



KEVIN AT NARBETHONG HOUSE.

this big four-engine air craft had no reverse on it.

After the war finished we started flying to England in the old Lancasters but they ran out of needing radio men with Morse code experience. The pilots had been doing their own landing instructions with telephone, so they didn't need us really on board and we became redundant.

They said to me and some others that if we got ourselves a commercial licence, they would take us on as pilots, so I did that.

The last seventeen years I did with Qantas was as a pilot. I ended up as a first officer, the second pilot on the aircraft. You had to be able to do anything the captain could do. If anything went wrong in flight you had to take over and bring the aircraft in. It was a fairly important sort of job.

Once I was on a flying boat called the *Clifton* and it was their best flying boat. We were doing a bit of night flying, so as Captain, I had to do some practice landings. We went off out of Rose Bay and it started to drizzle rain. We only had a couple of flares along the Harbour for a landing field. You'd line the three flares up, land along the end one and run towards the next one. There were crash boats that would patrol along the flare path to keep boats out of our way. There were no lights at night time in Sydney, it was all dark.

So on our first circuit there this night, and we were coming in to land and the

## A SAD ENDING TO THE STORY

rain had us a bit bamboozled and we weren't getting very good vision. With the flying boats you do a quick flare-out, and that knocks the speed off pretty quickly and then you just drop it gently into the water. Well we hit the water and knocked a great hole in the front of it underneath the flooring. Next thing I realised we were going down. It was a bit stark. So I smartly got out of my harness and went up the passageway, I was trying to find the emergency escape hatch out through the roof because I realised we were sinking. And the first officer, the second pilot, luckily had a torch in his pocket, and he lit that up and shone it down the passageway and I saw where the hatch catches were to get out the top of the aircraft and I've never been so happy to see the sky in my life, because she was going down.

I'd lost my coat with my wallet and everything in it – they had two decks, they were pretty high aeroplanes, and I was up on the boat deck, the flying deck, and I went to go down for my coat and the water was coming up through the hatch so I reckoned it was no good going down there. I tried to get out onto the wing and there was an aircraft carrier in port at the time, called the *Phoenix* and their crash boat had seen us hit the water and realised we'd had it. They rushed out their crash boat and picked us up off the wing. So we only got our legs wet but we were lucky.

My son joined the air force when he grew old enough, and he thought he'd be like me and have nine lives.

But Brian was killed in the air force at the age of 32. He was a training pilot with the RAAF. He'd been ten years with them when he was sent up to Broome to putting on an aerobatics display for the Festival of the Pearl.

Once a year they have a display up there — I somehow thought this wasn't going to be right for him — I was saying time and time again, "Get out of that Broome business". My wife and I went with our car and caravan, across to Exmouth Gulf and we camped there. Brian was coming in there to get fuel, out of Perth to Exmouth Gulf and from there to Broome. He was flying in a jet fighter called a Machhi.

He was flying one of the six jets, and all six came up to Broome. We were there the day before he was killed. We went to see him off.



BRIAN O'DWYER

He waved to us and I said, "For god's sake, be careful." And that was the last words I said to the boy. Next day he was dead.

He'd got into an aircraft, that he was flying up there, but the day before he'd taken it up there, it had been reported in with engine troubles.

"Oh no," they said, "there's nothing wrong with it." They sent it up with a test pilot and said there was nothing wrong with it.

Next thing he's taken it up to Broome, and the first aerobatics thing he's going to do was a stall spin. They come out at about three or four thousand feet and spin out. He couldn't get out of the spin, he had no power in the engine, he went into the trees, the thing burnt and he was killed. He had a wife and two kiddies — the second kiddie wasn't born at that stage, but he had two boys.

He'd always reckoned I'd had nine lives like a cat — getting out of prangs and other strife I'd survived — but tragically Brian wasn't as lucky.



## HEY—ISN'T THAT...?

# Queen of the Cosplay

Mandy Thane dresses up

SUPANOVA, ARMAGEDDON, Oz Comic-Con, EB Games Expo, Culture Shock. These are just some of the Pop Culture Expos that are becoming hugely popular in Australia. They attract fans of anime, video games, cartoons, sci-fi, animation, and fantasy. The promoters bring all sorts of stars and celebrities to the events. Actors, voice actors, scriptwriters, authors, artists, special effects wizzes ...

The fans turn up as their favourite character, staying and playing in character — this is known as cosplay (costume play). It is a worldwide phenomenon that originated in Japan. Any entity from the real or virtual world that lends itself to dramatic interpretation may be taken up as a subject.

Karlene Blacker, Braidwood assistant librarian, recently returned from the 'Supanova' in Adelaide. She estimates there were about 25,000 fans at the three-day event. She split her time between guest panels, classes and seminars. A typical Supanova expo could also include pinball competitions, AWF Wrestling, masses of retailers and Artist Alley vendors, cosplay chess, karaoke and concerts. "I went to my first pop culture expo at Darling Harbour in the early nineties and really enjoyed them for the next few years. After a while I was becoming disappointed so I stopped going.

"Nearly two decades on I went to Supanova in Sydney and I was hooked. I go to about six or seven a year. This year I have been to Melbourne, Perth, Sydney and Adelaide. Mum came with me to two of them. I am a volunteer at the Armageddon event in Melbourne. I work in the anime section looking after the guests who are there to pose with fans and sign autographs."

The guest signings and photos are the most popular aspects of the expos. Fans join long queues to meet their favourites, to get the autograph and photo to add to their scrapbooks and facebook. Karlene shows me her compre-

KARLENE AS SPONGE BOB SQUARE PANTS ...



KARLENE WITH BARBARA EDEN, THE GENIE MANY BABY BOOMERS DREAMT OF ... OR WAS IT BARBARA FELDON?

hensive collection. She is quite the expert. As we flip through her folders of memorabilia she can name every artist and everything they have done. She has many signed photographs. They don't come cheap though. Even though some artists will pose and sign for free, most charge around about \$40 for each.

I reckon Karlene has put in some overtime at the library because she has quite a few of them. I recognise Barbara Eden, William Shatner and David Hasselhoff but the rest are totally foreign to me.

Karlene says, "I didn't cosplay in Adelaide but I have at other ones. My favourite was a full Sponge Bob Square Pants onsie that I got from Paddy's Market in Sydney. After the event some mates and I stayed in costume and went to a Chinese restaurant. That was pretty funny!

"I am a member of the Australasian Risembool Rangers — a fan club for Vic Mignogna who is a voice actor in lots of things like Transformers, Dragonball Z, and Pokemon. We often cosplay when he is a guest at the event."

The author of Games of Thrones, George R.R. Martin was a very special guest at the recent Supanova. Karlene says, "I am a big fan and I was disappointed to have only spent a short amount of time with him, but he is so popular — everybody wanted his attention. Daemon Clark was interesting too. He's a Canadian guy and has won awards for

... AND AS YOU'RE MORE LIKELY TO FIND HER IN BRAIDWOOD.

