

First Call to Colors

The tragic story of the *Melbourne-Evans* collision and the survivors came to me in 1976 in the form of a chilling United States Navy training film. It wasn't chilling because of high production values; the low-budget film was typical of the Navy's training films. The actors themselves were U.S. Navy sailors and the ships used in the night scenes were clearly models.

It was chilling because the whole thing was so familiar.

I *knew* these people. Not literally, but I saw people just like them everywhere in the fleet. I *knew* this ship's bridge—I had stood on bridges just like it. And I *knew* similar situations—underway at night, ships in company, ordinary duties. Yet, the film unfolded, in just a few steps, from the ordinary and mundane into disaster and death.

Decades later, I started to tell the story. I wasn't sure where I was going with it or what course to steer until I began contacting some of the survivors. The last crew of USS *Frank E. Evans* showed me the way. Their words tell a story of survival and perseverance.

A note about times of events in this book—times are mostly given in military, 24-hour style. Thus, 0130 (zero-one-three-zero if spoken aloud) in civilian terms is 1:30 a.m., very early in the morning. Twenty three hundred (2300) is 11 p.m., or late at night.

However, in the context of this history, 0315 is late—too late.

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