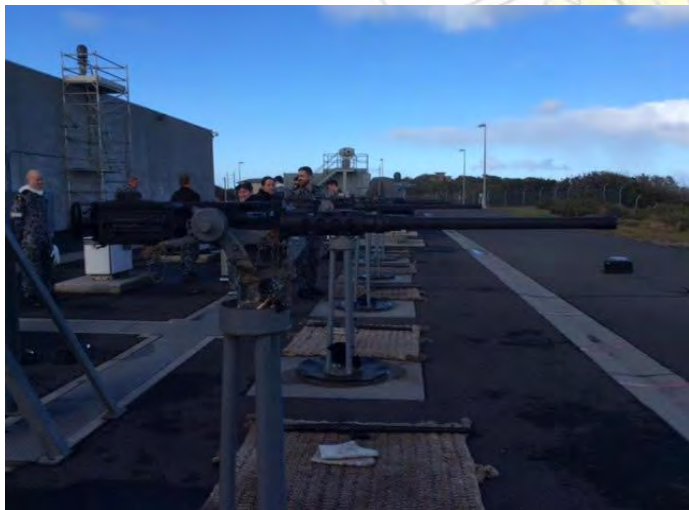


President's Musings – July 2019

Marty Grogan's talk about HMAS *Nestor* and 'The Nestor Bell' was very well received at our last meeting. To actually have the 'Bell' there made it even more special. We look forward to hearing more 'Tales from the Museum'. What a wonderful asset our HMAS *Cerberus* Museum is. Thank you Marty!

At our July 22nd meeting we will have three guests, namely our National President, Captain David Michael, plus LEUT Mario De Angelis and his wife Anna. During the meeting David will present Angelo with his prize for winning our annual Essay Competition. *As an added bonus David is our Speaker for the evening and he will recount on his involvement in the Gulf War 1990-91.*

On Wednesday July 3rd the Cerberus Museum staff joined with the Australian Railway Historical Society, in a visit to our RAN's West Head Gunnery Range at Flinders. Whilst we were there we witnessed a 12.7mm machine gun shoot. It was very interesting to view the first class facilities and see and hear the guns in action! We are very appreciative of the warm welcome we received from LCDR Peter Arnold and his staff. Enjoy the photos!



Ahoy-Mac's Web Log, <http://ahoy.tk-jk.net/>, is an excellent Historical Resource and is highly recommended when delving into Naval History. Mac founded his web site around 30 years ago,

and he dedicated the site to all 'who went down to the sea in ships' in WWII, and especially to the 84 officers and men who died in HMAS *Canberra* at the Battle of Savo Island on August 9th 1942. Mac was serving as a Sub-Lieutenant in HMAS *Canberra* and he was on the bridge when she was attacked. His account of the Battle is on his website and well worth reading.

LCDR Mackenzie Jesse Gregory RAN (9/02/1922-27/08/2014) was my friend and colleague. He was to my mind a fine example of the qualities a Naval Officer needed to have. He could communicate well, was a leader of men, very resourceful, loyal and above all a gentleman. I regarded him as a mentor and very close friend, and I enjoy delving into his 'Log' and sharing his stories. I quote from the Web Site: **Introduction to stories of "Commander Warwick Bracegirdle DSC** RAN "Gentleman Cordite". See Gentleman Cordite (68,703 words in 24 chapters)**

"As a Lieutenant in the RAN, I was fortunate in late 1944 to be appointed to the crack 8" Cruiser of the RAN, the fabulous HMAS *Shropshire*. This ship at the behest of Winston Churchill had been gifted to our Navy as a replacement for her sister ship HMAS *Canberra*.

Many of *Shropshire*'s crew had served in *Canberra*, as had I. Now *Shropshire* was many things, not only a lucky and happy ship but a most efficient fighting unit, she had been in every Pacific landing, bombarding before the troops went ashore, shooting down Japanese aircraft, and had played a big role at that surface action, the last "Great Sea Battle in Naval History, the Battle of Surigao Strait." A main reason for her success was the wonderful gunnery department, lead by that legendary Naval and Specialist Gunnery Officer, **Lieutenant Commander Warwick Bracegirdle, RAN**. In his WW II service, 'Braces' as he was affectionately known, won not one, not two, but three Distinguished Service Crosses. A most unusual feat! He had hand-picked most of his Gunnery ratings, being friendly with the drafting officer at Flinders Naval Depot (now HMAS *Cerberus*), where everyone in the RAN does their training. I am proud to have served with this wonderful man. Post war, Braces went off to live in a small village in England, and he died age 80. Nicholas, his second son contacted me recently from the UK, and as a result we decided to publish these stories on AHOY, to honour Warwick, and give them a wider readership. Terry Kearns from Atlanta, and myself, are delighted and honoured to bring them alive". (End of quote from AHOY)



LCDR Bracegirdle addressing his gunnery ratings HMAS *Shropshire*

It is my intention to share some of these stories in subsequent 'Musings', and as an example, have included part of one entitled HMAS *Bataan* - first of a name. The excerpt covers the period when

Commander Bracegirdle was CO of *Bataan* during her second period of duty in Korean waters in 1952. *Bataan* and *Warramunga* were tribal class destroyers.

"*Bataan* and *Warramunga* were back in Korean waters by early 1952. Off Taedong-Man at dusk, five 76mm shells straddled *Bataan*. Four were near misses, but one hit aft, wrecking the Captain's cabin and ruining Commander Bracegirdle's old frock coat. Rear-Admiral Scott-Moncrieff made him a signal expressing sympathy for the loss of his tail. By now *Bataan* had acquired something of a legend among the offshore islands of Korea. She was known dramatically as 'The Grey Ghost of the West Coast', enigmatically as 'The Big Top' and more explicitly as 'Brace's Circus'. *Bataan* added to this legend on 19th May, when she took part in a Round-Up operation. ROK guerrilla forces would land on a peninsula and drive along it towards an evacuation beach, dealing with all enemy personnel and equipment in their way. Air strikes and naval bombardment would isolate the peninsular and prevent enemy reinforcements interfering. At 1000 *Bataan* anchored off Mu-do to cover the guerrillas landing on Ponggu-muon peninsula. First of all the evacuation beach had to be secured, but this part of the operation was held up because the junks slowed down when approaching, for fear of Allied bombardment. Once the beach had been seized, *Bataan's* guns sealed off the peninsula, while her sick-bay operated on a guerrilla injured by a machine-gun bullet.

At 1130 *Bataan* covered the main landing and began bombarding enemy positions, mortar posts, troop concentrations and mine-fields further inland. Gradually the guerrillas worked their way down the peninsula and were evacuated at 1900. They had inflicted 150 casualties on the enemy and demolished 27 houses, 2 observation posts, one 76mm gun, one mortar, seven machine guns and one command post. One communist soldier had been captured and 10 Korean families evacuated. The guerrillas also took with them 120 bags of rice and 15 cows. Their leader showed his appreciation of *Bataan's* support by presenting CMDR Bracegirdle with a liberated communist calf. The next Round-Up was scheduled for 31st May/1st June. *Bataan* was assigned to the carrier HMS *Ocean's* screen while she flew off aircraft to cover a guerrilla raid up the Han River estuary. HMS *Amethyst* was given the inshore bombardment, but this Round-Up was not successful. Fog and cloud hampered air strikes, while the junks were becalmed during their approach. Soon after landing they were ordered to withdraw. *Warramunga* meantime had been operating on the east coast. On 25th April she had helped escort the battleship USS *Iowa* during a powerful air-gun bombardment of Chongjin. *Warramunga* had then carried out an interdiction patrol along the railway. Once, while shelling a railway bridge near Chongjin, she had stopped engines to turn close inshore when five guns straddled her with near misses. *Warramunga* went full astern out to sea, her forward guns silencing three of the field pieces.

Yours Aye!

Rex Williams