

# Captain William Frank Cook LVO RAN (Rtd)

26 October 1916 - 21 November 2003

Captain Bill Cook died on Friday 21 November 2003. A memorial service was held on Tuesday 25 November 2003 at the Garden Island Naval Chapel.

Bill Cook had a distinguished career in the Royal Australian Navy from 1930 to 1960. He commanded *Voyager*, *Vendetta* and *Nizam*, and served in HMA ships *Australia*, *Yarra*, *Perth*, *Murchison*, *Melbourne*, *Wyatt Earp* and *HMS Devonshire*.

Captain Cook was the Assistant Register of the New South Wales Bar Association from 1964 to 1970, and Registrar from 1971 to 1985. He was much loved and fondly remembered by many members of the Bar. Below are some members recollections of Bill.

When I came to the Bar in 1982 he was a most welcoming and supportive influence. He was the essence of decency and civility with an amazing ability to put people at their ease and make them feel comfortable. He made it his business to know your name and have a chat whenever possible. He was genuinely interested in every barrister and keen to see them uphold the great traditions of the Bar. Those traditions matched his own principles - courage, courtesy and the pursuit of justice for all. The Capt'n was a friend of every barrister of his time.

## Philip Greenwood SC

The twinkle in his eye, the perpetual smile at the corners of his mouth and the hearty chuckle which characterised his laugh will be my abiding recollections of Bill Cook - to me, they were constant features of the man, about whom I never heard a bad word said. I was fortunate to be at the Bar for the last 10 years or so of Bill's stewardship; I was never conscious of him treating me, or any other junior, no matter how raw, any differently than he did the doyens of the Bar such as Kerrigan QC, Deane QC, Byers QC and the like.

He was an impeccable, natty dresser which was something of a contradiction to the vision of Bill, frequently seen, hopping onto his motor scooter and beetling off home doing a very good impression of a motorised version of the 'Roadrunner'.

For those who did not have the good fortune to know him, he is immortalised in a portrait (I think the best in the Bar's collection) held at the Bar Association. From time to time, but never unkindly, it was asserted that the painting of the ostrich was in fact an accurate representation of our Bill.

## John Maconachie QC

In appearance Bill Cook was a dapper, chirpy sparrow of a man, always darting about intent on getting things done, moving between slower moving objects. Comfortable with authority - his own and that of others - he moved freely in any company. He was a man of genuine charm whose service record released him from any need to prove his strength. His natural empathy for others endeared him to the broad range of personalities - young and old - with whom he had to deal.

Bill used to advantage the name 'Captain Cook', disarming a generation accustomed to think only of James Cook. His self-deprecating, but dignified, use of the title 'Captain' allowed him to break down barriers, as his anecdote in *No Mere Mouthpiece* (2002) at page 56 illustrates. It is classic Bill Cook:

A very interesting case was that of Miss C who complained of a barrister's behaviour in the execution of his duty on a suburban council. Although it had been pointed out to her that it was not within the jurisdiction of the Bar to deal with her problem, she had persisted in her complaint almost to the point of being declared a vexatious litigant. Eventually she demanded to see the Registrar [of the NSW Bar Association] and I had her company for about half an hour during which time I offered her the usual hospitality. Some time later, the barrister [rumoured to be Barry O'Keefe] told me the sequel to her visit. At an examination as to her mental fitness, she was proud of the fact that she had had a cup of tea with Captain Cook. Alas, this was her undoing and she was committed to a mental institution. On hearing of her plight, the barrister immediately assured the medical board that she had, in fact, had tea with Captain Cook - the Registrar - and Miss C was released. I believe the barrister 'dines out' on this story, as indeed I do too.

Only a man certain of his own identity would habitually ride to and from the offices of the Bar Association (as he did) on the little red motor scooter that was his trademark. He had no need of a Harley Davidson. Again, we see his personality emerge in his reminiscence of Sir Maurice Byers QC in *No Mere Mouthpiece* (at page 60):

[Sir Maurice] was a scholar...exceeding wise, fair spoken and persuading'. In addition to being acknowledged a great constitutional lawyer, he had a fine sense of humour. I met Byers and [Leycester] Meares one evening as I was leaving Phillip Street on my little red motorbike. Meares suggested that I should give Byers a lift. I was able to reply 'Sorry, Sir Maurice, I wouldn't take a knight out on a bike like this!'

Bill had a fine sense of humour. If he possessed guile, he never made a display of it. As Registrar of the Bar Association, Bill Cook was accessible. The Bar and the Association were much smaller in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s than today.

As a junior junior in the last six years of his tenure as Registrar (before he retired in July 1985), my consistent impression was that, if he did not know the name of a member of the Bar, it was not for lack of trying, and he was generally friendly enough for formalities not to matter that much anyway. He was approachable and sympathetic. The Bar owes him much, and rightly respects his memory.

## Geoff Lindsay SC

A full obituary on Captain Cook's life has been prepared by The Hon Justice Beaumont for the Australian Law Journal.