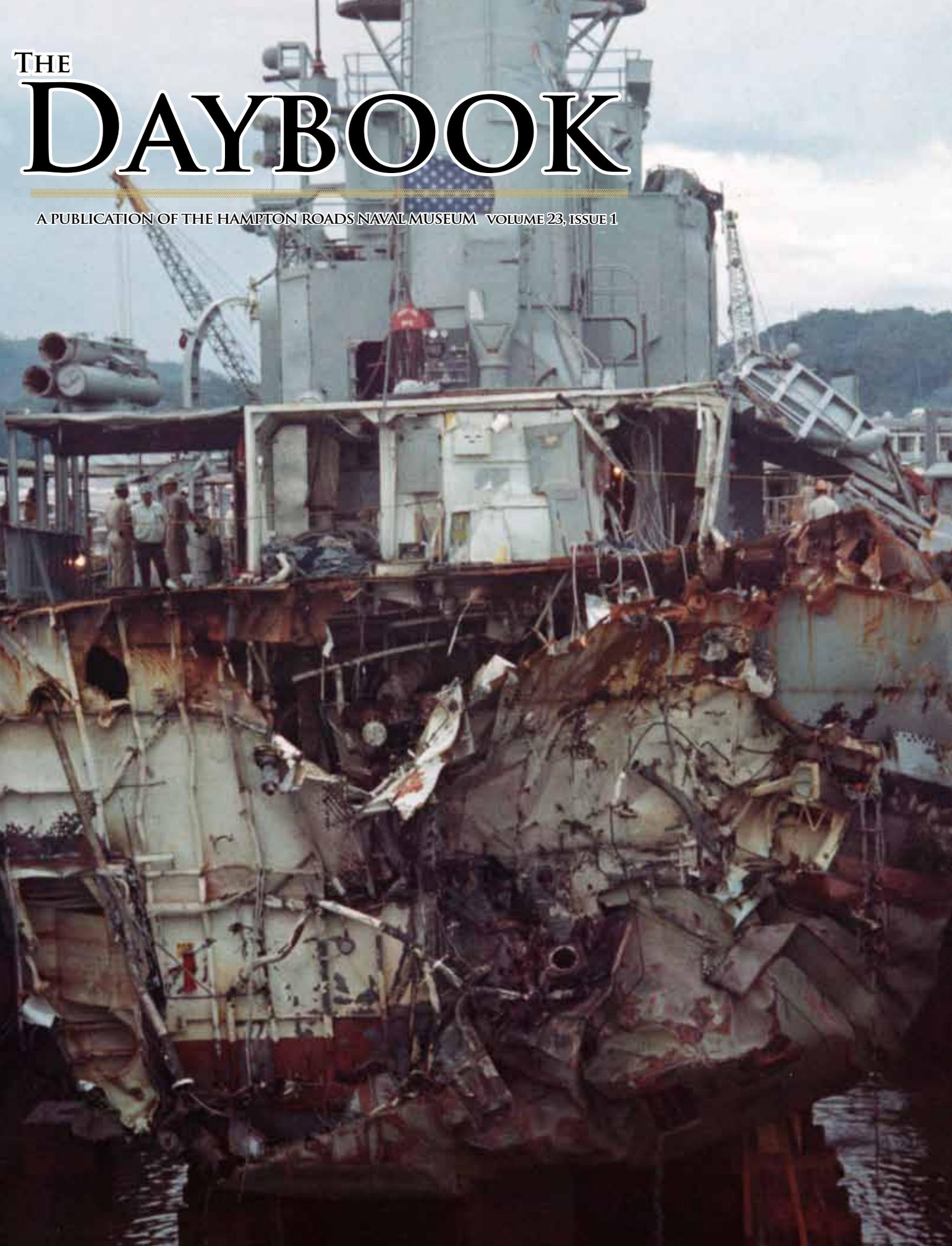


# THE DAYBOOK

A PUBLICATION OF THE HAMPTON ROADS NAVAL MUSEUM VOLUME 23, ISSUE 1



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**COVER:** The stern section of USS *Frank E. Evans* rests in the auxiliary repair drydock USS *Windsor* (ADR 22) at Naval Station Subic Bay, Philippines, three days after colliding with the aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne* in the South China Sea. Note that a temporary jackstaff has been installed as she remained a commissioned vessel. After her decommissioning on July 1, 1969, the destroyer's remains were sunk that October. (*Personnelman 2nd Class Ralph Tresser/ Naval History and Heritage Command image NHF-124.01*)

# THE DAYBOOK

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*The Daybook's* purpose is to educate and inform readers on historical topics and museum-related events. It is written by staff and volunteers.

Direct questions or comments to the Editor at (757) 322-3107, Fax (757) 445-1867, E-mail [hnavalmuseum@navy.mil](mailto:hnavalmuseum@navy.mil) or write *The Daybook*, Hampton Roads Naval Museum, One Waterside Drive, Suite 248, Norfolk, Virginia 23510-1607. The museum is on the World Wide Web at [www.hrnm.navy.mil](http://www.hrnm.navy.mil).

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USS Frank E. Evans (DD 754) takes on fuel from the carrier USS Princeton (CVA 37) somewhere in the Pacific in 1953. (Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Douglas Price)

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# FROM THE DIRECTOR

BY JOHN PENTANGELO



HRNM Director John Pentangelo.

The Hampton Roads Naval Museum, like all institutions across the country, is dealing with the new reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. The entire staff of the Naval History and Heritage Command is committed to interpreting our shared naval history with the Fleet and the public at large. I encourage all readers to visit the command's website at [history.navy.mil](http://history.navy.mil) and our sister museums' social media pages to experience some of the innovative online content that history professionals are producing while we work remotely to keep our families and ourselves safe. We look forward to welcoming visitors to the museum once it is safe to do so.

The current *Daybook* issue focuses on the collision of USS *Frank E. Evans* (DD 754) with the Australian carrier HMAS *Melbourne* on June 3, 1969. The two ships were conducting a training exercise in the South China Sea when they collided before dawn. Cut in two, *Evans* lost seventy-four Sailors. HRNM historian Clay Farrington explores the legacy of this tragic loss during America's long war in Vietnam.

The museum staff has seen a significant change since the last issue. Last October the museum said goodbye to Deputy Director/Curator Joe Judge. Joe's thirty-year career at HRNM was filled with many memories, laughs, and great successes. Since 1990, this museum has grown

from a small Department of Defense museum into the nexus of naval history education in the entire region. Joe's enormous role in this stunning transformation is pure fact. He relocated the museum from the Pennsylvania House aboard Naval Station Norfolk to the City-owned Nauticus in downtown Norfolk. In 1993, Joe was instrumental in the Navy's acceptance of priceless artifacts illegally removed from the USS *Cumberland* and CSS *Florida* shipwrecks. From 1998 to 2009, Joe assisted with the planning, management, and interpretation of the historic battleship *Wisconsin* (BB 64). His exhibits over the years have helped connect the American people to the Navy and to educate Sailors about their history in dynamic and meaningful ways. As my predecessor Becky Dove observed, Joe was "the glue that holds our institution together."



HRNM Curator Toni Deetz Rock. (Photograph by Max Lonzanida)

In December, we welcomed Toni Deetz-Rock as HRNM's new curator. Toni's impressive career makes her an ideal choice to carry the museum forward. Prior to joining the Naval History and Heritage Command as the manager of the Collections Management Facility in Richmond, Toni worked on many Navy-led curatorial projects such as the museum move from Treasure Island and Supply Corps collection transfer to HRNM. She also worked as an archaeologist at Jamestown Rediscovery and as Educational Coordinator for Preservation Virginia.

Welcome to the team, Toni!

Happy Reading and Best Regards,

John Pentangelo



# The Loss of USS *Frank E. Evans*

By Clayton Farrington  
Historian, Hampton Roads Naval Museum

The evening of June 2, 1969, was a quiet one for USS *Frank E. Evans* (DD 754). There was unrestricted visibility over the South China Sea and the nearly full moon shone down from the broken clouds silently gliding by. Despite the peaceful weather, this was no time for her crew to relax.

*Evans* was not alone over that placid stretch of water hundreds of miles from land, between what was then the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) and the Sultanate of Brunei on the island of Borneo. She was part of a screening group that included four other vessels from three other navies, protecting the flagship of the Royal Australian Navy, the aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne* (R.21).

Boatswain's Mate Jack Wimsett, who manned the helm from 20:00 to midnight, remembered years later, "The water was, well, really to me it was like glass that night. It was only like maybe one, two-footers. It was nothing. And when I left watch the *Melbourne* was right

where she was supposed to be, astern of us. We were point destroyer."

*Evans*, *Melbourne* and the other screening vessels formed a task group which was heading southeast from the Republic of the Philippines to Thailand. But the group was not alone. Somewhere in the dark depths beneath the task group and their destination was a submarine quietly shadowing them, awaiting the opportune time to strike. The captains of each ship knew it, turning off their running lights.

To thwart the submarine menace, at regular intervals the vessels of the task group would make carefully coordinated turns in unison, each move governed by a secret operational plan with orders issued in code. This slow motion water ballet in the dark had paused three times that evening so that *Melbourne* could launch and recover anti-submarine aircraft.

Illustration by M.C. Farrington with design elements by Don Darcy and Kev Curtis.

# SEATO

SOUTHEAST ASIA  
TREATY ORGANIZATION

THESE NATIONS ...

...have 1/7 of the world's peoples  
and  
1/8 of the world's surface

SUPPLEMENT TO

Free  
World

VOLUME V - NO 5

MAY - 1956



## What it is ...

IT IS A  
TREATY  
SIGNED  
BY

AUSTRALIA  
GREAT BRITAIN  
FRANCE  
PAKISTAN  
PHILIPPINES  
THAILAND  
UNITED STATES  
NEW ZEALAND

...And Was  
Signed In  
**MANILA**  
PHILIPPINES

September  
8  
1954

## Its Purposes:

TO STRENGTHEN THE  
FABRIC OF PEACE  
AND TO UPHOLD  
THE PRINCIPLES OF  
DEMOCRACY

TO PROVIDE MUTUAL  
DEFENSE AGAINST ARMED  
ATTACK AND AGAINST  
INTERNAL SUBVERSION

TO PROMOTE THE  
WELL BEING OF  
THE PEOPLES OF  
SOUTH ASIA

## Its Strength:

THEY CONTROL ...



62%

OF WORLD'S  
PETROLEUM  
PRODUCTION

60%

OF WORLD'S  
COAL  
PRODUCTION



55%

OF WORLD'S  
IRON ORE  
DEPOSITS

50%

OF WORLD'S  
STEEL  
PRODUCTION



40%

OF WORLD'S  
TRADE  
VOLUME

A SIGNIFICANT AND GROWING PART OF THESE RESOURCES IS LOCATED IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

A Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) promotional poster from 1956. (National Archives and Records Administration, GR 306, Records of the U.S. Information Agency)

The silent ballet performed by hulking black shadows in the moonlight typified the type of tactics that had proven wildly successful against enemy submarines a quarter-century before. Even though most of the ships zig-zagging their way in the dark hailed from that time, most of the men aboard them had not yet been born. That was a major reason the exercise, dubbed Sea Spirit, was taking place; so that the hard lessons of the last world war that begat these time-honed techniques would not have to be relearned during the next one.

Evans was practicing, some might even say pretending, to hunt a notional undersea enemy in preparation for a possible war in the future, yet the danger involved was real.

Before dawn, one-third of her crew, and half of the ship, would be gone.

The Cold War was a world war, but the nations working with the United States to deter Communist expansionism were not in lockstep. However, their shared strategic priorities formed the basis for two regional organizations of which the United States was a leading member. In the Western Hemisphere, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed in 1947 to counter the combined armed forces under Moscow's direction in Eastern Europe, while on the other side of the globe the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) formed in 1954 to perform a similar role against other Communist movements and governments, particularly those supported by the People's Republic of China. Great Britain was also a charter member of both organizations, and British Commonwealth nations Australia and New Zealand were active SEATO members.



Seen here during the Manila Conference of SEATO nations on October 24, 1966 are (left to right), Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky (South Vietnam), Prime Minister Harold Holt (Australia), President Park Chung Hee (Korea), President Ferdinand Marcos (Philippines), Prime Minister Keith Holyoake (New Zealand), Lt. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu (South Vietnam), Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn (Thailand), and President Lyndon B. Johnson present a picture of unity. Although not a signatory of the SEATO charter, the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) was an issue that divided the organization from its inception. (*Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library*)

The war in Vietnam was part of America's Cold War, and to a lesser extent, Australia's. The other members of SEATO, with the exception of member nation Thailand, were either neutral or openly against the war. This disunity threatened the organization's viability, but the SEATO military exercises had a broader, more general focus that Great Britain and New Zealand could throw their support behind. The exercises served as a way for the member states' naval forces to strengthen ties, maintain interoperability and present an opportunity for combatant commanders to establish collegiality. A full generation removed from the Second World War, such bridge building would pay huge dividends in the event of another war.

The joint statement issued after the 14th SEATO Council of Ministers meeting declared that "all were unanimous in their conviction that the Organization, far from being obsolete, continues to be both an effective and essential deterrent to aggression and as such, the only

possible set-up of its kind that can fulfill the obligations of its unique role at the present time."

Sea Spirit was to be the biggest naval exercise SEATO had conducted in over a decade, designed to reinvigorate readiness and impress friends and foes, particularly those like the Chinese who considered the organization a "paper tiger." It was also designed as a show of member solidarity to disaffected leaders in the neutral and nonaligned nations on the sidelines who considered the organization an anachronism as well as a waste of time and money.

In laying out Sea Spirit's broad objectives, which included convoy, anti-submarine and mine warfare aspects, exercise director Rear Admiral William T. Rapp, USN, said, "I believe that Exercise Sea Spirit highlights the credibility of SEATO in demonstrating that the participating nations have the will and capability to work together as a SEATO force to meet any would-be aggressor."



**UPPER LEFT:** The *Sumner*-class destroyer *Lyman K. Swenson* (DD 729), one of dozens of American vessels to take part in SEATO exercises with HMAS *Melbourne* over two decades, approaches the Australian carrier for underway replenishment during Exercise Sea Devil in 1962.

**CENTER:** As seen from *Melbourne* the following year during Exercise Sea Serpent, *Swenson* carries a banner expressing their comradeship. "Everybody on *Melbourne* was caught by surprise and thought the gesture was highly amusing," recalled Kim Dunstan, who was aboard at the time. "Certainly it was an indication of the friendly relations between our two navies." (Photographer unknown. Kimberly Dunstan collection)

## Hot War to Cold War

In the middle of a Western Pacific deployment that brought them from their home port of Long Beach in March 1969 to just off the beaches of Vietnam in early May, USS *Frank E. Evans* switched from fighting the hot part of America's Cold War as an individual warship to training for an even greater Cold War conflict against a more powerful enemy as a part of a large multinational task force. While *Evans'* operational mission in Vietnam could have been characterized as being in support of counterinsurgency operations, the SEATO training mission was designed to keep in practice for peer-to-peer naval conflict.

On June 3, 1969, *Evans* was operating as one of eight vessels comprising the screen unit of Anti-Submarine Warfare Group A, which would protect *Melbourne* on a 1,300-mile journey from the Philippines to Thailand,

where a mine warfare exercise was also taking place. Anti-Submarine Warfare Unit B, formed around *Kearsarge* (CVS 33), was on a similar mission about 30 miles away. Among the 40 ships involved in Sea Spirit, however, *Evans* and her crew would secure a role in history that would far outlive Exercise Sea Spirit, SEATO, or even the Cold War itself.

Named for a Marine Corps major general who had seen combat from the Philippines to France, *Frank E. Evans*, an *Allen M. Sumner*-class destroyer commissioned on February 1, 1945, was built at the trailing edge of the decade-long American building boom surrounding the Second World War. She emerged unscathed from combat in the Pacific in the final weeks of World War II and was put into mothballs not long afterward, but she saw plenty of combat after being brought back into service during the Korean War. Before participating in Exercise Sea Spirit, *Evans* had just finished her fourth deployment to the gunline off Vietnam.

## Majestic to Melbourne

HMAS *Melbourne* was also a product of the British shipbuilding boom of the Second World War, but had languished under the name *Majestic* on the ways after the war ended. Rather than breaking her up, the Admiralty decided to modernize the 22,000-ton aircraft carrier, making her the first British carrier with a built-in angled deck. While larger American carriers of the time, particularly the *Forrestal* class, could carry frontline air superiority fighters, American *Essex*-class and British *Majestic*-class carriers were better suited for antisubmarine warfare (ASW) in much the way escort carriers made deadly sub-hunting platforms during WWII.

Commissioned with her new name in the Royal Australian Navy in 1955, *Melbourne* had just completed a major refit before Exercise Sea Spirit to allow the operation of the latest American aircraft, A-4G Skyhawk fighter-bombers and S-2E Tracker antisubmarine aircraft, including the installation of a new radar suite.

For her entire service life, *Melbourne* had shown her nation's flag around the South Pacific region but had never fired her guns in anger. Considering the losses of four American and five British carriers to submarines during the Second World War, however, it was recognized that destruction could come without warning from a stealthy Soviet Romeo or Foxtrot submarine (not to mention Chinese variants) lurking under the waves. It was for that reason that carrier battle or antisubmarine warfare groups required a screen of destroyers.

## Daring Rebel to Sea Spirit

When she departed Long Beach on March 29, 1969, *Evans* performed her normal role screening USS *Kearsarge* across the Pacific. She arrived at her assigned station off Vietnam with four other American destroyers on May 4th to support units ashore during Operation Daring Rebel. For the next two weeks she responded to 86 calls for gunfire support, starting with the covering of an amphibious landing of 4,000 of the 1st Battalion, 26th Marines on Barrier Island, a Viet Cong staging area less than 20 miles southeast of Da Nang. Working sporadically around the clock during the two-week period, her three-inch mounts fired 1,838 rounds at fortified enemy positions throughout the area.

By May 17, she was in the Philippines preparing to join Sea Spirit as a part of Anti-Submarine Group A. *Evans* also gained around 27 new crewmembers in the Philippines before her departure.

*Evans* and the dozens of other screening vessels playing a part in the convoy escort exercise were to safely counter allied submarines playing oppositional forces on a track that took them from the Philippines to the Gulf of Sattahip in Thailand, and, when called upon, act as plane guard, or rescue destroyer, if an accident should happen during flight operations. Although *Evans* had routinely screened and acted as rescue destroyer for *Kearsarge*, a carrier slightly bigger than *Melbourne*, the experience in screening one of Her Majesty's Australian ships would prove different in ways both superficial and profound.

## Brig. Gen. Frank E. Evans, USMC

Born on November 19, 1876, Frank Edgar Evans enrolled as a private in Company M, First Wisconsin Infantry Volunteers on April 28, 1898, and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps on February 15, 1900. He served as the aide-de-camp to Brig. Gen. George F. Elliott, Commandant of the Marine Corps. Following that, he led the Recruiting Districts for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and New York. During World War I he served as Regimental Adjutant and Commander of American Embarkation Camp-Bordeaux. Evans received the Navy Cross for his "exceptionally meritorious and distinguished service" as the adjutant of the Sixth Marines, Fourth Marine Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, American Expeditionary Forces, in the Battle of Belleau Wood. He spent most of the following decade in Haiti, culminating as Chief of the Gendarmerie d'Haiti until March 31, 1930. Evans carried out additional duties as Inspector-Instructor, 10th Battalion, Marine Corps Reserve, from July 1939 until released from all active duty pending his retirement. Advanced to brigadier general on the Retired List on December 1, 1940. Brig. Gen. Evans died in Hawaii on November 25, 1941.



Captain Frank E. Evans, USMC, in June 1917. He was promoted the following month. (Library of Congress photograph LC-B2-4236-13)



HMAS *Melbourne* (R.21) veers away from USS *Enterprise* (CVN 65) during the Rim of the Pacific exercise in 1978 as the Royal New Zealand Navy frigate *Waikato* (F.55) remains in formation. (Royal Australian Navy)

The exercise plans stipulated simulating the types of contested convoy operations encountered by the American, British, and, to a lesser extent, Australian navies during the war. But such operations between the navies had taken place before most of the ships were even constructed, and all but the most senior officers had no real combat experience in such conditions.

On May 25 as the SEATO task groups were assembling, *Melbourne*'s skipper, Captain John Philip Stevenson, held a dinner for *Evans*' captain, Commander Albert Sydney McLemore, as well as the other captains of the destroyers who would be guarding his carrier as a part of Anti-Submarine Group 1, including those of the British destroyer *Cleopatra* and the American destroyers *James E. Keyes* (DD 787) and *Everett F. Larson* (DD 830). The screen unit commander, Captain J. J. Doak, Commander Destroyer Squadron 23 aboard *Keyes*, was, like Stevenson, a World War II veteran who made quick rapport with the Australian captain.

Although the 15,740-ton *Melbourne* was only 28% the weight of American carriers like the behemoth *Enterprise* (CVN 65), she was still big enough to break any destroyer in half. In fact, she had proved it nearly five years before when she plowed HMAS *Voyager* (D.04) asunder in Jervis Bay, Australia, while the destroyer was maneuvering into position for plane guard (also known as rescue destroyer) duty. Eighty-two men were lost after *Voyager* mistakenly cut across *Melbourne*'s bow and she was cut in half on February 10, 1964. Most of the men lost went down with *Voyager*'s bow section, which sank after only ten minutes. The aft portion also sank after a couple of hours, after which *Melbourne* took the destroyer's 232 survivors to Sydney.

The incident weighed heavily on Stevenson's mind during the meeting. In words that he would clearly recall later, Stevenson admonished the destroyer captains, "Watch my signals very closely before going to your next position. I do not think either Australia's Navy or its government can stand another collision at sea."

Although memories of the *Voyager-Melbourne* collision were relatively fresh, the tragedy should not have seemed foreign to the American officers present. A similar incident had befallen the U.S. Navy on April 26, 1952, 700 miles west of the Azores when USS *Wasp* (CV 18) rammed the destroyer *Hobson* (DMS 26) and broke her in half, sending her to the bottom in less than five minutes. Sixty-one survivors were pulled aboard *Wasp*, but 176 Sailors were lost.

Stevenson had personally witnessed the aftermath of the *Voyager* incident. He had no intention of personally witnessing a second collision with his own eyes. To that end he distributed escort instructions to the captains that were to be stringently followed by all watchstanders. It is unclear to this day whether many key watchstanders aboard USS *Frank E. Evans* read them.

## Near Miss

On the early morning of May 31, early in the exercise, USS *Everett F. Larson* was ahead and to starboard of *Melbourne* when she received orders to assume the rescue destroyer position astern of the carrier. On *Melbourne*'s



# Carrier Escort: Dangerous Duty



LEFT: USS *Decatur* (DD 936) receives serious topside damage off the Virginia Capes after running under the bow of the carrier *Bennington* (CVS 39) on May 6, 1964. The superstructure was crushed, but fortunately only one Sailor was injured. RIGHT: Accompanied by a brand-new HSS-2 Sea King, USS *Decatur* comes into plane guard position behind *Bennington* in May 1961. (National Archives/ Naval History and Heritage Command)



USS *Wasp* (CV 18) in drydock at Bayonne, New Jersey, three weeks after colliding with USS *Hobson* (DMS 26) while she was serving as plane guard on April 26, 1952. The court of inquiry investigation subsequently determined that as *Wasp* turned to recover aircraft returning from a simulated strike mission in darkened ship condition, *Hobson's* commanding officer, who was killed in the collision, misjudged the carrier's range and bearing and, overruling his officer of the deck, turned toward *Wasp* just as *Wasp* turned in *Hobson's* direction. Although *Wasp* took evasive action and tried to turn away 30 seconds before impact, *Hobson* ended up turning right in front of the carrier at the same time and was sliced in half. (Naval History and Heritage Command image.)



During a media briefing at the Pentagon on April 30, 1952, Captain Roy S. Benson points to the position of USS *Wasp* (CV 18) when she collided with USS *Hobson* (DMS 26) four days earlier. (National Archives)



bridge, Captain Stevenson looked in dismay and then horror as the American destroyer first turned to starboard further away from the carrier, then abruptly turned to port as the carrier was overtaking her, almost cutting across *Melbourne's* bow.

"I was watching [*Larson*] as Robbie [*Melbourne's* captain during the *Voyager* incident, John Robertson] was," Stevenson confided to his wife later. "I hit the voice radio, sounded the siren and put the full wheel on. Fortunately so did he. There followed the worst 30 seconds of my life, until he whistled down my starboard side no more than 100 feet off. It was a story so identical to the *Voyager* on, even down to the destroyer turning away first."

After the incident, Stevenson fired a missive at *Larson's* captain, Commander A. W. Rilling, complaining that his destroyer had started the maneuver as if the destroyer was proceeding from a point off the carrier's port bow when she was actually off her starboard bow.

In the wake of *Larson's* near miss with *Melbourne* (which no one on the other destroyers at this time knew about), the screen commander, Capt. Doak, flew to the *Melbourne* to consult with the antisubmarine group commander, Rear Admiral Gordon J. Crabb, RAN, who vetoed the suggestion to keep a destroyer behind the carrier at all times. The reasoning was that it would keep the destroyer from effectively performing its ASW duties when the carrier was not conducting flight operations.

*Evans* subsequently alternated between performing ASW search, using a variable-depth sonar array trailing

behind the destroyer's stern to detect submarines, and changing position to perform plane guard duties successfully, but doing so involved far more challenging maneuvers than when they had performed similar duties for the American carrier *Kearsarge*. Practicing for a scenario in which a submarine was attempting to torpedo *Melbourne*, the task group would frequently change course, in unison, making a zig-zag pattern.

## Zig Zagging in the Dark

The captain of any U.S. Navy warship cannot be on duty 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, nor can a single navigator or helmsman. It is for that reason that on a set schedule, usually every four hours, aboard every ship in the fleet, a new team assumes the watch to perform critical day-to-day duties that would exhaust an individual. The most important watch stander aboard any vessel is the Officer of the Deck (OOD), who is specifically responsible for the safety of the ship. One of the most experienced was Lieutenant Junior Grade Roland T. B. "Tom" Bowler III, a 1967 US Naval Academy graduate who reported aboard the destroyer in the fall of that year.

Since 20:00 local time, when Bowler assumed the watch, *Evans* and the other screening vessels kept station around *Melbourne* while making a complicated series of course changes, or zigzags, designed to throw off the

LEFT: HMAS *Melbourne* with her escorts HMAS *Voyager* (D.04) and HMAS *Vendetta* (D.08) in 1963. (Australian War Memorial)

RIGHT: Approximately one week after she collided with *Voyager*, breaking her in half on February 10, 1964, *Melbourne* appears with extensive damage to her bow after her return to Australia. (Photograph by Jack Davis via his niece, Carolyn Church)



targeting and ranging of a notional enemy submarine. Each vessel had to maintain position in its assigned zone in relationship to the carrier as each turn was made.

In this case, the zigzag plan, called 13 Sierra, dictated that the base course for all vessels began at a course heading of 220 degrees. Imagining that zero degrees is north, 90 degrees is west, 180 degrees is south and 270 is west, a 220-degree heading was slightly south-southwest. Following the plan, the ships of the group would turn every 30 minutes to a new heading that could vary from the base heading by as much as 90 degrees. The zigzag pattern, however, would be suspended during flight operations, upon which time the carrier would orient itself appropriately with the wind, which could also diverge from the base heading by a large margin. The position of the screening ship selected as rescue destroyer within the group would also change at this time, because the rescue destroyer had to post itself astern and to port (behind and slightly to the left) of the carrier.

On the night of June 2, *Evans* was serving as point destroyer, which meant she was in the lead of the carrier, ahead and slightly to starboard, but she had turned further to starboard wide and around the carrier to take the rescue destroyer position three times that evening without incident. *Evans'* captain, Cmdr. McLemore, had last been on the bridge at about 21:00, during the second time the destroyer had to move from point position to rescue destroyer position that evening.

At five minutes to midnight, Bowler was relieved by Lieutenant Junior Grade Ronald Ramsey, the ship's

communications officer. He was the most recently qualified OOD serving aboard *Frank E. Evans*, having earned his qualification just a few days before the beginning of Exercise Sea Spirit.

Before being relieved, Bowler had given Ramsey a thorough rundown of what had transpired during the watch and what he could expect. Bowler informed Ramsey that *Evans* was following a zigzag pattern and showed Ramsey which part of operational order 13 Sierra the group was following at that moment. He outlined the base course and speed *Evans* was following, and that their sonar was "streaming," or trailing behind the destroyer. He also went over other conditions below decks as of that moment, such as what boilers and generators were operating and whether any engineering damages, or "casualties," had been sustained during his watch. Bowler also informed Ramsey that Cmdr. McLemore had retired to his sea cabin.

Ramsey took the watch at midnight. "The ship had been maneuvering quite beyond its normal tactics with the *Kearsarge* during the entire SEATO exercise with Commonwealth ships," Ramsey would write later. "They sharpened us up, you might say. They do a lot of playing around ... and we have seldom if ever gone through zigzag plans and things like this."

At a little before 02:00, Ramsey handed control of the ship to his Junior Officer of the Deck (JOOD), Lieutenant Junior Grade James A. Hopson, a former Navy corpsman

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

# USS FRANK E. EVANS

ENS ALAN H. ARMSTRONG  
LOGAN, UT

SA JAMES R. BAKER  
WIERTON, WV

YN3 ANDREW J. BOTTO  
STOCKTON, CA

RM3 THOMAS B. BOX  
ATHENS, AL

ET3 JAMES F. BRADLEY  
STATEN ISLAND, NY

ENS ROBERT G. BRANDON  
LONG BEACH, CA

SA H. MELVIN BROWN  
DETROIT, MI

BT2 WILLIAM D. BROWN, II  
SONOMA, CA

HMC CHARLES W.  
CANNINGTON  
HELENA, GA

RD2 CHRISTOPHER J.  
CARLSON  
QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

SN MICHAEL K. CLAWSON  
AMERICAN FORK, UT

STGSN DANNY V. CLUTE  
SPOKANE, WA

YN3 JAMES R. CMEYLA  
NORFOLK, VA

ET3 LARRY W. COOL  
CLIFFTOP, WV

SN PATRICK M. CORCORAN  
PHILADELPHIA, PA

SA JOE E. CRAIG  
SACRAMENTO, CA

ET3 JAMES W. DAVIS  
SPRINGFIELD, MO

SA LEON L. DEAL  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

SN JAMES F. DYKES, III  
LANCASTER, OH

SA RAYMOND J. EARLEY  
SHENANDOAH, PA

GM3 STEVEN F. ESPINOSA  
SAN JOSE, CA

SA STEPHEN D. FAGAN  
HUNTINGDON, PA

SA WILLIAM D. FIELDS  
GREAT FALLS, MT

SA ALAN C. FLUMMER  
FORT LEWIS, WA

SA HENRY K. FRYE  
LONG BEACH, CA

SN FRANCIS J. GARCIA  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

STG3 MELVIN H.  
GARDNER, JR.  
PINEHURST, NC

SA DONALD E.  
GEARHART  
LEWISTON, PA

BM3 PATRICK G.  
GLENNON  
PHILADELPHIA, PA

SA KENNETH W. GLINES  
KANSAS CITY, MO

SA JOE L. GONZALEZ  
CLOVIS, NM

STG3 LARRY A. GRACEY  
LIMA, OH

SA DEVERE R. GRISSOM  
LOS ANGELES, CA

SA STEVEN A. GUYER  
ST. JOSEPH, MO

RD3 TERRY L. HENDERSON  
BUFFALO, NY

EMC EDWARD P. HESS  
YOUNGSTOWN, OH

RD2 GARRY B. HODGSON  
CHEWELAH, WA

# ROLL OF HONOR

SA DENNIS R. JOHNSTON  
TERRYTOWN, NY

SA JAMES W. KERR  
TERRYTOWN, NY

BMC WILLIE L. KING  
MEANSVILLE, GA

RD1 GEORGE J. LA LIBERTE  
ROYAL OAK, MI

RM2 RAY P. LEBRUN  
ST. LOUIS, MO

RD1 EUGENE F. LEHMAN  
ST. PAUL, MN

SA ISSAC LYONS, JR.  
OSCEOLA, AR

SA DOUGLAS R. MEISTER  
DETROIT, MI

SA ANDREW M.  
MELENDREZ  
LOS ANGELES, CA

SA FREDRIC C. MEISSIER, JR.  
CUMBERLAND, RI

SA TIMOTHY L. MILLER  
LANSING, MI

ENS JOHN T. NORTON, JR.  
BROOKLYN, NY

ENS GREGORY K. OGAWA  
CLEVELAND, OH

SA MICHAEL A. ORLIKOWSKI  
SPRINGFIELD, MO

IC2 LINDEN R. ORPURT  
PERU, IN

LTJG DWIGHT S. PATTEE  
SALT LAKE CITY, UT

SA CRAIG A. PENNELL  
BAKERSFIELD, CA

SA JEROME PICKETT  
CHICAGO, IL

YN2 EARL F. PRESTON, JR.  
NEWARK, NJ

BT3 LAWRENCE J. REILLY, JR.  
SAN DIEGO, CA

RD3 VICTOR T. RIKAL  
BUTLER, PA

BM2 GARY L. SAGE  
NIOBRARA, NE

RD3 GREGORY A. SAGE  
NIOBRARA, NE

SR KELLY JO SAGE  
NIOBRARA, NE

SR JOHN A. SAUVEY  
PORT CLINTON, OH

BTFN ROBERT J. SEARLE  
GRAND FORKS, ND

BTFA GERALD W.  
SMITH  
CHICAGO, IL

SR THURSTON P. SMITH,  
JR.  
DURHAM, NC

STG2 JOHN R. SPRAY  
SHAWNEE, OK

LTJG JON K. STEVER  
LOS ANGELES, CA

SA THOMAS F. TALLON  
COVINGTON, KY

RD2 RONALD A.  
THEBODEAU  
MANCHESTER, NH

SR JOHN W.  
THOMAS  
DELAVAN, WI

SR JOHN T. TOLAR  
BIG SPRING, TX

QM3 GARY J.  
VIGUE  
DOVER, NH

RD3 CON W. WARNOCK  
JEFFERSON, TX

SA HENRY D. WEST, III  
ORANGEBURG, SC

who had earned a commission and assignment to *Evans* two years before as electronics officer, although by that time he was the destroyer's assistant engineering officer.

Up to this point there does not seem to have been any confusion among the members of the bridge team, but a misunderstanding about basic heading, and a lack of communication between *Evans* and *Melbourne* during the following hour, the same type of misunderstanding and miscommunication which befell the American destroyer *Hobson* in 1952 and the Australian destroyer *Voyager* in 1964, would once again result in tragedy after *Evans* was ordered once again to assume the rescue destroyer position for flight operations.

When Operational Plan 13 Sierra took effect a few hours before, the base, or starting-off course heading was 220, five degrees south of due southwest (225 degrees). *Melbourne* signaled to her screening vessels to resume the zigzag plan at 02:15 in relation to that base course. But at 02:52, *Melbourne* signaled the formation to turn together at heading 185, which was only five degrees west of due south. One minute later, *Melbourne* signaled for the formation to resume the zigzag course once again, centered upon the original base course.

Aboard *Evans*, however, Lt. j.g. Hopson had mistaken the order of 02:15, believing that the new base course was 185 degrees. The 35-degree divergence in base course between *Evans* and the rest of Anti-Submarine Warfare Group A would result in tragedy exactly one hour later.

## "Right Full Rudder"

At 03:07, following Operational Plan 13 Sierra, *Melbourne* and her screening vessels were to come to a heading of 260, 10 degrees south of due west. *Evans*, still proceeding under the mistaken assumption of the base course, turned to heading 225, exactly southwest, drifting to port in relation to *Melbourne* and the other screening vessels from its original location ahead and slightly starboard of the carrier. At 03:15, the zigzag plan called for a turn south to 240. Lt. j.g. Ramsey, believing in error that the base course was 185, thought that *Melbourne's* heading was 205, a full 35 degrees south of her actual heading.

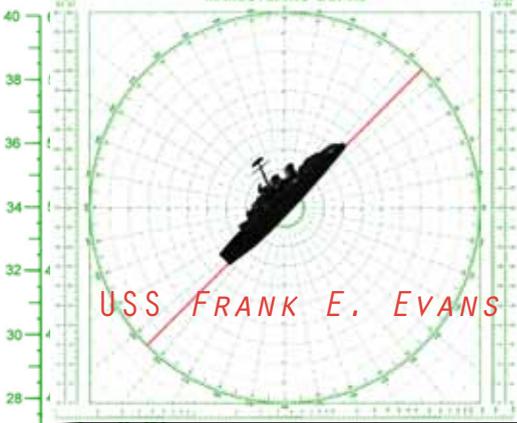


An A-4 Skyhawk approaches the aircraft carrier USS *Midway* (CVA 41) for landing on May 26, after a strike on North Vietnam. The destroyer USS *John R. Craig* (DD 885) follows the carrier as plane guard in case of mishap. Although the role of plane guard or rescue destroyer was common to both the American and Australian navies, miscommunication and a lack of situational awareness contributed to the greatest single mishap to befall both navies during a SEATO exercise. (Photographer's Mate 2nd Class Karl Helberg/ Naval History and Heritage Command photo curator/ Flickr)

*Evans* was already drifting rapidly off course about 3,800 yards ahead of *Melbourne*, crossing her bow and into the adjacent zone of HMNZS *Blackpool* (F.77), when *Evans* received the signal to once again assume rescue destroyer position. "When I checked to see if we were on station before I started helping Mr. Hopson," Ramsey said later, "we had the carrier bearing approximately 044 degrees true at about 3,800 yards." In preparation for the turn, Lt. j.g. Hopson checked the radar repeater on the bridge and found *Melbourne* at bearing 084 and 3,800 yards away. This was 40 degrees off a reading Ramsey had reported a short time earlier. As *Evans* began coming about, Hopson stepped outside the bridge and took the first and only visual reading of his watch. Looking aft, the carrier should have been drifting behind them slightly to the right. Instead, *Melbourne* was heading left in relation to them.

# MANEUVERING BOARD

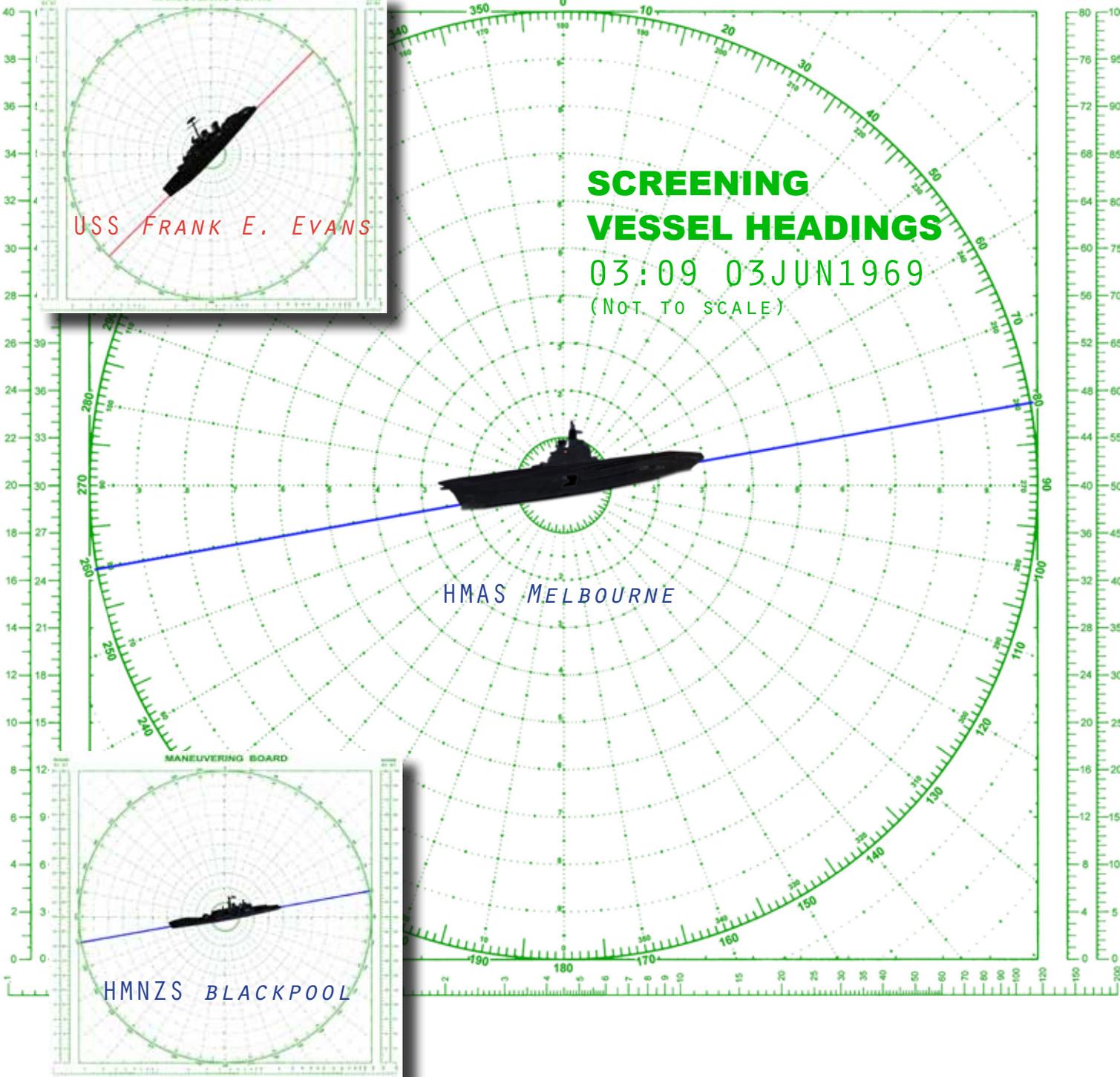
SCALES  
2:1



## SCREENING VESSEL HEADINGS

03:09 03 JUN 1969  
(NOT TO SCALE)

SCALES  
4:1 5:1



Seen here two minutes after HMAS *Melbourne* broadcast to her screening vessels to come to a heading of 260 degrees at 03:07 on June 3, 1969, HMNZS *Blackpool*, the left flank escort, is matching the flagship's course and heading about 3,800 yards off her port bow. Off *Melbourne*'s starboard bow is USS *Frank E. Evans* on a heading of 225 degrees because of a misunderstanding about the base course Anti-Submarine Warfare Group A was following. *Evans*' bridge team believed that they were maintaining their station as right flank escort, but they were drifting ahead and across *Melbourne*'s bow. Only three minutes after *Evans* was ordered to the rescue destroyer position at approximately 03:10, they would find themselves on a collision course with the flagship. (Illustration by M.C. Farrington with design elements by Don Darcy)

“The ships were at darken ship and all I could see of the *Melbourne* was a shadow,” recalled Hopson. “I could see no aspect at all. I then told Mr. Ramsey that she was drifting left and I applied 5 degrees left rudder.” After checking bearing and range of the carrier, Hopson testified later, “I then informed Mr. Ramsey that my intention was to come around to the right and pass down the starboard [right] side of the *Melbourne* and fall in astern of her at 1,000 yards . . . . At this time I would have been on her starboard bow.”

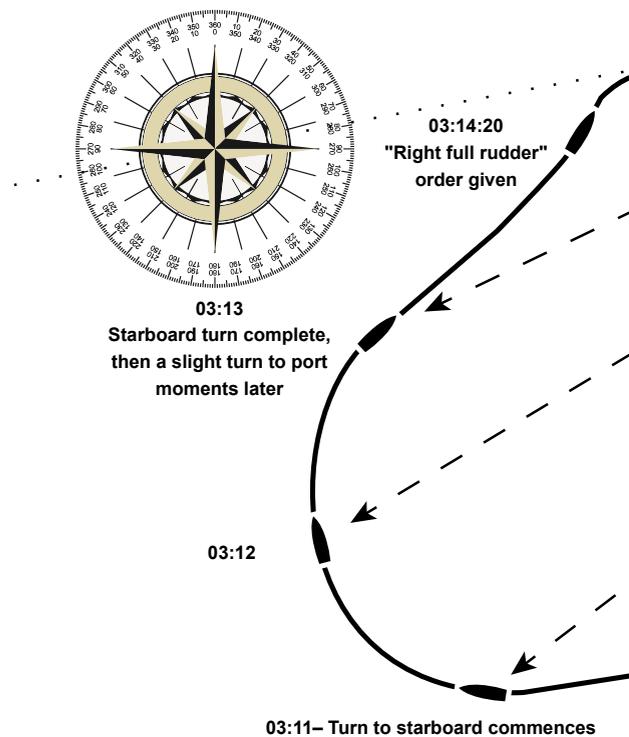
If *Evans* had been off *Melbourne*’s starboard bow at the beginning of the maneuver, coming about to starboard and slowing down to let the carrier pass safely by before executing another starboard turn to take the rescue destroyer position would have been the appropriate course of action. Because the divergence in heading of the last half-hour had actually placed *Evans* ahead and to port, *Evans* would be turning into the path of the carrier.

Although there was disagreement between *Evans*’ OOD, Ramsey, and JOOD, Hopson, about just where they were in relation to *Melbourne* as well as the relative courses of the two vessels, two other officers whose directions might have been helpful were not consulted to help clear up the confusion. One was Ensign Robert G. Brandon down below amidships in the destroyer’s Combat Information Center (CIC), which collected actionable information from *Evans*’ sonar as well as her air and surface search radars.

Standing Night Orders were left by each captain to the watchstanders on the bridge of each U.S. Navy vessel. One of the orders McLemore left to the *Evans* bridge team was that “. . . a continuous and accurate exchange of appropriate information between the bridge and CIC is essential to the operation and safety of the ship.”

Another possible help would have been the captain himself, Cmdr. McLemore.

Assuming the position aft as rescue destroyer from the anti-submarine screen forward of the carrier was a textbook change in formation, yet Ramsey, the OOD, did not wake the captain. He did not believe that such a change in station was required in the captain’s night orders, yet the orders found later revealed that the captain had to be alerted “when any changes are made to the formation of which *Frank E. Evans* is a part.” In Ramsey’s way of thinking about the night orders, the frequent changes in direction mandated by the zigzag plan did not require the alerting of the captain, so a change in

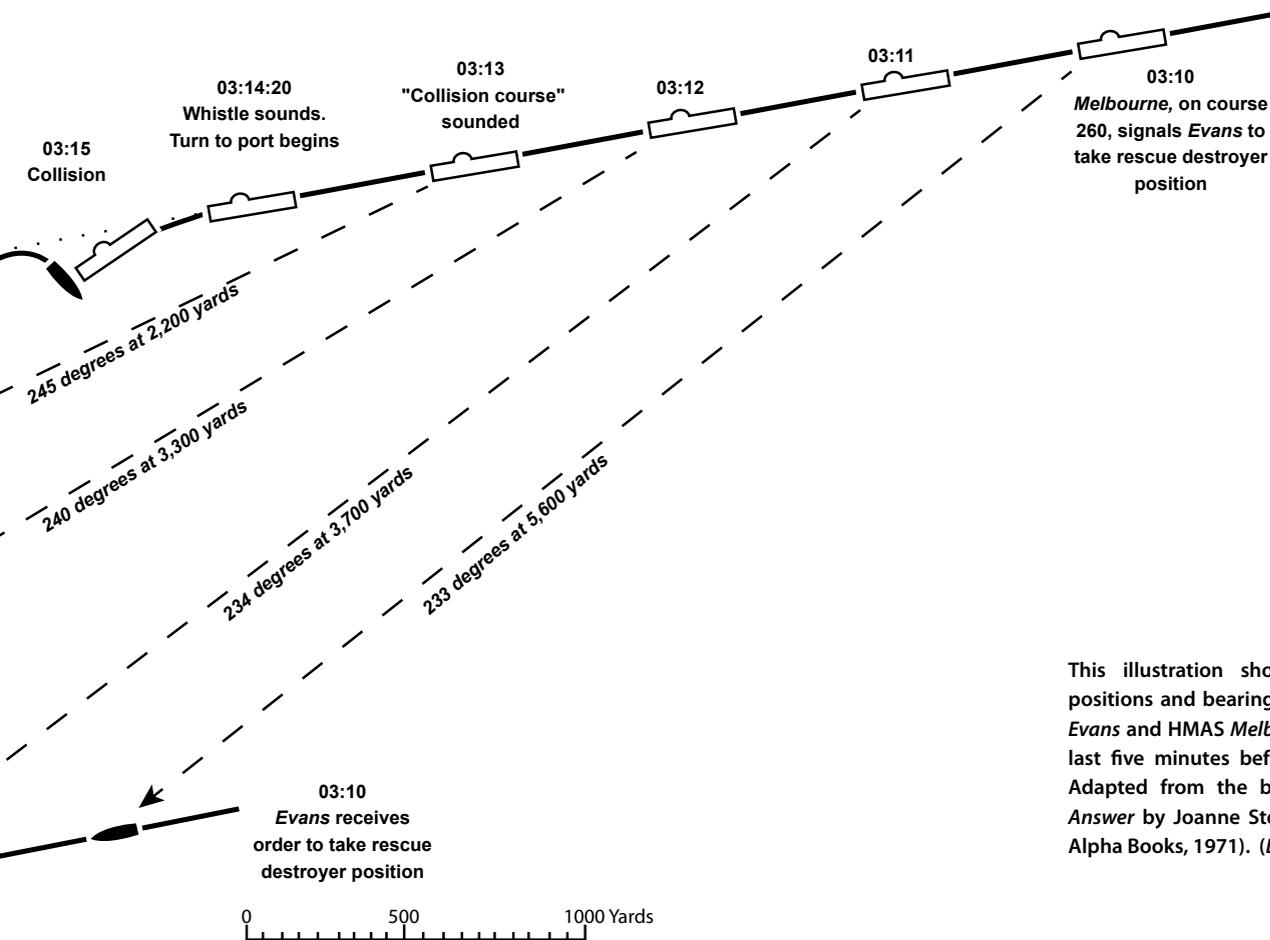


station to assume duties as plane guard did not require such a drastic measure either.

At this critical juncture, *Evans*’ OOD, Ramsey, believed that *Melbourne* was heading south at course 160 when, in reality, she was heading south at 260. *Evans*’ JOOD, Hopson, even disagreed with that reading, believing that she was on a heading of 205. Despite both officers being wrong about where they were in relation to *Melbourne*, neither felt the need to call the CIC watch officer or send the messenger of the watch to wake the captain.

Meanwhile, *Evans* came around to starboard, which from above would look like the destroyer was making a giant fishhook a mile in circumference. But instead of *Melbourne* moving past *Evans* at a safe distance into the middle of the fishhook’s arc (as the officers on the bridge assumed), *Evans* came around on a northeast heading to find *Melbourne*’s giant dark outline dead ahead.

Suddenly, the carrier’s flight deck lights flashed on. To the bewildered Hopson, this meant that flight operations were already commencing before he or Ramsey had



This illustration shows the relative positions and bearings of USS *Frank E. Evans* and HMAS *Melbourne* during the last five minutes before the collision. Adapted from the book, *No Case to Answer* by Joanne Stevenson (Sydney: Alpha Books, 1971). (Don Darcy)

Ramsey recalled:

*She looked like she had a steady course and was about 1,800 yards. And this was the time that we heard that she was coming left, or just before this, and she had not come left. So . . . I recommended to Mr. Hopson that we put 10 degrees rudder to open range because she didn't look like she was coming around right away. Mr. Hopson gave the helmsman left 10 degrees rudder and the helmsman answered and we started moving left to open range. So far up to this point it seemed like a normal approach.*

But to those on *Melbourne's* bridge, it was already apparent that disaster was in the offing. Ramsey's slight course change was not enough to avoid a collision. At best it would be a glancing blow that would waylay the destroyer and possibly even capsize it.

Moments later, it suddenly dawned upon Ramsey that the carrier was indeed coming right at them. Although he had not gotten a positive visual bearing, he ordered right full rudder. It was a rash but decisive move designed to take *Evans* out of the rapidly oncoming carrier's way at the last second.

confirmed that *Evans* had taken up the rescue destroyer position. More confusingly, although *Melbourne's* flight deck lights were on, her navigation lights were not and one couldn't be absolutely sure whether they had already reached rescue destroyer position with the carrier heading away from them, or, terrifyingly, the carrier was heading straight at them at a combined speed of 38 knots. Hopson blurted to Ramsey and the rest of the bridge crew, "I don't get it."

Before *Evans* began executing her turn, the officer of the deck aboard *Melbourne*, Lieutenant Russell Lamb, RAN, radioed *Evans* that they were on a 260-degree heading, but it was sent in code. Ramsey later testified that he believed the transmission said that the carrier was coming to course 160.

Unlike the coded transmissions they had been receiving from the carrier, *Melbourne* now broadcast in plain language to *Evans* that she was on a collision course. In response, the destroyer only made a slight 10-degree shift to port.

According to Ramsey:

*We received a transmission from the Melbourne, quote, you are on a collision course, unquote. By this time all the lights were on, white lights on the deck and navigation. We appeared to be on her port bow, about 45 to 50 degrees off her port bow. I could see her port running light quite clearly. When I received this transmission, I interpreted it to mean that she was steady on her course. I told Mr. Hopson, she had said that we were on a collision course. Mr. Hopson appeared to panic a little bit. He yelled, "She is on a collision course, but I don't understand..." I yelled to the helmsman, "Right full rudder." And the time left between when we heard "You are on a collision course," and I yelled, "Right full rudder," was about 15 seconds.*

In Hopson's recollection:

*At this time over the radio telephone circuit on the bridge, I heard from the Melbourne, 'You are on a collision course.' I turned and Mr. Ramsey. Mr. Ramsey looked up and ordered right full rudder. At that time I turned and looked again at the Melbourne and she was drifting rapidly left across our bow. She had bright white lights on her flight deck, a masthead and range light; well her navigational lights were on, but due to the number of lights, we still couldn't tell what aspect we were seeing.*

In any event, Ramsey couldn't have known that at the same moment he was ordering right full rudder, *Melbourne* had also decided to take evasive action because of a lack of response from *Evans* to their warning messages. Captain Stevenson ordered 30 degrees to port, tantamount to left full rudder.

Both ships turned simultaneously, but even more towards each other, at 03:14. If *Evans* had turned to port or *Melbourne* to starboard, there might still have been contact and possibly an international incident would have had to be smoothed over. But it might not have been a mortal threat to *Evans* and her crew. As it happened, the two ships could not have positioned themselves in a more devastating way: a 90-degree angle.



An artist's depiction of the collision. (Frank E. Evans Association)

“[*Melbourne*'s] next and last transmission,” recalled Ramsey, “was ‘My rudder is hard left.’ I can’t understand this. I stood frozen in the center of the bridge . . . Mr. Hopson yelled out several times, ‘she is going to hit us. She is going to hit us.’”

Both officers stood motionless for a moment, failing to grasp what had transpired in the last ten minutes, not to mention what they should do in the next ten seconds. A collision was imminent, yet they did not sound the collision alarm. Cmdr. McLemore was still asleep, as were two-thirds of his crew. The last order Ramsey belted out as they presented their broadside to the *Melbourne*'s looming bow was, “Engines, all back full!”

*Evans*' machinist's mates on duty in the engineering spaces struggled to comply with the order, but before they could do anything, *Melbourne*'s bow struck the center of her port side, at the location where the only other officers who might have known where *Melbourne* was in relation to *Evans*, those in her Combat Information Center (CIC), were on duty. Despite this, there was no communication between the bridge and CIC during the critical hour leading up to the collision, and there would be no one left alive from the CIC afterward to testify as to why.

*Melbourne*'s collision alarm sounded during the last few seconds before impact at 03:15, rousting a few of *Evans*' crew from their racks before the rest were violently tossed onto the deck or against the bulkheads. Aboard *Melbourne*, Capt. Stevenson had also ordered full stop to which his engineers were struggling to comply, but it was too late.



A rare photograph showing survivors in the aft section of *Frank E. Evans* gathering on the destroyer's fantail shortly after the collision. (Royal Australian Navy, Navy Heritage Collection 04102)

## Like Cutting Butter

Under the bow of and precisely perpendicular to *Melbourne*, USS *Frank E. Evans* twisted violently to starboard, almost capsizing under the carrier's 22,000 tons of momentum. With a shudder, the 3,200-ton destroyer broke in two. Watching from *Melbourne*'s flag bridge, the fleet communications officer, Lieutenant Commander Richard Arundel, later described watching his ship go through *Evans* "almost as though you were cutting butter." Aboard *Evans*, Lt. j.g. Bowler, who Ramsey had relieved as OOD at midnight, remembered it sounding like "50 automobile accidents happening at once."

*Evans*' forward half, which contained 10 officers and 101 enlisted crewmen at the moment of impact, remained with a heavy list to starboard as it drifted past *Melbourne*'s port side, while the aft end began to right itself while drifting along the carrier's starboard side. Lt. Cmdr. George McMichael, *Evans*' executive officer, was thrown violently from his bed and was able to escape his stateroom. "The first thing that caught my eye and I think, well—it captured my attention and I couldn't look away for a matter of several seconds—was the sight of the mast lying flat in the water. The mast appeared to be intact and I just looked at it and said, 'Oh, my God!'"

Without thinking, *Melbourne*'s diving officer, Lieutenant Robert Burns, jumped from the flight deck

some 45 feet above into the black water to save comrades he couldn't yet see. Despite being accidentally struck in the head by an Australian sailor who had also jumped into the water, Burns swam over 200 yards to save three *Evans* survivors. Leading Seaman Peter John Varley coxswained *Melbourne*'s port side cutter while members of his boat crew also dived into the water, ultimately bringing 29 *Evans* survivors back to the carrier.

Overhead, two of *Melbourne*'s Westland Wessex helicopters which had been looking for submarines until the collision used their landing lights to look for Sailors who had been thrown overboard while others equipped with rescue winches were being rushed to the flight deck. As they took off, "Some aircrew were still wearing their pyjamas[sic] under flying overalls," wrote a reporter for the *Royal Australian Navy News*.

Cmdr. McLemore, dazed, bloodied, bruised, and naked, had emerged from a ragged hole in his at-sea cabin and landed in the water, he organized the survivors and helped them gather on a larger piece of the debris. In the confusion of the moment the commander believed his ship had actually been torpedoed and that he and his men were the only ones left.

It became clear to him moments later that this had been no act of war. Motor whaleboats from *Melbourne* began scooping up the survivors and searchlights from the carrier's ready choppers were scanning the water.

## Helmsmen & Heroes

Decisions made by *Evans*' OOD and JOOD over the last hour had played themselves out to a calamitous conclusion. Manning the helm during that time was Seaman Robert Petty, standing as Boatswain's Mate of the Watch (BMOW). He had complied with every order he had been given at the wheel and had even jumped into action during the last seconds before impact when the lee helmsman failed to react to Ramsey's last order to place the engines into full reverse. Upon impact, the 19-year-old had been thrown starboard through the air off the bridge into the sea.

Petty smashed his head against floating debris when he landed. When he regained his senses, he thought he heard a voice. The voice said, "The hatch. There. Go." Petty mustered the strength to clamber up on the overturned side of *Evans*' forward section, un-dogging a hatch that led down to the messdeck and pulling it upward while a group of frightened Sailors who had been asleep in their racks below only moments before pushed upward. Sixteen disoriented and injured Sailors emerged.

For those still down below in the capsizing forward section, the overhead and decks (the ceiling and floors) were now the bulkheads (walls), the lights were out and the compartments were rapidly filling up with water. Chief Hospital Corpsman Charles Cannington had the presence of mind to retrieve his penlight from his locker and give it to the first man out of the chief petty officer berthing. Six men made it out and to safety using that penlight, but its owner did not.

One of the chiefs to make it out was Senior Chief Gunner's Mate Lawrence Reilly, *Evans*' master-at-arms. Although he was alive, his thoughts quickly flew towards another Lawrence Reilly—his son. Many fathers among the crew understandably thought of their children at home, but Senior Chief Reilly and his son shared the same home: USS *Frank E. Evans*. The younger Reilly had joined the Navy only two years before and served as a Boiler Tender 3rd Class in the destroyer's Engineering Division.

The forward section continued to capsize, as men scrambled out through steel hatches that had now to be pushed upwards instead of outwards, and at 03:18, just

under 90 seconds after the collision, the bow section sank so suddenly that the last few men to make it clear were sucked back under by the whirlpool left by the sunken section.

By the time Senior Chief Reilly made it to *Melbourne*'s flight deck where survivors from *Evans*' forward section were gathering, he knew the aft section of his ship had been lashed to the starboard side of the carrier to give every surviving Sailor aboard the chance to escape before it too sank. His son's berthing area was in that section, and for a moment, he felt a hint of relief. That is, until a fellow chief broke the news that the night before, the watchbill had changed and that Larry Jr. had been on watch in the forward fireroom, below the Combat Information Center. It was exactly where *Melbourne*'s bow had smashed into *Evans* and broken her in two.

Boiler Technician 3rd Class Reilly, along with 72 other shipmates in the forward section of the *Frank E. Evans*, were on their way to a final resting place 1,100 fathoms below.

Three of those shipmates were also brothers: Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class Gary Sage, Radarman 3rd Class Kelly Sage, and Seaman Apprentice Kelly Sage, who had all grown up on the same farm in Niobrara, Nebraska. Also among the victims was Yeoman 3rd Class James R. Cmeyla, who was born in Norfolk, Virginia, when his father Richard was stationed there. Another American Sailor lost in the forward section that morning was Radioman 2nd Class Christopher J. Carlson, who had been born 23 years before in Queensland, Australia.

Only one dead Sailor was pulled from the water, Seaman Apprentice Kenneth Glines, who had been standing watch as the port bridge wing lookout.

The Board of Investigation convened at Subic, held hearings in open and closed sessions over 20 days, viewed *Melbourne*, *Frank E. Evans*' stern section, and the bow section of one of the destroyer's sister ships.

The Board concluded: "Inasmuch as EVANS had the duty to remain clear of MELBOURNE in taking station in column astern of her, and she did not do so, primary responsibility for the collision rests upon EVANS." The board members found a number of officers guilty of negligence, and so lieutenants Ramsey and Hobson, the OOD and JOOD, pleaded guilty. Cmdr. McLemore was also found guilty at his subsequent court-martial. Capt. Stevenson of HMAS *Melbourne* was acquitted.



On the morning of June 3, 1969, SH-3 helicopters from USS *Kearsarge* (CVS 33) join search and rescue operations over the stern section of USS *Frank E. Evans* (DD 754), as USS *Everett F. Larson* (DD 830) stands ready to offer assistance (at right). A Commonwealth frigate, probably HMS *Cleopatra* (F.28) is also present. *Frank E. Evans* was cut in two in a collision with the Australian aircraft carrier *Melbourne* during Southeast Asian Treaty Organization exercises in the South China Sea. She was later towed to Naval Station Subic Bay, Philippines. After her decommissioning there on July 1, 1969, the destroyer's remains were sunk that October. (Naval History and Heritage Command image NH 98649)

## Conclusion

After several fractious years among its heterogeneous members, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization disbanded in 1977, and the Cold War, its *raison d'être*, ostensibly came to an end after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. After a two-decade interlude, however, the so-called “Pivot to Asia” during the administration of President Barack Obama and the concomitant militarization of the South China Sea by the People’s Republic of China makes the possibility of peer-to-peer conflict in the Pacific a greater possibility than at any time since the Cold War. This makes the subject of safely conducting joint, bilateral, and multilateral naval exercises a timely one.

While combat has sporadically afforded historians some of the most dramatic chapters of the U.S. Navy’s long story, preparing for combat has also provided

perilous passages. Common to them both has been the valor, bravery, and service before self practiced by the Sailors when faced with peril upon the sea. It is with this in mind that we remember the 74 lost in the collision between HMAS *Melbourne* and USS *Frank E. Evans*, as well as the American and Australian compatriots who swiftly came to the aid of those who survived.

“In three minutes they were gone, like a bright light flickering out to black,” wrote journalist Louise Esola in her 2014 book, *American Boys*, about the 74 *Evans* Sailors who perished after the calamity that shattered the calm that fateful morning 51 years ago.

“The ships in the vicinity held memorial services at sunset on June 3, 1969, closing a day that for many would live on forever,” Esola continued. “The haunting echo of ‘Taps,’ its first line ‘day is done,’ could be heard for miles in hearts and minds. It was one sunset they’d never forget.”



# BOOK REVIEW

BY A.J. ORLIKOFF

HAMPTON ROADS NAVAL MUSEUM EDUCATOR

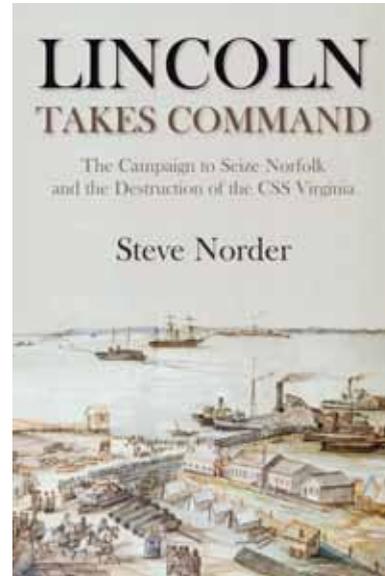
## *Lincoln Takes Command: The Campaign to Seize Norfolk and the Destruction of the CSS Virginia*

By Steve Norder (El Dorado Hills, CA, Savas Beatie, 2019)

Studies, books, and monographs on the Civil War are almost as legion as the millions who fought in the deadliest war in American history. The historiography of the Civil War is filled with impressive and landmark studies of influential individuals, decisive battles, and groups of soldiers and civilians. On the surface, it might appear that there is nothing new to study or write about the Civil War without contrivance. Yet Steve Norder, in *Lincoln Takes Command: The Campaign to Seize Norfolk and the Destruction of the CSS Virginia*, proves that there remain many stories worth telling about one of America's seminal conflicts. *Lincoln Takes Command* provides an in-depth examination of President Lincoln's Norfolk campaign in May of 1862 that is a worthy, rich, and welcome addition to the historiography on the American Civil War.

*Lincoln Takes Command* centers upon the military operations conducted by the Union in Hampton Roads that led to the capture of Norfolk in May 1862. As the title suggests, Norder focuses on Abraham Lincoln as the focal point of this invasion, arguing that it was the president's strategic vision and acumen that led to the capture of Norfolk and the critically important Gosport Navy Yard. In doing so, Norder provides an in-depth moment-by-moment breakdown of the various events, individuals, and actions on both the Union and Confederate sides that occurred while Lincoln was in Hampton Roads. Norder argues convincingly that without Lincoln's direct intervention in the military operations in the area, insisting that Norfolk should be taken and its defenses bombarded as soon as possible, Norfolk would not have been taken in the week of May 5, 1862.

This detailed examination of Lincoln's actions also provides an understanding of his leadership abilities and in particular his ability to make decisive and quick decisions. For example, Norder illustrated how Lincoln advocated for striking Norfolk the very night he arrived in Hampton Roads and even personally led the



reconnaissance mission for a landing location, the only time in American history a sitting president personally reconnoitered a hostile shore. Norder also provides glimpses into the Lincoln's character where appropriate, such as when he emotionally breaks down over the death of his son or provides some of his trademark humorous anecdotes over dinner at Fort Monroe. Indeed, Norder paints an accurate portrait of Lincoln as both a strategist and a man, providing a much-needed human element to the moment-by-moment minutiae of military operations.

Norder structured *Lincoln Takes Command* in a chronological day-by-day journalistic style that meticulously chronicled the various military operations in Hampton Roads, with all but two of the eight main chapters covering one day between May 5 and May 12 of 1862. Norder focused on Lincoln and his perspective while still providing valuable context outside the President's point of view where necessary. Norder included several supplementary chapters as well as an extensive appendix to broach topics outside of the narrative focus. For the most part, the unique narrative structure employed by Norder works exceptionally well as the narrative framework grounds the story of Lincoln's time in Hampton Roads in the moment-to-moment pace in which he experienced it. This aspect of Norder's work stands as particularly enlightening and informative



# BOOK REVIEW

BY ZACHARY SMYERS

HRNM EDUCATOR

## *The U.S. Invasion of Grenada: Legacy of a Flawed Victory*

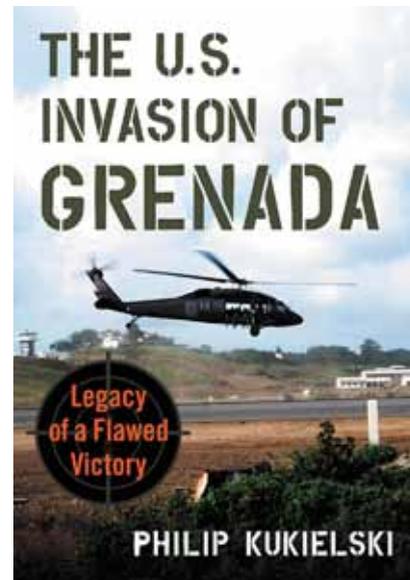
By Philip Kukielski (Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Company, 2019)

With the exception of Clint Eastwood's 1986 film, *Heartbreak Ridge*, not much has been said about the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983. Similar to Eastwood's film, which begins during the Korean War in 1950, the operation in Grenada has become the "Korean War" of the 1980s for the simple fact that it has been forgotten. Comparisons can be made between the two. The Korean War lasted three years, while the fighting in Grenada lasted three days. At the time of the Korean War, most Americans couldn't find Korea on a map. The same could be said regarding Americans' knowledge about the location of Grenada three decades later.

In his book, author Philip Kukielski sheds new light on this forgotten episode of American military history. He provides good insight regarding why Grenada was invaded in the first place. At the time, many Americans thought Lebanon would be targeted after attacks on the U.S. embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut killed over 250 Americans that year. He chronicles the hasty formation of the invasion force as well as the interservice rivalries, incompatibilities, and simple mistakes made during the operation that caused many casualties in the field.

The author's principal argument is made quite clear in the book's preface: "Grenada was a flawed victory that, in the long run, was more noteworthy for the shortcomings it exposed than for the battles that were won against a mismatched adversary." Kukielski supports his contention well throughout the course of the book.

*The U.S. Invasion of Grenada* is broken down into a chronological narrative, beginning with the formation of the Navy task force and the Army and Special Operations units involved, to when the order to go from President Ronald Reagan was given. After the mission begins, Kukielski tracks the individual units and their progress as they carry out their objectives. He makes it very clear how the mission itself was flawed before it even started due to limited intelligence, short notice planning, and



the emphasis on maintaining strict secrecy. Moreover, once the units were actually operating on Grenada, they were forced to think outside the box due to the constantly changing battle plan.

Kukielski uses a wide variety of primary sources such as after action reports and military monographs to support his argument. The sources he chose are effective in presenting the military, political, and media aspects. He presents a clear picture of the difficulties faced by the various unit commanders operating on the ground, particularly those caused by the lack of communication between the various service branches. On the political side, he delves into the challenges faced by the Reagan administration to justify the legality of the invasion, maintaining relations with nations that didn't support it, and how it presented the invasion to the American public. Finally, the reporters who initially leaked details about the pending operation in Grenada itself are for the most part left out until the very end. The operation's shortcomings led to a series of reforms, notably the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, which changed the tenure of personnel serving on the Joint Chiefs of Staff and created an entire new command specifically for US Special Operations. New guidelines regarding the media and how to cover the US military during large scale



This chewed-up Marine CH-46 Sea Knight became an iconic image of the invasion, but was much misinterpreted. The original caption for this photo incorrectly states this helicopter was shot down by antiaircraft fire. In fact, it was damaged in a contested landing to rescue American medical students. The helicopter was disabled and abandoned when a rotor blade came in contact with a palm tree. The damage to the nose was caused later when an Air Force AC-130 was ordered to fire on the wreck to prevent classified components from falling into enemy hands. (Photograph by Specialist Long, U.S. Army, via Wikimedia Commons)

operations also came about in the wake of Operation Urgent Fury.

Despite his extensive use of declassified documents and official histories, *The U.S. Invasion of Grenada* does not overburden the reader with unnecessary military jargon or doctrine. Kukielski's writing style is very straightforward, something one might expect from a veteran journalist who served as a managing editor at the *Providence (Rhode Island) Journal* for the better part of two decades. His reportage also brought stories to light that you would probably never see in an official report, such as what happened when Vice Admiral Joseph Metcalf, commander of the 2nd Fleet and overall commander of Operation Urgent Fury, tried to bring back 24 captured Kalashnikov assault rifles through Naval Air Station Norfolk to hand out as gifts.

With that being said, he does make some mistakes with some technical details. When writing about the invasion force for the operation in the first chapter, he describes "an 11-ship task force" (page 11). This figure is contradicted by a Naval History and Heritage Command account of the operation, which lists 22 ships, including two submarines. Also, he describes how A-6 Intruders "made bombing and gun runs" (page 119), which is not possible since the A-6 Intruder does not have a gun. Another minor mistake came from referring to a Marine Corps CH-46 helicopter, which has one designated crew chief, as having two crew chiefs (pages 97-98).

*The U.S. Invasion of Grenada* is not only a story about the invasion, but about the island, its people and the political history that presaged the invasion, something Kukielski gleaned firsthand by conducting extensive interviews with Grenadians on several trips he made to the island. This rich backstory might have been better placed nearer the beginning rather than in chapter 11 because it fully explains why the United States was eventually inclined to invade. I found the final chapter, which was something of a coda to the entire Reagan presidency, complete with details about the Iran/Contra affair, to be a bit long-winded.

Overall, I found Kukielski's book to be a worthwhile examination of an overlooked event in US military history with far-reaching implications. I did appreciate the straightforward approach to his writing. A bonus is that as a journalist, he doesn't harbor a particular bias towards one military branch over another. This gave the book an equal balance. It would be a welcome edition to the library of those who appreciate military history, doctrine, and organizational transformation, as well as those who seek to understand the political climate of the world during the Cold War.



**BACK COVER:** USS *Frank E. Evans* (DD 754) takes on fuel from the carrier USS *Princeton* (CVA 37) somewhere in the Pacific in 1953. (Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Douglas Price)



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