

GOTCHA: still a mystery

Well, true to the prediction of Sea Power Centre's Brett Mitchell, June's mystery ship (below) remains a mystery.

To adopt a well worn conceit, the silence from the usual suspects has been deafening.

The two who have had a go were Harry Goodall from Buranda (Brisbane) and ex-Defence civilian and RANR(NS) veteran Reg Bonney.

"Your mystery ship is the *Childers*, torpedo boat formerly of the Victoria Navy," said Harry.

HMVS *Childers* was a first class torpedo boat bought by the colony of Victoria in

1884 which also served in the Commonwealth and Royal Australian Navies until her decommissioning in 1918.

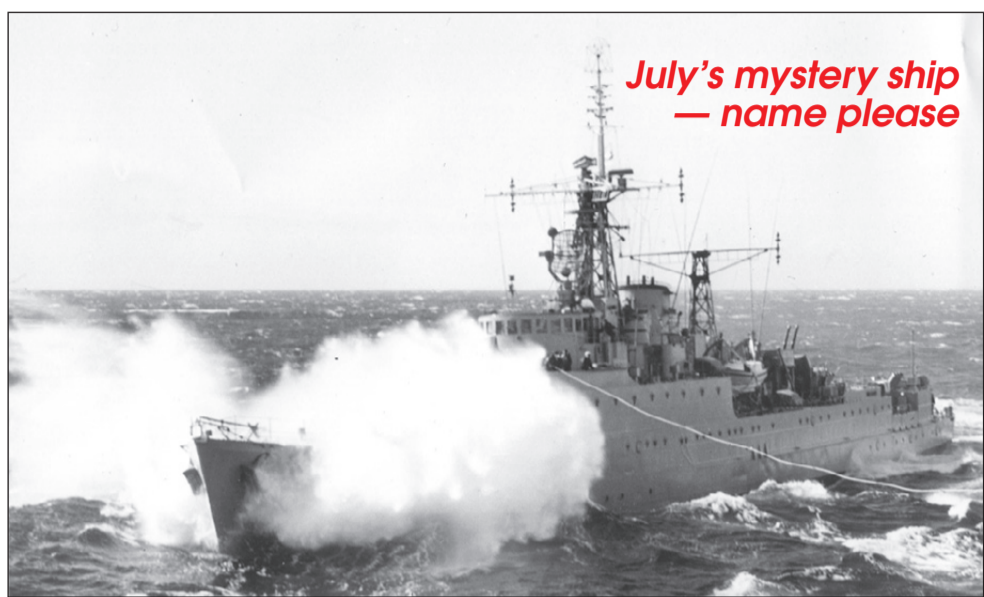
The 7th Armidale class patrol boat is to be commissioned as HMAS *Childers*. While one of the others is to be named *Bundaberg*, I'm not aware of any association with the small town of Childers, currently grappling with sugarcane blight, on the Bruce Highway a little south of Bundaberg near the Queensland central coast.

In a later email, Harry said: "I am afraid I got it wrong. I was looking at the wrong photo in my naval books and I am afraid that your mystery ship has got me stumped."

Reg Bonney said: "I have scoured all of my reference material in an attempt to identify the vessel depicted on Page 6 of Reserve News Vol. 13 No. 5. You did warn us – where did you find this beast?"

"My best guess is that it is a specific use craft. The hull shape (above the waterline) is similar to, although smaller than, a boom defence vessel without the horns. The straight stem could indicate no later than a 1920s design and it is likely she is steam powered. She is moored by a bow anchor and a stern line to a buoy.

"There is a rope ladder midships but her own boat is still



July's mystery ship — name please



June's puzzler — a mystery ship forever?

in the davits. The main mast is positioned aft, which may be significant, but it is not substantial, so the gaff lifting capacity would be lightweight. No flags are flown but there appears to be a ball suspended on a signal halyard.

"The armament shown is likely to be a 12 pounder. The covered object mounted above the bridge is a puzzle, as is the height of the pole at the bow. Some of the crew visible on the quarter deck have a light-coloured upper garment but that is not conclusive enough to show the nationality of the wearers.

"You have made me curious

so I am as hopeful as you that there is a firm identification."

I think 'stumped' is the operative word and the identity of June's mystery ship may now be lost forever in the mists of antiquity.

It was just too hard.

Incidentally, The 'GOTCHA' heading above was not an attempt to gloat. It's borrowed from the UK tabloid, *The Sun*, and referred to one of the RN's better moments in the Falklands War. (See *Ghost Force* review below.)

The mystery ship for July (directly above) is from a different source – from an old friend,

Vic Jeffery, who works at HMAS *Stirling* and knows a thing or two about naval ships.

He and I know the name of the ship.

Do you?

As there were no winners from the June ID comp., the prizes – five copies of the DVD documentary *1421 The Year China Discovered the World* kindly donated by DV1 – will go to five people who correctly identify the mystery ship for July.

Please email navyreservene@defencenews.gov.au.

— Editor

Books, Books, Books, Books, Books, Books, Books, Books, Books, Books, Books

Two of a kind - airport books: Be a spectator to Falklands War II

Want to fight the Falklands war again?

Interested in intrigue in high places?

Want a good airline book?

Well Patrick Robinson's latest publication, *Ghost Force*, could be just the ticket.

Robinson's latest novel – his ninth – is a tightly written page-turner. He's obviously researched his subject well.

Having visited Buenos Aires and the naval port, Mar del Plata, about five years after the Falklands war, I can testify to the population's heartfelt claim to (as they call them) the Malvinas.

The author suggests British ownership of the Falklands Islands, so many thousands of miles from the British Isles, is analogous to Argentina laying claim to a small group of islands in the North Sea.

Add a major discovery of oil in and around the Malvinas – ah Falklands – and you have an attractive target for a country which has struggled economically and socially for decades.

Compound the oil attraction with attention from the Russian bear – driven to desperate measures to find an alternate source of oil to the massive deposits



in Siberia – and you have the scene set for *Ghost Force*.

Like the United States' Tom Clancy, Robinson obviously enjoys a reasonably close association with the military. This is significant in that a key to this Falklands war of 2011 is down-sizing of the British defence forces.

Interestingly the first blow in the 2011 clash is struck with a Lockheed Martin A-4M Fightinghawk, the most modern version of an aircraft which began life as the Douglas A4 Skyhawk more than 50 years ago and that once flew off the carrier HMAS *Melbourne*.

This is war on an altogether grander scale than the Falklands War of 1982 with input of a torpedo laden Akula class Russian submarine sent to deal with the British task group.

The United States is also given a role this time, with US admirals taking an interest, an Australian staff officer wearing a USN uniform and Navy SEALs taking on an extraordinary mission in the forbidding environment of the South Atlantic.

It's all good stuff – ruthlessness, heroism and more – and Patrick Robinson, originally a columnist with the *London Daily Express* and co-author of Falklands War I task-group commander Admiral Sandy Woodward's *One Hundred Days* description of the 1982 stoush, is well-placed to render it.

More on this novel would spoil it.

It's a good read in the popular large-format paperback and released for sale from July 3.

Ghost Force, London, Heinemann, 2006. Distributed by Random House Australia Pty Ltd. ISBN 0434013145, <http://www.randomhouse.com.au>. 367 pages, RRP \$35.

— Editor

A novel approach to Al Qaeda terrorism

It's hardly surprising that since the tumultuous events of September 11, 2001, the movie and literary worlds would find today's terrorism a topical and compelling subject for the good old-fashioned ripping yarn.

Fiction based on the turbulent history, politics, cultures and creeds of the Middle East since 9/11 is hardly new.

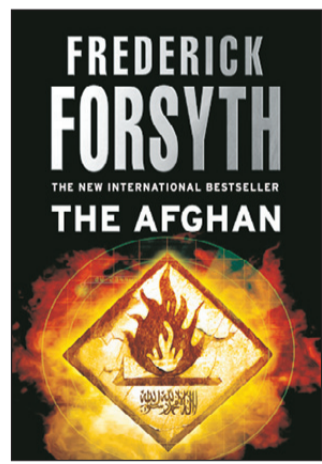
Indeed, Forsyth has given us *The Fist God*, which has an Iraq/Kuwait Gulf War setting.

What is surprising, given that it is generally accepted that Osama Bin Laden and the Al Qaeda leadership are still skulking around in Pakistan/Afghanistan, is that more authors have not seized on this theatre of the war on terrorism as a narrative vehicle.

But apart from the brilliant award-winning first work of the US-based, Afghani-born author Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, novels featuring Afghanistan are probably more difficult to unearth.

Given that *The Kite Runner* is not of the thriller genre, *The Afghan* goes a long way to helping fill that gap and does so in a highly entertaining way.

In *The Afghan*, a careless call on a mobile phone in Peshawar leads to a series of events which allow Coalition forces to stumble on a goldmine of information and a seemingly innocent phrase which may refer to a turning



point in the life of The Prophet. When combined with other intelligence – the mysterious phrase leads the Allies to suspect an Al Qaeda plot is brewing that will leave 9/11 in the shade.

Enter Briton, Colonel Mike Martin a hardened veteran of 25 years of conflict around the globe, particularly in the Middle East, who was born and raised in Iraq and could easily pass as an Arab.

After extensive tutoring in all matters Islamic and a burnishing of his many crafts, talents and guiles, his is the unenviable task of infiltrating Al Qaeda and passing himself off as an Arab – but not just any Arab.

Curiously, the man whose identity he is to usurp – the Taliban's high-up Izzat Khan – has already crossed paths with

his doppelganger twice before finding himself in the far-from-loving arms of American inquisitors at Guantanamo Bay.

For anyone who has read Forsyth's earlier novel, *The Day of the Jackal* set in France, *The Afghan* follows a familiar Forsyth formula. But it is a successful, plausible one at that.

Any reader who has kept even half an eye or ear on recent world events will easily identify with the basic premise of the plot and its nuances.

The real beauty in *The Afghan* is Forsyth's forte in delicately weaving a web of world history and headlines from around the globe to combine real, readily-recognised people with his fictional characters in a believable way.

To say that Forsyth's research is painstaking is probably greatly understated. His story unfolds against a richly-painted backdrop that details vast tracts of the intelligence sub-culture from satellite surveillance, passport skulduggery, Predator drones, Blowpipe missiles, prisoner rendition and ultra-secure prisons to the recent changing political situation in Afghanistan.

A cracking good, globetrotting read in the best Forsyth tradition.

The Afghan, Frederick Forsyth, Bantam Press, 343 pages, RP \$32.95

— Barry Rolling