

Harold John Bridges

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY RESERVE

Harold John Bridges RANR Service Number F 4733 DOB 15/04/1925

Place of birth: Esperance WA.

Education: Esperance State School Standard 8, Head Master Edward Ingles

First job: Esperance Bakery then junior worker Western Australian Government Railways Collie & Kalgoorlie.

Joined Navy in Fremantle at the age of 17 in 1942, travelled by train to Victoria to do basic training at HMAS Cerberus, Crib Point, the major training depot in Australia.

Graduated as seaman and sent to HMAS Melville Darwin via HMAS Torrens Port Adelaide, the journey to Darwin those days for service personnel was by train Adelaide to Port Augusta, the old Ghan train from Port Augusta to Alice Springs then thirty six service men and their kits were loaded on the back of an open semi-trailer truck for the trip over a dirt road to the railhead at Mataranka, this part of the trip took three days so there were overnight staging camps for meals and sleeping, the army staff at these overnight camps ran plenty of gambling games for the weary travellers, there were no lights for the camps but plenty for the crown and anchor and two-up, the remainder of the journey was by a pretty ancient train from Mataranka to Darwin, I arrived in Darwin 27/03/1943 and had my eighteen birthday in Darwin on 15/04/1943.

The bases I was in during my navy service were HMAS Melville Darwin, Cerberus Melbourne, Leeuwin Fremantle, Torrens Port Adelaide.

During my time in Darwin I was for some time seconded to Fairmile ML 815 which was the second one of this type of craft to serve in this area of operations. The crew of one of these ships consisted of 18, there were 14 men and 4 officers, the seamen did all the cooking for the whole ships company and as some of them had never boiled water before there was some very awful meals dished up.

I also took part in submarine entrance to harbour escorts, anti-submarine patrols, air sea rescues, was coxswain of duty boats, assisting the berthing of cargo ships and at times was required to do munitions magazines patrols and floating dock ship maintenance.

These wartime experiences really changed my life as you grow up very quickly, I was in the navy at 17 and out just before I was 21, I appreciated the comradeship that existed during my time in the navy, the discipline was harsh in the large establishments but more relaxed in the small ships, all in all I do not regret the time served as I was lucky and came out unscathed.

The war ended when I had returned to Fremantle and I was stationed at Leeuwin depot in the Guard and took part in the victory parade. I was not really that much affected by my homecoming as apart from being a few years

older and more responsible, the job I had before going away was there for me and I started again from there.

My girlfriend whom I had been going with before leaving Collie returned home from service with the WAAAF, we became an item and have now been married for 56 years.