*D.E.M.S. Gunner First P.O.W. in W.W. II.*

The official publication of the Australian War Memorial, “Australia in the War of 1939 to 1945”, Vol 4, chapter 7, under Prisoners of War, states – “The first men of the R.A.N. to be taken prisoners were petty officer H. Jones and able seamen W.J. Hurren and H.C. Sweeny from HMAS Hobart, on 9th August 1940“ etc. In the same set of books under NAVY Vol I page 83, it tells us about merchant vessels sunk by the Graf Spee. “Defensively Equipped Merchant Ship ratings of the R.A.N.R., who were in charge of the guns of these ships, were the first Australian Naval men to become prisoners-of-war in the 1939-45 conflict.”

With this premise in mind I wrote to the P.O.W. Memorial Trustees in Ballarat, Victoria, hoping for some information on Gunner Jack Andrew Daly S2572. He was on the Tairoa when it was sunk by the Graf Spee on the 3rd December 1939. He was later transferred from the Graf Spee to the German supply ship Altmark, which then headed for Germany, while the Graf Spee headed for Montevideo, where she was scuttled. The Altmark was eventually caught up with in neutral Norwegian waters and boarded by the crew of H.M.S Cossack. Over 300 prisoners were released, including Jack Daly.

According to the reply from Ballarat, Daly was not an R.A.N. Prisoner of War, but a merchant seaman. I was able to respond to the trustee Mr Bill Bahr, explaining that D.E.M.S. gunners were always listed as supernumerary deck hands. This brought them under the authority of the Master of the ship, and also averted problems with Service personnel entering neutral ports. I also got Jack Daly’s R.A.N. War Service records on line. Mr Bahr duly passed this information to A.W.M. Canberra and they concurred. Thus, 75 years and 2 days after the event, Able Seaman Jack Andrew Daly was officially acknowledged as an R.A.N.R. Prisoner of War.

This now confirms that the statement in Volume 4 chapter 7 of “Australia in the War of 1939 to 1945”, Series Two, is inaccurate in the statement concerning the first men of the RAN to be taken Prisoners of War. Jack Daly was taken prisoner approximately nine months prior to the men on the Hobart.

Jack survived the war, although he was aboard RMS Niagara when she was mined and sunk just out of Wellington, New Zealand in June 1940. He served on three other ships as a DEMS gunner, until the end of hostilities.

L. H.M