

WARTIME MEMOIRS`  
of  
ALLAN ROBERT BADDELEY

**Parents:**

Mabel Amelia (nee BOYD) – born 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1892

Robert Baddeley – born 20 October 1888

**Birthdate:** 9<sup>th</sup> May 1921. (4<sup>th</sup> child of 6) at Geelong

Turned 18 on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1939, and took action immediately (with parents' permission) to join the Royal Australian Navy Reserves, and was accepted on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1939.

Several boys from the Coburg Methodist Church had joined up, and I followed.

As a result of being in the reserves, I was called up for active service the day before war against Germany was declared. War was imminent at this stage.

My Story Is As Follows:

I commenced writing this in 1999. Wrote a short note in 2011 and finished off in 2013.

## Campaign Medals:

1939 – 1945 STAR

AFRICA STAR

BURMA STAR (WITH PACIFIC STAR CLASP)

WAR MEDAL 1939 – 1945

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEDAL

RAN LONG SERVICE AND GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL 1939 – 1945

MALTA MEDAL (50 YEAR GEORGE CROSS ANNIVERSARY MEDAL)

Awarded by Maltese Government 1992 for services rendered in the defence of Malta in 1942.



The following details my association with the Royal Australian Navy Reserves.

Soon after I had my eighteenth birthday on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1939, I took an interest in joining the Naval Reserves at Port Melbourne. I could have possibly been swayed with this decision due to other friends from the Coburg Methodist Church having joined. Anyway I obtained the permission from my father to go ahead and I commenced 14 days continuous training in August 1939 and was mobilised for war service on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1939 (the day before war was declared)

I was at work in the mail room at Spencer St. GPO when a telegram arrived at home for me to report to the Port Melbourne Naval Depot immediately, bringing toothbrush and shaving gear. My mother rang me at work, and I was released from duty and went home to change, etc.

When I arrived at the Depot I was kitted out with clothing, some second hand possibly from WW1 and some new. My hammock was second hand with second hand mattress and blanket. I was issued with a white (off white) suit that seemed to be made of canvas.

A group of about 20 of us including an officer, two Chief Petty Officers, two Leading Seamen, and the rest Able Seamen or Ordinary Seamen, like me, marched to Station Pier and boarded a Pilot Ship that operated in Port Phillip Bay. "Akuna" I think its name was. We set off very hush-hush and headed slowly down the Bay. Just before midnight, we were put ashore at Queenscliff and taken by a small train to Swan Island which was used by the Government as an ammunition storage depot.

We were advised that our job was to be a Boarding Party, if required, to take over a ship that was stopped by the guns at the Queenscliff Fort. This situation did not occur whilst I was on Swan Island. Our duties then became Sentry work in shifts, armed with a rifle and bayonet guarding the entry to the island which was via a bridge from Queenscliff and also checking each of several ammunition dumps. Each of these were enclosed underground with a locked door as an entrance to them. We were given a weekend leave to go home after some 2 months, and I think I only had the one lot of leave before being drafted back to Port Melbourne in late December 1939.

After a couple of weeks at Port Melbourne I was drafted to H.M.A.S. Westralia which I joined on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, 1940 in Sydney and we commissioned the ship as an Armed Merchant Cruiser. I was a member of the aft six inch gun crew, and was employed as a loader of shells and cordite bags. Each 6 inch diameter shell was some 15 inches long, and weighed 112 lbs.

I was made an Able Seaman on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 1940. We were involved in patrol work up the East Coast of Australia, went to Darwin and had a ship bottled up at Makassar in the Celebes Islands, near Borneo. This area was Dutch territory and at this stage (Feb 1940) they were not involved in the war.

It was during the time that we were bottling up this German ship that the Dutch came into the war, and they took over the ship in question. We then moved on to Colombo in Ceylon where we were based for some time doing patrols in the Indian Ocean. We were always on the lookout for Raiders but luckily didn't meet up with one. We visited Perth or should I say Fremantle, and the 12 mile bus or train trip to Perth.

I left Westralia in March 1941, when I was drafted to Flinders Naval Depot in Victoria to do an A.A. (Anti-Aircraft) gunnery course of 6 weeks duration. At the completion of this course I was drafted to H.M.A.S. Sydney which I joined on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, 1941 in Fremantle, after travelling by troop train from Melbourne to Perth which took 4 days. Whilst on the Sydney, my duties were as a mess boy in the Petty Officers Mess. My action station was as gunlayer on the port gun of the twin six inch "Y" gun turret. I was one of some 70 odd A.A. gunners on the Sydney who had been sent there to complete our course by doing a shoot at a drogue which was being towed by a plane.

Eventually I completed this task and was drafted off the Sydney on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1941. The Sydney was lost with all crew on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1941.

I travelled back to Sydney by troop train, and on stopover in Melbourne my parents came in to Spencer Street Station and spent an hour or two with me. After arrival in Sydney, I was loaded onto the troop ship Queen Elizabeth and we set sail for the Middle East. This was a big convoy including the Queen Mary and others. They were taking the whole of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division of the Army to Egypt. We had a stop at Fremantle where we embarked more Army people and then headed off to Suez. We made very good time, were escorted by H.M.A.S. Canberra from Sydney to an area in the Bight. The Sydney took over as Escort for a few days from there, and later on we had an English cruiser as escort. We were at Suez early in November and I was sent to a Naval Depot in Alexandria after travelling by train from Suez, via Cairo, which we passed through at midnight.

Eventually I joined H.M.A.S. Napier about 20<sup>th</sup> November 1941 where I served for two years. My job on the Napier was as Gun Sweeper. I looked after the two Oerlikon gun emplacements that were situated abaft of the torpedo tubes and the Pompom guns. It was my duty to ensure that guns were kept in good order all the time and that any cleaning and painting of both platforms were carried out. My action station was firing the starboard side gun.

We operated in the Mediterranean Sea as escorts for the larger ships. We went into dry dock in Alexandria during December 1941 for 2 days, and it was during this time that Italian midget subs got into the harbour through the boom gate net. (It was assumed that they must have followed the fleet in through the entrance) The subs set up explosives on two battleships – the Queen Elizabeth and the Valiant – which were tied to buoys in the harbour, and both ships were sunk. They were resting on the bottom with most of the superstructure still above the water. It was many months before they were back in service.

When the Japs came into the war on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1941, the Australian Government requested that their ships and soldiers be sent back to Australia. The Napier, Nizam and Nestor left this area in January 1941, and we escorted the aircraft carrier HMS Indomitable, which was loaded with land based Hurricane aircraft which were flown off in the area of Bali. We did this trip twice picking up aircraft from Port Sudan, which was halfway up the Red Sea. We did hear later that the Japs overran the area and all the planes were destroyed.

After that we joined the Eastern Fleet which was operating from Trincomalee on the Eastern side of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Colombo on the West side. We didn't last long in this area as the Japs were too strong so we made our base at Mombasa in East Africa. We were employed as escorts for the battle fleet.

In June 1942, we were sent back to the Mediterranean to participate in a convoy that was trying to get supplies to Malta. We had a hectic time getting bombed and shot at etc. This is the only time that I fired my Oerlikon gun at actual aircraft targets. Didn't hit one though.

After about three days out we had lost several ships including the Nestor which was some 500 yards on our port side. By the end of the fifth day out we were forced to turn around and head for Alexandria.

It was during this convoy that my brother Gordon was also involved. He was attached to an English ship, where he was an anti-submarine operator (ASDIC). They were ordered to pick up survivors from one of the early sinkings and take them to Tobruk. After they left Tobruk, they were heading for Port Said when they were torpedoed and sunk but most of the crew including Gordon got off it OK.

After this convoy we went back to Mombasa and settled in to work with the Eastern fleet again. We made several landings on Madagascar and were involved in a bombardment at Diego Suarez, one of the towns that wouldn't surrender. However, after a couple of minutes of fire they ran up the white flag.

At one stage we ran aground, or hit the bottom whilst escorting the battle fleet into Mombasa. A propeller and shaft was damaged, and after inspection we were ordered to

Durban where we waited for 3 months until replacements were obtained from England. This suited us fine, as we were fond of Durban and had made friends with the people there.

Some of us sailors had befriended a family in Durban by the name of Whitehead, and we had some fantastic times with them. Reg Whitehead worked at the Marine board or some such department as he was able to provide some good positions at the main wharf so we didn't have to walk too far to the C.B.D. and the nearest hotel. They had a good beer there called "Castle Ale. The Whitehead family consisted of Reg, his wife Ettie, and their seven sons. Only 5 sons were there at the time we were there in 1942/43. I heard later that they had boy #6 in 1944 and #7 in 1946. We had a table tennis competition, and we played test matches between Australia and South Africa every time we went there. Reg supplied the beer, and sometimes there could have been six of us there at the one time. They were very hospitable.

I made contact with one of the boys in the late 90's and after some 56 years (1943 – 1999) found out the history of them all

Name	Age in 1943	History
Reg	43	Went Blind. Died 1974
Ettie	40	Died 1991
Les	19	With BOAC Sunderland flying boats. Died in 2012
Bernie	17	Still correspond with him and his wife Cynthia
Ken	12?	Killed in Korean War – flying Mustangs
Dennis	9	Manager of shipping company
Rod	7	Accountant
Glenham	Born 1944	S.A. Airways – Captain of Jumbo jet
Howard	Born 1946	Man. Dir. Of Electricity for Durban

The following notes were written on 8<sup>th</sup> Jan 2011

We travelled up and down from Mombasa to Durban many times during 1942-43 whilst on HMAS Napier. We also participated in the takeover of Madagascar which was a French possession and still loyal to the Vichy French Government. We landed English Army commandos at several different ports, including Majunga, Diago Suarez and another town on the West Coast which I can't remember. I do remember the commandos coming back to the ship after they had finished their duties ashore, and bringing back fresh pork and we had a good roast pork meal.

Our first port of call at Madagascar was at a town called Morondava where the people were very friendly and they were obviously free from the Vichy French. We were able to go ashore and buy food, etc for our messes. We actually got a pay in French currency to enable us to trade.

At one stage, while we were at sea, we were running short of food and the Captain dropped depth charges at several locations trying to catch fish. We put a scrambling net over the side of the ship so that we could climb down and pick them up. This was not very successful as we didn't get enough fish for a feed for us all.

We did a trip from Durban to Bombay at one time and as we were unable to buy ping-pong balls at Durban we got some at Bombay and continued our test matches at the Whiteheads.

Whilst in dry dock in Durban a group of about six of us went on a train trip to a place called Swinburne in the Orange Free State, some couple of hundred miles from Durban, and stayed at a guest house in that town. The hotel was situated some 200 yards from the guest house but we spent most of our time in the pub. We played test matches between S.A. and Australia at lawn bowls and table tennis whilst there.

At another stage whilst we were in Durban I took a billet and stayed on a farm in Zulu Land, a few hours trip from Durban. (I forget how I travelled there now.) I had just applied to grow a beard at this stage and you must keep this for three months and then request permission to shave it off. My whiskers growth was pretty poor, and I was a bit embarrassed during the whole of my stay. The people we stayed with (there was another Pommie sailor billeted with them at the time I was there) were involved with growing sugar cane. All I can remember is visiting some native kraals and being in a big round hut thatched on the sides and roof, with people sitting down in a circle and a big bowl of locally made beer being passed around for everyone to have a sip of beer and pass the bowl to the next person. Shocking beer after the good Castle Ale we enjoyed in Durban.

After being drafted off HMAS Napier in Mombasa, East Africa, I stayed in a shore depot at Mombasa for about 2 weeks. I then travelled by the troop ship "Arundel Castle" to Durban in South Africa, where I was housed in a navy depot in Durban until February 1944.

I always enjoyed my stays in Durban, as I had made a few friends there. I eventually left Durban on a South African ship which carried a lot of servicemen, as well as private passengers. This was a ship of some 5,000 tons with a top speed of about 12 knots. I can't remember if it had any armament on board, but it may have had a stern gun emplacement. We were on our own, and in order to dodge the enemy we sailed down south and then towards Australia where we berthed at Port Melbourne. The trip took five weeks, and we kept lookout watches.

Whilst on this ship, after about three weeks at sea I got a rope splinter in my right middle finger which became infected. They had a go at it on the ship, but to no avail. Immediately we landed in Melbourne in March 1944 they worked on my finger with some deep cuts and

eventually squeezed out some very hard pus which held the splinter. I was told I was very lucky not to lose the finger – but all turned out OK.

After the finger was dealt with I proceeded on leave at home in Coburg. After two weeks, I was recalled and sent to Sydney by troop train – my third such trip to Sydney:

1. January 1940 when I joined the Westralia
2. October 1941 after I left H.M.A.S. Sydney II to board the troop ship “Queen Elizabeth” and proceed to the Middle East
3. This latest one to join the Whang Pu.

When I got to Sydney I joined H.M.A.S. WHANG PU which was a coal burning ship of some 4,000 tons that had been towed out of Singapore prior to its capture. It was towed to Fremantle, and fitted out as a Naval ship for building aerodromes in New Guinea. I was on board as guns crew and seaman. The only armament was a Bofors gun, and its top speed was about 8 knots.

We arrived in Madang, New Guinea early in May 1944, some weeks after the town had been cleared of Japs. The aerodrome was made using bulldozers and other heavy equipment that we had brought up with us. We stayed at Madang – tied up to a buoy – for about eleven months. The drome was made fairly quickly, and I don’t know why we stayed so long. There must have been a reason.

During the eleven months I was at Madang I would have only gone ashore less than ten times, and that was to play football or cricket.

Our ship was then made into a central stores vessel and fully stocked with ropes, tools, and anything that the navy would use. We set off for Moratai in March or April 1945, where we stayed tied up to a buoy until the war ended. Moratai was the main starting point of landing on the Philippines, Borneo, and other islands. Once again there was nothing in the town, and the only time I went ashore was for sport.

The war ended about August the 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945 and I developed my back problem at this time, caused through loading stores and lowering them down a hatch to another deck. I was in the sick bay on the ship getting treatment until I was taken onto a corvette H.M.A.S. Whyalla on 29/9/45 and taken home. I disembarked in Brisbane and travelled by train to Melbourne, where I was picked up by ambulance and taken to the hospital at Flinders Naval Depot.

I was there for some time getting different types of treatment including needles and a lumbar puncture. I also developed malaria while at Flinders, but had no complications. Eventually I was sent to Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital for more treatment, including being caged in a



plaster cast from head to bum. I wore this for four weeks, and was sent to the rest home at Inverloch.

All the treatment failed, and then they did a laminectomy on my back and fused discs L5/S1. This was quite successful, and relieved the pain. 68 years later, I still get pain in my back when I do the wrong thing, but this soon clears.

I took discharge in Fremantle on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1946, which was the place that I had registered my next of kin as living. Nothing came of this, as the girl I knew had become engaged to another.

I had three weeks holiday, and went back to Melbourne and work. I commenced back on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1946 – seven years after being called up for the war.

A.R. Baddeley.