

Reminiscences of My Naval Career

Rear Admiral Guy Griffiths AO DSO DSC RAN (Ret)

Transcript of an address to the Military History Society of NSW meeting on 7 March 2020.

Naval College in those days starting in 1937 was all a bit raw. It was based on Dartmouth in England and I think if we looked at it today, we would be quite critical of what happened in those days and the initiation into discipline. Because I was a country kid it wasn't a total shock, but it was some shock. Anyway, one survived.

After 4 years, on Friday 13 December 1940, we graduated as midshipmen – I don't have a problem with Friday 13th – some people may. The first five in alphabetical order in my term, we were posted to HMAS Australia which of course was operating in the North Atlantic on convoy duty, patrols. We went across to New Zealand just after Christmas, to Littleton, where we boarded the motor vessel Karamea waiting on the shore, we sat in line packed with goodies and sailed for the UK.

The Pacific, the horizon was only broken by a distant view of the tops of some Galapagos Islands before we got to Panama Canal. I must say, Panama was very exciting because one had read about it but to watch it in operation was really quite something. Anyway, in the Caribbean we proceeded up the east coast of the United States. Of course, summer changed to winter rather rapidly. We sheltered in duffel coats. Any who had the privilege of wearing a duffel coat knows how useless it is against any form of weather before about 25 degree centigrade.

Anyway, we made our way across the North Atlantic. Some mighty ocean movements here and there and gales and blizzards. All part of the initiation of going to sea I suppose. Couple of days out of Glasgow, nothing had been seen. We saw a couple of aircraft on the horizon. We thought "what a good idea we've got some antisubmarine patrols". Well, they weren't quite. They turned into the ship and the captain pressed the alarm buzzers. Needless to say, they were a couple of Heinkels experimenting with bomb dropping. They dropped it too low fortunately. The bomb bounced up, creased a derrick in a stowed position, just forward of the bridge, then went over the side to port and burst in the ocean. Other than that and a few bullet holes around the place, there were no casualties and no other damage to the Karamea.

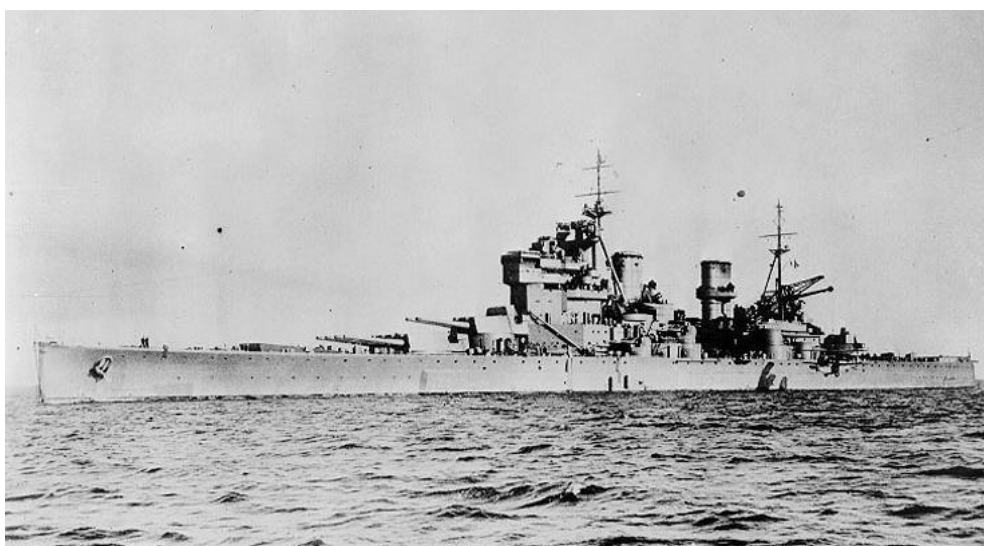
We steamed onto Glasgow. Arrived in the Clyde surrounded by snow-clad hills and all the rest of it, which to me was new. I hadn't experienced that before. We went down to London and it was there that we discovered that HMAS Australia at that time was probably halfway between Cape Town and Fremantle, and so we had missed that one. They took a couple of weeks to sort us out. We had arrived in February. On 8 March they found hammock slots for five "mids". By the way, you all remember the old classification of a midshipman. I think it goes back to the old sailor days but it probably still applies. "A midshipman is the lowest form of animal life at sea."



HMS Repulse, December 1941

Anyway, we joined HMS Repulse and immediately went off on convoy duty and throughout that period from say March through to about August that's what we did, except we were distracted at one stage to join the home fleet under Admiral Tovey, including the battleship HMS King George V, HMS Prince of Wales and the carrier HMS Victorious, which was so new that it was still unpacking its aircraft out of cases, and we went off to look for the Bismarck. Well, a couple of mornings later breakfast conversation, which had been quite eager in anticipation of engaging Bismarck, was rather quieter because HMS Hood had been sunk and we thought well, she's not heavily armoured and neither are we.

Little did we know that at that stage HMS Prince of Wales had actually damaged the Bismarck and deprived it of a lot of oil fuel from the forward tanks and the ship, instead of patrolling and searching around the Atlantic, had to head to Brest. So we did not meet with Bismarck and went off to Newfoundland to refuel and then to Halifax, which was good fun and bright lights. Then back to the UK, more convoys and escorted further south past Gibraltar to Freetown. Then around the Cape to Durban. The convoy was a boost for the army in Egypt.



HMS Prince of Wales

So we made Kilindini Harbour in Mombasa our headquarters for a couple of weeks or so and then went to Addu Atoll which was not terribly attractive and then up to Colombo where the dockies refused to work on us for some reason or other, but the midshipmen weren't cued into politics at that time. Then we went to Trincomalee and when we got there, we learned that Prince of Wales was joining us and both ships were going to Singapore to act as a deterrent. I don't think the word was used in our

conversation, but as you know from historical records, Winston Churchill wanted a deterrent against the Japanese to discourage them from coming south. Well, it didn't quite work and so we eventually got to Singapore on 2 December 1941, a couple of days in harbour and then of course on 8 December the Japanese bombed Singapore and quite well. We fired our anti-aircraft armament and I don't think we hit anything and later on the 8th, of course that was Pearl Harbour Day as well. In the evening, the Admiral took us to sea where Prince of Wales and Repulse were joined by four destroyers – HMS Electra, HMS Express, HMAS Vampire and HMS Tenedos. Tenedos was a little old lady that didn't have long legs so she was detached for the last series of incidents.

So away we went. We were sighted by 'reccy' aircraft and a submarine during 9 December as we headed northward off the coast to disrupt the landing in the area of Singora. Well by eight o'clock in the evening of the 9th, the Admiral decided that the surprise had gone, time to go home. Well that was okay but in the middle of the night somebody reported that there was a landing at Kuantan so we diverted, went in to have a look, arrived just after dawn. The Admiral sent in the destroyer Express which reported that all was quiet as a 'wet Sunday afternoon', so there was no battle there. So we looked at a tug and barges some 35 to 40 miles east of Kuantan and then headed to Singapore.

At 11 o'clock the first aircraft raids began. The first was on Repulse, a bombing attack, they hit us on the aircraft deck, penetrated down to the marines mess deck, killed a few and wounded others. Prince of Wales had an initial torpedo attack which virtually put her out of action because the torpedo hit portside aft, bent the port outer shaft and of course, with high revolutions, that tore the guts out of the ship on the port side aft. It locked the rudder as well so the ship was not under command. Two black balls were hoisted at the yard arm and that was virtually the beginning of the end of the Prince of Wales. It was on the morning of the 10 December when the Japanese sent off their aircraft from their airfields near Saigon. They were all twin engine, they had a 1,000 mile radius, and at some stage – I'm sure some of you have read, or most of you have read – the Admiral was told it looks as though they're doing a torpedo attack, and he replied 'there are no torpedoes around'. That is the one or one of the problems of the war. How the hell did Britain not know about the Japanese placing some 85 lethal aircraft so far south to disrupt things? But if Admiral Phillips didn't know about it – nobody had told him – if somebody knew about it I'm sure that it is in a locked or destroyed file because I just don't believe that nobody knew.



William Tennant, as Vice Admiral

Anyway, attacks continued after 11 o'clock, torpedo attacks and our Captain William Tennant, great fellow, he managed to dodge about nineteen (it was estimated). That shows that it was fairly thick in the water, so to speak, and eventually they started to register. At 11:22am we got a hit on the starboard side and four on the port at 11:33. Eleven minutes later, the dear old lady had listed to port, we lost nearly 520 fellows out of 1,300. Abandon ship had been ordered, but the sinking ship took too many with it.

So that's what happened and there we were in the water. A lot of kind people have asked me was I worried about sharks? I actually said quietly, that that was the last thing on my mind at that particular time. So Prince of Wales went down about 45 minutes after we did. The three destroyers Electra, Express and Vampire picked up the survivors, headed back to Singapore where we arrived about midnight. A bit of a clean-up and some sleep. On the morning of the 11th, Captain Tennant, who survived, he ordered all the midshipmen to go to the Cruiser Exeter which was in port, due to sail on 9 November and I think – I don't know what his exact words were – but he said something like "get the midshipmen out of here they are not going to contribute to Singapore", and how right he was. But basically, he saved our lives.

So to Colombo for a couple of weeks of relaxation with the wonderful hospitality of some of the people there, marvellous. Then we were sent across to Trincomalee to join HMS Revenge, that elderly battleship of not very modern mobility capability, and she was the guard ship of Trinco.

Well there were quite a bunch of midshipmen and clearly the gunroom was a bit too small and anyway it was almost heartbreaking, but it was certainly frustrating. There she was – seven weeks we stayed in Trinco without moving. Seven weeks and perhaps the only piece of training we had there, well one of advancement, I used to run the wardroom motorboat to take them into shore for relaxation. But the wind always forced us onto the jetty, we couldn't do anything about it, difficult to get on and I had one of those usual cheery RN Petty Officers with me who was a coxswain and he saw me being worried about this. When we had sorted things out, he said "you have to remember Sir, that old rule, when in a corner with no room to turn, drop it, 'f' it, have a burn". Of course, everybody smoked in those days, I didn't.



HMS Revenge

We did leave harbour after the seven weeks and went out and formed up with the eastern fleet which at that time consisted of Revenge – by the way she was built about 1916 and had eight 15-inch guns, not much AA, top speed of about 23, lumbering around the ocean – and her two sisters HMS Ramillies and HMS Resolution and we formed up on HMS Warspite, which was the flagship in the eastern fleet and we operated sort of mid-ocean. I'm not sure we really looked at trouble. There was a carrier or two around but the Japanese came through the Malacca Strait with their aircraft carrier and some cruisers which had sunk HMS Dorsetshire and HMS Cornwall. Then they sank HMS Hermes and HMS Vampire. Of course, as you know a lot of the Hermes and Vampire fellows ended up in camp.

At the end of our time in Revenge which I've always described as being the most unattractive time in my whole service, those few months from in early '42 to mid-'42. We then did our midshipman's exam, oh, one little incident, we had a very RN-ish type character as sublieutenant of the gun room. He had one of those charming hyphenated names, which I think he felt raised him above everybody. But we felt that it didn't raise him anywhere and because of the crowding in the gun room he decided that he was going to partition off – he had a couple of spaces for armchairs and he was going to partition that off and nobody was going to accept that because the partition reduced the area for the rest of us. I had a chat with my mate Morris Moloney – Moloney by name, he was an Irishman – and Morris having had a couple of beers one evening, I think, plus others – he wasn't alone – we decided we would get rid of this partition, which we did rather rapidly and nothing was said.

There was no discipline from the sub-lieutenant. It was just accepted because if you'd have put up another one it would have gone the same way. That sub-lieutenant was not really a friendly fellow, total contrast to the sub-lieutenant in Repulse. In the old days the junior officers' mess was really a continuation of college in its rules and regulations but Richard Poole, our sublieutenant of the Repulse said, "with our sublieutenants and our midshipmen I want the gunroom to run as a junior wardroom", which he did and it was all very happy and fair. It was really great.

We get to England for what they call subs courses and this is now in '42 or end of '42 and we were billeted around gunnery school, torpedo school and so on and also went down to Brighton, where we were billeted in Roedean College. They had actually removed all the contacts and buzzers at the head of the bed, under a little sign, "if you need a mistress during the night, press the buzzer." Of course, needless to say there were young hopefuls here and there, but it didn't bring any results.

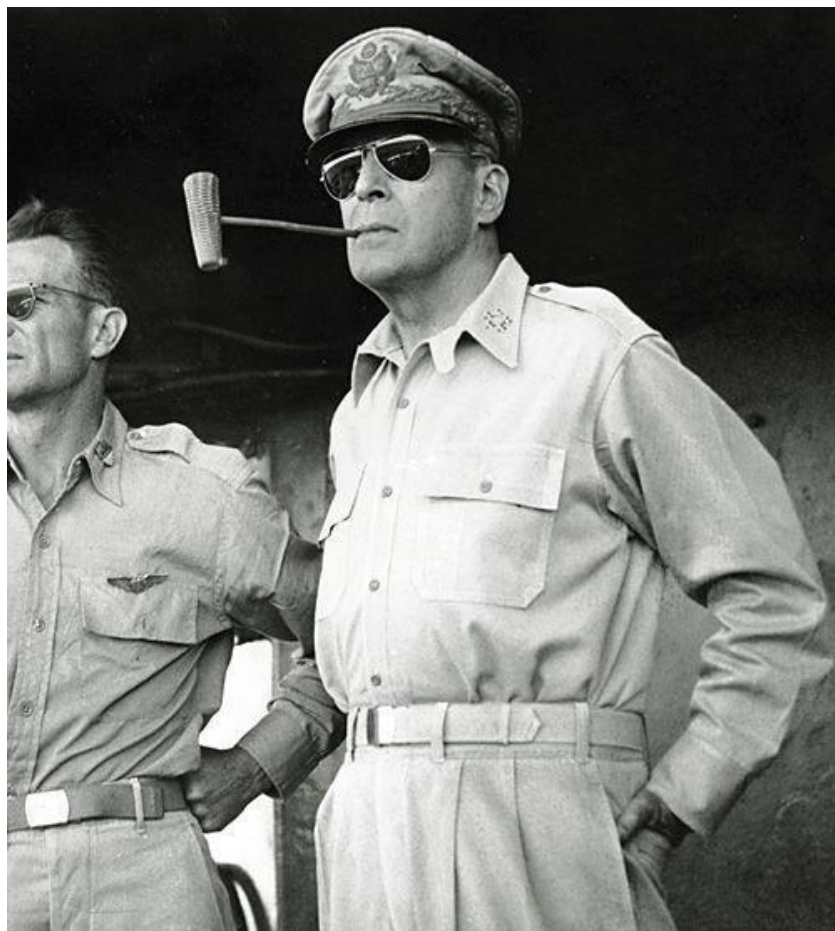
By the end of the year we'd completed our subs courses and then received a posting to – let me think Shropshire and we had time to fill in before joining, which was due in April of '43 and I decided I needed a watch keeping ticket. I went to an old VW destroyer operating out of Rosyth. The job was to escort convoys up and down the east coast to Sheerness. They were a vital part of the UK logistic plan but it was fun because of the average speed of eight knots. It was also wintertime in December, January, February, it always seems to be wintertime. So it was new and all the old fellows had their instructions to peel off the convoy, which was about seven miles long and a couple of lines, lots of puffers here and there. They would turn off into the port and one fellow peeled off to go into Hull and the ship a friend of mine was in, he was also trying to get a watch keeping ticket, he went up, the midshipman said, "you're not allowed to go in there, you've got to go north and you're going into somewhere up top." But the other replied from the bridge of the puffer, said, "I'm going up the 'umber" and he went up the 'umber. Just exactly as he wanted to but it was probably his home port anyway.

Having gained those bridge watch-keeping certificates, we joined Shropshire for passage back to Oz. The cruiser was a present from the UK to replace Canberra which had been sunk at Sabo Island in August 1942. The ship was commissioned as HMAS Shropshire. We then went up to Scapa Flow for training and exercises – no one likes Scapa.



HMAS Shropshire

The King came aboard and inspected the ships company and wished us well and we needed every wish we could get. Then in August '43 we were heading home, escorting a convoy down as far as Gibraltar. We detached and went on south to Cape Town, Durban, Fremantle and Sydney (arrived early October) and it was nice to be home. We were immensely mindful that we'd all been away for nearly three years. It was a bit of a stretch, but you get used to it. Of course Shropshire, her story is probably fairly well known. Joined up with HMAS Australia, HMAS Warramunga, HMAS Arunta and three American destroyers in November '43 up in Milne Bay and then we were part of MacArthur's bombardment force for all his landings along the New Guinea coast but leading up eventually to the Philippines.



General Douglas MacArthur

Later we were joined with three American six inch cruisers, all modern, air-conditioned. They all slept in bunks and shared food if you went over, which we eventually did from the gun room. They would have dinner there and I sat next to my host, he was an Ensign Fred Hipp. We kept in contact after the war. Fred said to the steward, "what's on for dinner tonight, stew?" and the steward said, "chicken, sir," "God damn chicken again?" Then of course we were grateful compared to the bully beef we got. We went on and at that time the strategy was a two-pronged attack across the Pacific, one led by Admiral Nimitz, based in Pearl Harbour with his third and fifth fleets, you heard the name Admiral Halsey, no doubt, quite a lot, a dynamic character who didn't always do what he should have done. Then General MacArthur from the south, who having promised the Philippine islands "I shall return," proceeded to do so. He picked out various spots for landing so that they could put down good airstrips from which to operate their long-range aircraft.

That took us from end '43 to October '44, when he got his whole force up to Leyte Gulf. The Battle of Leyte Gulf, well it involves the landing on 20 October. It involves the Battle of Surigao Strait, which was a night surface battle against the Japanese force which was destroyed. The Battle of Samar, which was east of where we were on the Gulf with a bunch of escort carriers, a lot of guts in that outfit and a bunch of destroyers acting as their escort.



US Admiral William "Bull" Halsey

After the night of Surigao, where we sank ships and spent a fair amount of ammunition on top of what we already spent supporting the troops, we helped ashore some 40,000 or 50,000 troops on Leyte Island. So MacArthur had returned. They used destroyers in charge of escorting the carriers, laterally peeled off against a Japanese force which came through laterally the eastern side of the Philippines through San Bernardino Strait led by one of their 50,000-ton battleships and proceeded to move southward. The destroyers, I think with enormous guts, courage and all the rest of it, professionalism engaged this task force of battleships and cruisers and the destroyers but for some reason rather the Japanese admiral turned around and went back through San Bernardino Strait. We of course, after Surigao, were mustering ready to go out to counter this outfit. It would have made a bit of a touch-and-go because our ammunition at that stage was down 35%, something like that. We badly needed ammo. Anyway they went home.

Halsey meanwhile had come into the scene and he was supposed to actually be in a position to engage that middle force but he was attracted to destroying their aircraft group to the northeast corner of Luzon. He did that and he it did well as usual, but he certainly wasn't there to hit that other Japanese task force. Eventually we went back to Leyte. Sorry, we spent six weeks in Leyte in the landing and that's where we first experienced the kamikazes, one went and hit the Australia on the bridge, which killed a captain, the navigator Commander Raymond – some of you would know his son Mike. That actually

only introduced us to the kamikaze, but they tended to increase. At that time our close range armament in the Shropshire was 20mm Oerlikan guns.

Then after all that, we went back to Manus Island, which was a big naval base where we ended up in November. That's when our brighter bunch of characters, that was the band and a leading seaman who was compere, he was known as 'Count Whitby', he was the leading hand, put on a show for the ship's company of music and dancing and three of the midshipmen aped the Andrews Sisters and so on. It was all good fun and we invited people from other ships to come and have a look-see.

Now in January '45 we moved to the second major landing in the Philippines at Lingayen Gulf, which is northwest of Manila and the plan was to put some 68,000 troops ashore so that they could move towards Manila and take it, which eventually they did. Anyway on the landing there were some 875 ships heading to Lingayen Gulf and of course, troop carriers went in and landed there. We were with the bombardment support force again and stayed there. Australia, for some inexplicable reason, was hit by five kamikazes and the dear old lady was a bit of a wreck but with a lot of guts and a still-working eight-inch fire control system they stayed on station and fulfilled all their bombardment support tasks.



HMAS Australia

It was terrific effort but eventually an American admiral went across to say good day to Captain Jamie Armstrong, and say, how you doing and had a look at their ship. He says, "you've got to get out of here and go home for repairs." We say they sent them home but, still, five hits. Shropshire, about 1,000 yards away we were attacked time and time again but no hits. How we managed it I don't know. It was somebody looking after us.

When we'd gone back to Manus after Leyte, our gunnery officer was Warwick Bracegirdle, known as Braces throughout his service – quite experienced, the Mediterranean, and he came along and he brought with him into Shropshire quite a lot of the experienced chaps that he'd known before. But when he got back to Leyte – to Manus after Leyte Gulf, Braces decided that the 20mm was no damn good and we needed 40mm.

How to get it? So he presumably got a hold of two cases of whiskey, went ashore to armament headquarters or whatever it was and he managed to extract 13 single barrel 40mm Bofors. These were positioned all around the upper deck and were most effective, way ahead of the 20mm.

Also in those days he had ensured that we had fitted out what was known as barrage directors, they were range-finding with a radar set. It varies especially and we used these barrage directors to control the turrets and then to fire 'eight inch' to burst at 3,000 yards and that was most effective. We even got radio news from Tokyo (Tokyo Rose) that we were using flamethrowers. Well the flame was the 'eight inch' bursting but it effectively helped keep them away. We got a few aircraft who hadn't got the message.

That landing was fulfilled. It was completed. The US had returned to the Philippines and one other thing about Shropshire, we had a very good radar set from the UK and it was managed by a reporting officer, Ronnie Major, a reserve lieutenant who had been into checking it out way back in the UK days and confirming it down here. You have an envelope where you can determine the height at which the incoming force of fighters or attacking aircraft, where they'd penetrate that limit. Ronnie could tell our force that the enemy was coming in at 15,000 or 10,000 feet and the fighters could get onto these. The ability of Shropshire was way above anything else that was in the field and was favourably reported back to the US headquarters.

After that we supported the Australians going into Balikpapan. Nothing complicated about that except for the fellows ashore. We then went back to Subic Bay and on 6 and 9 August we had news of the big bomb drops and on 15 August came the news of the surrender.

War isn't a pleasant game and I sincerely hope that we never ever have another one like WWI or WWII which spread itself across the globe. We threw a party in Shropshire on the quarterdeck for about 400 guests, our own ship, officers, any RAN that could make it, USN officers and so on.

But during the party, somebody spotted a couple of young characters with engineering lieutenant shoulder boards on and they and another are getting around and having a great time but nobody knew where they came from or actually who they were and we'd all been together for quite some time so it didn't take long to establish that these were two very enterprising young

stokers – from one of the engineering divisions and actually it was one of Philip Bowen-Smith's, I think. So needless to say they were up in front of the commander's table in a couple of moments' time. Our commander was "Copper" Morrow, who cut a wide swath through the Navy at the time, a great bloke but Copper was reasonably unconventional and he said to these blokes, "did you enjoy the party?" "oh, yes, it was tremendous rather, really." And Copper said, "well, I'm very happy that you enjoyed it because it cost the wardroom officers each 35 shillings to pool the bank for the party," so he said, "fine 35 shillings each. I'm captain of the bank so payable on demand."



Tokyo Bay, 2 September 1945

We then joined the incredible assembly of ships in Tokyo Bay for the signing of the surrender. The big aircraft carriers remained at sea to provide a vast armada for the flyover – together with a mass of shore based aircraft it was an incredible sight. It certainly was a very memorable day. There were some 260 ships anchored in Tokyo Bay.



Guy Griffiths, 1945

I then received a posting to undertake the Specialist Gunnery Course at HMS Excellent, Portsmouth in January '46. So I was returned to Sydney, leave and passage to the UK in the Stirling Castle – a pleasant change to a passage in RAN ships – I had a good time on board. We went to Greenwich first, rubbed the cobwebs off the brain. Mine had a lot of cobwebs I find or found in those days. I was sitting in my cabin one night and one of our brilliant fellows in my term was David Hamer from Melbourne. Absolutely brilliant bloke. He was one of those chaps that remembered every word of a conversation or every piece of formula. And I sat in my cabin one night, trudging my way through some sets of formula and David said, "Guy, come down and have a beer" and I said, "I don't want to go."

He said, "what's the problem?" I said, "these formulae we have to know." He said, "there's no problem," he said, "you don't need to know them all, you only need to know 20." He said, "these are the ones," and he wrote them all out. Just like that, and he said, "now you can come and have a beer."

Anyway, after that we went down to the gunnery school at Portsmouth and that was reasonably uneventful. The late Admiral Leach was there later. He was present when one of the sublieutenant's courses brought an elephant into the morning Friday parade and of course, everybody shouted, "get rid of that elephant", but it was easier said than done. But it produced a little humour.

Finished the course in March '47 went down to the gunnery school in Devonport in the West Country. At that time I hadn't realized that the Griffiths family actually had originated for some time in Bideford in Devon, which I visited much later. Anyway, the West Country was its usual charming self and it was great. I stayed there for two years, until I was ordered to join the carrier HMAS Sydney, which was just leaving for home, so I was taking passage.

Back to Australia, gunnery school. Having just spent two years in a gunnery school I protested. Okay, they dug me out, in January '50 I joined the carrier as the gunnery officer. That, of course, is a rare occasion for gunnery officers because 40mm Bofors were there plus a couple of pompoms here and there but talking of pom-poms, one of the professionals named Leading Seaman

Cazale in the Shropshire – I'm going back, jumping back, like you say, to Leyte Gulf and Caz was out maintaining his pom-pom and suddenly he spotted one of these fellows diving at us. He swung his pom-pom around, pressed the trigger, and split the aircraft apart. Needless to say, he did get a medal for that. Terrific work, he was a great bloke anyway.

Cerberus gunnery school, then aircraft carrier. All I could do there really on an aircraft carrier was so much parade and was certainly not much gunnery but I did marvel and loved to know about living in an aircraft carrier and its operation. I shared the cabin with Jock Cunningham who was piloting the Sea Fury and I just had to admire the professionalism of all members of the carrier air group. They really were terrific. These fellows flying at night and flying solo and their sheer guts when of course we went up to Korea and they did a lot of patrols. East coast, west coast in Korea, once again wintertime, duffel coats no use.

At one stage we were in Sasebo and a typhoon was approaching and Captain Harries – David Harries – took the ship to sea. He wasn't going to try and wait about the harbour because he wasn't sure that anybody'd really tested the typhoon buoys that put secure holding in the harbour. Anyway, we went out, it was rough as hell, we lost a few aircraft because securing lines gave way, and anyway, when we got back Sasebo Harbour it was a mess and I learned from that one and needless to say, of course, we got back home. We actually were 64 days on station at that time, we flew 2,366 sorties and we had three pilots killed and ten aircraft lost.



HMAS Anzac

Penalties from having been at sea was a stint at the gunnery school. I protested again and I was sent off to be the gunnery officer of HMAS Anzac, a new battle class destroyer. This is of course at end '52 and I joined off the west coast of Korea.

November – the pancake ice floes soon started – it was damn cold. Once again it was duffel-coat time, wasn't it – needless to say, we got into the army store in Kuri, the first opportunity and got a variety of stuff which actually did tend to keep out the cold.

Other than the winter, we did our job. I didn't like the fire control system and said so. It was okay for surface firing but not much good for aircraft. On completion of our deployment, we arrived back in Sydney early July '53. Then I was sent off to a staff course in early '54, that was Greenwich. Then I joined HMAS Melbourne, which had been renamed from Majestic as she was when building. We did a

renaming ceremony and I joined Melbourne as a gunnery officer. Of course, she had a slight angle deck flying Sea Venoms and Gannets, once again tremendous professionalism from the carrier air crew.



HMAS Melbourne

We took a lot of cargo aircraft on our way home. Little did I know at the time – and nobody was broadcasting it on board – there were lots of very telling conversations going on in Canberra about the viability of maintaining a carrier in the RAN. Of course, lots of us know where the pressure came from, and budget was an excuse. Of course, budgets can have quite an effect on your war readiness.

Then in '57 we went to south-east Asia for exercises. It was on that visit that I met a wonderful lady and we were married in 1959. Carla always accused me of taking two years to make up my mind.



HMAS Parramatta

Then I was back in Canberra in Personnel, appointed to my first command, HMAS Parramatta, the first of the rivers. That was fantastic, overjoyed with that one. I was posted from June '61 to January '63. In 1962 we went to south-east Asia for exercises. The capabilities of those ships were quite good. We had a change of fire control system. My gunnery expert in tactics and staff requirement, John Smith had been looking at a Dutch system.

He said, "have a look at it." We had a look and everything was good. We acquired one for Parramatta and one for HMAS Yarra and subsequently, other ships. It was good and it was simple and it wasn't like the previous one I'd experienced. Occasionally, you have to branch out. Things that should appear good in the old RN/RAN family, had to be changed. Needless to say, time marches on.

I then went after Parramatta, back to Navy Office in January 1963. A couple of years later, the Admiral, Chief of Navy, called me into his office. Admiral Harrington, he was always known for his sense of humour. He did have one. Called me into the office and he said, "Griffiths, I'm thinking of sending you to New Delhi as the naval liaison officer. What do you think of that?" I said, "I don't think much of that, sir." He said, "I thought that'd be your reaction." He said, "you'd better go over to the US and pick up Hobart. She commissions at the end of the year." He hastened to tell me that I couldn't take the family because I wouldn't be away longer than twelve months. Needless to say, one was away longer than twelve months. Nobody apologized to me or nobody apologized to Carla for giving an extra couple of months. That was of course not only Carla's luck but every naval wife had to put up with that.



HMAS Hobart

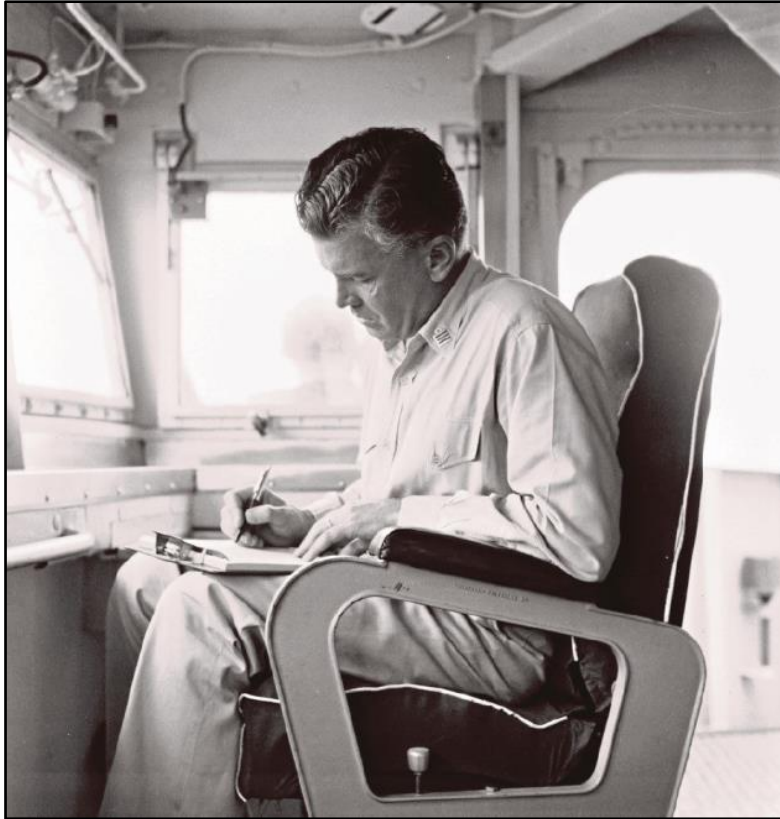
When I arrived onboard Hobart, I realized that the highly technical sailors have all been over to the US for pre-commissioning courses and invariably most of them had passed top of their American course in conjunction with the United States sailors on training at the same time. That indicated that it was being established as a good ships company.

It wasn't long before we left Bay City, Michigan, down to Boston, Massachusetts for commissioning, 18 December 1965, then on to Norfolk for some trials. Meanwhile, I'd arranged, having been with the Americans in WWII and Korea, I wanted to see what their fleet training group equivalent did, how they handled getting their ships from the raw state out of a dockyard or out of commissioning into operational readiness.

I went over to San Diego and talked to the boss. I said, "I don't want any niceties for the Aussies. I just want you to put us through exactly what you put an American ship through. If you got any add-ons, don't hesitate." He did that. I think he found difficulty because I had first met Ira Bonnett as a warrant officer from the cruiser Nashville in Milne Bay in the end of '43 so we'd known each other for quite

some time and here I am, '65. Anyway, as commander of the fleet training group, I told him initially, "don't be nice about it, give us the real result." He did that. At the end of it he said, "we're quite glad that you're on our side."

That was good. Needless to say, at that stage of the game I could easily form the opinion that I had an outstanding ships company. Every member from the juniors through to the seniors were first class. Really, it was quite something. Then it was home from San Diego, Pearl Harbor, bFiji, first port of call, Hobart, on 1 September 1966.



On the bridge of HMAS Hobart

Then at the end of '66, we were in a dockyard over in Cockatoo. We didn't really need docking. The RN came out with a carrier and some destroyers and brought a couple of their Hampshire class with them, which we had looked at when we were about to decide whether to buy the guided missile destroyer, Adams class from the US or the Hampshire class from the RN. It went the US way. Just watching the ships operating, they managed to break down occasionally, which was concerning I must say.



Back from Vietnam

However, at one stage we were heading south to Sydney at 21 knots. I was stationed on the port quarter of the carrier Victorious. For some inexplicable reason, no reason at all, he changed my station to starboard bow. I thought to myself, "he expects me to go under the carrier stern and crawl my way up starboard side." As we had four boilers connected, that gives me 30 knots at the drop of a hat. I wound them on, then requested approval to cross the bows, which was granted. I creamed across, feeling pretty good, actually. I think the other 330 fellows on board felt the same way.

Anyway, subsequently met their Admiral at a party in Sydney when they got back from this exercise. In chattering amongst various things he was talking about, and he came out with the expression, "I can't imagine why you chaps bought this American rubbish." I looked at him and I thought, "you shut your mouth, Griffiths." I actually turned away and went to talk to other people. It didn't seem to – I didn't need to say anything.

On top of that, we have Hobart in Vietnam. We did lots of work. Once again, the outstanding ship's company were dominant. They really were amazing. We did lots of work. I had 20 officers and 313 sailors on board and two five-inch rapid-fire guns. We had to exchange barrel after about two thousand rounds.



Rear Admiral Guy Griffiths

We worked our way through it off the coast doing interdiction and assisting troops, harassment and interdiction and I'm being very careful about the accuracy of getting on targets and so on. We received quite a few responses from their shore batteries. We got some shrapnel on board but never a hit. We sailed through the six months in Vietnam without any casualties and without any damage at all. We ended the operations from March to September '67. At Subic Bay we spent 10 days turning over to HMAS Perth and then came home.

Vietnam was plus and professional fun, not always basic laughter but the feeling of professional satisfaction because of the reliance I can place on every one of the ship's company, quite unique, and I've used that expression "outstanding" often and I will continue to do so.

That's the end of my address but I'll give you some statistics because the mathematicians will enjoy that. In the six months operations in Vietnam, we steamed 52,000 miles. We engaged 1,050 targets. We fired 9,240 rounds. We received fire on ten occasions. We did 117 replenishments at sea, day and night. Everything came via the replenishment ship. That was well done and excellent. That's about it. That's enough war stories for today.