

1
2 THE PRESIDENT
3
4 Q. 6 inch guns?
5 A. Every gun and every torpedo would be manned at action stations.
6
7 Q. I see you were mentioned in dispatches --
8 A. Yes.
9
10 Q. -- in 1946. What was that for?
11 A. I don't know.
12
13 Q. General good service, perhaps?
14 A. Undetected crimes.
15
16 LEUT VESPER: That is a good time, Mr President.
17
18 SHORT ADJOURNMENT
19
20 THE PRESIDENT: Is there anything further you want from this witness?
21
22 LEUT VESPER: I have no further questions, Mr President.
23
24 THE PRESIDENT: All right, thank you, Mr Radcliffe, we have your evidence,
25 thank you and it's been very helpful to me and I'd like to thank you for agreeing
26 to see us and for all your assistance to the Commission. Thank you very
27 much?
28
29 THE WITNESS Thank you very much.
30
31 <THE WITNESS WITHDREW
32
33 SHORT ADJOURNMENT
34
35 THE PRESIDENT: I've come to the home of Mr Allen Guthrie in [REDACTED]
36 Victoria to take his evidence.
37
38 He is currently 88 years of age. Thank you very much for agreeing to
39 see us, Mr Guthrie.
40
41 <ALLEN CHARLES GUTHRIE, sworn
42
43 <EXAMINATION BY LEUT VESPER
44
45 LEUT VESPER
46
47 Q. Sir, can you tell us your full name?

1 A. Allen Charles Guthrie.

2

3 Q. You live at [REDACTED]

4 A. Yes.

5

6 Q. Sir, you have declared a statutory declaration for the purposes of the
7 HMAS Sydney II Commission of Inquiry dated 22 May 2008. Is that so?

8 A. Yes.

9

10 Q. Sir, it follows that the contents of that statutory declaration are true and
11 correct. Is that so?

12 A. Yes.

13

14 THE PRESIDENT: I'll mark that as exhibit 9.

15

16 EXHIBIT #9 STATUTORY DECLARATION OF ALLEN CHARLES GUTHRIE
17 DECLARED 22/05/08

18

19 LEUT VESPER

20

21 Q. With the President's leave, Mr Guthrie, I just want to ask you a few
22 questions arising out of some of the matters in your statutory declaration. You
23 refer to your action stations position being in the B turret cordite handling room.
24 Was that the case for both your time in HMAS Sydney and in HMAS Perth?

25 A. Yes.

26

27 LEUT VESPER: We might just pause for a moment, Mr President, if that's
28 convenient?

29

30 THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

31

32 SHORT ADJOURNMENT

33

34 LEUT VESPER

35

36 Q. Mr Guthrie, I was just asking you about your action stations position in
37 the B turret cordite handling room. During your time in Sydney and indeed in
38 Perth --

39 A. No, cordite magazine.

40

41 Q. During your time serving in Sydney and subsequently in Perth did you
42 ever practice operating in that space when the main electricity supply had been
43 cut off?

44 A. It could have happened because the secondary lighting, I can't
45 remember any specific occasion, but we did have secondary lighting in the
46 magazine.

47

1 THE PRESIDENT

2

3 Q. Battery operated?

4 A. Yes, yes, and that was entirely through the ship; a secondary lighting
5 system.

6

7 Q. If the main electricity source failed?

8 A. Yes, there was a secondary lighting system that came on. It wasn't a
9 bright light but you could find your way around compartments.

10

11 LEUT VESPER

12

13 Q. Was that the case in both Sydney and Perth?

14 A. Yes.

15

16 Q. The hoists which would take the cordite and also the shells up to the top
17 of the turrets, when the main power was inactive or unserviceable, could the
18 hoists be used manually?

19 A. I'm not - I can't remember, to be quite truthful because I don't ever had to
20 have a drill to push it up. It was always, you know, electrically done. See, the
21 cordite charge in what they call Clarkson cases which were cardboard, about a
22 quarter of an inch thick, cylinders and the bags were put inside that and when
23 we would open the top of the Clarkson case to take the charge out then we put
24 it in the hoist. It stayed in the Clarkson case until we put it in the hoist. We
25 didn't have it lying around and it went to the cordite handling room and then
26 they put the detonator in it then she went to the gun turret.

27

28 Q. When you went to action stations, would you immediately begin to put
29 the cordite into the hoist?

30 A. No.

31

32 Q. What would make you do that?

33 A. When the turret officer would send down, see, because you could be at
34 action stations and they wouldn't load the guns, you see, but as soon as the
35 turret officer would order, you know, the system, to start bringing up.

36

37 Q. How would you know that the turret officer wanted cordite?

38 A. He would ring up see where - on the phone line - the leading hand or
39 petty officer, whoever was in charge of the magazine, would answer the phone.

40

41 Q. How long would it take, as far as you know, to get the cordite from the
42 cordite handling room up to the top of the turret, the gunhouse?

43 A. Well, I don't really know for sure, because our job, you know, we took it
44 out of the Clarkson case, put it in the hoist, then it went to the handling room
45 and then it went up to - see, you didn't move around a lot, you see, like, I was
46 on that ship two years, the only time I went in the engine room was when a
47 friend, a stoker, took me because you didn't go sticky-beaking around because

1 you were told to get out, you know. The only time I went up in the gun turret
2 was when my one of my friends took me up and showed me how the guns
3 worked.

4

5 THE PRESIDENT

6

7 Q. You stuck to your own jobs?

8 A. Yeah, in your department and you stayed there.

9

10 LEUT VESPER

11

12 Q. The other thing I'm interested in, Mr Guthrie, is the use in a secondary
13 role of all the members of the Miscellaneous Branch?

14 A. Yes.

15

16 Q. Of course, the stewards in the ship in Sydney and indeed in Perth were
17 members of the Miscellaneous Branch; that is correct?

18 A. Yes.

19

20 Q. I think also bandsmen, cooks and supply ratings were also members of
21 the Miscellaneous Branch. Is that so?

22 A. Yeah.

23

24 Q. You would all have secondary jobs, such as your job in the cordite
25 magazine?

26 A. Yeah. The cordite magazine was my first job, action station.

27

28 Q. Were some of the miscellaneous ratings allocated to damage control
29 parties, fire fighting parties, those types of roles?

30 A. Could have been. For instance, the band were in what they call the TS,
31 the transmitting stations that's when the order came from the direct - gun
32 director down to the transmission station and the bandsmen worked out, you
33 know, angle of deflexion and that sort of thing, then they sent the information to
34 the turrets, then - because bells used to ring, ding, ding, you know, B turret was
35 on target, A turret was on target then the gunnery officer would fire.

36

37 Q. I'm interested, though, in damage control and fire fighting?

38 A. We used to have what they call, you know, if we were at secondary
39 degree. We used to have various parties, we were shown how to use fire
40 extinguishers and buckets of sand all over the ship. They used to drum into us,
41 you know, not to put water on electrical fires and things like that.

42

43 Q. That was in the Sydney?

44 A. Yes, and while on the Perth more because war time routine, you see.

45

46 Q. The other job of damage control, shoring up damage compartments et
47 cetera, that was practised or exercised at least in Sydney as far as you can

1 recall?

2 A. Yes, there was - but, of course, that was under the direction of the
3 shipwrights and shipwright officer and he would delegate, you know, they had
4 stores in various compartments, bulkheads, to shore bulkheads up.

5

6 Q. What type of stores do you remember seeing in the ship for that type of
7 work?

8 A. Well, they had wooden beams strapped to the bulkhead, you know, that
9 could have been used to shore bulkheads, because they didn't have metal
10 beams because if you wanted - had a saw there you had to saw them, you see,
11 wood could be sawn.

12

13 Q. There were supplies of wood and tools for that type of work right
14 throughout the ship?

15 A. Right around the ship, yes. And also you'll see the sailor's hammocks, if
16 there was a hole they could plug them in because each mess, the mess we
17 lived in - so, you had your food in the mess where you lived, but you had a
18 hammock bin, that was part of the job if you're looking after - when you lash
19 your hammock up of a morning, it went into the bin on this end like a banana,
20 stacked and you had to get somebody in to help you, you know, push and ram
21 to get the last in, but they were there for damage control, because they could
22 just whip them out and put them in the hole.

23

24 Q. In Sydney your cruising stations position when you were on duty was as
25 a steward in the wardroom. Is that correct?

26 A. Cruising stations?

27

28 Q. Yes, when you were on duty during cruising stations?

29 A. Well, yes, if I was - I spent a reasonable amount of time in the warrant
30 officer's mess on both Sydney and the Perth. Because they were adjacent to
31 each other, you see, like aft there was port side was the wardroom and
32 starboard side was the warrant officer's mess and the captain's and
33 Commander's cabin were on the next level above that and --

34

35 Q. What uniform or clothing would you be normally wearing when you were
36 on duty?

37 A. Collar and tie and suit. See, those days there wasn't any, like, number
38 8's, you know, working dress, just wasn't there, so, when you went to work you
39 wore collar and tie and your suit, instead of having a double breasted suit you
40 had a single breasted one that was --

41

42 Q. I appreciate that you didn't serve in Sydney during war time, you left her
43 in July of 1939, but when you were in Sydney and the ship's company would
44 practice to going to action stations would you change out of that uniform or go --

45 A. No, go in that below(?). The only time you ever wore overalls is if you
46 were doing really dirty jobs, they would issue a pair of overalls, but otherwise
47 the only people that wore overalls were the engine room staff. Officers wore

1 white overalls, engineer officers wore white overalls and the blue overalls were
2 owned by the ship - the torpedomen and engine room.

3

4 Q. When you were called to action stations how would you get from your
5 position aft in the wardroom or the warrant officer's mess?

6 A. Well, Sydney and the Melbourne, the only access like after section from
7 B, X, Y turrets aft were the wardroom and warrant officer's mess, there was
8 only one passageway on the starboard side go forward over the engine room
9 into the over space.

10

11 Q. You would have to travel down that passageway?

12

13

14 A. Yes, you'd have to go there.

15

16 Q. Is it your memory that when everyone was going to action stations there
17 was just dozens of men all --

18 A. It was pretty crowded, you know, because, you see, if the bulkhead door
19 was shut from the flat, like, where the wardroom was at right aft then there was
20 the wardroom pantry, then there was the flat where half-deck - what they call
21 the half-deck flat and there was a hatchway that goes up towards the
22 Commander's cabin and the officer's - senior captains and Commander's cabin
23 then the half-deck sentry, then on the starboard side was that passageway that
24 went forward. That was the only access where forward. Port side was blocked
25 off.

26

27 Q. Did you have a specific place where you would have to go to if the ship
28 ever was to be abandoned? In other words did you practise abandon ship
29 stations?

30 A. Well, collision stations, you know. No, if there was any abandon ship
31 stations I would have gone to the port waist. That was my - that was our -
32 because that was the nearest place to our mess.

33

34 Q. Was that something that you and your fellow mess men were all told that
35 if we have to abandon ship that's where you muster?

36 A. That's where I'd go to because you were allocated a place to go to.

37

38 Q. Was that the case for all of the ship's company?

39 A. Yep.

40

41 THE PRESIDENT

42

43 Q. When you went to action stations did you have with you your life
44 preserver?

45 A. Yes and flash gear, see flash gear - life belts were issued in 1940 to us.
46 They were the blow-up ones or blimps, so you wore them deflated and - but
47 when your flash gear was issued to us well, you put that on your hood and

1 gloves.
2
3 Q. Where was that kept?
4 A. Well, that was kept with your respirator, because you had your old
5 respirator. When you went on leave - leave and draft you wore your respirator,
6 so you wore your respirator, because you had - didn't be wore and your kit bag
7 and your hammock and you had to get them up the ship's gangway, so, I was
8 getting up the gangway of the Sydney and Mort Stobium(?), big AB about
9 6 foot 5, you know, he came - said, come on son, give us your bag and he
10 grabbed me by the shoulder and hoisted me up to the top deck.
11
12 LEUT VESPER: I have no further questions, Mr President.
13
14 THE PRESIDENT: I don't think I do either. Thank you, Mr Guthrie, for being of
15 assistance to this Inquiry.
16
17 THE WITNESS: Thank you for coming here.
18
19 <THE WITNESS WITHDREW
20
21 LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT
22
23 THE PRESIDENT: I'm taking this evidence in The Navy and Military Club in
24 Melbourne where Mr Gordon White who is 87 years of age has come from his
25 home in [REDACTED] to give evidence.
26
27 Thank you for coming here, Mr White, to help the Commission.
28
29 <GORDON DEVERAUX WHITE, sworn
30
31 <EXAMINATION BY LEUT VESPER
32
33 LEUT VESPER
34
35 Q. Sir, can you tell this Commission your full name?
36 A. Gordon Deveraux White, pronounced Deveraux, I believe.
37
38 Q. Is your address [REDACTED]
39 A. That's right.
40
41 Q. Sir, have you made a statutory declaration for the purposes of the
42 Commission of Inquiry?
43 A. I have.
44
45 Q. I'll show you a document. Is that the statutory declaration you had
46 prepared? You don't need to read it, sir, just identify it, if you can?
47 A. It looks like what I've signed there. Is this a copy?