

FREEDOM OF ENTRY TO MELBOURNE”

Detailing some aspects of Naval “Freedom of Entry to Melbourne” History

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On Saturday 14th September 2019, Royal Australian Navy personnel, with swords drawn, bayonets fixed, drums beating, bands playing and colours flying, marched through the streets of Melbourne, exercising the RAN’s “Freedom of Entry” to the city. The marchers were from the Ship’s Company of HMAS Melbourne, FFG05, on her last visit to her namesake city, prior to decommissioning in Sydney on 26th October 2019. They joined with RAN band members from HMAS Cerberus, the Navy’s premier training establishment.

The history of the “Freedom of Entry” ceremony dates back to medieval times throughout Europe, when independent companies of armed men were maintained by the various land-owning Nobles. Often, there were disputes and tension between them and the threat of occupation, attack and looting was ever present. Hence, whenever armed bodies travelled to the countryside, they were rarely admitted to the environs of other cities. However, in special cases, often for mutual protection between related Nobles, some bodies of armed men were allowed the special privilege of Freedom of Entry to the city. Freedom of Entry to the city signified the true bonds of friendship and often the expectation that the armed body on whom the honour was bestowed would assist in the defence of the city.

Through its British heritage, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has maintained the tradition of Freedom of Entry of the ADF or individual units. Freedom of Entry to the city is normally conferred by the Mayor, or equivalent, at a parade of the Unit.

Shortly thereafter, the Unit exercises its right of Freedom of Entry by marching through the city in full regalia.

The Unit is then challenged by a senior Police Officer, and after producing evidence in the form of the “Freedom of Entry scroll”, the Unit is granted permission to enter. The “Scroll” conferring the Royal Australian Navy Freedom of Entry to the City of Melbourne on all ceremonial occasions with “swords drawn, bayonets fixed, drums beating, bands playing and colours flying” was presented in 1971.

It was prepared by hand with a Moroccan leather cover and utilizes a traditional style of illuminating the design and colour. The Scroll incorporates the armorial bearings of the Corporation of the City of Melbourne, plus the official badge of the Royal Australian Navy, and features many of the Navy’s battle honours. On Saturday 14th September 2019, the Navy again exercised its rights and privileges in honour of this tradition.

Including this September 2019 “Freedom of Entry” ceremony, the RAN, over the past almost 49 years, has exercised their “Freedom of Entry” (FOE) to the City of Melbourne on four occasions.

The 1971 FOE parade and ceremony of 8th March included guests among whom were Chief of Navy (CN) Vice-Admiral Richard I Peek, who in later years was appointed to the Navy League Advisory Council Panel of members. Also included in the 1971 FOE to Melbourne was Senior Naval Officer Victoria (SNOVIC) Commodore Ian K Purvis together with 1000 of the Ships' Companies from HMAS Cerberus and HMAS Hobart.

The next FOE to Melbourne took place in March of 1988. The march was led by SNOVIC CDRE Jim S Dixon with special guests at the ceremony including Governor General Sir Ninian Stephen and CN VADM Michael W Hudson. The 600 marchers included Ships' Companies from HMAS Cerberus and also from HMA ships Success, Brisbane, Darwin and Stuart which were visiting Melbourne for the 1988 Moomba Celebrations.

Following on from the Melbourne FOE of 1988, came the next FOE to Melbourne in September 2011. The March was led by Fleet Commander RADM Steve Gilmore, closely followed by SNOVIC Commanding Officer of HMAS Cerberus, Captain Mark Hill, accompanied by the Executive Officer of Cerberus, CMDR Shane Glasscock and CO of the Recruit School, CMDR Paul O'Grady.

In excess of 1000 Naval personnel from HMAS Cerberus participated in the 2011 Ceremony, together with the Lord Mayor of Melbourne and Deputy Commissioner of Police, Tim Cartwright. Also, in attendance were CN VADM Ray Griggs and RADM Allan du Toit.

In terms of procedures and formalities, the 4th FOE to Melbourne of September 2019, followed similar lines to the 3 prior ceremonies with senior Naval officer in attendance, including CN VADM Michael Noonan and CDRE Greg Yorke. The Senior Police representative was Superintendent Peter O'Neill.

The 200 Officers and Sailors marching in the September 2019 FOE to Melbourne from the Ships' Company of HMAS Melbourne, together with the band members from HMAS Cerberus, were led by HMAS Melbourne's Commanding Officer CMDR Marcus Buttler.

The City of Melbourne visit by HMAS Melbourne also provided Melbournians with the opportunity to visit and farewell the Ship prior to her decommissioning in Sydney in October 2019 after almost 28 years of service to Australia.

The guided missile Frigate HMAS Melbourne FFG05 was launched in Melbourne on 5th May 1989. The Ship was commissioned in Melbourne on February 15th 1992.

HMAS Melbourne is the third ship so named and follows Ship Number one, a World War I light cruiser and Ship Number two, an aircraft carrier that saw service during the Malayan emergency and Indonesian confrontation F.E.S.R. period.

Both Ships Number one and two were built in the United Kingdom, whilst the current third HMAS Melbourne was built to a modified United States design at the Amecon Ship Yard in Williamstown, Victoria.

