

“Ocean Joss”



Spotlight on Melbourne

By Geoff Walker



Michael Greenwood, one of the last “true blue” Sparkies around. He has now retired and lives in the suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. A man widely travelled and experienced and a fascinating and entertaining conversationalist when recapping nostalgic stories of his past seafaring days. Michael is a highly valued follower and contributor to “Ocean Joss” website.

A quirk involving a French freighter ended up making him responsible for receiving Australia's last ever commercial morse code message thus ending the country's official use of morse from its beginnings in the 1854 wire service between Melbourne and its docks until its 1999 demise, with the closure of the coast radio network's WT services. The quirk is also responsible for him sending the last ever broadcast in morse to mark the end of Australia's history of commercial radiotelegraphy.

Amongst the odd situations he found himself in or connected to is an extraordinary association with the tragic loss of the Derbyshire/GULK in 1980, sending a distress in the Adriatic in the middle of the night, being forgotten about during a shipboard fire in New York, intercepting the “Kirki” mayday and calming the agitated master after her bows disappeared, listening to those “bold gendarmes” smashing their way into the “Rainbow Warrior” bridge, avoiding Hezbollah's reach in the Lebanese civil war, chancing on the infamous Russian Woodpecker installation from the top of a block of ruined flats in Chernobyl's Pripyat, and also the experience of a bizarre 'cultural evening' in the Libyan desert hosted by Gaddafi's military, are some highlights amongst his many life experiences and sagas.

His maritime career began with training at Fleetwood & Manchester 1969-72 followed by sea service with Marconi and thereafter many foreign companies, most interesting to him being those in the never-a-dull-moment ship delivery game. Getting hitched in 1976 had him working on the more marriage friendly 2on/2off rotation in the North Sea oil and gas sector, until resuming deep sea in 1979 with mainly Tradax, and also (as an EU national) with Grimaldi under the Italian flag.

An extended holiday in Australia turned into accidental immigration after hearing the fateful words 'I'm having a baby', thereafter raising a family while serving in the coastal radio stations network at Sydneyradio/VIS, Carnarvon/VIC, Hobart/VIH, Perth/VIP & finally Melbourne/VIM. After the closure of the coastal network in 2002 he went back into the drilling and offshore construction business until the closure of WA's borders (due to the Covid pandemic) made him swallow the anchor in 2020. Since then, he's found truth in the adage of not knowing how he used to find the time to work, busy as he is with five grandchildren living nearby, and the daily struggle of blissful freedom to do as he pleases.

Michael will be instrumental with Geoff in establishing a new “Radio Room” segment for the “Ocean Joss” site, in due course. Many thanks Michael.

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