**Report for November 2014**

November was one of the busier months, starting with the annual mess dinner at HMAS *Cerberus* commemorating the *Sydney-Emden* action. However, this year had special significance from several points of view, first of these, of course, was the fact that it was the centennial of the action, secondly, it was an occasion when HMAS *Sydney* & VLSV Assoc. was able to present to the Warrant Officers and Senior Sailors Mess certain historical artefacts for display at the mess, where it was felt they would be secure, accountable and permanent; something which was lacking with our previous arrangements.

Without a doubt, the night was a most memorable one, from the association’s perspective - due, in no small measure to the particular efforts of one person - who, by his own admission, had let this particular project of his, ‘grow like topsy’.

Vern Bechaz - a member in good standing of this association - has, over the past few years, put together two life size montages - complete with all the relevant accoutrements - of the commanding officers of *Sydney* and *Emden*. These, and the other historical artefacts mentioned above, will now be recorded on the naval heritage listing, kept in perpetuity by the RAN.

Other members made separate donations as well, notably association stalwart Ron May and his family, and Doug Jenkin. These items will also be added to the naval heritage listing for safekeeping. Hopefully, the items the association and others have donated to the mess will complement the historical significance of the existing displays, portraying this memorable occasion.

It would be terribly remiss of me if I didn’t also mention, that at the conclusion of the evenings proceedings, the president for this combined mess occasion, recognised our very own Marty Grogan, for services rendered to the mess on a previous occasion, and presented him with a statuette of *Cerberus* (the three headed dog guarding the gates of hell).

Two days later, led by our chaplain Dennis McMillin, the association observed a short, but poignant commemorative service for the centennial of the action, at the Shrine of Remembrance. In attendance, representing the RAN on behalf of the CO *Cerberus* was Warrant Officer Brendan Woodsell and his wife. Several persons, purporting to be descendants of crew members of HMAS *Sydney* 1 were also in attendance, as were a number of members from this association. A short narrative of the action was given as an integral part of the service. [You can download this for reference by clicking this link.](http://hmassydney.com/wardroom/president/documents/2014/Sydney-Emden%20Shrine%20Service%209%20Nov%202014.docx)

The day was capped off most pleasantly with a very enjoyable luncheon at the Melbourne Grammar dining room, organised by David Dwyer, and catered for by former RAN chef Jamie Brennan. Well done, and many thanks to both.

Many members of this association also hold positions in other like-minded organisations. Foremost amongst these, of course, is the RSL. Noel Mclean, a member of this association, is also the president of the Bayswater RSL sub-branch. Noel and I served in HMAS *Yarra* 1967-68 so we have known each other for quite a while. Noel recently invited me to the book launch at the RSL for a local historian, Ray Peace, of his book titled *Knox Anzacs*.

What, you might ask, has this got to do with our association? Well besides being courteous to an old shipmate, the historical significance becomes quite clear when, at pp.33-34 of the book, the *Sydney-Emden* action is described in some detail. Serving in *Sydney* 1 at the time was one Able Seaman Bertie Green RAN, O No: 2511, of Lower Ferntree Gully, who was wounded during the action. ‘He returned to Melbourne on a passenger liner in March 1915, and after a brief convalescence returned to duty. He was awarded the DSM a month later.’ *The London Gazette*, 9 April 1915, p.3551, has confirmed the conferring of this award.

The launch was opened by local MHR Alan Tudge, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, who spoke at length about the significance of the centenary of ANZAC, and other matters relevant to the occasion.

On or about the start of the month, I requested our webmaster post Statement of Principle (SOP) 28/2014, which referred to Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia. The purpose behind this was to inform members that the ‘potable water factor’ had been added to this SOP, which made it easier for those of us with Vietnam service to claim for this illness, by citing ‘potable water’ as a possible causative factor. SOP 28/2014 was officially gazetted in March 2014.

Members need to be aware that SOP 28/2014 was revoked and replaced by SOP 80/2014 in August 2014. SOP 80/2014 bears little or no resemblance to the one it replaces. I have written to the Registrar of the Repatriation Medical Authority (RMA) on 13 November, requesting an explanation for this action. [You can download a copy of my letter for reference by clicking this link.](http://hmassydney.com/wardroom/president/documents/2014/The%20Secretary%20RMA%20SOP%2028%202014.docx)

On 14 November I was contacted by Jonathon Hall, a producer from Channel Seven in Sydney, who looks after Seven News Flashback segment, which airs on Saturdays. It is a longer feature program which looks at historic events and anniversaries. His interests were to do with ships bearing the name *Sydney*.

After suggesting he contact people closer to home in Sydney and giving him several contact numbers, he came back and insisted he do the segment via Channel Seven in Melbourne. As we had our shrine service commemorating the 73rd anniversary of the *Sydney-Kormoran* action and the eventual demise of both ships on the 19th, he decided that this would be an ideal venue.

Led by our chaplain Dennis McMillin, the association observed a short, but meaningful commemorative service, which was attended by 15 descendants and several members of the committee, and one or two members of the association. There were quite a few members of the general public who also took part, mainly out of curiosity, and with obvious respect for the occasion. A short narrative of *Sydney*’s dynamic two and a half years of war service, leading up to the action with *Kormoran* was given as an integral part of the service. [You can download this narrative for reference by clicking this link.](http://hmassydney.com/wardroom/president/documents/2014/Sydney-Kormoran%2019%20November%202014.docx)

However, I digress. We as an association are fortunate to have amongst us some very talented and committed young people, who take part in what we do very seriously. Foremost amongst these is Laura Benney. When asked to give her impressions of the historical significance of the day by the television producer, the comment was made by him in response, ‘that was excellent.’

This occasion was again catered for by Melbourne Grammar, courtesy of Jamie Brennan and his staff. Needless to say David Dwyer had a hand in this as well.

During conversations over lunch with several of the relatives and descendants who had been approached regarding the *Two Lost Ships* project - mentioned in previous reports, and in the GFL - it was ascertained beyond doubt, that they had not been fully informed regarding the intentions of certain organisations - which now includes the CSIRO - being given permission to take samples, scrapings and undertake probes of the wrecks of *Sydney* and *Kormoran*. If they had, their responses may well have been different.

In this respect I can report that the *Two Lost Ships* project is likely to proceed. Information to hand from a very reliable source has the already chartered research ship scheduled to depart for the site in February or April 2015. The project management is currently attempting to raise more funding, so that they can stay on site longer. Funding already granted by Federal Government has been spent purchasing equipment for the project.

Stan Davis in Hobart reports that on Sunday16 November, there was a well-attended commemorative service in remembrance of the 73rd anniversary of the *Sydney-Kormoran* action. Foremost amongst those in attendance was the Lt. Governor Hon. Justice Alan Blow OAM, along with NOC TAS, Legatees, and many other service club representatives, plus our very own Fred House, who read the ode. Excellent photographs of the event are courtesy of member Dianne Eggins. Many thanks must go to Di for taking the time to attend, and record the occasion on behalf of the association.

In the very recent past I have received emails and calls from members and former members on two inter-related topics. One, they had felt cut off without their GFL, and two, they had felt that the association was meaningless to them because of a lack of direction. When it was explained to them that the GFL was back, and that the association was pursuing issues which may affect their health and welfare, many expressed the view that this was what they joined us for in the first place.

Currently, there are four SOPs awaiting a vetting process by a recognised medical professional, before being submitted to the RMA for investigation and possible amendment to reflect the ‘potable water factor’ for those of us with Vietnam service. This has been an ongoing process for the past twelve months, and has involved a lot of time and research. This process has the backing of the Naval Association of Australia and its National President, Russell Pettis.

There are various other issues we need to pursue in the not too distant future, which I may have alluded to in my opening report to you earlier this year. Be aware that we will need your support as well to pursue these, because there is strength in numbers.

Wishing you and yours all the best for the festive season, and beyond

Dr John R Carroll

President

22 November 2014