

MEDICAL DEPARTMENT HMAS NIRIMBA



"May 28th 1798 - First Sick Bay introduced by Lord St Vincent in the Mediterranean Fleet.

October 17th 1884 - Sick Berth Branch gazetted in the Royal Navy by Order in Council".

The Sick Bay in HMAS NIRIMBA began its life as the RAAF Hospital Schofield5 in 1945. For many years after NIRIMBA commissioned as the Apprentice Training Establishment, life in the Sick Bay was very spartan for patients as well as staff. There was no heating or cooling of any kind, no blinds or curtains and in some parts of the Sick Quarters there were no floor coverings. The staff spent a period of months charting the ward temperatures each watch in an effort to convince the administration that the Sick Quarters could be very hot and very cold.

It took a long time and a lot of effort to obtain the services of clerical staff and of a full time cleaner. All this work had formerly to be carried out by the Medical Staff.

Originally the Captain and his family lived in one half of the building with only a fibro cement wall separating the sick from the Captain and his family. It was due to the complaints of one Commanding Officer that staff and patients were stamping around the bare floors in heavy boots and disturbing his home life, that the Sick Bay was able to obtain some floor insulation and floor coverings.

Among the young apprentices, outbreaks of infectious diseases occurred fairly frequently, including Influenza and Rubella. One such outbreak almost brought the Establishment to a halt. The Medical Department took over the cinema as a ward for the milder cases - 120 of them, whilst the severe cases were kept in the Sick Quarters.

The first Medical Officer appointed to HMAS NIRIMBA (Apprentice Training Establishment) was Surgeon Lieutenant Cleary in 1956. He was remembered as a pugnacious Irishman. Surgeon Lieutenant Cleary paid off at the end of 1957 and went to Bellevue Hospital in New York to study psychiatry.



NIRIMBA Sick Quarters 1944 - ?



Surgeon Lieutenant G Mahony followed. He was a very enthusiastic officer who was responsible for the establishment of a considerable area of garden around the Sick Bay. Surgeon Lieutenant Mahony paid off at the end of 1958, obtained his Fellowship in Surgery and now practises as an Orthopaedic Surgeon in Sydney.

The next Medical Officer in NIRIMBA was Surgeon Lieutenant H Lindsay Thompson who came to the place with considerable seagoing experience. This officer is now prominent in the General Practitioners' Society of Australia.

NIRIMBA's industrial machinery in the training world can be the cause of a high incidence of eye injury and the arrival of Surgeon Lieutenant A Lyne was very helpful as this officer had specialist qualifications in Ophthalmology. The routine wearing of safety spectacles was not introduced in HMAS NIRIMBA until Surgeon Lieutenant Lyne saw to this rule.

Surgeon Lieutenant Kevin Manion followed Doctor Lyne. This unflappable officer was a law unto himself in the Sick Bay and took no nonsense from anybody. Surgeon Lieutenant Manion served in HMAS NIRIMBA on a later occasion and now practises in Blacktown NSW.

HMAS NIRIMBA sport was the better for the arrival of the next Medical Officer, Surgeon Lieutenant F Palmer, a keen and able soccer player. Dr Palmer was noted to shake his head ruefully at the rugby players' loose use of the word 'football'.

Surgeon Lieutenant Kevin Manion followed Surgeon Lieutenant Palmer and he was relieved by Surgeon Lieutenant Sam Sakker a very able Doctor who later gained his Fellowship in Surgery and is now a Surgical Consultant to the Navy.

The next Medical Officer of HMAS NIRIMBA was Surgeon Lieutenant Vic Gilmour who remained only a short time before retiring from the Navy. Vic, however continued active association with the Navy in the Naval Reserve in South Australia and returned to full time service in the RAN in 1981 in the rank of Surgeon Commander. He is now on the staff of the Director General of Naval Health Services.

Surgeon Lieutenant M B Robinson followed Dr Gilmour in NIRIMBA and Surgeon Lieutenant Robinson is remembered as a man of many talents. It is said that he may have been happier as an Engineer.

A Vietnam veteran from HMAS HOBART, Surgeon Lieutenant L Barnett and a very able doctor came next to NIRIMBA. This officer later obtained his Fellowship in Surgery and now practises in Queensland as a General and Vascular Surgeon.

Medical Officers in HMAS NIRIMBA who followed were:

- Surgeon Lieutenant R Willis RAN
- Surgeon Lieutenant R Bain RAN
- Surgeon Lieutenant R Clarke RAN
- Surgeon Lieutenant M Dowling RAN
- Surgeon Lieutenant A Ball RAN
- Surgeon Lieutenant R Anderson RAN
- Surgeon Lieutenant M Sweeney RAN
- Surgeon Lieutenant Commander Andrew Marsden RAN
- Surgeon Lieutenant Commander K Donovan RAN
- Surgeon Lieutenant Peter Gibson RAN
- Surgeon Lieutenant Commander John Parkes RAN
- Surgeon Lieutenant Commander Kevin Donovan RAN
- Surgeon Lieutenant Gordon Norris RAN



Surgeon LCDR Kevin Donovan RAN

Anecdotes are plentiful in all departments of HMAS NIRIMBA and the Medical Department comes up with the story of the elderly officer who approached the Medical Officer at lunch on a very hot day just before Divisions (formal parade) and informed the Medical Officer that he was



not feeling too well. It was agreed that the Medical Officer would stand behind the unwell officer on parade so that the Medical Officer would be in a position to catch the patient if he fainted. During the ceremony, attracted by the sounds of a low moan and a falling body, the forward ranks turned around to see that the Doctor had fainted.

During a football carnival recently, an injured and unconscious player was placed in the ambulance on the playing field. The zealous driver sped off towards Sick Quarters and to the astonishment of worried onlookers, the rear door of the ambulance opened and discharged the stretchered patient and the attending Medic back onto the playing field.

Prior to World War I, one Nursing Sister was attached to the Royal Australian Naval College at Geelong but it was not until 1978 that a commissioned officer of the Royal Australian Naval Nursing Service was posted to HMAS NIRIMBA. A formal nursing service was not set up in the Royal Australian Navy until World War II. During World War I, a nursing staff was carried in the only hospital ship which the RAN operated - HMAS GRANTALA (formerly of the Adelaide Steamship Company). GRANTALA's nursing staff comprised a Matron and six Sisters who were civilians under Naval jurisdiction. The RAN Nursing Service, as we know it today, began in 1942 when twenty three qualified nursing sisters joined the service. Matron A Laidlaw, an Army Nurse from World War I was appointed Principal Matron of the RANNS. The RANNS was disbanded in 1948 when the last of the wartime nursing sisters left the Navy.

Two civilian nursing sisters were appointed to HMAS CERBERUS in 1951 to serve at the RAN College CERBERUS and at the WRANS Quarters. One civilian nursing sister was appointed to HMAS NIRIMBA, when the RAN Apprentice Training Establishment commissioned at Quakers Hill in 1956. This was Sister Barnett and she served in HMAS NIRIMBA until she was relieved by Sister B Brooks who joined HMAS NIRIMBA on 8th January 1958. Sister Brooks, the wife of Mr Brooks who was the Staff Clerk of HMAS NIRIMBA in the early days, remained in charge of the Sick Quarters of HMAS NIRIMBA until 29th April 1977. Mr Brooks died while Sister Brooks was serving in HMAS NIRIMBA and Sister Brooks some years later married Sick Berth Petty Officer John Hazell. The Hazells now live at Kilcare on the central coast of NSW.

The RAN Nursing Service was reformed in 1964 when Miss M A J Jones, who had served as a civilian sister since 1951 was appointed Principal Matron at HMAS CERBERUS. However, members of the RANNS were not appointed to HMAS NIRIMBA until 1978 when Lieutenant Norma Devilla arrived to take up posting. Lieutenant Devilla served in HMAS NIRIMBA until 23rd July 1980 when she was relieved by Lieutenant A M Higgins RANNS.

Lieutenant Higgins trained at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Sydney, the Women's Hospital Crown Street, Sydney, the Tresillian, North Willoughby and the Cumberland College of Health Services. She entered the RAN on 21st January 1980 and served at the RAN Hospital CERBERUS before taking up her posting at HMAS NIRIMBA.

There have been several changes to the uniform of the sisters of the Royal Australian Naval Nursing Service. Wartime RANNS Officers wore the gold sleeve insignia of the male Naval Medical Officer with the scarlet coloured cloth designating the Medical Branch between gold sleeve stripes. On reforming of the RANNS in 1964, the Sisters adopted the insignia of the Royal Queen Alexandra Naval Nursing Service. In 1971, the insignia of the RANNS was changed to the gold lace and maroon coloured cloth between rank stripes. Members of the RANNS retained the title of Sister until 1979 when they were given the rank titles of their male counterparts and now rank from Sub-Lieutenant to Commander RANNS.



Surgeon Lieutenant
Gordon Norris RAN





Lieutenant Shirley Murphy RANNS

Lieutenant Shirley Murphy RANNS joined HMAS NIRIMBA in July 1983. Lieutenant Murphy trained at the Austin Hospital, Melbourne. Since graduation she has served in Ontario Canada, Frobisher Bay Canada, as Assistant Matron Austin Hospital and at the Australian College of Nursing where she obtained the Diploma of Nursing Administration before entering the RANNS in 1977.

Our longest serving Sister - Sister Hazell - recalls with pleasure her time in HMAS NIRIMBA. This lady recently said, "I enjoyed my years at NIRIMBA. I always thought the Navy a great life for a lad provided he was happy in it. I was able to help any sailor, perhaps more to apprentices to become well adjusted and able members of the Ship's Company, I was

content. One lad from an early apprentice intake, newly commissioned and returned to NIRIMBA as a member of the staff asked me if I enjoyed seeing them come back as a success. I certainly did".

The excellent service of this fine lady was recognised by the Navy when Mrs Hazell was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire soon after she left HMAS NIRIMBA.

There have been nursing sisters in HMAS NIRIMBA for nearly forty years now - the present HMAS NIRIMBA Sick Bay was formerly the RAAF Hospital RAAF Schofields. Their gentle and dedicated care to the young and not so young of NIRIMBA over those long years has been much appreciated by the thousands of patients who have passed through their care in that time.

The first Physiotherapist to work in HMAS NIRIMBA was Mrs A B Long who visited twice per week from November 1972 to August 1973. Following this a Physiotherapist visited twice per week from the RAN Hospital HMAS PENGUIN. In February 1974 Mrs Olwen Wishaw commenced to practice physiotherapy in HMAS NIRIMBA. Olwen, a graduate of Sydney University, commenced her working life as an assistant to a Physiotherapist in Wollongong following her graduation and was appointed to the Wollongong District Hospital. Her work was confined there mainly to industrial therapy. Olwen worked with amputees and in the rehabilitation field for some years and then worked in private practice in Blacktown, Castle Hill and Parramatta before commencing duties at HMAS NIRIMBA. She is a member of a panel to serve Veterans' affairs, lectures for the State Department of Community Health in Obstetrics and is an active member of the Physiotherapy Sports Medical. Olwen is a great advocate of preventative medicine especially in the field of sports.

A Psychologist Section was established in HMAS NIRIMBA with the appointment of Mr Pat Hickey as visiting Psychologist in 1966. Following a period of research testing, psychology services were introduced into the Royal Australian Navy at Recruiting level shortly after World War II.

In addition to the screening of apprentices on aptitude and suitability, the Psychology Section has provided other valuable services to HMAS NIRIMBA over the past 16 years.

Psychologists have been available for assessment and advice on personnel who have shown doubtful progress in either training or disciplinary areas. This service has saved the Navy considerable expense in the subsequent application of seemingly unsuitable trainees within training fields more appropriate to their suitability and aptitude rather than their being discharged 'Unsuitable'.



Counselling has been provided to personnel finding difficulty in various areas associated with adjustment to service life. In addition the Psychology Section has been active in assisting in the development side of training.

Junior Psychologists who have worked in HMAS NIRIMBA have been Miss Judy Chapman and Mr

Robert Nixon.

Miss Lynn Christie has been Secretary to the NIRIMBA Psychology Section since 1967.

Senior Psychologists of HMAS NIRIMBA have been:

Mr Pat Hickey
Mr Neil McAdam
Mr Terry Hodge
Mr Stan O'Brien (1982)

The periodical Naval Psychologists' Conference was held in HMAS NIRIMBA in July 1983.

The Department of Defence (Navy Office) mounted a serious campaign in 1983 to combat what is seen by the Director General of Health to be a serious epidemic of obesity in the Royal Australian Navy. This resulted in the formation of what is known on board as 'The Toad Club'. Members of the Toad club are given written directive to 'shape up or ship out'. In these days of unemployment in civilian life, the programme has resulted in a spate of strict dietary and exercise ventures by the obese.

Julius Caesar said -

*'Let me have men about me that are fat,
Sleek headed men such as sleep o' nights.
Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look,
He thinks too much,
Such men are dangerous.'*

In 1983, many formerly fat and happy officers, sailors and WRANS were to be seen jogging out of the morning mist wearing definite 'lean and hungry' looks.

The Sick Quarters continues to be housed in the 1944 built former RAAF Hospital, although in the Master Plan there 'is provision for a new and modern hospital on board HMAS NIRIMBA.

Sailor and WRAN Staff of the HMAS NIRIMBA Sick Quarters at time of writing comprises:

Chief Petty Officer Medical Henry Matueliwicz
Leading Seaman Medical Darryl Trawin (husband of Senior WRAN
Steward Kerry Trawin also of HMAS NIRIMBA at this time)
Able Seaman Medical Rick Monck (former Leading Seaman Weapons
Maintainer)
Able Seaman Medical Rex Davis
Able Seaman Medical Kyle Richardson
Able Seaman Medical David Hutchinson
Leading WRAN Medical Karin Hogan
Seaman Medical David Kewick
Mrs Eileen Russell (Civilian typist), who has worked in HMAS
NIRIMBA for many years

