



Naval Historical Society  
of Australia

### President's Musings – November 2017

Thank you sincerely for the confidence you have shown me and my team in re-electing us. Thank you!

We look forward to our 'End of Year Celebration' on November the 27th. We have a very interesting person to speak to us. LCDR Cassandra Mohapp RAN, the First Lieutenant of HMAS *Cerberus* speaks very well and she certainly has an interesting tale to tell. I'm looking forward to catching up with you on the night.

Over the last couple of months I have been researching the 'Pride of the Victorian Navy' HMVS *Cerberus*. My prime objective has been to assist, in the company of a number of others, the preparation of our NHS of A revamped Website, and as a result of my efforts, have learnt a lot about our Victorian Navy, a forerunner of our Commonwealth Navy (1901) and subsequently our Royal Australian Navy (1911). Victoria certainly led the field of all the Australian Colonies. War scares, the



*As she arrived in Hobsons Bay*

possibilities of Russian cruisers holding Victoria to ransom and stealing our GOLD, were indeed legitimate concerns to hold by our Colonial Masters. The skill of these politicians in overcoming the reluctance of the RN, and getting the Brits to cough up most of the money to fund our new 'Coastal Defence Turret Ship/Iron Clad Breastwork Monitor, which was especially designed for harbour defence, was an impressive feat indeed! The task of bringing this heavily armed example the 'Monster Class' of Monitor, to our shores was entrusted to Lieutenant Henry Panter RN, and the fact that he succeeded in his task is quite remarkable indeed. The ship had very poor sea



HMVS *Cerberus* loading Quick Firing Guns at target practice - May 1895

keeping qualities, was flat bottomed, rolled badly, a beast to steer properly, had a mutinous crew, and was similar to the turret ship HMS *Captain*, which had capsized off Cape Finisterre on September 6, 1870, (*just weeks before Cerberus was to sail*), with only 18 saved from a complement of 493!!

CERBERUS was steam powered and although not designed to have masts or sails, a barque rig was fitted temporarily to help conserve her coal supply on the trip out and also her stability. It was also necessary to increase the sides of the vessel by 6 feet for the duration of the voyage.

(Unfortunately the sails were to prove of little use, and having adequate supplies of coal was a real problem.)

My admiration for the Lieutenant Panter RN increased as I delved further into the *Cerberus* story. His seamanship, leadership skills and courage impressed me greatly. I have taken excerpts from his official report of the voyage out which fully support my view and also make very good reading! We have these excerpts for you, and they are included with my 'Musings'.

Soon after Panter had successfully delivered HMVS *Cerberus* from England, he was appointed Captain and Senior Naval officer of Victoria, an honour well deserved! He retired from this role on July 14 1877.

He was born in England about 1841, and joined the Royal Navy at the age of 14. In 1855 he went out to the China Station, and served for the duration of the China War. He was 'Mentioned in Dispatches' three times having taken part in storming parties and several boat actions. At the age of 20 he was given command of a gun boat, and whilst in command he brought his ship safely through one of the worst typhoons ever known to blow on that coast. On this occasion twenty five of his crew were disabled and with just five fit men he pulled his ship through! Service in HMS *Marlborough*, Flag Ship of the Mediterranean Fleet, followed. Another command came his way, and in this case his gun boat carried three guns. Promoted to Navigating Lieutenant, the next step in his promising career was a stint at Naval College to study steam power, and after this he joined HMS *Excellent* the Gunnery ship. On passing his examinations he was posted to the 120 gun ship of the line, HMS *Nelson* for her delivery voyage to Melbourne.

At Saint John's Church Toorak, Captain William Henry Panter, Commanding Officer of the Victorian Navy married Alice Seaton Manifold on July 2nd 1872. It was certainly a good match, the Manifold family were pioneers of the Camperdown District, and subsequently very wealthy. Henry and Alice were blessed with seven children, all girls!

Captain Panter died aged 74 on 14th July 1915 and he is buried in Brighton cemetery. Indeed he was an excellent officer both in the Royal and Victorian Navies, and we of the NHS honour his achievements.

Your Aye!

*Rex Williams*

Lieutenant Panter's report below....





## Naval Historical Society of Australia

### Voyage of HMVS Cerberus to Port Phillip: 1871 – 1872

**The following are excerpts taken from the official report on the Voyage of HMVS Cerberus to Port Phillip: 1871 – 1872 by Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Panter RN**

On the 29th of October 1871, at daylight, I sailed for Plymouth, but soon after passing Dover I experienced such strong head winds, and the weather looked so threatening, and also being so very short handed, I put in to Spithead, and remained there until the 31st, as it was blowing a strong gale all the time, when I started again for Plymouth arriving there on the 2nd of November. On my passage I found there was no means of getting the water off the lower deck except by bailing with buckets, and as I had already had 2ft. of water below, I decided on having two pipes let into the deck, so that the water would run into the main drainpipe. I could then pump it out. This I had done at Plymouth, and after coaling and getting some more men, I sailed on the 7<sup>th</sup> November for Gibraltar. On my passage across the Bay of Biscay I encountered a very heavy gale, and for some hours on the 15<sup>th</sup> I expected she would have turned over, as she was rolling to 40 degrees both ways, and at times some of her bottom was out of the water, and I had been informed at the Admiralty a few days previously, that I was never, if possible, to let her go over more than 10 deg. The gale lasted till the 12<sup>th</sup>, when I was off Finisterre. I then fortunately had fine weather to Gibraltar, where I arrived on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup>.(sic-17<sup>th</sup>?) only having five tons of coal left. Here I had great difficulty in keeping my men on board, so much so that I had to get the assistance of the military and the police. After coaling I sailed again for Malta, on the 20<sup>th</sup>, where I arrived on the 27<sup>th</sup>. The crew broke out of the ship as soon as I anchored, and I had to send 25 of them to gaol. I found it was very necessary to take strong measures or I should have lost them all. In some cases, they said they would sooner go to prison for six weeks with hard labour than toil in the ship. With the exception of the 'stokers', I did not fill up their places, as I had already found I should never be able to do anything with the sails, and therefore should not want so many men. After coaling and cleaning the ship's bottom, which was very dirty, and overhauling the engines, I was on the point of starting when a heavy gale set in, which kept me a week longer in harbour. I sailed from Malta on the 11<sup>th</sup> December, and arrived at Port Said on the 19<sup>th</sup>. During my passage I had fine weather, and I tried the ship under all circumstances, both sailing and steaming, but she would do nothing under sail.



LEUT Henry Panter, RN  
*Photo courtesy of Henry Panter's  
great grandson, David & Peg Orr.*

*Lieut Panter's report is necessarily most comprehensive, however in the interests of brevity we paraphrase the following points of interest using his text.*

On my arrival at Port Said I visited the canal authorities. As her steering qualities were so bad, I deemed it prudent to take a tug through the canal and after taking 198 tons of coal, I started at daylight on the 21<sup>st</sup>, and arrived at Suez on the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. I found, owing to her great beam under the water, 43ft, and her screws projecting so far out on each quarter, and also her bottom being only half an inch thick, that it was very dangerous work getting her through, for if her screws had touched they would have broken, and if her bottom had struck at all hard it would have bent it, so I only proceeded at the rate of two miles per hour. I just touched twice, but not hard enough to take the paint off her bottom. I made a very fair passage to Aden, where I arrived on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, and after overhauling the engines and taking 400 tons of coal on board, 200 tons of which I had to stow on my decks, I started again on the 14<sup>th</sup> for Galle. I had to sail nearly 600 miles up the coast to Arabia before I could stand out to sea, on account of the N.E. monsoon, which at this time of the year blows from the E.N.E. and then I kept away from Galle, arriving there on the 31<sup>st</sup> January. I sailed again on the 4<sup>th</sup> for Batavia.

I experienced very fine weather all the way, and arrived there on the 17<sup>th</sup>, and after cleaning the boilers and engines and taking on 305 tons of coal, I sailed on the 25<sup>th</sup> for Australia. Soon after leaving the Straits of Sunda I got into very rough weather, and for three days it was close to a hurricane. I had to run down the south-west side of it to avoid the centre, which would have been fatal to the ship, and consequently I had to go some distance out of my way; and when I got down to the western coast I had strong winds for three days. I was obliged to go into Fremantle and get enough coal to take me to the Sound, where I arrived on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March, and after cleaning the ship's bottom and coaling I sailed again on the 30<sup>th</sup>, and with the exception of the first two days I have had fine weather all the way. I sighted the Otway at half past 2pm on the 8<sup>th</sup>, and arrived in Hobson's Bay at 1 pm on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

In conclusion, I have the honour to inform you that the principal causes of my anxiety during the whole voyage have been - 1<sup>st</sup>. My never having had a trial, and therefore not knowing what stability the ship had; also the general idea amongst the officers, both at Admiralty and Chatham, Sheerness, Portsmouth and Plymouth dockyards, that she was not fit for a sea-going ship, and further, the bad steering qualities of the ship, as when it was blowing I seldom got her to steer within three or four points of her course each way, and consequently at times she would get into the trough of the sea, which made it very dangerous, as I have had nearly the whole way upwards of 2000 tons of weight above my water line, and only 1800 below it. - 2<sup>nd</sup>. Her sails being almost useless to her, I always had to trust my engines, and at times I had had to carry 154 tons of coal on my upper deck, which made her roll very heavily.

#### **Reference:**

Official Report of Lieutenant Panter, HMVS Cerberus, Geelong Advertiser, 15 April 1871, available through [Trove](#)