

MILDENHALL

BARRISTERS & SOLICITORS

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28 January 1994

Frank E Evans Association
C/- HG (Nick) Nichols
PO Box 306
FRANKSTON
TEXAS 75763 USA

Dear Sir

I recently became aware of the Association and hence this letter. My link with the USS FRANK E EVANS is that I was one of the crew of the S2-E Tracker of which the ship was to take up the position of Res Des for in the early hours of 3 June 1969. Rather than provide you with all the details of my participation in the events of that night, I enclose a photocopy of pages from the Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia Journal, "Slipstream" in which it is described. I also enclose, for what it is worth, photocopies of photographs which I have in my possession.

In the letter in the article I state that I inflated my Mae West and threw it to a survivor in the water - he was between the 2 ships when the stern section of EVANS was drifting down MELBOURNE'S starboard side. I'm interested in finding out if he survived and if so, to tell him that in 1972, the RAN was seriously considering court martialling me for having lost the Mae West over the side and not having its loss recorded in the ship's log!

Unfortunately, it is unlikely that I will be able to attend the memorial service in Canberra on 3 June 1969 but my thoughts will be with not only the families of those who were lost in those tragic few minutes but with the survivors, many of whom I am sure suffered trauma in having lost shipmates as well as enduring an horrific experience. To them all, my heartfelt sympathy.

I had the good fortune to serve with the USN both ashore at NAS North Island, San Diego and at sea in the CVSs, BENNINGTON and KEARSAGE. The hospitality and warm friendship extended by members of the USN and civilians alike will always be remembered. I remember also, many runs ashore in Hawaii while at RIMPAC exercises and of course while at Sabic Bay and meeting with US Navy personnel.

My sincere best wishes to the members of your Association. If any of them come to Perth, they will be made most welcome in the best traditions of Australia.

Yours aye


GEOFF VICKRIDGE
LIEUTENANT COMMANDER RANR

Geoffrey Vickridge
Lieutenant Commander RANR

Adrian N. Ward
B. Juris (Hon) LL.B (1978)

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HMAS VOYAGER REUNION

The survivors of *HMAS Voyager* are holding their 30th Anniversary Reunion at Huskisson RSL Club on 5th and 6th February, 1994.

On Sunday morning, 6th February 1994, there will be a march from the Huskisson Post Office to the Memorial in Voyager Park. This march, lead by a Naval Band, will commence at 0930 and be followed by a service at the Memorial.

Your members are cordially invited to join us for this march, and afterwards adjourn to the RSL Club for a light lunch. Notification, in due course, of the numbers of Association members attending would be appreciated.

John K Hannay - Reunion Coordinator

PO Box 235

ENFIELD NSW 2136

Tel: (02) 642 2082 - Fax: (02) 746 2068

* Local area FAA Association members wishing to attend, please contact NSW Secretary, Terry Hetherington c/- PO Box 28, Nowra NSW 2541 or Tel: (044) 230056

HMAS Melbourne - USS Frank E. Evans Memorial Service

The Memorial Service marking the 25th Anniversary of the collision between *HMAS Melbourne* and *USS Frank E. Evans*, will be held in Canberra on 3 June 1994.

A dawn service will be held at the US War Memorial at Russell Offices, followed by breakfast at the Canberra RSL Club. The cost of the breakfast is quoted at \$7 per head.

Other functions are being planned over the weekend 3 - 5 June inclusive.

Anyone interested in attending should contact Ron 'Nullarbor' Baker (ex-CPO RS) on (07) 2813553 (H) or (07) 2803061 (DNATS 8-72-3061) (W) for further information.

Anyone who can billet interstate/overseas visitors during that weekend should also contact Mr. Baker.

Members may be unaware of the existence a Frank E. Evans Association. For those who wish to make contact, the address is as follows: Frank E. Evans Association, c/- H.G. (Nick) Nichols, PO Box 306, FRANKSTON, TEXAS 75763, USA.

THE MELBOURNE-EVANS COLLISION! One man's observation

In the early hours of the morning of 3 June 1969, 74 United States Navy sailors lost their lives when their ship, the *USS Frank E. Evans* was cut in two by *HMAS Melbourne* in the South China Sea.

Shortly before the collision, the American destroyer was ordered to take up the position of rescue destroyer for the 816 Squadron Tracker - 848 (Crew: Pilot Lt John L. Clarke - Tacco S/Lt Ian Payne - #3 Operator PO Ken Beaton - #4 Operator Lt. Geoff Vickridge) which was scheduled to be launched at 0330.

Whilst changing station, the *Evans* collided with the Australian aircraft carrier.

The following account of the tragedy is taken from a personal letter that the then Lt. Geoff Vickridge, wrote to his wife shortly after the event

HMAS Melbourne
At sea
03 June 1969

Dear...

Where does one begin after such a terrible tragedy? Of course you will

have well and truly heard the news by now and I am glad to hear over Radio Australia that we have been reported as having no casualties - which is perfectly correct.

I am also grateful that you did not send a telegram to the ship as have many of the wives; the 'sparkers' are flat out now sending off all kinds of messages and the personal telegrams must be an additional load that they wish they did not have.

If you were to ask me my reaction now, at 2215 - exactly 19 hours after the collision occurred, I could honestly say I am stunned, as we all are. After *Voyager*, it didn't seem possible that it could happen again. Both the *Frank E. Evans* and *Voyager* were destroyers which the Americans call 'tin cans' - *Melbourne* has now earned herself the unenviable nickname of *HMAS Can Opener*.

At present we are headed for Singapore for a hull examination and a temporary repair job prior to returning to Sydney; also, an enquiry. My estimate of the earliest we will get home is around 7 July; it is by no means official.

Mail is closing on board at 0400, so I am hoping that this will reach you

as quickly as possible to allay any fears you may have as to our safety.

Needless to say, the exercise has been cancelled; also the remainder of the trip. This was done by Rear Admiral Crabb within an hour of the collision. His first communication outside of the ship was to Chief of Naval Staff (VAT Smith), whom I believe was on an aeroplane within an hour headed for Singapore.

At the last count there was 1 dead and 56 missing and, as we called off the search at 1745 and are proceeding away from the scene of the collision, I would say that this may be the final figure. All the ships in the exercise have been requested to proceed to Singapore with us and from the latest info, they are all complying with the request.

The damage to *Melbourne* is not nearly as severe as it was with *Voyager*, but even so, we have been holed in several places up for'd. I believe that a trim tank was flooded to the extent of 70-80 tons of water taken in, and some of the compartments have been shored up by the Damage Control crew. The bow is a real mess and because of damage to the catapult, 816 and 805 Squadrons will not be flying at all. How it is intended to disembark the Trackers and the Skyhawks, I have no idea.

I was scheduled to brief at 0200 this morning and launch at 0330 (Ken Beaton was with me). We had done our pre-flight and were in the aircraft just prior to starting up when I heard the two blasts on the