

[REDACTED] Mrs. Jean Salisbury, OAM, [REDACTED]

8 July 2008.

The Secretary,
H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY" II,
Commission of Inquiry,
Level 18,
Defence Plaza,
270 Pitt Street,
SYDNEY. N.S.W. 2000.

Dear Sir,

LOSS OF H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY" - 19 NOVEMBER 1941

In January 1939, I was appointed to the position of stenographer in the Department of Defence, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne. From that date for the next three years, I was on the staff of the Defence Committee, which consisted of the three Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of the Department of Defence (Sir Frederick Shedden). The secretary of the Defence Committee was Mr. Vincent W. Quealy, whose hand-writing became very familiar to me. He was appointed the notetaker of the Advisory War Council during 1941 and continued in that position for the duration of the war. I have a clear recollection of the loss of the "Sydney" in November 1941.

In 1942, I was appointed personal stenographer to Sir Frederick Shedden, secretary of the Department of Defence Co-ordination and of the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council, and continued in that position until May 1945. I became very accustomed to his hand-writing also and have no difficulty in reading it even now.

In 1993, the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council Notebooks were released and launched at Old Parliament House, Canberra, by Senator Bob McMullan. My husband, Alan Salisbury, was also on the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council staff during World War II, and we were guests at the launching of the Notebooks.

I realised that a useful historical record would be gained by transcribing the War Cabinet Notebooks, and between 2004 and 2006, I undertook the task of transcribing Sir Frederick Shedden's Notebooks covering 6½ years from September 1939 to January 1946. I presented the completed copy of 500 pages to the Australian Defence Force Academy which arranged for the work to be bound, and the book was launched in February 2007.

The Advisory War Council notebooks, written by V. W. Quealy, are also very interesting and in rather more detail in some instances than the War Cabinet Notebooks. As I have a continuing interest in the loss of the "Sydney", I obtained copies of the relevant pages some years ago from the National Archives, Canberra. More recently I have again examined the microfilm at the National Archives in order to decipher some of the blurred writing at the bottom of some pages.

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I thought you would be interested in the discussions which took place at the War Cabinet and Advisory War Council meetings at that time. I'm sure you will realise that Mr. Quealy's notes were taken down in a great hurry and he used many abbreviations. He would not have had time to complete sentences, but recorded sufficient comments from the members to be able to prepare comprehensive minutes of the meetings. Alan Salisbury's task was to assist in this preparation, and to take any action necessary, distributing minutes to relevant departments and to Chiefs of Staff.

The Notes indicate the uncertainty about what actually happened at the time of the sinking, and John Curtin's anxiety regarding the loss of Naval personnel.

All of the male members of the War Cabinet Secretariat are now deceased. I think that I am the only person still living who would be able to interpret the writing.

I hope you will find the transcription of use in your inquiry.

Yours faithfully,



(Mrs. Jean Salisbury)
nee Nicholson

Enclosures: Typed transcription of War Cabinet and Advisory War Council Notebooks (26.11.1941 to 4.12.1941) - 14 pages

Copy of hand-written pages of War Cabinet and Advisory War Council Notebooks - 14 pages

Copy of typed official minutes of Advisory War Council dated 28.11.1941 - 3 pages