



YACHT NIRIMBA AND HISTORIC CRAFT

Without doubt the greatest achievement in any single material sense in the life of HMAS NIRIMBA - was the building of the 41 foot steel masthead sloop NIRIMBA by the apprentices of HMAS NIRIMBA - under the guidance of civilian and uniformed instructors of HMAS NIRIMBA. The mammoth task was not without obstacles in its path, over six years of struggle.

Like any seemingly impractical endeavour this project was not without its dedicated 'pushers' who to their great credit won out in the end in the face of great adversity. Even after Yacht NIRIMBA successfully took to the waters of Sydney Harbour in 1966, there were the usual 'knockers' around as evidenced by this letter to the Editor of a Sydney newspaper:

'NAVY BUILT YACHT'

'Sir - In your issue of November 6th, you had a picture of a yacht built by naval apprentices.

A great job no doubt. But it took these boys and others five years to build.

A few of us would like you to print the actual cost of this boat. It must have cost the taxpayer thousands of dollars'.

Fivedock

J MITCHELL

There followed a lengthy diatribe by a 'Navy Spokesman' who justified the effort and cost in incalculable benefit to naval trade training and in the sail training of young seamen in the Navy and so on.

On the other side of the ledger, were the enthusiasts who were the driving forces behind this great venture. If only J Mitchell of Fiveclock had known, plans for the building of a yacht by NIRIMBA apprentices were fermenting in the minds of the earliest administrators of HMAS NIRIMBA.

Shipwright Vince Fazio, who was tasked to set up the training venue for Naval Shipwright Apprentices in HMAS NIRIMBA in 1956, before the first entry of apprentices arrived here, was instructed by the Executive Officer, when setting up the Shipwright Training Workshop to... *'leave the centre area clear for the full length of the building to enable a yacht to be built there'.*

After HMAS NIRIMBA had been operating for two years and had begun to settle down to organised training schedules there appeared a lengthy minute by the Technical Training Officer (Shipwrights) Lieutenant Bert Hunter entitled -

"Practical Training of Naval Shipwright Apprentices in Ship Structure and Fitting Out". Lieutenant Hunter masterfully and obviously with tongue in cheek stated inter alia - *'There being no indication of a training aid in the form of the part of an old naval vessel becoming available for some time, and the pressing need for some alternative scheme to fill the gap, preliminary investigations have been made with the idea of building small ship forms in HMAS NIRIMBA.*

The idea developed quickly, and its merits over the old naval ship scheme are such as to make it considerably more attractive. It might seem a little ambitious, but during the War, ship shapes were built many miles from the sea, and it is understood that the Caledonia Naval Shipwright Apprentices have already started a similar plan having lost HMS ARTIFEX as a Training Ship. Patching old ship structures cannot approach the depth of training offered in new building work, nor the great attraction of something productive which will one day take to the sea!'



Little by little, Lieutenant Hunter sold his plan to build a 'ship shape' ie a yacht, to the Administration - which was already on side, to a degree. His first major obstacle was the lack of a suitable mould loft cum drawing office. No trouble! Lieutenant Hunter advised that Building Number 197 (then derelict) which had comprised the wartime aircrew briefing room would be suitable if its floor were covered with masonite or something similar to provide a good drawing space. Mould loft equipment of course, - said Lieutenant Hunter -

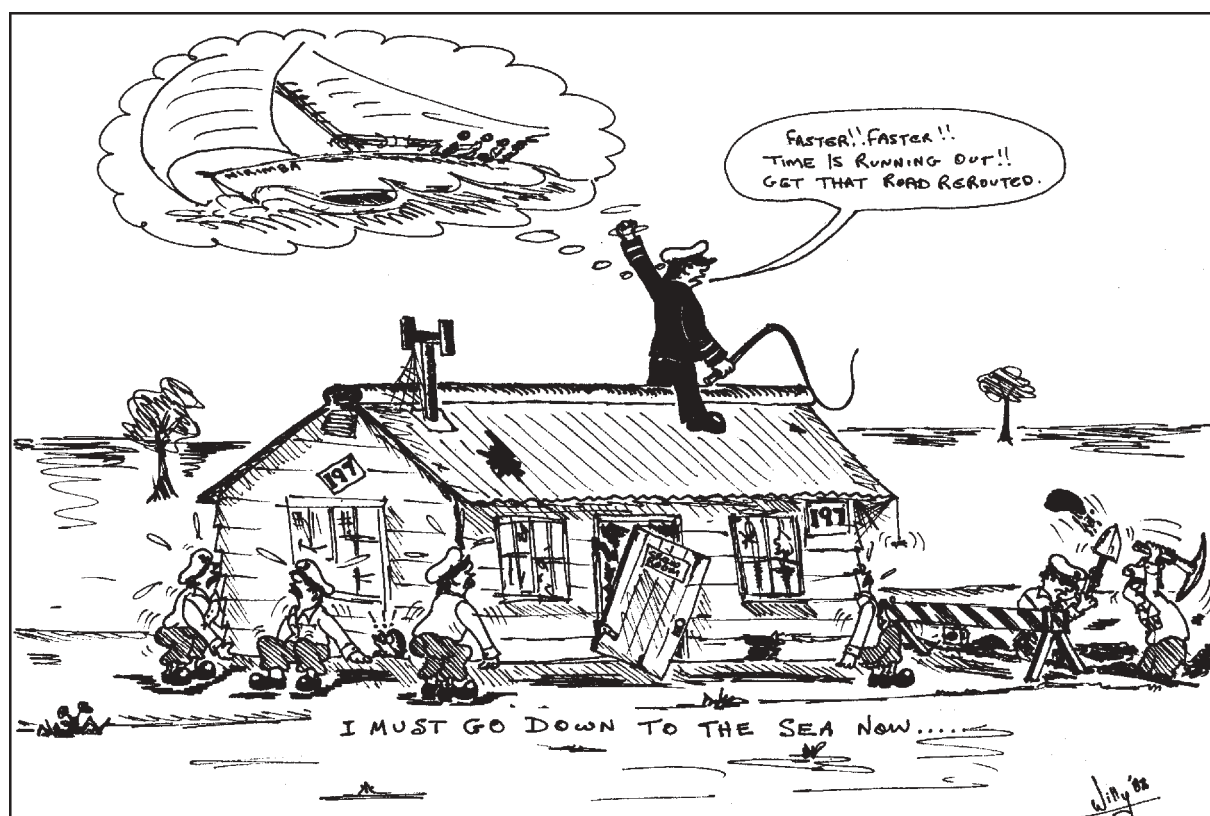
'Can be manufactured here'.

Howls of protest greeted this suggestion as Building Number 197 was located a long way away from the Building Slip. The intrepid and determined Technical Training Officer (Shipwrights) remained undaunted by this problem and immediately came up with the solution which read as follows:

"We'll move the building to the space between Building 205 (Welding Shop) and Building 207 (Electrical Shop) or to a space on the other side of the Electrical Shop near the coke compound. The first space is traversed by a road which will need re-routing of course.

If Works and Housing cannot cope with building removal, it can be done with apprentice labour having cut the stumps at ground level and the power lines and removed some of the floor boards, many apprentices placed around the building and inside it could lift it and walk it by degrees across the airfield".

Who could blame the Naval Shipwright Apprentices if they began to lose enthusiasm upon hearing of the last suggestion regarding the moving of Building 197?



The Technical Training Officer (Shipwrights) foresaw other mundane objections to the project and put forward an answer to each, including...

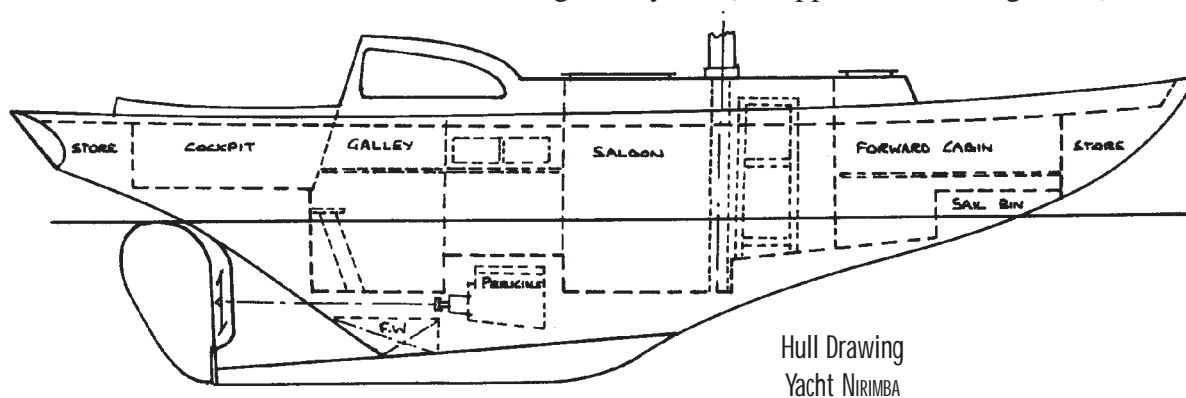
'there could hardly be any trouble from Trade Union sources with a publicised statement that NIRIMBA was building ships with apprentice labour when it is known that each term would only be adding a small part to a structure which might one day be tested for watertightness in the sea'.

Just two years later it is noted in the journal of the building of the yacht NIRIMBA, that,

'Navy Office approval is given for construction of a steel hulled yacht, in HMAS NIRIMBA as a training project for Naval Shipwright Apprentices'.

(Navy Office Letter 1275/53/34.)

The Technical Training Officer (Naval Shipwrights), Mr Ward and Mr Morrison visited several places around Sydney where steel yachts were being constructed. TTO(NS) contacted Mr Williams of Bell's Laundry owner of CHIRANA - 1959-60 Hobart Yacht race winner. Mr Williams offered to pay for a new design by Mr Alan Payne, designer of SOLO and GRETEL. Mr Perce Holmes of NIRIMBA staff was able to arrange the contact with Mr Williams. The preliminary statistics of the proposed yacht were decided as 41 feet length, 10 tons displacement, material cost £2,000.0.0 and time of building three years (six apprentice training terms).



On Saturday 5th November 1966, Yacht NIRIMBA was launched at Garden Island with Shipwright Lieutenant Vince Fazio in charge of operations.

A newspaper report of the day gives a precis of the years of effort which went into the building of Yacht NIRIMBA and read:

'Years of painstaking work, often times interrupted, ended on November 5th, when a 41 foot steel yacht built at HMAS NIRIMBA, was launched and named NIRIMBA.

The yacht, a handsome project will be used for training purposes.

Its completion was the result of hard work and initiative by the apprentices and those associated with the construction of the yacht.

Shipwright Lieutenant Vince Fazio prepared a statement on the history of the yacht...

"In early 1958, it was decided that a project by which naval apprentices could benefit was required at HMAS NIRIMBA, the RAN Apprentice Training Establishment, Quakers Hill New South Wales.

After much legwork and correspondence a decision was made in 1960 for the construction of a steel yacht. Visits were made to a firm of engineers in Parramatta and with the exuberant spirit prevailing, having observed the firm's product, the general feeling was that we could do better. We did.

Through the good offices of Mr Perce Holmes, the Barber at HMAS NIRIMBA and Mr Williams of Bell's Laundry, the drawings of a 41 foot masthead sloop were obtained. This vessel was designed by Mr Alan Payne of SOLO and GRETEL fame.

Permission was granted by Mr Payne for the lines to be faired out and modified and lofting was commenced in May 1961. Making of moulds and templates also commenced at that time, under the direction of Mr Barry Ward - a former shipwright, instructing in the drawing office.

In November 1961, the framing of the yacht was erected and plating was started in June 1962. Bulkheads were erected and chines faired in. Some minor mistakes in templates were discovered and soon rectified.

Work then ceased for a period due to the lack of working hands and in February 1963, jigs were produced to shape the plating. This was along and tedious process but the end result proved the effort worthwhile.

Some difficulty was encountered in obtaining a cast iron keel but this finally arrived and was fixed into place after the yacht was turned right side up in April 1964.

In 1964 plating continued. A point of interest at this stage is that after plating was completed a rain-storm flooded the hull after it had been moved outside its building berth. The standard of construction was such that no leaks were encountered and holes had to be drilled to allow the rainwater to drain. This promised well for the future.

The spare mast and boom from the Yacht FRANKLIN were obtained and modified for use on the project. In September 1965, internal painting was commenced and in October of the same year, an allocation of £4,000.00 was made by Navy Office.

In January 1966, the hull was moved to its final resting place at HMAS NIRIMBA, between the Welding and Smith shops and fitting out was started. Events began to move at a quicker pace and the finishing touches, electrical wiring etc became more of the task.

In August 1966, a completion date was determined and not without a lot of heartache and difficulty, was eventually met within a week of the set date.

On Saturday November 5th, 1966, the yacht was finally placed in its natural element ready to meet the challenges of the future.

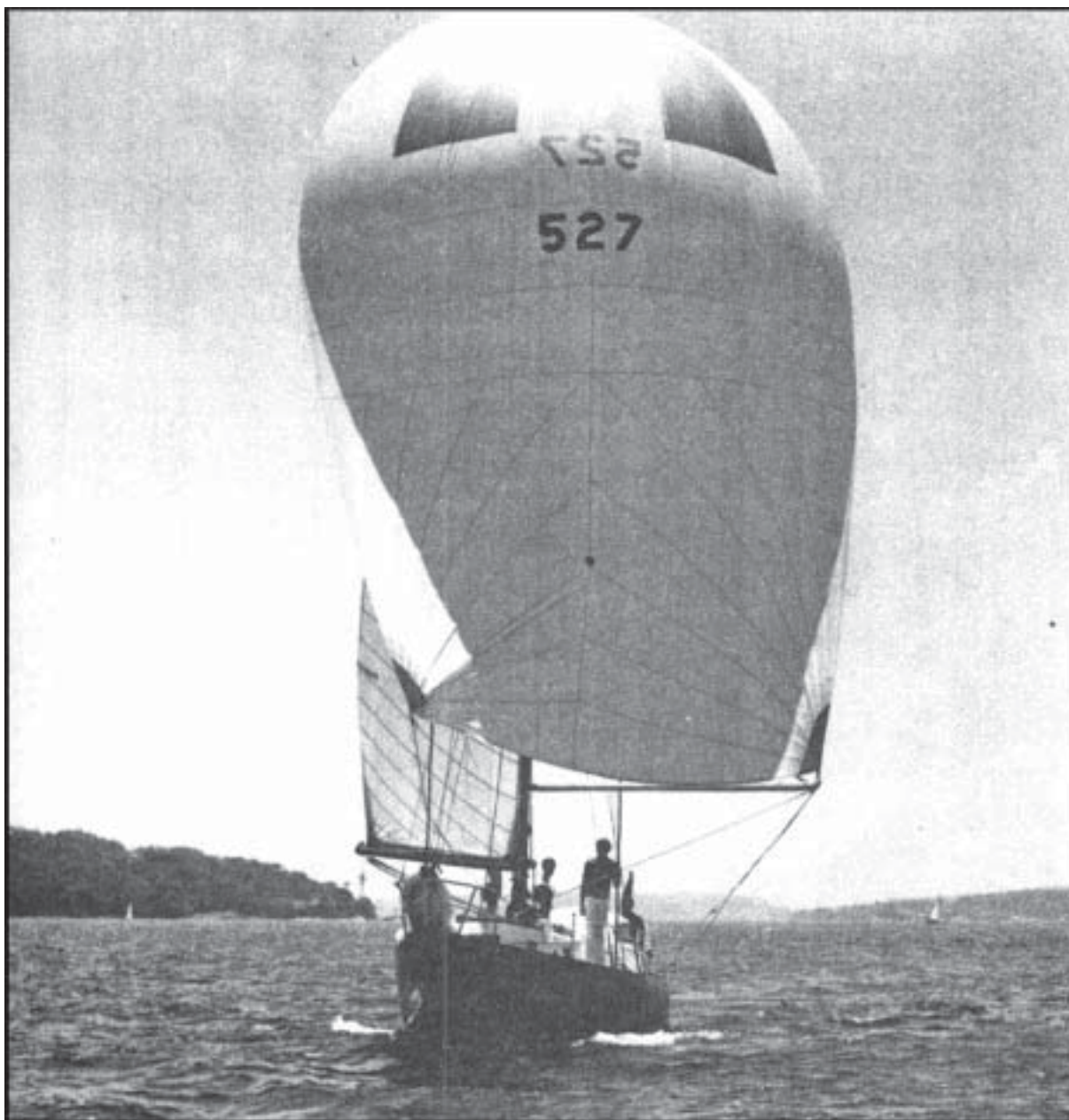
Much credit is due to a lot of people for the successful completion of this project principally to Mr Charles Loines, a Senior Technical Instructor at HMAS NIRIMBA and Mr Barry Ward, without whose devotion, this project may well never have reached fruition".

Vince Fazio's precis of the saga of the construction barely touched on heavy matters of drama and trauma associated with the vessel's building. Reading the log of progress of building of the yacht from the very beginning, commenced by the inimitable Lieutenant Hunter, one sees adversity arising in the path of the builders over the six years of its building. Some examples from the log:

"29 March 1963: Welding flash noise and the need for more space in the woodworking shop necessitates moving the yacht to the plate shop together with welding plant.

19 November 1963: Demand for steel casting for keel rejected by Naval Stores due to cost.





Yacht NIRIMBA training for the Sydney-Hobart Yacht Race

14 January 1964: A fresh start on the yacht fouled up by Mr Loines having to take over Mr Brewer's job. Mr Brewer to help in welding shop pending selection of another two instructors. (There had been some weeks down time while moves were being made to obtain the keel.)

1st May 1965: Report that Navy Office want to sell the yacht because of financial stringency.

11th July 1965: Tarpaulin covering the hull (now outside) torn apart by gales over the weekend, hull filled with rainwater."

There were many other upsets in the scheme of things over those six years of the yacht's building but as Lieutenant Vince Fazio reported, this marvellous project came to fruition due to the devotion to duty, drive and industrious application in the highest traditions of the Royal Australian Navy and with very great credit due to all concerned in the project - both civilian and uniformed members of HMAS NIRIMBA Ship's Company.

Nineteen years later, Yacht NIRIMBA is still serving HMAS NIRIMBA personnel in sail training and she has taken part in several ocean yacht races including six times in the Sydney-Hobart yacht race. Yacht NIRIMBA will be finally paid off in 1984.

STEAM LAUNCH TRITON

In 1980, Lieutenant David Twiss, Officer in Charge of the NIRIMBA Steam Club ascertained that Mr Bob Slocumb uncle of Mr Terry Hodge then resident NIRIMBA Psychologist, owned a 32 foot ex-naval sailing/pulling pinnace. Mr Slocumb, had converted the pinnace into a steam launch powered by a single cylinder 7 horsepower reversing steam engine.

The counter stern had been removed from the pinnace to make room for the propeller. This launch was afloat on the Hawkesbury River and was the last steam launch to operate on the Hawkesbury. After Mr Slocumb became ill, the launch settled into the mud at Brooklyn where it remained for seven years. The launch was donated to the NIRIMBA Steam club by Mr Slocumb's estate.

The NIRIMBA Steam club, under the direction of Lieutenant Twiss, pumped out the derelict and dredged a channel to get the boat into deep water. After caulking some minor leaks, the club members towed the boat into the channel and left it there for 48 hours. This operation was successful in that the boat did not develop leaks and it was taken by road to HMAS NIRIMBA.

The boiler and engine have been restored by the NIRIMBA Steam Club and it is planned to use the refurbished launch for recreation on the Hawkesbury River.

NEW ENDEAVOUR

Apprentices from HMAS NIRIMBA worked on the restoration of the barque NEW ENDEAVOUR over a period of ten years. NEW ENDEAVOUR is a popular attraction on Sydney Harbour.

TUG WARATAH

The Port Jackson Steam Museum located at Birkenhead Point was helped by NIRIMBA apprentices during the period of restoration of the 1901 Tug WARATAH, which now lies at Birkenhead.

