



10 Nov. 2008

Commander J. T. Rush QC
Senior Counsel Assisting
HMAS SYDNEY 11 Commission of Inquiry.

Dear Sir,

Your letter of 24 October received today and I will endeavour to answer your queries to the best of my ability.

(a) I joined HMAS Sydney on 17-3-1940 and was issued with a life belt (blimp) on the 19-3-1940 and was told to immediately stamp my name on the waist belt (we had been issued with a name stamp for our kit) which I did. All life belts were identical and had to be named. See (b)

(b) According to service certificates available on Google the Ship's company of 'Sydney' were issued with life belts at the end of December 1939 before I joined the Ship.

I stamped my name on the waist band which was about one inch wide.

(c) Issued life belts were personal issue and not stowed anywhere, we used them as pillows when dozing at all night action stations in war zones.

I cannot recall anything written or stencilled except our names.

(d) I cannot ever seeing anything indicating the manufacturer's name.

(e) Yes, it was normal practice on the four ships that I served on to always wear my life belt especially at Action Stations.

(f) I cannot remember whether I was issued with an Identity disk before joining "Sydney."



- (g) (i) Mine was a red electrical insulating material stamped with the following
- (ii) . F2803. TP Fisher, O.4 R.C. (i.e. official number, name, blood group, and religion.)
- (iii) Most definitely
- (h) All did in my time. Some men purchased a chain, most used a strong boot lace.

The life belts were made of a rubber bladder with a woollen cover and a tube about six inches long to blow them up. There was a screw type valve to close off the tube and keep the air in when blown up. An attached loop to put over our heads to keep the life belt on our chests and a waist strap either side to tie at our backs to keep the belt close to our chests. Our names were stamped on one of the waist straps. All life belts were the same for all the ships personnel, Officers and men
We were often warned not to blow them up before jumping into the water if abandoning ship otherwise it could result in a broken neck.

The Identity disks were about the size of a 20 cent piece or a little larger made from a red sheet of insulating material and the details were stamped on. I think the red material was called Fibre.

A little story,

While serving in HMAS Quiberon in 1944, at Sunday Divisions in harbour, Commander Harrington asked a sailor where was his identification disk. AB Humphries rolled down his tropical stocking and had his disk on his ankle. Commander H said, "Humphries, if your leg got blown off we could not identify you, wear it in the proper place, around your neck."

Humphries replied, "Sir, if my head got blown off you still couldn't identify me."

The Commander then said to our Divisional Officer, "Put that man in Number Ones' report."

Humphries got 7 days stoppage.

The moral was, always wear our "Dog tag."

Sir, I hope that I have answered your queries.

Yours sincerely

Thomas P Fisher