

SKILLED HANDS AT SEA

THE STORY OF
HER MAJESTY'S AUSTRALIAN SHIP NIRIMBA
AND NAVAL TRAINING IN NSW
1855 - 1983

BY

COMMANDER L G R WILSON MBE, RAN



1982

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and

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THE FRONT & BACK COVERS

The designs symbolises the endeavours of HMAS NIRIMBA in four fields of Engineering associated with the Navy which have been taught in HMAS NIRIMBA for over twenty eight years:

Marine Engineering, Hull Engineering, Weapons Electrical Engineering and Aircraft Engineering.



FOR OUR SHIPMATES
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
AND FOR
THE LATE CHAPLAIN HUGH MICHAEL McDONALD RAN
SPORTSMAN
AND
CHAMPION OF YOUTH

*"Naval strategy has for its end to found,
support and increase, as well in peace
as in war, the sea power of a country".*

(MAHAN, USN)



Acknowledgements

I take this opportunity of thanking all those who so willingly assisted in the compilation of this history.

These generous and thoughtful people are indeed 'Friends of the Navy'.

Some of the information in this history has necessarily been taken from pamphlets previously published, from official records and gleaned from members of the naval and civilian communities.

In some cases, verification of fact has not been possible, but, where practicable, detailed research has been undertaken to authenticate input.

Formal acknowledgement to those those assisted in a major concept is given below, but special mention is deserved of those several thousand men and women who made this history, including one of my sons - Peter Wilson, one time apprentice; my nephew John Evans, former apprentice and now an Optometrist and my son-in-law, Kim Cooper, who served here as a Leading Seaman Quartermaster Gunner.

Specifically I acknowledge the generous assistance and use of reference material to:

F B Eldridge Esq*History of the RAN College*

Commander Nick Newman*A Brief History of HMAS NIRIMBA*
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(1973 - Hawthorn Press)

Mrs Rita Aston*History of Quakers Hill, 1790 - 1960*

Mrs Frances M McGuire*The Royal Australian Navy*

Mr Kevin Moore*History of Blacktown District*

and Commodore I H Nicholson CBE, RAN (Rtd); Mr Reg Philpott; Mr Darrell Coomber; Mr Charles Loines; Mr Eric Scanlan, Mr Rick Paynter; Mr George Bray; Mr Derek Searle; Mrs Mary Riley; Lieutenant Jack Shepperd MBE, DSM, RAN (Rtd); Lieutenant Vince Fazio RAN (Rtd); Mr Gordon Forbes; Mr Ron Payne; Mr Albert George Whibberley; Mr Dennis Allnutt; Mr Bob Moore; Lieutenant Bill Forder; Lieutenant Commander Pat Midgley; Commander Brian Swan; Commander John O'Neill; Lieutenant Davis Twiss; Warrant Officer ETP Mick Hardwick, Chaplain Kerry Costigan; Mr Wally Fox (Ex Chief Ordnance Artificer); Mrs Dorothy Stenning, Mrs Leila Franks; Mrs Betty Hazell MBE, SRN; Captain D R O S Fox AM, RAN; Lieutenant A M Higgins, RANNS; Petty Officer Musician M Wortham; Leading Writer John Biddle; Miss Lynn Christie; Chaplain Bill Rosier; Brother Christopher of the Brothers of Saint Gerard Majella; Lieutenant Commander Peter Cunningham; Warrant Officer MTP Bob McMillan, Warrant Officer MTH John Davison, Mr Jan Leach; Lieutenant Commander Douwe Prass; Chief Petty Officer QMG L Nicholson; Chief Petty Officer PT Terry Hill; Mr Roly Mannin, Mr Len Middleton; Mr Keith Marks; Mrs Mavis Clark; Sub-Lieutenant K Stone; Mr Bill Dore; Chief Petty Officer Cook Bill Rose; Sergeant G E Wilson, ARA; Warrant Officer Cook Tex Watson; Mr Lyall Miller; Mr Tom Boyd; Mr Ron Smith, Petty Officer MTP Steve Hoskin; Mrs Robyn Allen, ABDEN Mark Fleming, CPOSV Jim Short; Lieutenant John Cullen; Blacktown City Council; Alderman Jim Lynch, Mayor of Blacktown Mr Paul Arundell, Community Relations Officer, Blacktown City Council; Mrs June Kirk; Mr Jim Kay, Printer, Blacktown City Council; Mr M Webber, Town Clerk, Blacktown City Council

I am sure many of the above are pleased that the History of HMAS NIRIMBA such as it is, is completed so that I will not badger them any more to plumb the depths of their memories. I am sure also that readers will recall pleasant associations in reading these names.

L G R Wilson, 1984

Thank you all so much for your assistance.





Captain F L George, the First Commanding Officer of HMAS Nirimba
inspecting the first Intake at Divisions - 1957

Foreword

I am pleased to be associated with the recording of the History of HMAS NIRIMBA, more particularly as it comes to fruition at the time when we have just celebrated the Silver Jubilee of the commissioning of HMAS NIRIMBA, Australia's largest trade training establishment.

The History of HMAS NIRIMBA is essentially the story of those several thousands of men and women, both uniformed and civilian who passed this way in the naval service of their Sovereign and their Country. As such, this history is fast forming an important part of our national naval heritage - and when it is realised that HMAS NIRIMBA has been training officers and sailors for over twenty six years and members of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service from recent times, the importance of the NIRIMBA story can be appreciated in its true perspective.

The main thrust of the history relates to HMAS NIRIMBA, Quakers Hill, New South Wales, formerly Royal Naval Air Station HMS NABTHORPE and HMS NABSTOCK, Royal Australian Air Force Station Schofield and Royal Australian Naval Air Station HMAS NIRIMBA. However, in order that readers may be aware of our beginnings, it is only fair that they know something of the activities of those excellent people who paved the way for our modern technical training in the Navy in Australia through their service to the nation in other Establishments and Ships. Where practicable, the record of that evolution is incorporated in each segment of this history.

There have been dramatic and far reaching changes in the endeavours and lifestyle of HMAS NIRIMBA in the quarter century of her life and it is my hope that the history of this great trade training establishment will be continued over the years so to that future Ship's Companies will know something of their beginnings.

I strongly endorse the view that it is a duty of serving personnel, as a service to those who come after us, to preserve the story of our naval heritage so that it will not be lost to posterity.



D R O S FOX
Captain, RAN
Commanding Officer
Quakers Hill, NSW, 1982



Foreward to the Revised Edition

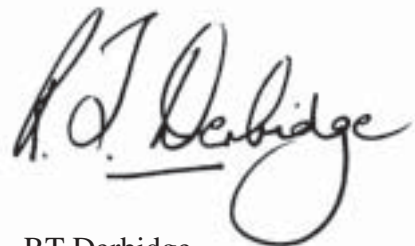
It was my privilege to assume command of HMAS NIRIMBA, the Royal Australian Navy's principal technical training establishment, on 16th June 1984. My previous posting had been as Commanding Officer of the new guided missile frigate, HMAS CANBERRA. Here at HMAS NIRIMBA, many of the young men and women of the Royal Australian Navy are trained to maintain the modern, complex and often sophisticated equipments and weapons systems installed in such as HMAS CANBERRA.

Many seafarers will testify that a ship is only as good as the men who sail in her. We at HMAS NIRIMBA are committed to the task of training technical sailors and WRANS to the highest standards so that they can be the best at their trades and confidently take their place among the companies of the latest ships and highly complex shore facilities of the Royal Australian Navy.

An historical record of such an important part of our naval infrastructure is really the story of the men and women of Australia who have achieved the high ideals of the endeavours of HMAS NIRIMBA. I am pleased to be associated with the history of this great training establishment.

Technological, sociological and political norms are constantly changing and, as with other forms of human endeavour, these changes place pressure upon HMAS NIRIMBA, within and without not the least of these is the fact that many of HMAS NIRIMBA's facilities, though still in use belong to a past era and need to be updated to best serve the future Royal Australian Navy. HMAS NIRIMBA has developed into an important teaching institution of Australia over the twenty eight years of her role as a technical training establishment. Some six thousand young Australians have been given trade training over the years and they will eventually carry those skills with them into civilian life.

I heartily endorse the philosophy of the NIRIMBA Heritage Trust that it is our duty as serving personnel, to preserve for posterity this part of our national naval heritage so that it will not be lost with the passage of time.



RT Derbidge
Captain, RAN
Commanding Officer
Quakers Hill NSW 1984



NIRIMBA - the Name

HMAS NIRIMBA was formerly the home of a Royal Naval Air Station during World War II. In line with the tradition of naming Royal Naval Air Stations after sea birds, it was originally intended to name the Station FALCON. However, that name had already been allocated to a Royal Naval Air Station at Malta, so the name NIRIMBA was submitted as the alternative and approved by the then Minister of State for the Navy.

The name NIRIMBA is derived from an East coast aboriginal word meaning Pelican - hence the Pelican is the main theme for the HMAS NIRIMBA crest.

The format of the crest is in accord with all crests for ships and establishments of the Royal Australian Navy. The crest is surmounted by the Admiralty Crown and is pictorially represented by the sterns of three wooden Men-of-War and two sails. Immediately below the crown is a scroll containing the name of the ship in the case NIRIMBA. This is adjacent to a rope grommet surround to the theme of the ship. Under the theme and its surround, is the particular Australian representation of a boomerang, a fighting stick and an aboriginal axe - all of which are native weapons. Below the is the motto of the 'SUCCESS FROM ENDEAVOUR' which is pertinent to HMAS NIRIMBA's prime role of Training.



Submitted Design
1952



Approved Official Design
1953



New and Final Design
1973



Submitted Re-design
1964



Approved Official Design
1964



Commanding Officers of HMAS NIRIMBA

| | |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| 1956 - 1958 | Captain F L George RAN |
| 1958 - 1961 | Captain B W Mussared RAN |
| 1961 - 1962 | Captain F W Purves RAN |
| 1962 - 1965 | Captain J R McMurray RAN |
| 1965 - 1966 | Captain H J Bodman RAN |
| 1966 - 1968 | Captain E J Morrison RAN |
| 1968 - 1972 | Captain J W Stead RAN |
| 1972 - 1974 | Captain T R Fisher RAN |
| 1974 - 1976 | Captain B L Cleary RAN |
| 1976 - 1978 | Captain J S Partington RAN |
| 1978 - 1980 | Captain D G Holthouse RAN |
| 1980 - 1982 | Captain D R O S Fox AM, RAN |
| 1983 - 1984 | Captain D H Thomson AM, RAN |
| 1984 | Captain R T Derbidge MBE, RAN |

Commander SDEX PR K G Graham MBE, RAN was appointed Commanding Officer in 1974 between the appointments of Captain T R Fisher RAN (outgoing) and Captain B L Cleary RAN.

Captain J R McMurray, Commanding Officer 1962-1966 died in August 1983 in Sydney.



Captain David H Thomson AM, RAN
Commanding Officer 1983-84



Captain Ralph T Derbidge MBE, RAN
Commanding Officer 1984

"It has always seemed to me that, considering his responsibilities and the great charge committed to his care - his nation's honour and security - there can be no prouder or nobler position than that of a Commander of a ship of War".

Anonymous, Quoted by the
Governor of New South Wales
1902 - Admiral Sir Henry Rawson.



Commanding Officers of HMAS NIRIMBA



Captain B W Mussared



The Founding Father
Captain F L George



Captain J R McMurray



Captain H J Bodman



Captain E J Morrison



Captain J W Stead



Captain T R Fisher



Commander K G Graham



Captain B L Cleary



Captain J S Partington



Captain D G Holthouse



Captain D R O S Fox

Commanding Officers of HMAS NIRIMBA 1956 - 1982. Captain F W Purvis, Commanding Officer from 1961 - 1962 is not pictured above. All of these photographs were taken in 1981 when the Commanding Officers gathered HMAS NIRIMBA for its 25th Anniversary.



Commanding Officer

Captain Ralph T Derbidge MBE, RAN joined HMAS NIRIMBA from Command of HMAS CANBERRA, one of the RAN's newest ships, on 16th June 1984. He is the first specialist Gunnery Officer to command HMAS NIRIMBA. He joined the Navy as a Cadet Midshipman in 1954 and his first ship on graduation from the Naval College was HMAS SWAN.

Since then Captain Derbidge has served in HMA Ships ANZAC, QUIBERON, STUART, VAMPIRE, BRISBANE and CANBERRA and in HMS LLANDAFF - a Royal Navy Air Direction Frigate. Specialising in Gunnery, Captain Derbidge underwent the specialist Gunnery and Missile Officer's course at the Royal Navy Gunnery School, HMS EXCELLENT. Since attaining his Gunnery Speciality, Captain Derbidge has served as Officer in Charge of the West Head Gunnery Range at HMAS CERBERUS, Gunnery Officer of HMA Ships VAMPIRE and BRISBANE, Deputy Director Surface and Air Weapons, Navy Office, Naval Member of the Services Estimates Staff in the Joint Intelligence Organisation and Officer in Charge of the RAN Gunnery School, HMAS CERBERUS.

Captain Derbidge is a graduate of the Joint Services Staff College and the US Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey California where he studied the Defence Management Systems course.

During HMAS BRISBANE's deployment to Vietnam in 1971, Captain Derbidge, then a Lieutenant and the Ship's Gunnery Officer was invested as a Member of Order of the British Empire, for his outstanding service as Gunnery Officer of HMAS BRISBANE.

Captain Derbidge was awarded the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977 and subsequently the National Medal and the Defence Force Service Medal. He became a Lieutenant Commander in 1970, Commander in 1977 after serving as Executive Officer of HMAS STUART and was promoted to the rank of Captain on taking up his posting of Commanding Officer, HMAS NIRIMBA in 1984.

Executive Officers of HMAS NIRIMBA

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 1956 - 1960 | Lieutenant Commander H W Stapleford RAN (Later A/CMDR) |
| 1960 | Lieutenant Commander I S Benney RAN |
| 1960 - 1963 | Commander J Hume RAN |
| 1963 - 1964 | Commander R E Bourke RAN |
| 1964 - 1966 | Commander K A Young RAN |
| 1966 - 1968 | Commander D M A H Hamilton RN |
| 1968 - 1969 | Commander D J Robertson RAN |
| 1970 - 1974 | Commander K G Graham RAN |
| 1974 - 1976 | Commander J McNamara RAN |
| 1977 - 1979 | Commander M W Unwin RAN |
| 1980 - 1981 | Commander J N King RAN |
| 1981 - 1984 | Commander C G Bartlett RAN |
| 1984 | Commander A L Thompson RAN |



* The Price of Liberty is Eternal Vigilance*



The Returned and Services League of Australia
Maroochydore Sub-Branch Inc

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Post Office Box 83
Cotton Tree 4558
Phone (07) 5443 1719
Fax (07) 5443 7551

The Honorary Secretary
The Naval Historical Society of Australia
The Boatshed Building 25
Garden Island
Sydney NSW 2011

7 November 2002

Vince, For Attention: Mr Vince Fazio

PUBLICATION - 'SKILLED HANDS AT SEA'

I was very pleased to receive your letter of 29 October 2002 regarding waiver of Copyright attached to "Skilled Hands At Sea". It is gratifying to note that the great story of Nirimba which touched so many Australian lives including yours and mine will not be lost to posterity.

There is no problem with Copyright. I will waive Copyright in favour of the Naval Historical Society of Australia. Enclosed is said waiver.

Note that the book has two ISBN:

ISBN 0 9591942 0 7 and
ISBN 0 9591942 1 5 Revised Edition

The book was wholly set up and printed by the Blacktown City Council Printery. They may well have the original type setting sheets, cover block and blocks for the illustrations. Printing was around 1983/84.

With every good wish for the success of the Society.

Lindsay Wilson
Lindsay Wilson (Tug)

Enclosure: Copyright waiver.



COPYRIGHT WAIVER

I Lindsay Gordon Robinson Wilson Retired Naval

Officer presently resident at 19 Tumala Street Buddina Q 4575 do

hereby consent to waiver of Copyright which attached to the publication

titled 'Skilled Hands At Sea' and bearing ISBN 0 9591942 0 7 and

ISBN 0 9591942 1 5 in favour of the Naval Historical Society of

Australia .

signed: Lindsay Wilson
Lindsay Gordon Robinson Wilson

Witnessed: Robert
Robert John Gavin
Secretary

at: Maroochydore Qld

at: Maroochydore Qld

on: 7 November 2002.

on: 7th November 2002



About the Author

Commander Lindsay Gordon Wilson MBE, RAN, joined the Navy at the end of World War II as a Recruit Writer and has served in every rank to Commandder.

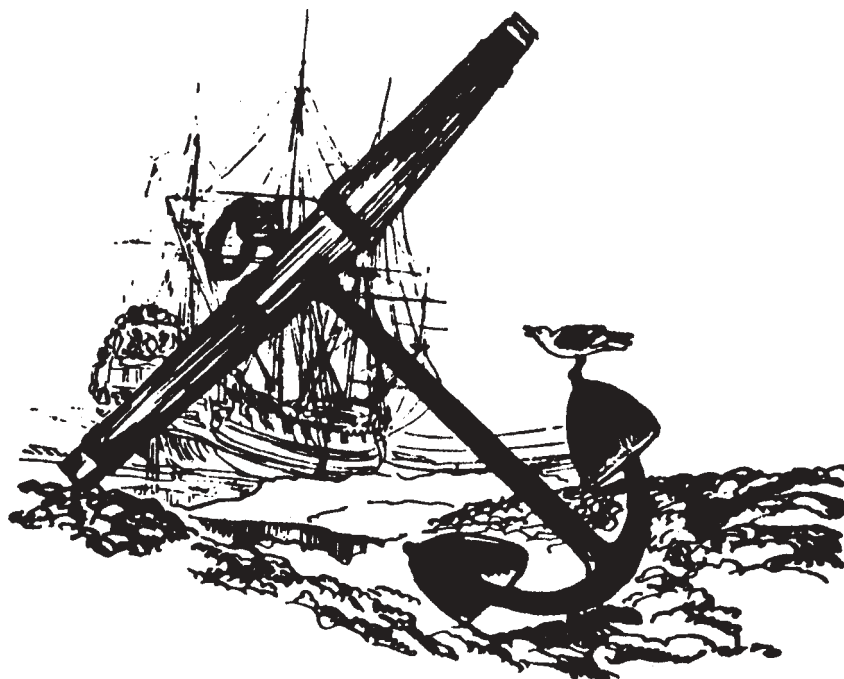
He has served in HMA Ships KANIMBLA, SYDNEY, CONDAMINE, ARUNTA, YARRA, VAMPIRE and MELBOURNE. He has been in Supply Charge of YARRA, VAMPIRE, NIRIMBA (twice) and PLATYPUS. In 1948 he went to England as part of the commissioning crew of HMAS SYDNEY Australia's first Aircraft Carrier, and he is the last member of the commissioning crew still serving. Commander Wilson was appointed a Member Of the Order of the British Empire in 1972 for outstanding service on board HMAS YARRA.

Commander Wilson set up and developed the HMAS CERBERUS Museum in 1980-81 and compiled the history of Flinders Naval Depot in a book (still unpublished) titled *Cradle of the Navy*. He has also setup and developed an excellent historical collection in HMAS NIRIMBA. This is now open to the public on weekends.

He has three sons in the Navy, two sons in the Army and his only daughter is married to a Navy Petty Officer.



Commander Lindsay Wilson



Introduction

Twenty seven years of naval tradition are reflected in the name HMAS NIRIMBA, the name of Australia's premier naval trade training Establishment, located at Quakers Hill, New South Wales, close to historic Richmond.

The name has been worn with pride by over six thousand naval technical trainees and several thousand more members of the Royal Australian Navy who have served here in non training billets. NIRIMBA is the daily work place of around 1300 Defence personnel and 130 civilians and covers an area of 300 hectares, housing some 200 buildings.

Against the background which, since its formation prior to World War I, the Royal Australian Navy has possessed a record of high standards of professionalism - exists the requirement to train young men and women to maintain the highly complex equipment in ships and shore facilities. This is a real challenge. This challenge falls to HMAS NIRIMBA.

To meet this challenge, NIRIMBA has four separate technical training streams. Specialist training at varying levels is carried out in the fields of Marine Engineering, Marine Hull Engineering, Weapons Electrical Engineering and Aviation Engineering.

While the main effort is directed towards the naval trade training of sailors, courses are conducted in HMAS NIRIMBA for junior Engineering officers. Personnel from Allied navies also undergo lengthy technical training in HMAS NIRIMBA under the Defence Co-operation Programme.

An important part of HMAS NIRIMBA is the supporting organisation which provides food service, pay, clothing, general stores, training resources stores, accommodation, medical and dental care, transport, personnel support and housing. There is an efficient printing department which produces NIRIMBA's very large requirement for training software and textbooks. When authors set out to record the achievements of any great endeavour, they sometimes forget the numerous workers who toil away industriously in the background, unsung and unheralded in support of the main endeavour. This history attempts to record, as far as is practicable the sterling efforts of all the men and women who have contributed towards the common good through their service in HMAS NIRIMBA.

NIRIMBA possesses extensive playing fields and extensive recreational facilities including two pools, movie theatre, tennis courts and a small golf course.

For over twenty five years every apprentice entered sailor in the RAN will have passed this way and lately more adult entry sailors of the technical branches have served in HMAS NIRIMBA undergoing technical phase training to align them with their counterparts of the apprentice entry scheme. The first technical branch member of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service graduated from HMAS NIRIMBA in 1980.

Inevitably HMAS NIRIMBA will remain the provider of 'Skilled Hands At Sea' for the Royal Australian Navy.

This historical record has been compiled in the hope that the colourful record of HMAS NIRIMBA and her companies of men and women, both uniformed and civilian, will not be lost with the passage of time.

