

## History and Heroism Remembered - Down Under (Part II) By Bo Ault

Townsville, Australia

The following day, May 5th, we flew several hundred miles north to Townsville located on the shores of the Coral Sea. By now our group was down to five men, three of whom were accompanied by their wives. The other men had already departed for home. During World War II, Townsville was a major military staging area for the allied forces for all of northeastern Australia and the South Pacific theater. Today, there remains little evidence of that. It has grown to become a beautiful tropical city of approximately 100,000 people. It has none of the fast paced activity and heavy traffic flow of Brisbane with it's population of 1.5 million people. We came to Townsville to attend the Coral Sea memorial service the following day. By now, we were thinking we had experienced the ultimate in hospitality and temporary celebrity with all of the events in Brisbane. Nothing, we thought, could surpass what we had seen and done there. We were about to receive more pleasant surprises.

As we walked into the airport, we were greeted by a representative of the city council. She was accompanied by a newspaper reporter and a photographer. Our group was interviewed right there and photographs were taken. From there we were driven to our hotel, a twenty story high Holiday Inn with great views of the harbor and surrounding countryside. The accommodations were excellent. Our first scheduled event was a dawn memorial service the next day.

**A Magnificent Service:** In the pre-dawn darkness of May 6th, we assembled at the Coral Sea Battle Memorial Plaza. It is located at ANZAC Park in an area known as The Strand. It sits beside the harbor leading out to the Coral Sea. We were seated in the front two rows facing the memorial and the water beyond. A gentle tropical breeze was stirring. The U.S. Navy Seventh Fleet band was seated under the trees in front of us and to the left of the monument. The ceremony began as a bugle sounded and the flags of Australia and the United States were raised to masthead. An Australian naval honor guard slowly marched on in a hushed cadence and took up their position on all four sides of the monument.

The President of the Townsville chapter of the Australian Naval Association delivered a prologue with these words. "On this day, we gather to observe the 60th Anniversary of the engagement of Allied Naval Forces in The Battle of the Coral Sea, fought over the days from 4th to 8th May 1942. The Battle of the Coral Sea was vital to the preservation of Australia from invasion by Japanese forces. In respect for those who paid the supreme sacrifice in the service of their God, king and countries, please join us in remembrance of them."

We stood as the band played the national anthems of the United States and Australia. Prayers were said and scripture was

read and the Battle Hymn of the Republic, "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory" was sung. This was followed by the Lord's Prayer and the Naval Prayer and then the Naval Hymn was sung. Wreaths were laid at the foot of the monument. A bugler sounded the "Last Post." Then a lone bag piper slowly circled the monument while playing "The Lament" as both flags were lowered to half staff. A moment of silence was observed. The Naval Ode was then delivered whose words are:

"They have no grave but the cruel sea  
No flowers lay at their head  
A rusting hulk is their tombstone  
A fast on the ocean bed."

This was followed by The Ode whose words are:  
"They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old;  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn;  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
We will remember them. Lest we forget."

A bugle sounded Taps followed by the Naval Reveille and the national flags were raised to masthead. As all of this was happening, the first light of dawn rose gently from the sea. This was truly a spiritual experience, very moving and beautiful. The benediction was given and the honor guard then slowly marched away. Such a magnificent service, unlike any I have ever attended before. It will remain with me always.

Following the memorial service, we were taken to a local yacht club for a buffet breakfast. There, the mayor of Townsville gave us a very warm welcome. As he introduced us individually to the assembled guests, he presented each of us with a wrapped gift which turned out to be a beautifully engraved pewter mug. What grand hospitality and class!

On May 7th, our final full day in Australia, we took a road trip north to the town of Cardwell. This is the point of land closest to where the Coral Sea battle actually took place, approximately two hundred miles off shore. There we visited the Coral Sea Battle Memorial Park where another monument is located. This is a beautiful, small park right on the shores of the Coral Sea. There were no scheduled ceremonies that day. We took pictures and had lunch with two ladies, both local residents, who are active in the Coral Sea Battle Commemorative Association which maintains the park.

The next day, May 8th, I began the long trip home. The second leg of my flight was from Brisbane to Auckland, New Zealand. As the big Boeing 747 jet climbed out over the Pacific Ocean, I glanced at my watch. It was 2:30 P.M. local time. I was keenly aware that sixty years ago to the day and to the very hour, my father was returning from a strike on the Japanese aircraft carrier Shokaku. His date with destiny was only minutes away. I said a prayer for him and thought of those epic events which history has recorded as the Battle of the Coral Sea.

*Bo Ault's father, Commander William Bowen Ault, USN, was the Air Group Commander aboard the USS Lexington CV-2 and was declared missing in action following the Battle of the Coral Sea. He was flying a Douglas Dauntless SBD dive bomber and was presumed to have been shot down or ditched in the ocean following the strike on the Japanese carriers Shokaku and Zuikaku. Ault was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross and the US Navy field at Clover Valley on Whidbey Island was named in his honor. In March 1944, the USS Ault (DD-698) was christened by Mrs. Ault and commissioned two months later. After a shakedown cruise in the Caribbean, the ship was transferred to the Pacific for combat operations joining Task Group 38.2, with service in the South China Sea. In 1945, it went to Task Force 58, bombing Iwo Jima and Okinawa airfields. It later was anchored in Tokyo Bay for the formal surrender of Japan.*