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SUBMISSION No 34A

**SUPPLEMENTARY
PRESENTATION TO THE
JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE
ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE
AND TRADE
DEFENCE SUB-COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE CIRCUMSTANCES
OF THE SINKING OF HMAS SYDNEY**

FROM

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WJO

27/02/98 10:00

NO. 537 002

CARLEY FLOATS

Although I have already made a submission (published in Volume 1) I have felt the need to make a late supplementary submission regarding Carley floats.

From a study of the terms of reference I initially concluded that the committee would recommend the exhumation of the Christmas Island corpse. However, after reading some of the submissions regarding the Christmas Island Carley float I began to feel that an exhumation of the corpse was not a *fait accompli*.

I therefore wish to provide the committee with some additional information on Carley floats. Information that I consider vital to anyone conducting an investigation into origins of the Christmas Island corpse.

In September 1996, I produced a report which included a study of the Christmas Island corpse and Carley float.¹ In March 1997 I passed on my findings in a letter, through Mr J. Poprzeczny of the Sunday Times, to Mr J. Heazlewood. To my surprise I found a copy of my letter included in Submission No.84A. As the contents of this letter are essentially the same as my September 1996 findings I will refrain from repeating them in this submission. However, I would like it to go on record that I still stand by my 1996 findings and that the information contained in the March 1997 letter is accurate.

However, since March 1997 I have discovered further information regarding Carley floats which I think needs to be presented.

In July 1997 I discovered that the Western Australian Maritime Museum had two Carley floats in its collection. Although not on public display, an application to view one of these floats was successful. On 29 July, assisted by museum staff members Mike McCarthy, Karen Jackson, and Norman O'Neil, a study of one of the floats, designated Historic Boat Exhibit No.26 (H.B.26) was conducted. The study revealed that H.B.26 was a Pattern No.20 Carley float. (This is the same size and pattern as the Carley float ex-Sydney and now on display in the Australian War Memorial)

The float had been badly damaged prior to its acquisition by the museum. This damage was mainly in the form of large holes hacked into the buoyancy tanks to render the float unserviceable. While this damage is disappointing from an exhibit point of view, it proved quite useful in establishing the types of materials used in the float's construction.

It was noted that the buoyancy tanks and inside framework were constructed of Lysaght Queen's Head galvanised sheet iron. The Queen's Head brand incorporates the year of manufacture, and it was hoped that the approximate age of the float could be ascertained by a study of the brand. Unfortunately, the only clearly distinguishable brand had been cut in half during fabrication of the float; the year of manufacture not being visible. Though the letters AUS were present, indicating that the sheet was made in Australia.

However, of more interest was the outer covering of the float. All holes and tears in the painted canvas revealed an inner covering of balsa wood.

Although it has not been verified, one former Sydney crew member has indicated to the author that pre-war Carley floats were covered with balsa wood.²

It is also noteworthy that Carley float H.B.26 is fitted with a double grating. (The grating is the wooden platform, or floor, and is secured to the inside the float rim by rope netting.) The double grating was designed to carry emergency rations and was

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approved by the Admiralty in mid 1941. An Admiralty Fleet Order describing the arrangements for the issue of the emergency rations was issued on 31 July 1941.³ This double grating was to be retrofitted to older floats with single gratings as circumstances permitted. It is noteworthy that the Sydney float in the A.W.M. is fitted with a single grating.

Taking the Admiralty approved double grating into consideration, it would appear that Carley float H.B.26 was Royal Navy or Royal Australian Navy issue. Given that the inside framework is Australian manufactured Lysaght galvanised iron, it would appear probable that Carley float H.B.26 is ex-Royal Australian Navy.

Supporting this theory is an Admiralty publication titled *Manual of Seamanship Volume 2 B.R. 67*.⁴ This publication states that Carley floats supplied to H.M. Ships were constructed of copper and covered with cork and canvas.

On 26 February 1998, assisted by Mr Norman O'Neil of the Western Australian Maritime Museum, I conducted a study of the museum's second Carley float. This float, designated H.B.27., is in slightly better condition than H.B.26 and has less perforations in the buoyancy tube. H.B.27 is also a Pattern No.20 Carley float and is fitted with a double grating. Like H.B.26, H.B.27 is painted grey; no distinguishing marks or numbers being visible.

The buoyancy tanks and internal framework of Carley float H.B.27 are constructed of 24 gauge Lysaght galvanised sheet iron; a single Lysaght Queen's Head brand being visible through one of the openings in the tanks. The Queen's Head brand incorporates the letter K and the numerals 44. This indicates that the galvanised iron was made at the Port Kembla works in 1944. An unexpected find were the words WAR FINISH at the bottom of the brand.

The outer covering of Carley float H.B.27 consists of a layer of cork, covered with canvas.

Due to the presence of the Admiralty approved double grating and the use of Australian manufactured galvanised iron, it is considered probable that Carley float H.B.27 is ex-Royal Australian Navy. Year of manufacture was probably 1944, although a 1945 or later year of manufacture cannot be ruled out.

In 1949, the Australian Director of Naval Intelligence, Captain Oldham, concluded that as the Christmas Island float had a kapok covering it was not ex-HMAS Sydney. Oldham offered no explanation as to his reasoning, but it is assumed that he made his judgement on the basis that Sydney's Carley floats should have been constructed of copper with a cork and canvas covering.

Partially supporting Oldham's conclusion was the 1993 investigation of the Carley float in the A.W.M. collection.⁵ It was discovered that the covering material consisted of the Admiralty specified cork and canvas. However it was found that the buoyancy tanks and framework were made from Australian manufactured galvanised steel. Specifically, a Lysaght product called Zincanneal. It is perhaps noteworthy that Zincanneal is described in the June 1938 Lysaght's Referee as a new product, with superior rust-resisting properties. Other Lysaght products mentioned in the Referee included Orb brand galvanised corrugated iron and Queen's Head brand galvanised plain iron sheets. It is also noteworthy that Lysaght's was the only manufacturer of galvanised iron and steel sheet in Australia prior to and during the Second World War.

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As the inside framework of the Christmas Island Carley float was recalled as being constructed of Australian made 'Annealed Zinc'(Baker) or 'Dua-Anneal Zinc'(Smith), it would appear that the float was actually constructed from Lysaght Zincanneal; the fallibility of memory perhaps accounting for the different recollections of the manufacturer's brand.

However, it was the alleged covering of the float which caught Captain Oldham's attention and moved him to conclude that 'it seems reasonably certain from the particulars given of the covering of the Carley Float that the Float did not belong to an H.M.A. Ship'.

However was Captain Oldham correct in his conclusion?

Although the Admiralty specifications called for copper buoyancy tanks and a cork covering, was Oldham justified in expecting that all Royal Australian Navy issue Carley floats should be manufactured from these materials?

We know that one surviving Australian manufactured Carley float was constructed of galvanized steel, and covered with cork and canvas.⁶

We know that another surviving Australian manufactured Carley float was constructed of galvanized iron, and covered with cork and canvas.⁷

We know that a third surviving Australian manufactured Carley float was constructed of galvanized iron, and covered with balsa wood and canvas.⁸

As none of the three surviving Australian manufactured Carley floats were made from copper, and only two had a cork covering, one is left with the impression that Captain Oldham was probably not correct in his conclusion.⁹

Given what is known about the surviving Australian manufactured Carley floats, it would appear probable that Captain Oldham did not conduct a thorough investigation of Australian made Carley floats, and that the Christmas Island Carley float could indeed have come an H.M.A. Ship. If this was so, the only Australian warship that it could have originated from was *Sydney*.

Therefore, the possibility that the Christmas Island corpse was that of a *Sydney* rating cannot be ruled out.

SYDNEY DOCUMENTS

One final suggestion that I would like to make concerns the various collections of Australian Archive and Australian War Memorial documents relating to the loss of the *Sydney*. While I have been fortunate in being able to view many of the available documents, there are a vast number of Australians who cannot. Anyone who lives outside Melbourne or Canberra is handicapped by the fact that the majority of the *Sydney* related documents are only available in these two cities.

I would therefore like to propose that the Joint Standing Committee consider the feasibility of having all available *Sydney* related documents duplicated and deposited in all Australian Archive offices.

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Yours Sincerely,
W.J. Olson

W. J. Olson

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NOTES

- 1 Olson, W.J. *With All Hands*, Western Australian Maritime Museum Report No. 115, pages 19-24.
- 2 Interview with Mr George Ramsay, current President of the Western Australian Chapter of the Ex-H.M.A.S. SYDNEY Association.
- 3 Australian Archives (Vic), MP 1576/1, Admiralty Fleet Orders 1941.
- 4 *Manual of Seamanship Volume 2 BR 67 H.M.S.O., London, 1951.*
- 5 Ashton, Challenor, and Courtney, *The Scientific Investigation of a Carley Float*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1993.
- 6 Pattern No.20 Carley float ex-*Sydney*, Australian War Memorial.
- 7 Pattern No.20 Carley float, Historic Boat Exhibit No.27, Western Australian Maritime Museum.
- 8 Pattern No.20 Carley float, Historic Boat Exhibit No.26, Western Australian Maritime Museum.
- 9 It is perhaps noteworthy that kapok was used for flotation purposes and may have been used as a wartime substitute for cork. It is therefore possible that due to wartime shortages some Australian manufactured Carley floats may have been completed with a kapok covering.

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