

Involvement with the Current Day Navy - Recruit School HMAS *Cerberus*

As part of a commitment to Recruit School, HMAS *Cerberus* - more specifically *Shipp Division* - members of the Vietnam Veterans Association Education Team and the HMAS *Sydney* & VLSV Association combine to give a presentation to the newest members of the RAN at the end of week three of their training, which is just before their Unit Readiness Evaluation (URE). The school considers this activity to be very beneficial at this vital time.

The idea behind the presentation came about after the then Divisional Officer of *Shipp Division*, Lt Mike de Zilva, witnessed a presentation given in 2015 to student history teachers completing their Graduate Diploma of Education or Masters of Education at Monash University. It was felt by those at Recruit School that the newest members of the RAN could do with a bit of a 'gee up' at this specific stage of their training. What better way to do this than involve those who had previously lived the experience, similar to what they are going through now?

With the approval of the Commanding Officer of Recruit School, Cdr Luke Ryan, and with the enthusiastic support and practical assistance of the current Divisional Officer, Lt Jeff Thornton, the first of these presentations was carried out at the Recruits' recreation rooms, Club Sobroan, in mid-2016. There have been a further four presentations given to *Shipp Division* since that time.

The presentation emphasises the five most important personal aspects of RAN service: Honour, Honesty, Courage, Integrity, and Loyalty, and how - by various ways and means - these values remain with individual members long after they leave the service. In this instance - and with recollections of the Vietnam War still reasonably fresh in each presenter's mind - the members of *Shipp Division* are given a personal and historical account of what service was like some 50 years ago, and how aspects of this experience remain with them in their everyday life.

Not all the presentation is about Navy. Certain important aspects of the Vietnam experience involve the other two branches of the armed services. For example, HMAS *Sydney* fulfilled the role of a troop transport, with nigh on 16,000 Army and RAAF personnel being transported to and from the war zone. One of the presenters - Jim Dewar, a National Service army member - travelled to and from Vietnam in *Sydney*. Another army member, Bob Edgell, had the experience of being the welcome recipient of covering Naval Gunfire Support (NGFS) by HMAS *Brisbane* while out on patrol in unfriendly territory. Yet another, Rob

Lowe, experienced the NVA/Viet Cong attacks on Saigon during the 1968 Tet Offensive.

Naval aspects of the presentation involve the daily activities of shipboard life in the troop transport HMAS *Sydney*, and those of her escorts; the tasks performed by Clearance Diving Team 3 (CDT3); and NGFS, Interdiction, Rescue Destroyer (RESDES) and Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) duties performed by HMA Ships, *Hobart*, *Perth*, *Brisbane*, and *Vendetta* otherwise known as the 'Gunline' destroyers.

An emphasis is then placed on the duties performed by all four contingents of RAN Helicopter Flight Vietnam, of which Noel Shipp was an integral member of the second contingent. This specific, and somewhat personal aspect of Shipp's service, is taken up in greater detail towards the end of their training by Cdr Max Speedy, who served with Shipp as a helicopter pilot and survived Vietnam.

Display boards, graphic DVDs, and a Power point presentation relating to the time, all illustrate specific aspects of each part of the presentation. Questions are encouraged, and time is given for the division to scan the displays and come up with answers to several questions posed to them by the presenters. This in turn encourages the participants to utilise their powers of observation.

The layout of the classroom tends to vary, depending on the size of the division. For greater understanding and comfort of the audience, the division is advised that sitting down for extended periods is not always comfortable, and that they are free to stand and move around should the need arise, especially in hot and humid conditions. Participation in the presentation is an essential part of the experience, with certain tasks and responsibilities being given, and accepted, in the spirit of the occasion.

The VVAA Ed Team has provided audio equipment to enhance the presentation, although this is only used when required. Most, if not all of the display boards, give examples of cooperation between the services, especially those serving in the troop transport, HMAS *Sydney*, and their Army and RAAF 'passengers'. This aspect of service is emphasised several times during proceedings.

Always discreetly present are members of the Recruit School staff, who listen in, observe, and participate when appropriate. To date, every presentation has met with their broad approval. As with most teaching and learning experiences, there will always be room for improvement. What works for one group may not

necessarily work for another, especially when the numbers of participants become a determining factor.

Each presentation is based upon a flexible mode of delivery, usually starting by introducing each of the presenters, and their service details. Unfurling of the Navy in Vietnam Banner follows. This gives a sense of long standing traditions to those present. Two Recruits are nominated to return the correctly folded Banner to its case upon successful completion of their training.

A quotation from Greg Denning's book, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language* (1992) is recited, which is still very applicable today, and reads:

'On a ship, as on a battlefield, every event needed to be predictable and every response instinctual. So, every place, every occasion, every action had its definition and its rules. However, unlike a battlefield where the experience of the unforeseen is usually a small part of a soldier's life, on a ship, every day and every night, sailors experienced the value of efficient, instinctual behaviour in the face of the unpredictable.' (p.82)

This quote is used to emphasise the continued need for reinforcement of basic service fundamentals in all naval personnel.

On a more formal note, we introduce the Recruits to the Naval Ode and the Ode as part of service history, indicating when and where these are recited. When applicable, *Shipp Division* is advised that, on Anzac Day in Melbourne, they will be representing the RAN and in the public eye. Consequently, comments will be made regarding their dress and bearing on ABC television by a member of the presentation team.

As this presentation is made at the end of the third week of their training, a further assessment of their standards is made on the day of graduation, some eight weeks later. *Shipp Division* has always met the presentation team's expectations. This is mainly due to the standards set by their instructors, and the pride each member takes in achieving or exceeding these standards.

Upon completion of their training, awards are presented at the graduation parade of the division. The HMAS *Sydney* & VLSV Association presents a prize to the Recruit who has best displayed Leadership Potential during this formative period.

After graduation, some of the now Ordinary rank sailors seek out members of the team, to thank them for the presentation they gave earlier in the year. The consensus view of these new sailors is that listening to our experiences, and heeding some of our advice, has helped them decide to persist with their new

and demanding vocation. All presentation team members appreciate this form of feedback.

Looking forward to the next session, due in February 2018.

Dr John Carroll

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