



THE THREE-HEADED DOG



Newsletter of the Victoria Chapter

Naval Historical Society of Australia

SPOTLIGHT

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New NHSA(V)
Committee for
2023

Committee
meeting 23
November – call
for input

“Answering the
Call” needs a
facelift

Loss of HMAS
Armidale – a
survivor’s tale

Visit to
Williamstown 4
November

Waverley RSL -
future site
development

“Raising Steam”
– Max Thomson

Christmas
Celebration
event – RADM
Simon
Harrington

Welcome to our Victorian members and other friends and supporters of our Chapter.

As the year draws to an end, it is worth noting the various important naval commemoration services that will be held in Victoria in coming weeks.

These can be found on the Navy Victoria Network site at

<https://navyvic.net/calendar/calendar.html>

This includes the 80th Anniversary of the sinking of HMAS *Armidale* off Timor on 1 December 1942. This event has gained added publicity in recent times due to the award of the Victoria Cross two years ago to Ordinary Seaman “Teddy” Sheean as he heroically fought against the attacking enemy aircraft which eventually sank the ship.

Yet the heroism displayed by the *Armidale* survivors is also a story that deserves regular re-telling, especially as most have now passed away.

We were fortunate to be provided recently with a copy of an account written in 1998 by one of those survivors – former Ordinary Seaman Rex Pullen. His first-hand description of the aftermath of the sinking, and how one group of survivors tried to make their way to safety or await rescue, is compelling.

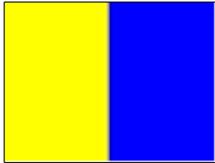
His story is therefore included in this issue - largely as written except a few paragraphs which have been omitted for brevity as shown. This was written 24 years ago, by a man whose hatred of the enemy who sank his ship and machined gunned survivors in the water remained evident. Omitting these comments takes nothing away from his account of the innovation the survivors displayed, nor the courage, grit and determination they showed in terrible conditions at sea in an open boat for eight days in the tropics. While occupying more space in this Newsletter than would be normal, I believe it deserves telling as written.

I’ve attached a small chart at the end of the story to show the key locations and dates where the three groups of survivors were sighted.

I thank those Members who have offered items for inclusion in this Newsletter and invite others to do so where possible.

Andrew Mackinnon - Editor

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS



Flag KILO

* International Marine Signal Flags are used by ships at sea. The code flag K "KILO" nowadays means 'I wish to communicate with you'.

At our Chapter's Annual General Meeting on 24 October, I reflected on a year we spent largely free of the COVID restrictions which impacted us previously. I was honoured to be re-elected as President for a further year. It was also a delight to welcome Ms Lynda Gilbert onboard as our new Vice President. Lynda has been involved in NHTA activities for many years and is very active in the Navy League, so I'm sure she'll bring some fresh ideas and energy to our Chapter Committee.

I thanked John Redman for his support as previous Vice President, noting he chose to stand down this year, and other members of the Committee for offering their services for a further year. The full list of our Committee members is shown on the back page, reflecting a few minor changes to our structure.

We were then treated to an excellent presentation by Commander Doug Stevens RAN (Rtd) on potential future east coast basing options for RAN nuclear submarines. While based on work in his earlier studies, he acknowledged elements of conjecture that are yet to be resolved. This remains a very topical issue.

Our focus now turns to our end of year Christmas Celebratory Dinner on 28 November, when our Guest of Honour will be Rear Admiral Simon Harrington AM, RAN (Rtd). He has kindly agreed to provide a talk entitled "*Hands Across the Trenches - Centenary of Gallipoli*", which draws on his experience as the Australian Team Leader of the Joint Historical and Archaeological Survey of the Anzac Battle Site at Gallipoli from 2010 to 2014.

I'm confident this will be another fun event, the last for this year. For those who wish to attend and have not yet done so, I encourage you to make bookings as soon as possible - time is running out! Payment and other booking details are in the Flyer at the rear of this Issue.

I have included some remarks later about deterioration of the bronze commemorative statue "Answering the Call" located on the foreshore at the end of Bay Street in Port Melbourne. I would welcome comments from readers about this and whether our Chapter should lobby for some remedial action to ensure it can be better enjoyed and appreciated by the passing public.



It was most encouraging to see our former President Rex Williams under way again after a few months in "dry dock", not only assisting with our recent AGM but recently spotted in good humour at an operatic performance in the city. Two phantoms at the opera, perhaps?

I have convened a meeting of our new Committee on 23 November, to discuss the year ahead and what future activities we might seek to generate within our Victoria Chapter. If any members have ideas or issues they would like us to discuss, please send me an email beforehand.

One priority is to ensure we have a presence at the HMAS *Cerberus* Open Day on Sunday 19 March 2023. This provides an opportunity to stimulate awareness among the broader naval community, and others with an interest in naval history, about the benefits of membership of the Naval Historical Society and specifically the Victoria Chapter.

Finally, on behalf of all our Chapter members, I offer our sincerest condolences to our dedicated member Laurie "Lozza" Pegler, whose dear wife Dorrell recently passed away. Her funeral was held on 7 November, and ended with appropriate naval commemoration in light of her previous service in our Navy. As the naval service element noted: "Once Navy - Always Navy".

As always, I'd welcome ideas to help strengthen our organisation, increase our membership, and to better serve our members – andrewmackinnon0404@gmail.com.

What Ships & Where?

This segment seeks to include an interesting photo that might test recognition ability and/or naval history. What is this rust-streaked ship and where is it berthing? The answer will be found on the back page.



- In naval parlance, what is mousing?
- The expression “No No!” might have been used in a naval motor launch. Why?
- What is whipping? (Nothing to do with cream or convicts!)

Answers on the back page.

Editors Correction: In the last edition, I misspelt the name of the German ship that was apprehended while trying to depart Port Philip in 1939. This was the SS *Pfalz*.

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JUST WONDERING



Some may recall that our formidable former member LCDR Mac Gregory’s vision to erect a bronze commemorative statue of a World War II sailor “Answering the Call” was finally realised when the Chief of Navy (Vice Admiral Tim Barrett AO CSC RAN) unveiled this on the foreshore at Port Melbourne seven years ago.

As the Chief of Navy noted in his address “*This fine new statue is a place of reflection where our generation, and those that come after us, can pause, and remember what we owe to all those who fought and returned from the sea - and to those who lie there still. The legacy of all those Australian sailors commemorated here is our life long liberty. Lest We Forget.*”

This splendid eye-catching statue was mounted on a base which usefully informed visitors of its purpose and provenance.

Over the succeeding years the statue itself has taken on the inevitable patina associated with most bronze statues, but regrettably the wording on the seaward side of the base has weathered to such an extent that it is almost unreadable.



THEN



NOW

This raises a question about whether there is need for a regular maintenance regime for this statue – ideally undertaken by the Port Melbourne Council – that would see it maintained to the same standard as other important commemorative statues in our city. This unique statue commemorates our sailors like few others in Australia. Former Navy members could rightly expect that it would be regularly maintained to a better standard than at present.





SURVIVAL AT SEA: a personal account by Rex Pullen

This account was kindly provided by Ms Geraldine Hare, whose father (Eric Millhouse) also survived the sinking of HMAS *Armidale*, and who was one of those rescued from the ship's motor boat.

Editor's Note: As reported in the August issue of the Three-Headed Dog, this link provides a more detailed account of the *Armidale* sinking and the continuing "Remembering HMAS *Armidale* Association". [Microsoft Word - Angus Callander - Armidale3.docx \(navyvic.net\)](#)

It is now a well-known fact that HMAS *Armidale* sank at 3.15 pm, on 1 December 1942 after two torpedoes struck her in the port side. A near miss from a bomb didn't help much either.

My action station was loader on the starboard Oerlikon gun. I had watched our gunner, Lou Lyndon, fire at the Zeros as they flew in low to machine gun the ship. He seemed to be spot on, the tracers seemed to penetrate the planes' windscreens and sides as they flashed over us, but the Japs didn't hesitate. They just kept coming.

I was on the deck, reloading a magazine, when the first torpedo struck. The ship instantly began to heel over to port and I heard Captain Richards' order to abandon ship. Everyone around me seemed quite calm as though it were an everyday occurrence. With my life jacket (or "blimp") blown up, I walked down the slanting starboard side and jumped into the water. It was a terrible experience. I could see bobbing heads and flailing arms ahead, so set out to join them. I wasn't far from the sinking ship when the second torpedo hit about port midships.

I felt little burning feelings in my legs and later I found tiny pieces of shrapnel sticking in to my skin! I swam on and joined a few blokes, pausing long enough to look back and see *Armidale* in her last death throes. She was at the perpendicular, with the quarterdeck still above water and the two propellers turning lazily. I swam on and took another look back. All I saw was a boiling mass where *Armidale* had been. [Next para removed]

For a bloke who had been invited to help make up a water polo team but who declined because of poor swimming ability, I was doing well. I think I passed some water polo players as I put distance between me and where *Armidale* had been. I really couldn't tell who they were because they were covered in crude oil, black and putrid. So was I!

The Japanese aircraft continued to strafe us as we swam wide of where *Armidale* had been. We had sense enough not to congregate but scattered about to give less of a target to these heathen bastards. I can't remember if it was only the Zeros that did the strafing or whether they were joined by their Bomber mates. [Part para removed]

Before our ill-fated voyage, we were tied up alongside a wharf. Leading Seaman Leigh "Bumble" Bool suggested that we collect any dunnage lying about the wharf as we returned from shore leave. We would bring this timber aboard and lash it with cordage to the guard rails. "Bumble" thought this could be handy in an emergency. I recall bringing quite a few super feet aboard and helping to lash it to the guard rail.

Fortunately, during the attack, some persons were near enough to be able to slash the timber free. So, the timber plus the cordage floated freely once *Armidale* had disappeared. This is for the benefit of those who have read Frank Walker's book¹ and wondered why so much flotsam was available. Bumble's emergency had arrived! And that timber was to play a big part in our survival.

Talk about otters being busy! Flotsam was scattered over a wide area and we set to work to gather it and bring it to a central area, piece by piece. It was hard work but at this stage, except for those who were wounded, we were pretty fit. While some swam and collected, others stayed and built a raft. There was never enough cord or rope, so what we had was unravelled and tied together. There were always repairs to be done to the raft. Nevertheless, there were about 80 who could get some rest on it.

The sun was hellish by day but after sundown and during the night the air was freezing. No wonder we found a few missing at the sunrise roll call. There was no means of keeping warm except exercise. No point in trying to wrap an extra bit of water round our ears to keep warm! Sunshine began to thaw us but soon the heat was too much. As the day progressed, we were hit with pangs of hunger but the lack of something to drink was worse. We were aching all over, having spent most of the first night treading water and repairing the raft. Oh for somewhere to lie down and sleep!

On the second day, it was decided that Captain Richards should take the motor boat with some of the wounded and some fit rowers and head towards our Australian reconnaissance area. So, a total of 22 left us, with our blessing, and steered towards Darwin.

¹ "HMAS *Armidale: the ship that had to die*" by Frank B. Walker, Kingfisher Press 1990.

We had found the whaler but it was submerged and floating just below the water line. I guess it was kept afloat by buoyancy tanks. Overnight, we had taken turns with our legs suspended in the whaler, using our life jackets to keep us afloat. The scenery above water was pretty miserable, only heads mostly covered in oil which gradually dried up as the sun boiled down. I was one of the unfortunates who had requested to grow a beard when we learned we were going to be stationed "up north", so, as well as matted hair, I'd gathered enough oil on my beard for a day's steaming! The oil was filthy and stinking and made it difficult to recognise anybody.

We organised a shark watch! Those who were unable to help with the raft because they were wounded would hold their head under water for as long as possible. If a shark were spotted in the clear water, we would all splash the water in an attempt to frighten the creature off. This worked well during the daylight hours but at night we simply had to take a chance.

Hunger! Thirst! Still no planes looking for us! The situation looked hopeless. Another cold and fearful night, followed by yet another hellish day. Day 3 brought no searching planes and no joy. We came to the conclusion that the Skipper hadn't been found yet and we were really down in the dumps.

Day 4 and it was a very significant one back at the raft. It was decided that an effort should be made to salvage the whaler. Apparently, Lieut. Palmer and Leading Seaman Bool had discussed how we were to do it.

The stern of the whaler was badly damaged with a big hole just at the water line and above! Lieut Palmer detailed enough sailors around the whaler and they were to swim alongside the sunken boat and point the damaged stern at the raft. Other hands were detailed to stand, sit, or whatever on the edge of the raft at which the whaler was pointed.

The weight of bodies depressed the edge of the raft to below the keel of the whaler. With a final effort, the whaler crew pushed the sunken boat as far on to the makeshift raft as possible. At a given order, the raft crew jumped back into the water. The rising raft acted as a lever and lifted the stern of the whaler, thus spilling some of the water from it.

Two steel helmets appeared from somewhere and these were given to two smaller men who had the job of baling which they did and did well. Being small, they took up less room in the whaler. Naturally, each helmetful of water taken from the whaler lightened it. As many as could were ordered to blow up life jackets as tightly as possible and surround the whaler. These men had to lift with all their strength while swimming with the boat. It was a long and painful operation but, centimetre by centimetre, we were winning. Finally, with most of the small holes plugged with pieces of rag and clothing, we had the boat up on the raft – or floating dock – and almost dry.

This was accomplished through sheer determination, grit and strength of character which I like to think relates to young healthy Australians – if not today, then it did in the days of my youth. It must be remembered that in the 80-90 hours since *Armidade* went down, we had practically no food or water and had suffered badly from heat in daylight hours and from cold at night. Someone described our flesh as "tripe-looking". The continual submergence was having its unpleasant effect. The coral dust was penetrating broken flesh and ulcers were the result. The occasional rubbing of bodies against bodies or flotsam brought cries of pain. We were a weird-looking mob. In my case, I recall that the matted oil in my beard and hair was cruelly uncomfortable. However, we worked on with no thought of giving up until we had the bigger holes in the whaler patched and plugged. When she was finally floated again, the intake of water was controlled by baling with the two helmets.

Floating again on the water, the whaler gave indescribable relief as we each were given a turn to rest our weary bodies. At this stage whilst resting in the whaler, I first realised that time was taking its toll. No food or water to speak of was quite evident. I was looking into faces covered in despair – and oil – and the eyes were sinking back into their sockets. I was pleased I couldn't see my oil-sodden bewhiskered face – the clean-shaven blokes were bad enough.

That night we continually changed from treading water to a turn at sitting in the whaler. But the baling continued; it was a never-ending race to keep the water out.

Lieut. Palmer discussed the bleak situation with us next morning – the 5th day – and we all believed that the motor boat hadn't been sighted or something worse had happened to it. It was readily agreed that he (Palmer) should take as many of the strongest sailors in the whaler and head for Darwin. Perhaps if the Skipper hadn't been lucky, then Palmer and his crew might be. It was worth a try.

Then Lieut. Palmer chose the 28 others to make up the 29 who would fit in the whaler. He was the only person who was capable of steering a course to Darwin. As stated earlier, I was selected but I don't know why. I hope that Lieut Palmer had some hope in me as a rower.

The scene at the raft was not a pleasant one as we said a tearful cheerio to our mates. I became very worried at the time when we rowed out of sight of the raft folk. Was I deserting my mates? Was there a hope that we could be sighted? Could help eventually be sent to the raft? These thoughts still haunt me. And I'll never know the answer. I will never know exactly what those on the raft were thinking.

Never look back – isn't that what we've been taught? Well, we settled down to a steady rhythm and set our hopes on reaching Darwin. Progress was slow because with only one whaler oar plus a half dozen smaller and makeshift ones, it was difficult to keep the boat on course. As I looked around the whaler with its holes all plugged and a huge repair in the stern, I realised that we were nearly "up the creek without a paddle". What a mess, just because a bloke in Darwin had said "Air

attack is to be accepted as ordinary, routine, secondary warfare". On even terms, yes, but in the case of *Armidale*, what a load of codswallop! I wished that same fellow could have been sitting on one of these thwarts with us and his behind was becoming more chafed with continually sliding across the thwart and pressure was put on the oar and his broken blisters were turning into tropical ulcers because of the infestation of the coral dust! It's a cruel world at times.

Imagine 29 men in a boat 27 feet long, probably 10 trying to row, 2 baling, and 17 others trying not to get in the way of the workers. Imagine lying on the bottom of the whaler in water 6 inches deep, the legs and feet of rowers continually brushing or rubbing your body and the tin hats of the balers slipping down your festering body! Not a nice picture. Not a good story but very true. How much can the human body stand? I guess we had some sleep but I can't remember ever waking up. The night was bitterly cold again but at least as we took our turn at rowing or baling we were able to keep a little warmth in our body.

Bill Lamshed used his pusser's knife to cut up some floorboards. He then used the knife to extract a screw or two from the boat. He eventually screwed the boards together and fashioned a tiller which helped to keep us on a straighter course.

Day 6 and the motor boat mob was picked up by HMAS *Kalgoorlie* but of course we didn't know this at the time.

Day 6 for the whaler crew was, if anything, worse than Day 5. Of course, we were quickly using up our energy and our sores were getting worse. Even to hold the oar was an effort with our cracked, swollen and festering hands. How long could we last? This too was the day of the Pacific Gull which obligingly landed on an extended oar. As the oar was gently pulled in the boat, the bird stayed very still until it was within grabbing distance. Then it realised that it still had wings and flew off. Later, it returned to the oar we offered but again flew off just as we were about to grab it. I can remember that, had it been caught, we'd have eaten it, feathers and all!! Today, 56 years on, what a terrible thought!

Another freezing night! It was always better to be rowing at night. Our behinds were getting so ulcerated that it was agony to try and sit as we rowed. Our progress was slowing. A tired body with skin peeling from sunburn is not much value in this situation. By this stage, clothes were freely given to make sails which we tied together and hoisted on a long oar, hoping to catch any draught that happened along. Of course, some sailors were in a seriously weakened condition and were offered extra clothing to help keep cold out and to prevent the sun from fiercely burning them. Some of us were still offering prayers for help and our thanks for survival to this date. In our position, praying was easier than rowing!

Day 7 came and now I'm confused because I think *this* was the day of the Gull! However it doesn't matter much. The bottle of water was found to be empty. Someone stated to Frank Walker that the water was stolen from the lemonade bottle. Whoever told this story stated that two men were responsible and that everyone knew who it was. I disagree. I didn't know who had taken the water and the storyteller didn't either. But because two men were sitting near it, they got the blame. One was my friend and I wouldn't believe he'd do such a thing. In fact, I know he wouldn't. No-one had seen anything. It was very unfair to accuse anyone of stealing the water. No-one was seen to do it. Anyone could have been responsible. Most of us were going bonkers and wouldn't have been responsible for our actions. As far as I'm concerned, it's a mystery and will remain that way.

On this day we'd become accustomed to being hungry and lack of food wasn't much of a problem. But, thirst! A different matter. Tongues were swelling and we needed water. We were all craving for liquid, preferably water. Thirst added to the torments of ulcers, broken skin and swollen joints. We were so desperate that we caught the little bit of urine we could muster in a rusty bully beef tin and tried to drink it. Not a lot of luck but at least it moistened our mouth and helped to delay the swelling of our tongue. It was terrible! Disgusting – but life is sweet! Ugh! The less we think about this, the better.

We battled on. The least little thing would start an argument. We were skinny and terrible to look at, ribs well to the fore and the oil in our hair and whiskers had dried out and was brittle and bent our hair into strange shapes. I didn't think it was possible to live in these conditions. Attempts to swim ashore were common and the offenders were dealt a heavy whack and were often knocked out for the count of 10! On regaining common sense, the offender would return to his usual calm and would settle down. It was a shocking time.

Sharks and sea-snakes were still with us and the occasional bloke who went over the side was quickly pulled back aboard.

I think on the eighth day our prayers were heard and answered. The sky clouded over early in the day and squalls narrowly missed us. But in the end a light rain fell and it was the most wonderful feeling to find it splashing lightly on our bodies. We were ready for this happening. With deflated life jackets we were able to catch sufficient water for each man to have a reasonable drink and still have a few pints in reserve. Some had split their life jacket open and caught the run-off in them. Wonderful water! The filthy old urine tine came in handy – a bit on the nostril but who cared. This drink seemed to give us new life. Even the pain from the ulcerated behinds seemed to vanish. Our spirits were up and it was "Look out Darwin, here we come!"

It was at this stage that I was dubbed "Ordinary Seaman Pullen with the radio-location ears". I thought I heard an aircraft and shouted for silence. But no-one else could hear it. I stuck to my guns and said an aircraft was near. Everyone searched high and low for a plane. I was sure it was getting closer and eventually others heard it too. A few minutes later, not only could we hear the plane but it hove into sight.

Lieut. Palmer asked for calm. There was no sense in having put up with days of hell to find that we had broken up our friend the whaler through sheer undisciplined behaviour. It was a Catalina flying boat and it headed towards us. But it turned away from us and disappeared. Presently it returned and this time flew over us and around us. Signal lamps blinked from the plane and the message was received by our signalman. Answer was returned by semaphore. As the plane circled around us, it dropped a bundle into the sea. We paddled towards the bundle and found it to be a blanket. Inside the blanket was a note which said "*Your captain is safe. We found the raft. Dropped them all our food and water and now we are returning to Darwin to send out a ship for you.*"

At this moment Lieut. Palmer realised that there was no point in continuing to row. The Catalina crew had noted the exact bearing where we were. So why move away? The ship would come to us. We were told to stop rowing. Had our prayers been answered? Definitely.

The effort over the past few days had been well rewarded. Suddenly we realised that our work was done except for the balers. So, the two hats were passed around the fittest of us and the never-ending baling continued. We simply couldn't allow the volume of water to increase inside the whaler.

What amazed us was that most of the time since *Armidale* had been sunk, the weather had been good and the seas calm. At the time we were sighted, the water was too rough for the Catalina to put down on the sea!

We knew we'd have to settle down for at least one more night and we did just that as gently as possible. No bodies were ever more broken than the 29 inmates of the whaler. It was simply impossible to get into a comfortable and painless position. So the night passed, long and cold and very painful – and with no rowing to occupy our minds or to warm our bodies. A turn or two at baling and the sun came up again to mercilessly burn us – burn upon burn!

Daylight and still no ship to be seen but surely rescue was getting closer! Not long after, a plane appeared – a Hudson bomber – soon to be followed by more Hudsons. Have you ever seen grown men cry? What a pathetic scene.

This was 13 Squadron of Hudson Bombers. They flew over us, dropping parcels of food. Sharks or no sharks, we were over the side, attempting to rescue as much as we could. Four-gallon tins of water were dropped and it was a struggle to get a couple into the whaler – we were so weak. Eventually we had rescued as much as our weak bodies would allow so we set about having a feed and plenty of water.

What a change had come over us. Most of us were laughing and joking as if we were just out on a training run on the bay. Tucker and water! You bloody beauty! There was also a message from 13 Squadron. "*Merry Christmas, Boys. 13 Squadron takes off their hats to you, even though you nearly shot us down.*" They referred to an incident which had occurred about the second morning after we left Darwin. Thirteen Squadron approached us from directly ahead and just above water level. A sitting duck for our 4-inch gun! We signalled for identification but they ignored us. By this time, our gun was trained on them and the order to fire was given. Instantly these planes – about 9 of them – spread out like a huge fan and signal lamps quickly blinked out that they were friends. This was possibly the only decent shot the gun crew ever got in!

More food and another note were picked up. "*A corvette will pick you up in about 3 hours. We have given it a course to steer.*" HMAS *Kalgoorlie* hove in sight right on time. She hove to and we rowed alongside to her scrambling nets and were soon helped aboard by wonderfully kind crew members.

Our legs were like strips of licorice and we had to be carried in to the mess deck where lovely hot soup or stew was being issued to survivors – for surely that's what we were now! The sheer luxury of *Kalgoorlie's* mess decks was only bettered by their showers. After a feed or as much food as we could manage, each one of us was carried to the showers where we sat or knelt on the deck while *Kalgoorlie* sailors helped us clean ourselves up. Boy, oh Boy! – soap and hot water! What a combination! What a luxury!

You won't believe that we were no sooner back on the mess deck when the "Action Stations" alarm was sounded! I must say that my confidence was tested. However, one shot from *Kalgoorlie* was the only bit of action! A Jap bomber had sighted the ship but kept its distance and then flew away.

It was then I realised my glands on the left side of my neck were extremely swollen. Up until now I hadn't noticed but suddenly I was in great pain. Only a bit more pain really. We were all chocka with pain from the top of the head to the tips of our toes.

We enjoyed a good sleep as *Kalgoorlie* conveyed us to Darwin and the hospital where we were united with the Captain and his mob from the motor boat. I must admit that I have very little recollection of our arrival. I think I may have headed for "Fantasy Island". I have been told that Commodore Pope lined us up on the wharf and spoke to a few words of welcome. [Sentence omitted]

I forgot to mention that Lieutenant Commander Litchfield – *Kalgoorlie's* Skipper – asked whether we would like the whaler to be brought back as a museum piece. "Yes please" was our definitive answer. The *Kalgoorlie* crew brought two strops and put them under and round our whaler and brought it to the mine-sweeping winch. They began to lift it out of the water but, before they could bring it inboard, this beaut boat which had saved 29 men simply broke up into matchwood. We were very disappointed but we realised just how close we'd been to Death's door over the last few days!

Now back to Darwin. We were taken to the hospital where we met the Skipper's motor boat men. It was made known to us that the raft and its mob couldn't be located. They had vanished. And to this day, nothing is known of what happened to them. Their disappearance after being sighted is a complete mystery.

We were warned that we must not speak about *Armidale's* loss! We were almost treated as suspects, as though we had purposely sunk the ship.

[Paragraph omitted on treatment of his ailments while in Darwin.]

It was wonderful to be safe and sound in Darwin and particularly in the hospital. We were treated well there and the bed was very cosy. No more sun to burn by day nor the chilly air to freeze us by night. Plus, of course, the essentials to look like normal humans. One by one we were sent to various hospitals to do more serious operations. [Section omitted re return of other wounded sailor and assistance provided by his cousin in Darwin.]

During my stay in hospital, I saw the Red Cross once and they gave me a washer and soap, toothbrush and toothpaste, even though I had no teeth. When I suggested some clothes, they told me I'd be kitted out when I got to Melbourne! I must admit that I had a pair of shorts, a shirt, and a pair of shoes which the kind crew of *Kalgoorlie* had handed me. I was still wearing them when I reached Melbourne weeks later! They must have been on the nose by then!

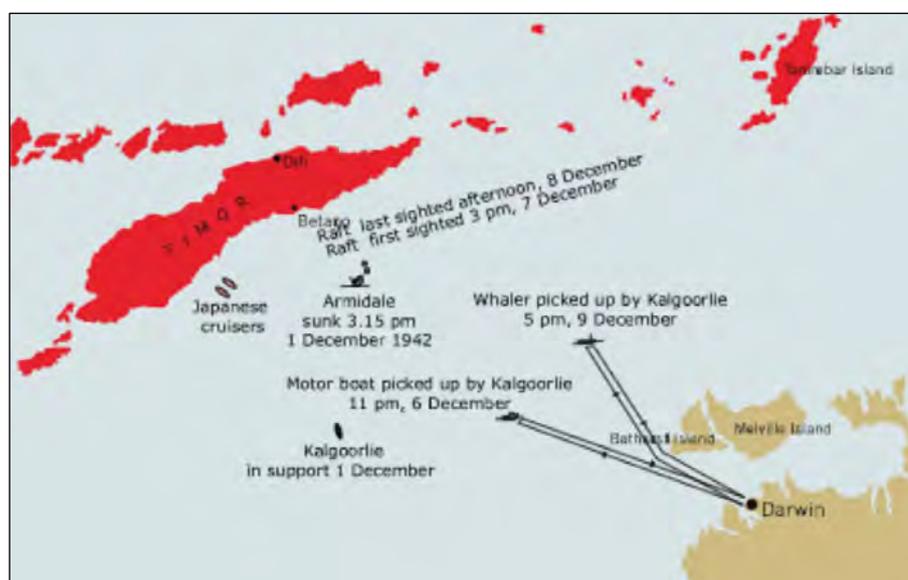
I could continue this saga but enough is enough! What has always amazed me is the crook treatment and bad press we Armidaleans received from the Navy – this Navy which I really loved took until 1992 – 50 years after the event – to forgive us and hand out a bouquet or two. Our wonderful Skipper – Lieutenant Commander Richards, wasn't given another command, but Lieutenant Whitting who lay wounded in the motor boat was given command of another corvette – HMAS *Colac*, I think.

In conclusion, I would like to make the point that, over a period of 56 years, my memory may have slipped a cog or two. However, as I read through this account, I am confident that what I've recorded is about spot-on. No doubt each survivor has his particular story to tell, but mine is full of admiration for the tenacity and sheer determination of those concerned to survive and try to get help for our mates on the raft. History will tell that we accomplished what we set out to achieve but the sad part is that the raft and its occupants disappeared the day after the RAAF had reported finding them. For us, that was a sad conclusion to what in other respects was a successful mission.



HMAS *Armidale* (I) under enemy aerial attack –
1 December 1942
(artwork by Maritime Artist John Ford)

Key locations and dates



Recent Events

As mentioned earlier, our meeting on 26 September included a presentation on the Naval Heritage Aspects of Osborne House at Geelong. A video recording of this presentation is now available on the NHSA(V) link on the NVN website at <https://navyvic.net/associations/nhs/recordings.html>

Visit to Williamstown

Our enjoyable group visit to Williamstown on 4 November was changed at the last minute due to the flooded Yarra River levels causing our ferry trip to be cancelled – it couldn't get under the low bridge! So, the 24 stalwarts had to forego their sea-time and make their own way, initially for a tour of ex-HMAS *Castlemaine* as she celebrates her 80th anniversary since commissioning. The volunteers onboard did a great a job of getting us around the ship, in a fairly short one-hour tour.



Under the watchful gaze of the chief whip-cracker and his sturdy clipboard, the initially overcast skies brightened to a wonderful warm Melbourne spring morning.



Lunch was enjoyed at the nearby Customs House Hotel, where folks got to mingle a little more and chat with others who rarely get to gatherings such as this.

After lunch we visited the not-for-profit SEAWORKS Maritime Museum just across the road, to delight in some of the amazing ship models and artefacts they have on display.

There is an obvious wish to expand their naval collection, which is highly appropriate given that the museum sits on land previously occupied by the Naval Dockyard where so many RAN ships were built and maintained over the years.

A lucky few managed to don the virtual reality headset and equipment, to find themselves onboard the former HMVS *Cerberus* – a wonderful piece of cutting-edge technology now at the Museum.



There would seem to be benefit in our Chapter maintaining closer ties with both of these museums, given their presence in the wonderful maritime heritage setting at Williamstown and that they are effectively two of the key public-facing organisations that provide insights into aspects of our Navy's history, pre and post Federation. Helping them maintain their roles would be entirely consistent with our mission – "Honouring History".

The Waverley RSL Future

As our members know, we meet monthly at the Waverley RSL, where many enjoy the opportunity for pre-dinner drinks and a meal before listening to a variety of Guest Speakers or other activities. The RSL's generosity in accommodating our meeting needs is well recognised and much appreciated and Navy ties are recognised in the naming of their dining room after HMAS *Warramunga*.

Yet in recent months we have been asking "*What's going on with the Club, and the Suburban Rail Loop Project?*"

The following echoes advice provided to members of the Waverley RSL Club about the impact of the Suburban Rail Loop Project currently under development.

"To date, the confidentiality agreement between the Waverley RSL and the Suburban Rail Loop Authority (SRLA) has limited your Committee from commenting in detail on the Suburban Rail Loop Project. Now that the EES (Environmental Effects Statement) process has been finalised by the State Government, we are able to bring you up to date on the current SRLA plans for the new underground station at Glen Waverley and its impact on the Waverley RSL.

The Waverley RSL has set up a Planning and Development Sub-Committee to lead discussions and negotiations with the SRLA and as part of pre-planning and early engagement, regular meetings have been taking place since December 2020.

The new underground station in Glen Waverley will be located adjacent to Coleman Parade, south of the existing Glen Waverley Station and central to the busy activity centre. It is proposed that the SRL East section will be operational by 2035. Initial construction of the main station in Glen Waverley is expected to commence in 2025.

SRLA's support and willingness to assist the Waverley RSL through this stressful and inevitably disruptive process, has been and is appreciated. The SRLA has indicated it wants to achieve the best outcomes for both the delivery of the rail line and for Waverley RSL as a valued local community facility.

SRLA has assured the Waverley RSL that it will be able to continue operating at the current site for the next 5 to 6 years and the Waverley RSL and SRLA are committed to working collaboratively to minimise impacts of the project on the Waverley RSL and to ensure a smooth transition to a new location.

SRLA is actively providing support to assist Waverley RSL to explore its potential relocation options. This work is underway but finding a suitable and available site is challenging. As you are aware the Waverley RSL is currently well located in the Glen Waverley Central Activity Area and when considering alternative locations it is imperative that any new facility is both fit for purpose and commercial viability in order to ensure our ability to provide ongoing quality services to our members and the community.

Discussions and negotiations with SRLA are ongoing and we will continue to provide information to members about progress and timelines as they become available. I can assure you that the Waverley RSL is committed to investigating all opportunities and work with the SRLA to achieve a negotiated relocation in a comparable location".



"...is hereby awarded the Navy Commendation medal for his suggestion that stale bread be painted brown and served as toast..."

Upcoming Events

Commemorative Events

The Calendar on the NVN site (see Links) provides a list of the commemorative events being held this year at the Shrine of Remembrance or elsewhere. It's always good to have a NNSA presence at these.

Future Meetings

Our Guest Speakers and meeting presentations for early 2023 are currently planned as follows:

Mon 27 Feb "The Yachtsman Scheme" (Jan Roberts-Billet MA)

Mon 27 Mar "HMAS *Wyatt Earp*" (Chris Harvey)

Mon 24 April "Alfred Graving Dock" – (Mr Peter Quinlivan)

Mon 22 May "Mulberry Harbours at D-Day" – video

“RAISING STEAM” – HALF A CENTURY ONWARD

- by Max Thomson

It was tossed onto the table as a conversational piece amid the conviviality of a gathering of WW2 seafarers: "HOW DO YOU RECKON YOU WOULD FARE IF YOU SUDDENLY WERE ORDERED TO BOARD YOUR SHIP OF ALL THOSE YEARS AGO AND TAKE HER TO SEA AGAIN?"

Forget all the new-fangled gadgetry and hi-tech sophistication the lads and lasses of our Navy have aboard their warships today. We're talking of your last ship about the time that World War 2 ended.

The boiler-room boys were quick to respond. They reckoned, for sure, that they could fire the boilers and raise steam in pretty smart time. At which the engine-room crewmen were off the mark to claim that once learned they had never forgotten their expertise in handling all the dials, gauges, indicators, valves and throttles of a warship's engine room PLUS all the intricacies of the ancillary machinery.

A couple who all those years ago had been part and parcel of a fo'castle party affirmed they'd still be able to operate the winch, raise the anchor, wash it down and stow it correctly in the cable locker below.

Confidence being what it is, old-timer Navy signalment reckoned that once learned, Morse code on a signal projector – or semaphore instructions by flag – were not to be forgotten but covered themselves with the hope that the orders for the ship transmitted by signal lamp would be not too fast – and any semaphore orders even slower.

Radio room sparkers avowed the dits and dahs business in a warship's radio room was still well and truly in their memories – though some unkind soul jibed that during WW2 their expertise lay mostly in listening because radio operators rarely went "on the air" to transmit messages for reasons of sheer security and secrecy.

But the mysteries of Naval Code became something of a stumbling block. Whether a couple of coders could still manipulate the monstrosity that was called the Coding Machine is still being argued.

Gun crews, for their part, were as positive as ever with a claim that they could still acquit themselves well – until some hard case in the group added "provided you had your thick lens spectacles on all those years afterwards".

Depth charge crewmen contended that they could still accomplish the settings on their depth charges on the throwers and racks by day or even in the darkness of a warship completely blacked out at night, as had been the case for them so often at sea during the war.

Mutterings from all present indicated that there would be something along the lines of a mutiny of Captain Bligh proportions, however, if Navy sick berth attendants even thought of inoculating the entire ship's company with just one, or at the most two, needles.

There were no officers present to confirm that despite today's satellite navigational and hi-tech processes, navigation itself was still a basic skill. That a ship's chart was still a chart – even though some of them used all those decades ago in some part of the Pacific where our ships were obliged to operate, had been compiled on the basis of surveys done by such ships as HMS CHRYSANTHEMUM away back before even the turn of the century.

Yet a few aspects of all the conjecture and speculation really stumped the gathering. There were groans aplenty when someone unkindly reminded them of the need that would arise to grab hold of a bulkhead or deckhead fitting to swing themselves up into a wartime hammock – a sight that would be something to behold in the case of some of the veterans at the gathering.

Imagine them lined-up to “dress ship” as the warship left harbour – or trying to squeeze their expanded waistlines into skin-tight bell-bottomed uniforms of yesteryear!

Worse still, of the receding hairlines or even baldness that would be apparent when the time came to present themselves and take off their cap upon which to receive their princely pay on board. Imagine the cryptic comments at receiving such pay on the basis of five shillings (50 cents), six shillings (60 cents) or a handsome seven shillings and six pence (75 cents) per day for suffering unbelievable conditions and discomforts amid all the hard yakka, iron discipline, drama and sheer danger of life at sea on a warship in those war years. A reward for a day’s such work which, in this day and age, would not even purchase a candy bar!

Yet there was ONE THING on which the entire group was in complete agreement. When it came to “Splice the Mainbrace” or to toast the Queen, the King or anyone else, they’d do it extremely well SITTING DOWN in conformity and accordance with the Navy’s long-established custom handed down from the days of the Nelson era.

They also agreed on something else!

What a thrill it would be to do just one more trip ON THEIR OLD SHIP.

Editor’s Note: Max Thompson served proudly in the River Class frigate HMAS *Hawkesbury* during the latter stages of WW2, and wrote fondly and frequently of his time in the ship



Naval Historical Society of Australia – Victoria Chapter

Cordially invites you to

Our November Meeting

&

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATORY DINNER

Guest of Honour and Speaker

Rear Admiral C.S.H. (Simon) Harrington, AM, RAN (Rtd)

Monday 28 November 2022

From 6.00 pm for preliminary mingling, guests to be seated by 7.00 pm

Waverley RSL – Sunset Room

161 Coleman Parade, Glen Waverley

The annual Raffle returns to celebrate the coming festive season
and prizes include Lynda's fabulous Christmas Cake!

Tickets: \$30 per head for two course meal

(numbers are limited so please book early)

PAYMENT:

*Direct Debit – BSB: 633000; Account: 118958503

(please print your name as identification)

Or,

Cheque: made payable to the:

"Naval Historical Society Victoria Chapter"

and posted to:

Marty Grogan

549 Nepean Highway

Frankston VIC 3199

***Direct Debit is preferable**

Key Links

This section aims to provide links to other information sources that members may find of interest and might choose to access. The choice is yours.

NHSA(V) website: Our local website is found via the NVN at <http://www.nhsavic.navyvic.net/>. Members who wish to access previous Guest Speaker presentations will find these by clicking 'Recordings'.

Navy Victoria Network: This site provides a wealth of information on current activities within Victoria, including a forecast Calendar of Events - <https://navyvic.net/>. By joining this free network, members are provided with the monthly "Broadside" Newsletter which includes the monthly 'Navy Hero' article and other items of topical interest.

Military History & Heritage Victoria (MHHV): This group provides opportunity to hear a range of topics as their title suggests. A modest charge is required to access a range of highly regarded speakers. <https://www.mhhv.org.au/>

Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network: This group seeks to foster greater recognition of, and knowledge about, Melbourne's rich maritime heritage and maritime industry sector – past, present and future. Receiving their informative free newsletter requires an email registration, or can be accessed through the NVN site. <https://mmhn.org.au/>

Navy News: This is Navy's flagship newspaper; the site provides access to the latest fortnightly news plus historic editions from 1958 to the present <https://www.navy.gov.au/media-room/publications/navy-news>

Australian Naval Podcast Series. Highly recommend. <https://www.unsw.adfa.edu.au/hass/our-research/naval-studies-group>

History Guild: This volunteer organisation publishes a wide range of historic articles of interest – a great site <https://historyguild.org/military-history/>

Ex-HMAS Castlemaine Museum: <https://hmascastlemaine.org.au/>

HMAS Cerberus Museum: <https://www.navy.gov.au/heritage/museums/museum-hmas-cerberus>

SEAWORKS Museum: <https://www.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au/visit/Experience/Things-to-do/Seaworks-Maritime-Precinct>

Queenscliff Maritime Museum: <https://maritimequeenscliffe.org.au/>

Polly Woodside Museum: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/places/polly-woodside/>

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ANSWERS:

What Ships & Where –

HMAS *Vengeance* on 5 March 1953 in Port Melbourne - looking rather streaked from her long delivery voyage. Commissioned in 1945, too late for active service during WW2, she was loaned to the RAN in 1952 to replace the delayed aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne*. She operated briefly as an aircraft carrier and then became a training ship for the majority of her three-year loan. After return to the UK in 1955, she served in the Brazilian Navy 1956 –2001.

Oddities -

1. (Pronounced *mowzing*). Seamen types would recognise this as passing turns of twine or small wire around the open end of a secured hook to prevent it unhooking, or to do the same around the end of a bolt or shackle pin to prevent it working free.
2. If challenged by a ship, this was the reply from the coxswain saying that those onboard did not require marks of respect to be paid!
3. Yarn lashed neatly around a rope's end to prevent it becoming frayed – and thus to keep it "tiddly".