

WILLIAM RONALD HARNIMAN

18 September 1914–12 December 1999

Squadron Quarterly March 2000

William Ronald Harniman was born in September 1914. His father was a retired professional soldier, an officer in the Queen's [?King's] Own Hussars. On the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, he returned to service and took the third batch of reinforcements of the Tenth Battalion to France. He died in 1920. Bill's mother died at his birth. He made no reference to other siblings or relatives, and rather vaguely alluded to having been 'fostered' by a kind lady who was a friend of his mother, together with his gratitude to Legacy. Through scholarships he was able to enrol at Saint Mark's College and to read law. He graduated LLB (Adelaide) in 1936 and became a commercial lawyer.

[I did not press Bill on matters he was clearly diffident to discuss, and he did not mention what schools he attended. — PML One was Saint Peter's College.]

From childhood he was interested in boats and the sea. Years later he discovered that some of his ancestors were much involved with sailing to the East Indies, including Norfolk Island. Perhaps that explained it. He recalls being taken out as a Legacy Boy from Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron. But he was not able to be directly involved until he bought a dinghy of about fifteen feet for £5, which he restored and launched from Saint Kilda in the 1940s.

Presiding as President of the Court of Marine Inquiry over the past 22 years has increased his interest in the sea and in yachting. [Added to the MSS by Bill.]

In about 1945 or 1946 Bill bought the first of a series of power boats about sixteen to nineteen feet long, which were kept at Victor Harbor. In 1948 he bought the well-known motor cruiser *Jeannie*, which he renamed *Jeannie Claire*, that being his wife's name.

At that time the Squadron facilities at the Outer Harbor were concentrated in the original 'big shed'. Upstairs there were toilets and showers for men and women, with a table, crockery, cutlery and an electric jug. Even though the facilities were so primitive, there was an active social life. During the summer season there were friendly barbecues most Saturday nights. Bill was included by such gregarious souls as Peter King and Colin White. A notable memory was how egalitarian the Squadron was in those days. Rich men mixed readily with those who were not, happy to share their common interests in yachting. The Club was much smaller than it later became. The regulars all knew each other.

One of Bill's long-standing crew was Jack Spurgeon. He and others accompanied Bill on many happy fishing cruises to the North Coast of Kangaroo Island. Every Christmas they took *Jeannie Claire* to Victor Harbor, where she lay at a mooring. From there they regularly fished at The Pages. The fishing was vastly better there then than it is now.

One year there was an intense storm, with winds of eighty knots or more. *Jeannie Claire* parted from her mooring, and was driven on to a limestone shelf about two or three hundred yards from shore. She was high and dry at low water. Geoff Rumbelow, an ex Rat of Tobruk, notified Bill, and then set about refloating the stranded vessel. He borrowed a large bulldozer to cut a channel to the shore, together with the creation of a pool large enough to hold her at high water. He put tyres against the boat, and using the bulldozer, 'led her by the nose' into the hole in the beach. There was no significant damage. A new mooring was arranged, and *Jeannie Claire* was taken out to it at the next suitable high tide.

Tragically, Geoff Rumbelow lost his life when something the same happened to his own boat. He drowned trying to refloat her.

Bill fell into a congenial programme of taking his boat every year across the Gulf to Port Vincent as well as to Kangaroo Island and Victor Harbor. For several years he participated in the racing program by making *Jeannie Claire* available for use as a duty boat regularly through the season. Jack Spurgeon was a good friend in the way he helped to do so.

In due course Bill bought *Nyroca* from Jim Stump, who then joined him as regular crew, together with Jim Taylor, Howard Byerlee and Graham Hanson. They usually made three or four cruises a year, each lasting ten to fourteen days. Howard was an excellent sea cook, but he took a long time preparing dinner. He started about 1500, and used virtually every utensil aboard before they sat down to eat at about 2000. By then Howard would have consumed a bottle of sherry. Bill seemed often to be dishwasher, finishing at midnight or later.

Nyroca was succeeded by *Altair*, which was a very pretty boat. Then came *Hawaiki*, which was designed by Alden and built by the celebrated John Guzzwell. *Iniquity's* crew met him in Alaska in 1994, and reported of him, "He was the first Englishman to sail single-handed round the world, and one of life's true gentlemen." [*Squadron Quarterly*, September 1995: 25.]

Bill wanted an inside steering position, so he bought *Allamanda*, which was built by Jack Williams as his definitive cruising yacht. The 1995 crew are Peter Dermott, Jim Bullock, Max Holbrook, Trevor McHugh, Ted Thickener and John Allen.

Over the years, the Squadron has changed very considerably. Physically it is wonderfully improved. The upstairs dining room is excellent for many purposes, and the extensive collection of burgees adds a component which is quite distinctive. The grounds, lawns, slips and facilities generally are excellent.

In addition to serving on committees and holding successive flag ranks, Bill has been involved in considering the governance of the Squadron. Tom Flint obtained the constitutions of virtually every Royal yacht club round the world. Bill headed a committee with Richard Smith and Ian Scott to consider what was best for Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron. After comparing all the variants, they were convinced that the Squadron's highly democratic system is the best and must be maintained. Every office holder is subject to removal by the general body of members. The self-perpetuating 'lifetime' governance of an elite 'Board of Directors' established at the Cruising Yacht Club of South Australia was emphatically rejected. One modification of our system would be worthwhile. This would be to add the Immediate Past Commodore *ex officio* to the General Committee.

There are a couple of negatives in the current state of the Squadron compared with how it once was. An inevitable consequence of expanding its size has been to dilute the close fellowship which once applied to the regulars. It's not that people aren't friendly; it's that they tend more to stick to their own groups than to mix together as they once did. The marina development has aggravated this tendency, splitting the Club and encouraging people to stay more on their boats.

In 1995 the Squadron has significant financial problems. Essentially it is sound, but in overcoming them it is important not to drive away long-standing older Members. They remain attached to their Club, but many cannot afford to stay on if it becomes too expensive.

Interviewed by Peter Last 13 November 1995

Minor alterations a few days later.

Bill has an interesting photograph of about six NAP vessels, including *Nyroca*, at the seawall by the Pilot Tower, taken during the Second World War.

Bill Harniman died on 12 December 1999, at the home of his daughter Anne.

Dr PM Last OAM MB BS FRCP FRACP FRACMA
(address deleted)

Telephone (deleted)
Fax (deleted)

21 November 1995

Mr WR Harniman
(address deleted)

Dear Bill,

Here is a draft of what I made from our talk the other day. I emphasise that it is your story, not mine. Please let me know of anything you would like to add/alter/delete.

Thank you again for the privilege of listening to your memories.

With best wishes,

Contacts for Bill Harniman Jnr

(deleted)

WILLIAM RONALD HARNIMAN

[THIRD VERSION, 8 FEBRUARY 2000]

18 September 1914–12 December 1999

Squadron Quarterly March 2000

William Ronald Harniman was born in September 1914. His father was a retired professional soldier, an officer in the Queen's [?King's] Own Hussars. On the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, he returned to service and took the third batch of reinforcements of the Tenth Battalion to France. He died in 1920. Bill's mother died at his birth. He made no reference to other siblings or relatives, and rather vaguely alluded to having been 'fostered' by a kind lady who was a friend of his mother, together with his gratitude to Legacy. Through scholarships he was able to enrol at Saint Mark's College and to read law. He graduated LLB (Adelaide) in 1936 and became a commercial lawyer.

[I did not press Bill on matters he was clearly diffident to discuss, and he did not mention what schools he attended. — PML One was Saint Peter's College.]

From childhood he was interested in boats and the sea. Years later he discovered that some of his ancestors were much involved with sailing to the East Indies, including Norfolk Island. Perhaps that explained it. He recalls being taken out as a Legacy Boy from Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron. But he was not able to be directly involved until he bought a dinghy of about fifteen feet for £5, which he restored and launched from Saint Kilda in the 1940s.

Presiding as President of the Court of Marine Inquiry over the past 22 years has increased his interest in the sea and in yachting. [Added to the MSS by Bill.]

In about 1945 or 1946 Bill bought the first of a series of power boats about sixteen to nineteen feet long, which were kept at Victor Harbor. In 1958 he bought the well-known motor cruiser *Jeannie*, which he renamed *Jeannie Claire*, that being his wife's name.

At that time the Squadron facilities at the Outer Harbor were concentrated in the original 'big shed'. Upstairs there were toilets and showers for men and women, with a table, crockery, cutlery and an electric jug. Even though the facilities were so primitive, there was an active social life. During the summer season there were friendly barbecues most Saturday nights. Bill was included by such gregarious souls as Peter King and Colin White. A notable memory was how egalitarian the Squadron was in those days. Rich men mixed readily with those who were not, happy to share their common interests in yachting. The Club was much smaller than it later became. The regulars all knew each other.

One of Bill's long-standing crew was Jack Spurgeon. He and others accompanied Bill on many happy fishing cruises to the North Coast of Kangaroo Island. Every Christmas they took *Jeannie Claire* to Victor Harbor, where she lay at a mooring. From there they regularly fished at The Pages. The fishing was vastly better there then than it is now.

One year there was an intense storm, with winds of eighty knots or more. *Jeannie Claire* parted from her mooring, and was driven on to a limestone shelf about two or three hundred yards from shore. She was high and dry at low water. Gwen Rumbelow spotted her and phoned Bill at home. Geoff Rumbelow, an ex Rat of Tobruk, set about refloating the stranded vessel. He borrowed a large bulldozer to cut a channel to the shore, together with the creation of a pool large enough to hold her at high water. He put tyres against the boat, and using the bulldozer, 'led her by the nose' into the hole in the beach. There was no significant damage. A new mooring was arranged, and *Jeannie Claire* was taken out to it at the next suitable high tide.

Tragically, Geoff Rumbelow lost his life when something the same happened to his own boat. He drowned trying to refloat her.

Bill fell into a congenial programme of taking his boat every year across the Gulf to Port Vincent as well as to Kangaroo Island and Victor Harbor. For several years he participated in the racing program by making *Jeannie Claire* available for use as a duty boat regularly through the season. Jack Spurgeon was a good friend in the way he helped to do so.

In due course Bill bought *Nyroca* from Jim Stump, who then joined him as regular crew, together with Jim Taylor, Howard Byerlee and Graham Hanson. They usually made three or four cruises a year, each lasting ten to fourteen days. Howard was an excellent sea cook, but he took a long time preparing dinner. He started about 1500, and used virtually every utensil aboard before they sat down to eat at about 2000. By then Howard would have consumed a bottle of sherry. Bill seemed often to be dishwasher, finishing at midnight or later.

Nyroca was succeeded by *Altair*, which was a very pretty boat. Then came *Hawaiki*, which was designed by Alden and built by the celebrated John Guzzwell. *Iniquity's* crew met him in Alaska in 1994, and reported of him, "He was the first Englishman to sail single-handed round the world, and one of life's true gentlemen." [*Squadron Quarterly*, September 1995: 25.]

Bill wanted an inside steering position, so he bought *Allamanda*, which was built by Jack Williams as his definitive cruising yacht. The 1995 crew are Peter Dermott, Jim Bullock, Max Holbrook, Trevor McHugh, Ted Thickener and John Allen.

Over the years, the Squadron has changed very considerably. Physically it is wonderfully improved. The upstairs dining room is excellent for many purposes, and the extensive collection of burgees adds a component which is quite distinctive. The grounds, lawns, slips and facilities generally are excellent.

In addition to serving on committees and holding successive flag ranks, Bill has been involved in considering the governance of the Squadron. Tom Flint obtained the constitutions of virtually every Royal yacht club round the world. Bill headed a committee with Richard Smith and Ian Scott to consider what was best for Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron. After comparing all the variants, they were convinced that the Squadron's highly democratic system is the best and must be maintained. Every office holder is subject to removal by the general body of members. The self-perpetuating 'lifetime' governance of an elite 'Board of Directors' established at the Cruising Yacht Club of South Australia was emphatically rejected. One modification of our system would be worthwhile. This would be to add the Immediate Past Commodore *ex officio* to the General Committee.

There are a couple of negatives in the current state of the Squadron compared with how it once was. An inevitable consequence of expanding its size has been to dilute the close fellowship which once applied to the regulars. It's not that people aren't friendly; it's that they tend more to stick to their own groups than to mix together as they once did. The marina development has aggravated this tendency, splitting the Club and encouraging people to stay more on their boats.

In 1995 the Squadron has significant financial problems. Essentially it is sound, but in overcoming them it is important not to drive away long-standing older Members. They remain attached to their Club, but many cannot afford to stay on if it becomes too expensive.

Interviewed by Peter Last 13 November 1995

Minor alterations a few days later.

Bill has an interesting photograph of about six NAP vessels, including *Nyroca*, at the seawall by the Pilot Tower, taken during the Second World War.

Bill Harniman died on 12 December 1999, at the home of his daughter Anne.

An obituary was prepared for publication in *Squadron Quarterly*, incorporating this material and additional information from Peter Dermott's eulogy. The draft of that was confirmed by Bill Harniman Jnr. After the draft was sent to the Printer, Jim Bullock provided some minor alterations, which are incorporated in this third version, but they came too late for the magazine.