

Flying Stations

Printed & Distributed by : Glen Hartig, 8 Valerie Close, Edens Landing, Qld. 4207. (07) 3299 6336.

Postal Address: PO Box 36 Beenleigh, Q 4207 - Email: glenhartig@bigpond.com

May The Memories Sail On Forever

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AIRCRAFT HANDLERS LEGEND

Henry "Nobby" Hall

Nobby joined the RAN aged 16 years in 1938 and in his words it was either join the Navy or sent to a home for uncontrollable boys. Life at sea appealed to him because his mother Dorothy had read him many sea adventure stories. His brother Robert also joined the Army at that time.

He worked his way up from Ordinary Seaman to Lieutenant Commander, not bad for a boy who left school aged 14 years. He did however have a thirst for knowledge and reading.

He said his late wife Ethel deserves much of the credit for his successful career. Without Ethel understanding of what life at sea was all about, his career would not have been so glorious. He met Ethel whilst he was training in meteorology at Kite in England where she was a Leading Wren who helped him during the course and after courting her for a while he remarked "shouldn't we get married" and the reply was "We'll get married or nothing". After a three day honeymoon he returned on board HMAS Sydney. Another of his many career milestones was the birth of the Australian Fleet Air Arm and the establishment of HMAS Albatross.

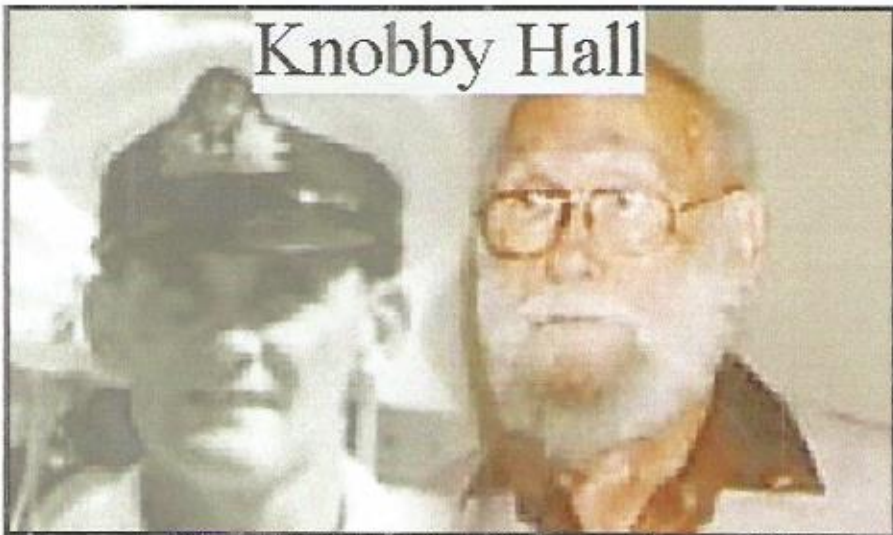
No matter what he faced in life Nobby Hall MBE could always see the humorous side to things. The Curarong identity had an eventful life particularly during his 43 years in the RAN.

During the Second World War he experienced collisions, torpedo attacks, a sinking and some bombings. If you had to pick out one incident that shows the type of person Nobby is, then the battle of Salvo Island in August 1942 is the one. During the battle the Japanese attacked an Allied fleet and sank four ships in the attack. He was on HMAS Canberra when it was sunk.

The human carnage from the attack was immense, but Nobby was left unhurt, and even though he had no medical training, got in and helped the wounded and dying. He helped performed amputations, removed shrapnel from wounds and held hands of men while they were dying.

"It was like a production line of people that needed medical attention "he says," I lived on coffee and cigarettes for five days and then I collapsed from exhaustion". He helped "because I could" and it was this motto that became consistent then in his life. He even treated burnt Japanese. Nobby, because of his efforts at the battle of Salvo Island was Mentioned In Despatches.

Knobby Hall



Even talking about such grim and bloody situations, Nobby Halls humour comes through. "The sight of blood, other than my own, does not scare me". He says his humour is macabre and then exploded into laughter as he told the story of a shipmate who unfortunately received a shrapnel wound in his backside. Still his memory of these events is remarkable vivid. "I can remember things that happened 30 years ago, but do not ask me to remember what happened yesterday".

Nobby had mixed emotions when he heard that HMAS Sydney 2 had been found. A quirk of fate prevented him from going down with the ship. He signed on in 1938 and was assigned to a group of about 20 recruits. Luckily for him, fate, in the form of a needle stepped in and he could not take his place on board the Sydney.

An inoculation went wrong and he ended up with vaccination fever, collapsed on the parade and woke up ten days later. It was decided to assign him to another class and so he avoided serving on the ill-fated ship.

The light cruiser was lost in November 1941 off Western Australia with its entire crew of 645 men, following a fierce engagement with the HSK Kormoran. Her disappearance was Australia's greatest military mysteries - until recently.

He is glad his mates will now have an official final resting place. It will be marked on the map as a war grave - a sacred site.

He was a quartermaster on HMAS Australia on one of its trips after the war and who else was one of his side boys but Ambrose Boulter. It was in Hong Kong that Ambrose mentioned the call for volunteers for the to be formed Fleet Air Arm and both volunteered. Nobby went for photography but due to some paper mix up ended up a MET trainee.



On arrival back at Sydney the Jossman called him in and said he had a pier jump to the Kanimbla next day. When asking about pre-embarkment leave he was told to take a make and mend and report next day to Kanimbla. Some things never change.

His fellow MET trainee was an AB Arthur Nelson Hussey and he made a name for himself with the Wrens in Kite with his slow deliberate Australian laconic drawl, he told them some many strange and wonderful stories. Like when our ship was tied up at no1 buoy in Farm Cove the kangaroos on the grassy banks used to jump in and swim across to dive in and pick up pennies thrown in and then put them in their pouches. Arthur's comment to some of the Wrens "my old man has sent me a smoke signal to tell me that if I pass this here weather course he's going to set up a 18 gallon on the banks of the mighty Molongo (he lived in Canberra) and me and my mates will have a barby and barby some kangaroo steaks and get pissed". Many times Ethel, on behalf of her fellow Wrens would ask Nobby to translate.

Nobby progressed to PO MET whilst in England but there was some problem in his elevation to CPO MET rate which was overcome when he did an AH one course under the eyes of POAH Von Kimber in 1956. He became a "handler" and did stints as Hanger control Officer on Melbourne and Fire Officer at Albatross and continued to be a number one nice guy.

There was no rest for Nobby when he retired in 1981. Along with Ethel that motto of "we help because we can" formed the basis of their lives.

They volunteered for Meals On Wheels, worked at the Senior Citizens Association and volunteered for Legacy. He brushes off the community service with laughter. "Ethel and I used to say we were going to help feed the elderly and we were both over 80 years of age and the people we were helping were younger than us" he says. He continues to volunteer for Legacy and looks after the welfare of 25 widows as well as lecturing at the University of the Third Age on a variety of issues.

He is also a keen vexologist, otherwise known as a studier of flags. He displays a different flag from a collection outside his home every day.

Nobby Hall knows all good things come to an end and at his funeral they will be playing "Return to Sender" by Elvis. He chuckles.

Today Nobby says he is lucky to be close to and loved by his daughters Jenny Pender and Gwyneth Hall

(The Postie Note: There is a lot more that could be said about Nobby and one day maybe it will).