



Naval Historical Society
of Australia

Victorian Chapter

President's Musings – April 2018

Our year has started off very well with good attendances to February and March meetings. Last month WWII WRAN Pamela Nicholls captivated us with her humour and the tales of trials and tribulations encountered in her early days as a WRAN, in, (on board) HMAS HARMAN and provided an insight into the War against the Japanese in the dark days of 42/43. It was fascinating to learn how we monitored Japanese Naval radio Traffic and that Pamela and her colleagues were able to read their code. If you missed the meeting you can listen to a pod cast of it on our web pages on the [Navy Victoria Network Website](#). You just click on recordings.

PLEASE NOTE THAT OUR APRIL MEETING IS BEING HELD ON APRIL 30th, NOT ON 23rd

ON April 30th we celebrate ANZAC day by listening to the men who were there! ANZAC VOICES GALLIPOLI is an ABC CLASSIC TWO CD RECORDING WHICH IS AVAILABLE TO PURCHASE FROM YOUR ABC SHOP OR ON LINE. IT IS CD 481-1626 and on the 30th we will hear disc one. These men are no longer with us and the recollections were obtained from ABC archives for these recordings in 1990. Underlining the narrative is some very reflective backing music.

Our Sydney office received a request for information about a 'Dutch Film Unit' based in Melbourne during WWII from our member in NSW, Andrew Humphries. I was able to source the information requested from our friend and colleague Ian Pfennigwerth, it being a clandestine intelligence unit. Upon chatting to Andrew whilst conveying the information, he chanced to mention that his father had served on an anti aircraft gun in Crete. As my Uncle Reg was also on an anti-aircraft gun during the Crete campaign, I asked Andrew to enquire of his father David Humphries, if he knew my uncle, Sergeant Reg Allwood. Imagine my absolute delight when being advised that David had not only known Reg, but they were the best of mates having served together as recruits, but also on Crete as well, although on different sides of the island. I have been privileged to speak to veteran David Humphries and learn more about my Uncle's war, he having died of war causes in 1953. I was able to learn more about their experiences in Egypt, Syria etc. and their experiences back in OZ after Crete. Both Reg and David were billeted together in 'Paradise' in South Australia and the accommodation provided them with a double bed only. We can conclude that they knew each other very well!! They then both served on batteries in WA and they lost contact when David served in New Guinea.

Victoria has a new Senior Naval Officer by the name of Commodore Greg Yorke CSC RANR, and you will have the opportunity to meet him at our meeting on May 28th. Commodore Yorke has accepted our invitation to speak to us in May. He has enjoyed a very interesting career to date, which included being the first CO of HMAS ARUNTA! More information later. Mark the date on your calendar! It is a good opportunity for the Navy family to 'Meet and Greet' our new SNO.

L/Stoker J.H. Schofield's Odyssey – Excerpts from his Diary for July 1940 whilst serving in HMAS Voyager I in the Med

July 3rd /4th 1940: Quite an interesting day. Ship is under two hours notice. A panic started at 2115, when volunteers were called to stand to, to take French ships. I volunteered with ten other stokers, and Arthur. All drew webbing gear and bayonets, but the French crews quietened down. Expect more trouble tomorrow as they want to leave Alex., and we can't allow them in case they give themselves up.

July 4th: Two men off another destroyer were killed last night while boarding a French destroyer. Another exciting day! French fleet causing a lot of bother! They want to give up their ships to Germany and get home. However at 1230 after a 'little talk' and covered by 15" guns and torpedos, they decided to place their ships in a non combatant state and return home in a passenger ship. Big Air Raid today and we nearly got ours! Bomb landed about 100' astern. They dropped 29 bombs, two of which landed in the coal yard, and one hit PROTECT0R, (fast Net layer, T98 Ed) killing two L/Seaman. British Fleet forced to destroy large French Fleet at Oran who tried to leave the harbour to give themselves up to Germany. (On July 3rd the RN successfully attacked both the French Fleet at Mers-el-Kabir, and on July 4th, the French Fleet at Oran. Ed)

July 5th, 6th and 7th 1940: Both July 5th and 6th, were relatively uneventful but on the 7th there was an air raid which was successfully beaten off by the Air Force with no bombs dropped. At 1430 Voyager I left Alex with two Battleships, an Aircraft Carrier with a further ten destroyers to pick up a large convoy.

July 8th: Saw the Battle Squadron at sea which was attacked by the Italian Airforce at 0920, 1100, and during the afternoon there were six raids, mostly containing six planes in each raid. The enemy had to keep very high on account of our anti-aircraft barrage. Something like 80-100 bombs were dropped in all but to no effect. Voyager pinged a submarine but had to leave it alone owing to the aircraft activity.

July 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th: At Sea off Italy on the 9th, the Squadron engaged an enemy fleet of four Battleships, four Cruisers and twenty Destroyers. Aircraft from HMS EAGLE torpedoed one Battleship, but we won't know full details until tomorrow, (an Italian

Destroyer and Submarine were sunk, with an Italian Battleship sustaining a direct hit which saw twenty nine killed and sixty wounded. Information supplied by the Italians. ED). Enemy Aircraft attacked all through the action, dropping about forty bombs, scoring no hits, however two were dropped very close to VOYAGER. The Action ceased at 1815 when the Italian fleet disengaged, and fled through the Messina straights. VOYAGER went into Malta to oil ship on the 10th leaving port at 1530 and conducted an anti submarine patrol off Malta, during which they were bombed and machine gunned until midnight. No casualties sustained. Destroyers, HMAS VAMPIRE, VOYAGER and HMS DECOY then left with a convoy of five ships bound for Alex. The next day enemy aircraft proceeded to bomb them all day. This factor led to a deal of discontent, with the Australian ships having bombs dropping all around them, but with no ability to fire a shot in return, the WWI destroyers not being fitted with anti-aircraft guns! The Italian pilots were getting lower all the time and it was felt that one of the ships would go, ie be sunk, soon. Despite this, Voyager added another Submarine to their total today. During the action VAMPIRE was hit by shrapnel and the Chief Gunner's Mate was injured.

VAMPIRE was relieved on the 12th by HMS JANUS. There was only one air raid that day which consisted of two planes and short in duration. Our author was part of a delegation of five leading stokers who requested that the ship be fitted with an anti-aircraft gun to their Divisional officer. He reported that the Officer took the wrong slant on things, as that he expressed the thought that the 'mob' were getting 'yellow'. On the 14th the Battleship RAMILLIES joined the convoy and on the 15th they arrived at Alex. Whilst at Alexandra on the 16th, there was a severe air raid for an hour or so, but many of the bombs didn't explode, fortunately as some of those fell close to VOYAGER. One bomb hit King Farrouk's palace. During the raid AA guns brought down three aircraft!

An air raid was aborted on the 17th owing to our aircraft chasing them away and there was no enemy aircraft activity on the 18th. Voyager sailed at 0545 on the 19th in company with the aircraft carrier HMS EAGLE and VENDETTA. The ships exercised with torpedo attacks on the carrier and in turn attacked by dive bombers etc. They returned to harbour at 1130. At 1315 that day VOYAGER was back to sea again in company with five Destroyers, battleships Ramillies and Malaya, plus HMS EAGLE. The objective was to seek the enemy throughout the night. Upon returning to harbour the next day it was learnt that our HMAS SYDNEY II had sunk an Italian Cruiser on the 19th and also chased another without success. A Great Victory! (BARTOLOMEO COLLEONI was sunk and several hits were sustained on GEOVANNI BELLE BANDE NERE, before she escaped. Ed.)

At 1030 on the 20th, SYDNEY and her Destroyers returned to harbour and all ships in harbour turned out and gave them a rousing cheer. J H ended his diary entry for the 20th with: 'Australian victories to-date are one Cruiser, one Destroyer and eight Submarines!'

It was relatively quiet for the next few days, with only one air raid taking place on the 24th, in which the planes were prevented from dropping their bombs by the RAF fighters.

Voyager had more convoy duty and the 29th saw her arriving at Haifa at 1717. J H commented that Haifa is rather a big place with huge oil tanks which were painted to look like houses and gardens, and consequently were well camouflaged. They were off again by 1920 convoying three oil tankers. The next day they arrived at Port Said, where they dropped off one tanker, picked up another ship and sailed west again arriving back at Alex on the 31st.

JH's summary for the Month of July 1940: "Very exciting month, the main points of interest were the subjugation of the French Navy, our first contact with major units of the Italian Navy, and the number of times we were bombed! It was about sixty times and we had some very close calls!" He considered his ship very lucky to come through it unscathed. And plus the fact that Voyager had added another Submarine to her list, and that HMAS SYDNEY II had sunk the Italian Cruiser were certainly things to be proud of! HMAS VOYAGER I sailed 4,361 miles, spent fifteen days at sea, with sixteen in harbour. He didn't have much leave, owing to the fact that the ship was often under one hours notice to sail.

Yours Aye!

Rex Williams.