

# Flying Stations

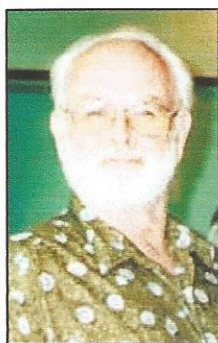
Printed & Distributed by : Glen Hartig, 8 Valerie Close, Edens Landing, Qld. 4207. (07) 3299 6336.  
Postal Address: PO Box 36 Beenleigh, Q 4207 – Email: glenhartig@bigpond.com

May The Memories Sail On Forever

Volume : 8. Issue : 2

Apr/Jun. 2010.

## AIRCRAFT HANDLERS "LIVING LEGENDS" No. 17



### COL SPENCE "A Living Legend"

I was born Chelsea, Victoria 25 October 1931. Educated at Chelsea State and Frankston High, which I did not finish. At 14 I left home and together with two ferrets, a dog and mate traveled to Deniliquin and obtained employment on a sheep station called "Darbrekan ". Given a dray and a horse, camping equipment and food we were sent to eliminate as many rabbits as we could - bunny type not Navy type. It was very lucrative. We sent a truck load of rabbits at least twice a week to Melbourne markets. All went well until one night back in the station hand's hut one idiot went berserk and tried to eliminate us following which I was taken into care in the main homestead and later for my own welfare sent home. There I became a roofing tile maker and armed with this I went to Queensland (Caloundra) where I set up the first concrete tile factory in Queensland. Unfortunately we went bust simply because builders preferred asbestos super six to concrete tiles.

Back to Chelsea I became apprenticed to a builder and worked mainly around the Frankston and Mt Eliza areas. Unknowingly I had set the main course of my life after pussers. I had lost an uncle in the "Sydney disaster" and decided I would take his place and join the Navy, so at the first possible entry age, I enlisted was accepted and reported to Lonsdale 26 April 1949. Following recruit training at Cerberus drafted to Albatross where because I could play a trumpet I was made bugler. In the absence of any tannoy system I had to ride around on a bike playing reveille. The result was I was constantly pelted with stones from the huts I rode past.

In February '50 I passed no 6 ah3 course and on 6 June 1950 was drafted to Sydney where I immediately ran afoul of Reg Holton . It seemed I had sat at the wrong end of the mess table. Initially for flying stations I became Cdr (Air's) messenger was onboard for the trip to U.K For the 20<sup>th</sup> CAG then later to Korea and Japan. There I was more active on deck as starboard hook man with Snow Tite my opposite on portside.

On return from Korea. I married Marice, I can recall Eric Kearney was best man. Tom Tingwell was there as well as one other of our mob can't recall who it was. We had arranged for a house in Killarney near JB (in short supply those days) but it was given to the Marine Bandsman Peter Babbage before we arrived so we lived in a garage. On occasions we did not report in as the creek used to flood so we would have a mutual meeting telephone the base and spend the day at home. Nobody came to check, this was in '52. I had returned to Nowra on General duties which was really mostly the Blue jacket Band as I recall and in '53 became salvage driver for 6 months then AH2 course followed by 7 months A/LA IC Runway Control Van.

In June '54 posted to Vengeance training Nashos. I had the trip to U.K. again but swapped with Darkie Howlett as Marice and I had Colin Junior on the way. I was drafted from Vengeance to Sydney for two months and then back to Nowra for no 9 AH1 Course September '55. On completion drafted to 723 Sqd for two months supposedly in charge of hanger party but in reality mostly with Shamus O'Farrell on the end of a chopper cable. It was by his influence (letting me fly the chopper under his direction) that later in Malaysia I obtained my own wings.

In November '55 Jonnie Walker (Lt CDR) for some reason known only to him became my mentor and decided he wanted me for better things - initially in the Tower where I stayed until '56 (nothing more nerve racking than trying to cope with night flying with a tower full of upper deck socialising in the tower as though at a cocktail party, used to piss me off in large lumps). Couldn't say anything though.

At that same Gentleman's recommendation I was posted to Kuttatubul and promoted to P.O. as Minister for the Navy's Coxswain/ driver. Fortunately I had plenty of experience in Boat handling as Skimmer Coxswain with Lylle Kerrison in the two years on board Sydney. Here I joined Stalkey Maley who was dockyard Commodores driver. Can't recall admirals' driver but I was often collared by Arch Harrington to drive he and Lady Harrington on special occasions. He liked the Humber Pullman. Minister at that time was Senator Sir Neil O'Sullivan a cabinet colleague of The Prime Minister, Robert Menzies so had many occasions of meeting both at the airport and driving them as required in Sydney. In '57 I returned to ATC duties but this time without my mentor around I got the Van again.

Continued over.



In early '58 I spent a short time in Cerberus at the Petty Officers School where having earlier passed the Air Administration Board. I was recommended for branch Rank, Sub Lt (SD). Not aware whether by design or intention on my return to Nowra I landed Quartermaster watchkeeping on the Gangway at the main gate. Late in '58 I became an instructor at the AH School for three months thence Back to the Runway Control Van for three more months and back to the school for six months.

I spent June '59 to October '60 on Melbourne as No 1 Team Captain flight deck and Parking director in fly one. I returned to Albatross October 6 with 6 months of my time left .Due to pay off I was given the job of supervising a team clearing bush to the west of the Field. Commander used to turn up occasionally to see what we were up to but in the main we did our own thing. We had a dozer and the articulator and used to cart the logs into the base for firewood where I'm told by Glen Hartig that he used to turn it into firewood.

With no prospect for promotion to Chief let alone Subbie due to lack of vacancy which might or might not occur for years I opted to take discharge. Of course all that changed shortly thereafter with decisions to integrate air with general service--still I have no regrets. On leaving I worked for Dickson Primer as controller Radio room then Customs as an excise officer then foreign Affairs and while an attaché in the High Commission in Kuala Lumpur I returned to Melbourne off Singapore for War games as High Commissioners rep in I think '65. A great day and despite what some think I did absent myself from the wardroom and checked the messes to say hello only to find them empty.

I spent '68 in Bangkok as Attaché property in charge of construction of a new Chancery. In '69 I joined the National Capital Development Commission as a Project Co-Ordinator working on major projects and it was here I met Victor Albert Trumper on the steps of the defence complex and he raised his hand pointed to me and said Spence what are you doing here. Fantastic memory but then if you had been hooked in the neck by someone wielding a broom as a Commander onboard SYDNEY I guess you wouldn't forget them?

In '75 following the cyclone I was seconded to the Darwin Reconstruction Commission as Operations Manager then Chief Manager Field reconstruction in charge of the whole of the reconstruction programme. Returned to NCDC I had an accident on site of the Belconnen Bus Depot and injured my brain. As a result I was invalided out of the Public service. I had a 10 acre property Growing mangoes, left that and took over the resort at Noosa. But over a period of several years had three heart attacks a then a quad bypass so I'm now retired from the resort but still enough go to get with my old and some not to old compatriots. Its funny but the bond is stronger now than it was in bygone days but lets face it we are a unique group of people and boy didn't we live life to the full.

Regards to all Col