West in early 2000 for a South-East Asian deployment and it was during that time that I qualified as a submariner. Being awarded my dolphins, whilst dived, somewhere in waters off South-East Asia, was and still is the proudest day of my naval career.

After qualifying as a submariner, I was then able to get on and do my job at sea as Watch Navigator, Periscope Watch keeper and Diving and Surfacing Officer of the Watch. After my time in Farncomb, I posted to NUSHIP Sheean (Commanding Officer LCDR Hordern Wiltshire, RAN) as the Torpedo Officer (Torps) and I continued to thrive and love life as a submariner.

The work was hard and the hours long but I loved being a part of an unique, close-knit community that is a submarine crew. After a short stint in Sheean, I was posted as part of the Commissioning Crew for NUSHIP Dechaineux (Commanding Officer CDR Steve Davies, RAN). Unfortunately my submarine sea-going service would end early and unexpectedly due to an extraordinary illness I suffered. Whilst I never returned to sea in a submarine, I have continued my career in the Navy contributing to the Submarine Squadron through postings to Submarine Operations, the Subsafe Program and now as a Project Manager within Capability Development Group where I am working on the project for the replacement Submarine Escape Rescue and Abandonment System for the Collins Class and Future Submarines.

I am now, most importantly, a mum of three beautiful children and whilst day to day life these days is very different to that when I was at sea in a submarine, I look back very fondly at those experiences and the 'cool' world I had the privilege to be a part of.



**‘Task book in hand,
and with the help of an
extremely supportive
crew, I got to know my
submarine back to front,
inside and out.’**



Stories Of Command

Captain Allison Norris

I joined the Navy because it sounded like a good idea at the time and looking back now...IT WAS! I could see the opportunity to assert myself and gain some independence but I had only a very basic idea of what the Navy involved and very little knowledge of my potential career opportunities. After completing my HSC, I was accepted to ADFA as an Instructor (IT) Officer (now known as Training Systems). After my first foray into life at sea onboard HMAS *Tobruk*, I was hooked and from that point my career as a Seaman Officer began.

Command; more specifically Sea Command is what we in the MWO community strive for. I have been blessed with two opportunities for Sea Command, it is the professional pinnacle for a MWO and very difficult to surpass in terms of job satisfaction, sense of achievement and of course, pride. The path to achieve this over the better part of two decades has not always been a smooth one to navigate but the reward has been definitely well worth the wait.

It has been my privilege to Command HMAS *Melbourne* (2008-2009) and currently HMAS *Success*. Both of these Commands have been very different; different missions, different skill sets, different challenges; and yet very similar in culture, dedication and professionalism of our people. Navy has prepared me well for Command; developing my warfare and mariner expertise in conjunction with my leadership and management skills throughout my career.

I approached both Commands very differently. *Melbourne* was my first and of course, there is always something special about the first Command. I was enthusiastic, keen and couldn't wait to get onboard and establish myself as the leader of the team. I never expected to get another opportunity, so I was

determined to make the most of my sea Command experience. I was entirely comfortable in Command of *Melbourne* because I was very familiar with the ship, the weapons system, the armament, the engineering configuration, the layout and the manoeuvrability of an Adelaide class frigate.

When I look back there were many highlights of my Command of *Melbourne*; simply being there was a highlight. The efforts of the Ship's Company stand-out in my mind, their continued focus and dedication and especially their teamwork. Deployments to South East Asia and Hawaii were certainly memorable and exercising with a range of international navies very rewarding. However, the biggest highlight and for me, the most professionally satisfying was the successful firing of the RAN's first SM-2 missile in the Eastern Australia Exercise Area in Dec 09. It was the culmination of months of training, planning and meticulous preparation and I breathed a sigh of relief when I heard that missile go WHOOSH!

I have spent much of my seagoing career serving in Adelaide's at various levels, OOW, PWO, XO and finally in Command, however, *Success* is a new and inviting challenge. Before assuming Command, I had barely

set foot onboard and definitely not been to sea in her. *Success* was certainly an unknown element and pushed me somewhat out of my comfort zone. One challenge for me was to get to know the 'grand old girl', learn my way around, familiarise myself with the routines and understand fully her logistic/replenishment role. As I said, Navy has prepared me well for the unique challenges that *Success* brings.

My approach to Command in *Success* was more measured, I won't say more considered but certainly more restrained. I had the benefit of hindsight and the opportunity to reflect on my Command of *Melbourne* and learn from my experiences. In this Command I have certainly taken more of an opportunity to savour the experience but also to think about the 'bigger picture'; particularly, how my actions support the broader strategic intent for Navy is not always an easy thing for a CO to do.

I have been blessed with two opportunities for Sea Command and a myriad of opportunities to progress my mariner skills over many years at sea. I look forward to proceeding to sea in *Success* and confronting the next challenge.



‘ The path to achieve this over the better part of two decades has not always been a smooth one to navigate but the reward has been definitely well worth the wait.’



Walking Tall

Commander Jan Noonan

For as long as I can remember I wanted to join the Police Force. Year after year at High School I turned the pages of the Career Handbook analysing all the traditional jobs of teaching, secretarial work or accountancy that my girlfriends were being encouraged to follow. Sessions with the careers counsellor ruled out any desire for alternative career paths – the Police Force was the only career I intended to pursue.

Despite knowing I was two centimetres shorter than the required physical standards, the day I turned 18 years of age I applied. Two centimetres may well have been twenty centimetres – there was nothing I could do to close that gap - a career as a Police Woman was never to eventuate. Lamenting that loss was short lived – I knew there must be another career that would provide diversity, excitement and the chance to leave Tasmania! Joining the Navy and commencing study at the Australian Defence Force Academy in 1998 was one of the pre-eminent decisions of my life and I remain ever thankful for those two centimetres that I didn't grow!

‘While the number of men pursuing careers in the Executive Branch far outweighed the few women of my class, I felt that we were treated no differently.’



Years of navigation and warfare training both at sea and ashore followed graduation from the Defence Academy. While the number of men pursuing careers in the Executive Branch far outweighed the few women of my class, I felt that we were treated no differently. The fact of the matter is that when I was executing astronavigation, a position fixing technique that evolved several thousand years ago, or manoeuvring the ship to reduce the roll when running with a beam sea, there was no discrimination by gender. The late 80's and early 90's were a fun time to be at sea, as I participated in joint exercises in Hawaii and Asia-Pacific deployments. The reality of what service to the country meant though was brought home first hand in 1992 when I sailed in *Tobruk* in support of Operation Solace, Australia's contribution to the international peacekeeping effort in Somalia. Civil war and mass starvation are images that remain with you forever, but equally as strong was the sense of pride I felt that the Australian Navy was in some small way helping this desperate country. While not so naïve to think it equated to restoring the society to a functioning political and social entity, I felt that this was a career that made a positive difference.

Recollecting my time in the Guided Missile Frigate *Canberra* would have to bring the wryest of grins to my face. With just three female officers onboard, dripping



wet we would have been lucky to have a combined weight of 150kg between us. By contrast the other 200 members of the Ship's Company were big, brazen and blokes! We punched well above our fighting weight though, and despite being accommodated in a hucked out boat locker, I felt as 'at home' among that crew as everyone else.

Despite not following the specialist warfare path, I continued to relish my time at sea in Minor War Vessels, firstly as Executive Officer of the Fremantle Class Patrol Boat HMAS *Warmambool*, followed by Commanding Officer of the Landing Craft, HMAS *Labuan*. Shortly after assuming command, *Labuan* was deployed to East Timor, and I became the first woman to command a Royal Australian Naval ship assigned to active service. The crew worked immensely hard through an intense

'...I became the first woman to command a Royal Australian Naval ship assigned to active service.'

period of demanding operations in East Timor to provide vital stores, food, water and medical aid to the United Nations peacekeeping forces and local communities alike. No achievement or milestone that I reflect upon though would have been possible without each and every one of *Labuan's* crew. Whether delivering equipment to the shore of the East Timor enclave of

Oecussi, conducting beach landings on the coast of Lautaim, or transporting supplies to Batugade during the wet season when the roads were closed to all alternate transport, *Labuan* was indispensable to rebuilding East Timor.

Through the lens of my world today, my time at sea is a distant past. I feel more at home teaching our nine year-old how to solve an algebraic equation or frenetically creating a book-week costume for our six year old at midnight, than working out the maximum pay load for the tank deck or preparing for a beach landing at Suai. Regardless of the time that has passed and my perceived insignificance of what I have achieved, as a member of the Navy, I always stand tall in uniform having fulfilled that promise I took 25 years ago to do my bit to keep Australia safe.

The Beginning

Nancy Bentley - First Enlisted Female Sailor in the RAN, 1920 No 00001

With permission of the publishers of "Ships Belles: The Story of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service 1941-1985" by Shirley Fenton Huie

The first enlisted female to be into the Royal Australian Navy was not a Wran but a little girl called Nancy Bentley. No history of women in the RAN would be complete without recording the extraordinary story of Nancy Bentley and her enlistment in the Navy in 1920 at the tender age of six years.

She was not a member of the WRANS but a full member of the RAN just as women are today.

In 1920 Nancy lived with her parents in Port Arthur, Tasmania. The Navy often called in at the port and on this occasion there were, in the bay, about six naval vessels which had just completed an exercise. Nancy and her brothers were in a paddock overlooking the harbor, listening to a ship's band playing.

The family was nearby and when Mrs Bentley called the children for dinner they came running through the high grass not realizing the danger that lay in store. Nancy ran to keep up with her brothers, but as the grass was wet from recent rain and quite slippery before she could help herself she fell over. In the grass was a snake and as she fell on top of it, it bit her on the wrist.

"I screamed when the whip snake bit me" she said, "I must have fallen on its tail."

The nearest doctor was at Sorrel many miles away, so her father put a tourniquet on her upper arm and made haste to HMAS *Sydney* where he sought immediate medical help by approaching the ship's captain.

In those days women were not allowed on naval vessels except on social occasions, and Nancy can remember



'In order to comply with naval regulations there was nothing for it but to enlist Nancy in the Navy...'

being put aboard a fishing boat which drew alongside HMAS *Sydney* and her father asking for help. Although against Kings Rules and Admiralty Instructions (KR&AI), this was obviously a case of life or death and Nancy was taken on board, carried to the sick bay and treated for poisoning by the ship's doctor.

Once immediate danger had passed the doctor explained that she was not to be moved for several days, so protocol had to be observed. In order to comply with naval regulations there was nothing for it but to enlist Nancy in the Navy and she was formally enlisted in the RAN. Her service number was 00001 and her official rating was mascot.

She spent eight days aboard HMAS *Sydney*, being cared for by the ship's officer and crew with her parents visiting daily to bring fresh cow's milk. "Goodness me



‘Her service number was 00001 and her official rating was mascot.’



they looked after me well. It was wonderful.” Nancy said. “Officer Higgs, I think it was, even used to do my hair. When I was well enough to get up, they gave me an outfit they had made. A proper little navy dress like a sailor, with a sailor’s cap and scarf.”

The officers and crew doted on little Nancy and when the ship sailed for Hobart she went along too. On November 20 she was awarded a Good Conduct badge, duly entered in the ship’s records. Her character was described as ‘very good’ and her naval rating ability as ‘exceptional.’ She was discharged from service because she was ‘required by her parents.’

When she was fully recovered, she was returned home to Port Arthur loaded up with boxes of chocolates. “There were so many boxes of chocolates,” she said, “That they had to carry me ashore. They didn’t like parting with me.”

The crew of HMAS Sydney kept in touch with her for years, and in 1986, as part of the Navy’s 75th anniversary celebrations she was made a life member of the HMAS Sydney Association. Many years after her stint in the Navy, Nancy married Allan Jones, had three children and many grandchildren and lived in Penguin, Tasmania. She passed away on 9 August 1999.

A.S. 459.

The corner of this Certificate is to be cut off if the man is discharged with a "Bad" character or with disgrace, or if specially directed by the Naval Board. If the corner is cut off, the fact is to be noted in the Quarterly Ledger.

CERTIFICATE of the Service of
Miss Nancy Bentley
in the Royal Australian Navy.

POST DIVISION— *Melbourne* Official Number— *000001*

Date of Birth _____
 Where Born { Town *Port Arthur*
 State or Country *Tasmania*
 Usual place of Residence { *Port Arthur*
Tasmania
 Trade brought up to *Nil*
 Religious Denomination *Church of England*
 Can Swim *Not tried*

Nearest known Relative or Friend (Relationship, Name, and Address)
M. J. Bentley
Port Arthur
Tasmania
Father

Engagements.			Medals, Clasp, &c.	
Date of actually Volunteering.	Commencing Date of Engagements.	Period Engaged for.	Date Received or Forfeited.	Nature of Decoration.
<i>15th November 1920</i>	<i>15th Nov. 1920</i>	<i>Until fed. up.</i>		

Description of Person.	Stature.		Colour of—			Marks, Wounds, and Scars.
	Feet.	In.	Hair.	Eyes.	Complexion.	
On entry as a <i>boy</i> <i>girl</i> ...	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Light Brown</i>	<i>Blue</i>	<i>Frick</i>	<i>Scar Right Wrist</i>
On advancement to man's rating, or on entry if under 28 years of age ...						
On re-entry, or on entry if over 28 years of age ...						

Name: *Miss Nancy Bentley*

Ship's Name	Rate and No.	Rating	From	To	Cause of Discharge
<i>H.M.A.S. Sydney 5th 3</i>		<i>Mascat</i>	<i>15th Nov 20</i>	<i>23rd Nov 20</i>	<i>Required by his Parents</i>

Date _____ Wounds received in Action and Hurt Certificate; also any Meritorious Service, Special Recommendations, Pms, or other Grants _____
 Captain's Signature _____
Wound of Right Wrist caused by a Scorpion Bite while skimming in the bush at Port Arthur Tasmania

Name *Miss Nancy Bentley* Conduct.

Second Class for Conduct, Inclusive dates.		Character, Ability in Rating, Recommendation for Medal and Gratuity (R.M.G.), on 31st December each year, and on Discharge from the Service.				
From—	To—	Character.	Ability in Rating, noting Seaman's Duty, &c., Obeyance, &c.	R.M.G.	Date.	Captain's Signature
		<i>Very Good</i>	<i>Exceptional</i>		<i>Not</i> <i>28th 1920</i>	<i>H. C. Bayley</i> <i>Captain</i>

Good Conduct Badges.		
Date.	1st, 2nd, 3rd.	Granted, Deprived, Restored.
<i>20th Nov. 1920</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>Granted</i>

Date.	D. C. O.P. or W.C.	Days.	Date.	D. C. O.P. or W.C.	Days.	Date.	D. C. O.P. or W.C.	Days.

Time Forfeited.

A.M. 190.

MEDICAL HISTORY SHEET FOR PETTY OFFICERS AND MEN.

When Entered *20th Nov 20* Date of Birth _____ (Name) *Miss Nancy Bentley* Where Born *Pool*
 Where Entered *Port* Age of Entry *6 years* (Official Number) *000001* Previous Occupation _____

Rating.	Ship's Name, &c.	Number on Ship's Books.	Date of Admission on Sick List.	Date of Discharge from Sick List.	Number of Days Sick.	Disease or Hurt.	How disposed of.	Surgeon of Ship's Latitude.	Number of Hospital Days.	If Invalid, where and when?
<i>Warrant</i>	<i>H.M.A.S. Sydney</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>15. 11. 20</i>	<i>25. 11. 20</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>Scorpion Bite & Blood Poison</i>	<i>Discharged on shore</i>	<i>H.B.</i>	<i>8</i>	

