



Naval Historical Society
of Australia

Victorian Chapter

President's Musings – May 2018

At our April meeting, we paid homage to our original ANZACS through the medium of the ABC Archives recording. To still hear the voices of original veterans was indeed a privilege.

We have a new Senior Naval Officer in Victoria, Commodore Greg Yorke CSC RANR. You will have an opportunity to meet and greet him at our May 28th Meeting. Commodore Yorke has agreed to speak to us, and indeed he has a very intriguing tale to tell, his having had an interesting career both in and out of uniform!

L/Stoker James Henry Schofield's Odyssey - Excerpts from his Diary for August through to November 1940 whilst serving in HMAS Voyager I in the Med.

Thanks to my friend and colleague CMDR John Smith, our research guru in Sydney, we now know JH's actual names. Whilst perusing his diary from beyond July 1940, it is obvious that the frenetic pace of events had eased off, the Italian fleet preferring to stay in harbour rather than seeking to mix it with the RN and the RAN. Jim summarised the month of **August 1940**: *'Altogether a very quiet month, went into the floating dock - had 48 hours leave - swung compasses, ship was degaussed, and had trips to Pt Said and Haiffa. We went to sea with Battle Fleet but nothing happened! The boilers were cleaned and the ship fumigated. Had 13 days at sea - 18 in harbour. Steamed 2,935 miles this month.'*

September 1940 Summary: *Quietest month of the war - for us! Most of it was spent in our refit. Enjoyed a good rest at camp, although the mosquitoes gave me hell! Only had 2 or 3 severe air raids. Italians advanced into Egypt this month and put themselves in a sorry mess as the fleet bombarded them from the sea whilst our air force bombed them! Steamed 982 miles.*

October 1940: HMAS Voyager I was fitted with an anti-aircraft gun on October 6th. At last they could answer back when attacked from the air! On convoy duty from October 8th-11th and patrolled with the fleet from the 12th. The fleet now numbered 27 ships. HMS York (8" heavy cruiser) sank two Italian Destroyers early that day. A damaged HMS Ajax (6" light cruiser) joined the fleet at 2300. She had a big hole in her stern, and Jim thought that it was probably caused by a mine, the sea being lousy with them! The fleet had three heavy air raids that day, but no damage was done. The fleet was patrolling around Crete and was subjected to another two air raids which were also unsuccessful, but during the night torpedo bombers were successful in hitting the light cruiser HMS Liverpool and blowing away the forecastle. This necessitated her having to return to harbour going

astern. She arrived in Alex. on the morning of the 16th. Jim described her as being in a hell of a mess and the buzz was that there had been 50 killed. Whilst at sea with the fleet on the 26th, a perceived threat was anticipated from TM7 boats (variant of the German E boats). All watches and lookouts were doubled, but no attacks took place. On the 27th, Jim reports that fourteen aircraft from HMS *Eagle* bombed the Italian bases on the Dodecanese islands, and all fourteen aircraft returned. Overall tension heightened, and the next day, the 28th, saw Greece entering the war and the 31st saw *Voyager* conducting anti-submarine patrols off Suda bay.

October 1940 Summary: *'Pretty hard month, only in harbour eight days - leave on four of them. Broke the record for Destroyers steaming in the Med. this month by travelling 7,279 miles. Last week very tough, no bread, potatoes or meat.*

November 1940 Summary: *'Spent large amount of our time this month at sea - with convoys and Battle Squadron. Took convoys to Malta - Suda Bay and Port Said. Seas starting to get rougher. Attacked by torpedo bombers at sea a few times. Had 46 air raids in 12 days over Alex. Provisions again light this month owing to our long stretches at sea. Big draft went to England and a few to Australia. We cleaned boilers this month taking five days out of ten in harbour - 21 days at sea. Got a new engineer this month, a tiger of a man! Received no letters this month. The Battle fleet of the Western Med. had a go at the Italian Navy this month but they ran away again! 'Ship travelled 6,606 miles this month, 65,396 miles since we started. **Jim failed to note in his summary that Voyager sank another submarine on November 6th.***

Yours Aye!

Rex Williams.