

TO THE MEN OF USS FRANK E. EVANS, DD 754

I am honoured to convey the greetings of the HMAS MELBOURNE Association to the men of USS FRANK E. EVANS and their families and friends on this 3rd Annual reunion.

The HMAS MELBOURNE Association is the cover organisation to support those who served in the first HMAS MELBOURNE, a First World War cruiser, the second HMAS MELBOURNE, the carrier which served from 1955 to 1982, and I am proud to say, the present HMAS MELBOURNE, an Oliver Hazard Perry class Frigate, commissioned in 1992. By coincidence, perhaps, I feel well qualified to speak for the Association on this occasion, having served in HMAS MELBOURNE on numerous occasions ranging from air operations to a short period as Commanding Officer, but more specifically having been the Navigating Officer in 1969, during our operations with USS FRANK E. EVANS.

Those operations culminated in the collision on the morning of 3 June 1969. As we all know, 74 brave men lost their lives, and many families lost their fathers, husbands, sons and brothers. Nothing will change that. But out of that dreadful morning came many instances of great bravery, of fortitude, of comradeship, of acceptance that such is the danger that faces the mariner. And I believe the danger inherent in our naval business as we practice our profession in order to ensure that we can meet the expectations of our country and our allies, should we ever have to, is not widely understood.

Outsiders will question - why did it happen. We here know it is a dangerous business, that the maritime environment can be unforgiving, that in striving for realism in our training we are operating close to the margins, that manoeuvring fleet units, particularly at night, places great demands on individuals. It is a fine line at times between success and failure.

Yet the aftermath of such a tragedy shows the strength of the bonds between mariners of all nationalities. It is a bond that crosses international boundaries, and is very visible in our day to day activities, as well as on special occasions like national anniversaries and fleet reviews. I suggest that bond was evident when Donald Webb of USS JAMES E. KYES, DD 787 wrote to the National President of our Returned Services League in 1992 providing his impressions of the search and rescue activities of the morning of 3 June, and seeking to renew friendships made shortly thereafter, and when Ron Baker saw the importance of a 25 th Anniversary Memorial service and a reunion and made it happen, very successfully, in Canberra on 3 June this year. When LARRY Maliley and John Gamber and their wives attended that service and reunion. And now when the MELBOURNE representatives are warmly welcomed at your 3rd Reunion.

Those events or activities are reflective of what navy people are about, of their comradeship, of their understanding and of their friendship. Our representatives are delighted to be present this weekend, and thank you for taking them into your family.

Tony Harris