

**MEETING AT THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL  
TO DISCUSS RESEARCH FINDINGS TO DATE  
RELATING TO THE RECOVERY OF THE UNKNOWN SAILOR FROM  
CHRISTMAS ISLAND**

1. At 1600 on Friday 01 December CAPT Parsons and CMDR Blenkin attended a briefing by Australian War Memorial (AWM) staff on the findings of investigations into various items relating to the unknown sailor recovered from Christmas Island. These items included;

- a. a metal object recovered from the skull of the remains,
- b. metal eyelets recovered from the foot of the grave, and
- c. metal press studs recovered from the grave.

2. This was an **informal working group level meeting** held to discuss findings to date, to provide the other forensic researchers with information that may expedite the identification phase of the investigations, and to allow Navy to provide guidance on continued research by the AWM staff. It was not a final report and the information has not been cleared for release by the AWM Director - the information was provided as part of the normal investigative research process and not for any other purpose at this stage. This was made very clear by the AWM team leader at the outset of the meeting

**Metal Object**

3. The metal object showed no signs of containing lead, showed magnetic properties and therefore was ferrous, meaning it was probably not a bullet. It was badly corroded, but in the centre was a small piece of non corroded material which was very hard. The metal object was examined at ANU using a scanning electron microscope, amongst other tests. The aim was to compare it with items recovered from the Carley float in the possession of the AWM during an earlier detailed examination of the float. It did not match any of these items.

4. The test revealed that in addition to the iron content the metal object had a significant presence of other elements (silica and manganese) typical of a German hardening process of the time and consistent with the process of making hardened munitions such as armour piecing rounds of large calibre. While it did not match the 20mm and 39mm rounds tested during the analysis of items recovered from the Carley float it is probably consistent with material used in ammunition for *Kormoran's* 150mm main armament. The AWM does not hold any examples of this ammunition and therefore a comparison cannot be made at this time.

5. It is understood that Germany provided the hardening technology to other Axis countries so it is possible the sample may not be German. The AWM will continue its investigations and attempt to locate rounds of this size for purposes of comparison - the Imperial War Museum is one possible source.

6. The evidence to date is consistent with the piece of metal being shrapnel from *Kormoran's* main armament.

### **Eyelets**

7. A small number of brass eyelets were recovered from the foot of the grave and a number of these had small fragments of textile material attached. This material was of quite heavy, plain weave<sup>1</sup>, and similar to a tarpaulin. No colour could be established. This is consistent with the Navy Team's belief that at some stage during the recovery in 1942, due to the decomposition of the body, it was placed upon a piece a canvas to facilitate its movement. The body was probably still on the canvas at the time of burial.

### **Clothing**

8. Reports from 1942 indicate that the body was dressed in a boiler suit that was either white or blue that had been bleached white by the sun. The boiler suit was reported to have had four press studs down the front.

9. During the exhumation a number of metal objects (which appeared to be press studs) were located amongst the remains, all in the area between the waist and neck. Some of these had small traces of textile material attached.

10. All items were examined by the AWM. There were two complete closed press studs, a single male half, a single female half, and two fragments. It is possible, but not certain, that these may be the remains of a total of four press studs. The items were brass. The zinc component had corroded away leaving only the copper content and this too was corroding. It was common at the time (1941) for press stud manufacturers to include some written information inside the stud, either pressed into the metal or raised above it. It is possible that x-rays may reveal traces of this writing.

11. One press stud was opened to reveal the textile material clamped between the components. This revealed a sample of doubled over cloth of plain weave<sup>1</sup>. No colour could be identified, but this may have leached out. Textile samples examined from different press studs were similar meaning all press studs were probably from the same article of clothing.

12. Dress regulations of the time were quite specific for most items of uniform but not for items of working dress. Overalls were considered to be fire/flash resistant and were probably worn in action. The AWM holds an example of the standard Navy issue overalls from the period which is a common pattern for both Royal Navy and RAN. They are blue in colour, twill weave<sup>1</sup> (not plain) with metal buttons, not press studs. Therefore it is unlikely that the material and press studs recovered from the grave are from a standard issue boiler suit.

13. The AWM has traced two WWII officers who described the overalls they wore as being white, of fine plain<sup>1</sup> weave and having four press studs. Fasteners below the waist

were buttons of celluloid material which would decompose quite quickly leaving no trace. Overalls were normally worn for action as they were quick and easy to put on. Press studs at the time were expensive and not in common use.

14. There were a number of different patterns of German overalls but a distinctive difference was that fasteners were held on with split rings allowing them to be removed for washing. There was no evidence of this in the samples examined.

#### **Clothing summary**

15. The evidence appears to indicate;
- a. the boiler suit/overalls were not a standard issue sailor's blue item.
  - b. the boiler suit/overalls may be similar to those worn by officers, and
  - c. the boiler suit/overalls were not of German origin.

#### **Where to now**

16. The AWM will do the following;
- a. compile a report on their findings to date and provide it to Navy as soon as practicable, noting that some aspects of the research are continuing
  - b. attempt to find samples of WWII ammunition that may assist in providing further information about the metal object recovered from the Christmas Island sailor.
  - c. attempt to locate any writing inside the press stud samples.
17. The fact that the body recovered may be that of an officer could have significant impact on the identification process. It will allow the numbers to be narrowed to a much smaller group (initially at least) and efforts concentrated on this smaller group.

#### **Conclusion/recommendations**

18. Although the findings outlined above are the results of the AWM investigations, they are based on notes taken at a verbal briefing. It is strongly recommended that no information be released until after the final written AWM report has been received.
19. The briefing was filmed by a Defence film crew.

Prepared by  
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**Notes:**

(1). Plain weave is a simple over one thread and under the next. On the other hand, twill weave referred to later is a weave of over one, under two (or more) over one etc. It produces a visual effect of a diagonal across the cloth.