



The HMALST 3501, later named HMAS *Labuan*, was built in Canada in 1943. The 2300 tonne naval vessel served in World War II before joining the Australian Navy. Her first ANARE voyage was to Heard Island, delivering Australia's first winter contingent on 11 December 1947. Far from comfortable, when heading into a sea she was described as being like a caterpillar in motion, rippling from bow to stern. The noise was deafening, with bulkheads buckling in and out with loud cracks, while the rivets creaked and groaned. On 16 December 1948 the ship was renamed HMAS *Labuan* and painted yellow for Antarctic service. She completed seven voyages with ANARE before being withdrawn from service after suffering severe damage when returning from Heard Island in 1951.

remove one and roll it down to the starboard waste for use in the engine room. I worked alone, while the seamen worked in teams. Their work was mostly on the dangerous fore deck and most of my time was spent on the quarter deck.

When we arrived in Atlas Cove the seamen lashed about 15 44-gallon drums to a cargo net and lowered it over the side, from where it was to be towed ashore. The sea was calm but the waves were rising and falling 15 or 20 feet up the side of the ship. When the sea rose the drums fell apart and on the way down they crashed together and scraped against the side of the ship.

The First Lieutenant was in charge and he turned to my mate and me and said, 'Right-o lads, down you go'. He wanted us to climb down the scaling net and fix the problem. Of course we could have been killed, so we hesitated. He then turned to the Petty Officer and said, 'Call the Master at Arms. I will charge these men with mutiny'.

Just inside the mess deck entrance there was a large notice called *Kings Rules and Admiralty Instructions*. This was a list of crimes and punishments that read something like this:

'Desertion: Death or such other punishment as is hear and after mentioned.

'Cowardice: Death or such other punishment as is hear and after mentioned.

'Sodomy: Death etc..'

And there it was, leaping off the page... **'Mutiny:** Death or such other punishment as is here and after mentioned'.

Fortunately, when we got below deck the Master at Arms said we would not hear any more about the incident. But I glanced at that notice every time I passed it for the next week.

Royal Australian Navy ex-Stoker, Neil (Tim) Tyler, was a crew member on the first Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition (ANARE) to Heard Island in 1947, when Australia's first scientific research station was constructed at Atlas Cove. Here he reminisces about the journey to claim Heard Island for Australia.

I was born at the seaside town of Rye, on the Mornington Peninsula, where I learnt about the sea. I left home when I was 14 to become a farm labourer in Gippsland and worked seven days a week from 5:30 am to 7:30 pm with time off on Sunday between milking. I believed then that men earned their living that way, so was satisfied with my lot. When I did leave it was because I could not take the cold Gippsland winters any more. It is ironic that within a few months I would be on my way to the Antarctic.

I enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) for two years and was nearly three years at sea. This short time influenced much of my life thereafter. Even in my wedding photo I was standing at attention. After all this time I still march rather than walk, and pull my shoulders back when standing in a group.

After recruit training I was sent to Sydney to join HMALST 3501 (HMAS *Labuan*). I and the rest of the crew lived in Landing Ship Tank 3008 and crossed the gang plank each morning to work on our own vessel. Everything was new to me. Sydney was wonderful and Sunday anchored in the harbour was a delight.

I did not realise how different life on a ship could be until we sailed through Port Phillip Heads at the start of our journey to Fremantle. As we sailed down one of the huge rollers that race through the Heads, I found myself propelled across the quarter deck and straight into the Chief Stoker's arms. He said, 'I didn't know you cared', or words to that effect. Not a good start to my life at sea.

Our adventure began in 1947 when I was 18. Our captain (Lieutenant Commander Dixon RANR) came aboard and told us of our mission. We were to claim Heard Island for Australia and establish a research station there. The ship's complement was to be 112 crew and 14 scientists.

I was one of the few lucky people on board as I was never sea sick. However, as Upper Deck Stoker I was not spared other misfortunes that awaited us. I did not keep watches, but had to deal with all the material on the upper deck that was connected to the engine room. There were a lot of drums held with chains which I had to keep secure, and from time to time

When the ship beached at Atlas Cove, all off-duty men were told to report to the bow doors. When I got there I was given a pair of waders that came to about eight inches below my arm pits. A bulldozer had constructed a path from the ramp to the beach to unload stores and there was a line of men either side of the path passing light boxes hand-to-hand to people waiting on the beach. Suddenly the officer in charge said, 'Jump in there lad'. He was pointing to a space in the line. I did as I was told and quickly found the reason nobody stood there...it was a hole. I went up to the top of my waders in the water and had to be pulled out.

Later, I was sent ashore with a work party to recover metal objects from a pontoon which had sunk and was breaking up on the beach. For a few shillings worth of cleats and turnbuckles we had to paddle around in water up to our knees and take our mittens off to use the tools.

Adventure on the high seas

The Petty Officer saw something further down the beach and sent me to see what it was. I was nearly there when I glanced up at Big Ben. Something quite fascinating was happening. There was a fluffy collar around the top of the mountain which was growing larger and rolling downwards, looking like a smoke ring. Suddenly the Petty Officer yelled 'Run!'

As I ran I saw the rest of the party disappear into the hut [Admiralty Hut, built c1927] and then the storm hit me. The sleet, like hail and beach sand, was flying horizontally towards me and I had to cover my face with my mittens. It was a desperate moment, but a few yards from the station the sleet eased and I saw someone holding the door open for me. Eight of us made it to the hut while the rest climbed into the Walrus aircraft that was tied down on the beach. They must have spent a dreadful night. The plane was blown to bits by the storm the next day.

Main picture: Effective government administration and control of Heard Island and the McDonald Islands was transferred from the United Kingdom to the Australian Government on 26 December 1947 at the commencement of the first Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition to Heard Island. A formal declaration took place at Atlas Cove. The transfer was confirmed by an exchange of letters between the two governments on 19 December 1950.

Just before heading home the Captain told us that the fuel oil was too thick to pump because of the cold. We would have to go to South Africa to pass through a warm current and free the fuel. But just as we were slapping each other on the back he spoke again. The problem had been solved.

It seems that a young seaman had suggested they lower a steam hose into the tank to warm the oil and then pump the condensate away before transferring the fuel to the boiler fuel tanks, which were heated. The young seaman became very unpopular after that.

I had several more trips to Heard Island as well as Kerguelen and Macquarie islands, but that's another story.

For more information about Heard Island visit:

<<http://www.heardisland.aq>>

<<http://www.aad.gov.au/default.asp?casid=6209>>

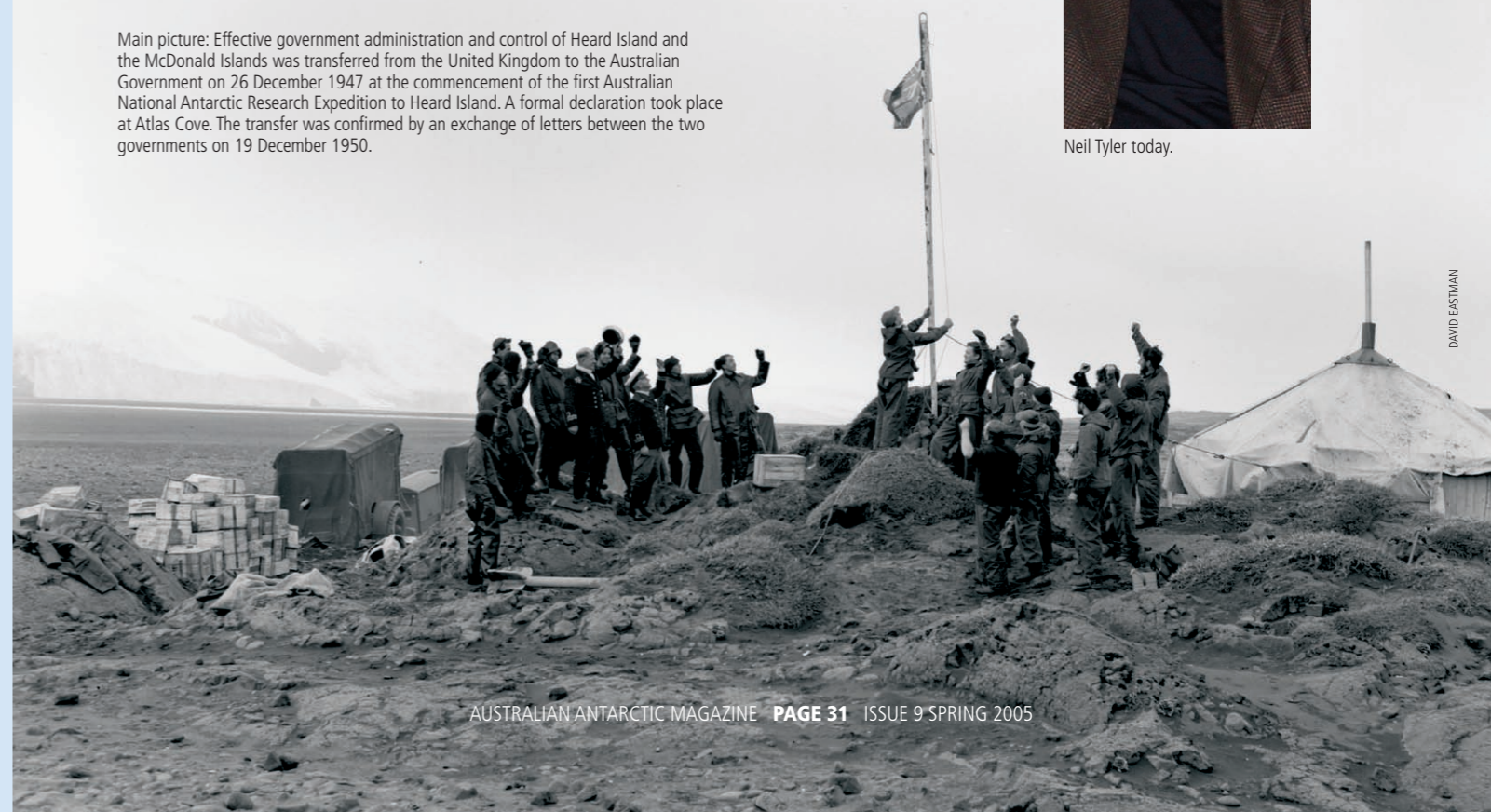
—NEIL (TIM) TYLER
Ex-Stoker, RAN



'At 18 I thought I was a man, but as you can see I was a boy. I was very proud of myself in my uniform. Today our fine young men and women are allowed to go out in civilian clothing. This privilege came in the last months of my service. It is great to be able to do that, but it would be nice if certain days were put aside for them to wear their uniforms so that we could see them and be proud.'



Neil Tyler today.



DAVID EASTMAN