

**HMAS SYDNEY II COI**  
**Statutory declaration of Mr Thomas Patrick Fisher**

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**Commonwealth of Australia**  
**STATUTORY DECLARATION**  
*Statutory Declarations Act 1959*

I, Thomas Patrick Fisher, [REDACTED] retired Claims Manager, make the following declaration under the Statutory Declarations Act, 1959:

1. I was born 30 April 1921. I enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy as a cadet in 1937, and transferred to the Reserve in 1939. At the outbreak of war I was an apprentice mechanic in a garage. I received a telegram telling me to report to Fremantle in my uniform with shaving gear. I was initially posted to the Naval wireless station at Applecross for 2 months as a guard before receiving training at HMAS CERBERUS V.
2. Annexed to this Statutory Declaration is a copy of my Certificate of Service which lists the ships in which I served. In short, my career included:
  - a. on 16 March 1940 I completed my initial recruit training at the HMAS CERBERUS V in Cliff St Fremantle. This involved seamanship training which I understood to be similar to the training received at HMAS CERBERUS in Victoria;
  - b. on 17 March 1940, I joined HMAS SYDNEY II in Fremantle as an Ordinary Seaman. CAPT Collins was the CO at that time. CMDR Hilken was the Commander. I was in Forecastle Division, LEUT Treloar was my Divisional Officer;
  - c. on 26 October 1941, I left HMAS SYDNEY II and was posted to HMAS Vendetta that was doing a refit in Singapore; and

- d. on 26 November 1941 I joined HMAS HOBART in the Mediterranean until 13 October 1943.

### **My Service in HMAS SYDNEY**

3. For the first two weeks in the ship at sea I was on lookout duties. After that my Action Station (1<sup>st</sup> degree of readiness) position and Cruising Station (4<sup>th</sup> degree of readiness) position was generally in "A" turret (apart from the periods I spent on the bridge on the Depth Charge release lever, which I explain below).
4. At Action Stations there were 20 men in turret. They were as follows:
  - a. The officer of the turret;
  - b. The PO of the turret;
  - c. The phone-number;
  - d. Then seven men for each gun:
    - i. The layer, No 1;
    - ii. The breech worker, No.2;
    - iii. Two rammers, No.s 3 & 4;
    - iv. The tray worker, No. 5, who would push the tray with the shell on across to the breech and then take the bag of cordite from No. 7 and insert it into the breech chamber;
    - v. The next man, No. 6, was forward of No. 5, and he would operate the tray with the shells from the hoist so that the shell slid down to the tray to operator No. 5;
    - vi. The last man, No. 7, was the cordite handler. He would take the cordite from the cordite hoist, extract it from the cardboard cylinder, hand it to No. 5 and then he would throw the cardboard cylinder out of a chute in the rear door of the turret;
  - e. Finally, there were three men were in the forward cabinet between the guns; They were there to assist in the laying of the guns if the turret went into local control. They were called the Layer, the Trainer and the Instrument Hand. Together, they were called the Cabinet crew.

5. When the ship went to Action Stations, the guns were not loaded – they were only loaded when the order came through from the Transmitting Station. I was told that the reason that the guns were not automatically loaded when we went to action stations was because when the shells were rammed home, the copper band at the base of the shell could be damaged and the shells would have to be forced out of the barrel and may not be of further use.

*Operation of the Main Guns in Local Control*

6. If the turret was in local control, it could be trained by hand but I can only remembering myself practicing this twice, both times while we were in Alexandria harbour. In local control, I estimate that it would take approximately 10 to 15 seconds to train the turret from a fore and aft position to 90 degrees port or starboard for a firing position.
7. The local control cabinet was in the front section of the turret situated between the two guns. In local control, the cabinet crew would take readings of the target's range and bearing and these settings were transmitted to the Gun Layers in the turret. The cabinet Layer elevation settings were entered into his instruments and were then transmitted to both Gun Layers' instruments on the guns.
8. In local control, the guns were fired by the Layer in the cabinet as he was in visual control of the target. This operation was powered by current from the 24 volt batteries in the pump space of the turret. The Officer of the turret was in charge as he had the use of a periscope at his seat in the rear of the turret and gave the orders. The Petty Officer moved over to the opening to the local control cabinet to relay orders.
9. In the Cabinet, there was a big Change Over Switch which isolated the main power and fed in power from the turret batteries. This power was only sufficient to work the instruments, firing circuits and emergency lighting in the gun house but not to train the gun house as the motor working the hydraulic system was powered from the 220 volt main ship's power supply.



### *Action Stations*

10. Before SYDNEY arrived in the Mediterranean theatre of operations, every morning, about 40 mins before sunrise, there was a dawn stand-to at Actions Stations. All hydraulics were tested, that is guns elevated and depressed, turrets trained on all bearings and firing circuits tested with a dummy tube.
11. After we carried out the drills, we would be standing in the turret talking over what ever had occurred during the night.
12. In the Mediterranean, we would go to Action Stations at night at 2000 and stay closed up until after dawn action stations. One guns crew would stay on watch and the other would get some sleep.

### *Torpedomen*

13. In Dec 40, in Malta, I joined the Torpedo party and was qualified in Apr/May 41 as a Seaman Torpedoman (S/T).
14. The Torpedo Department in SYDNEY, like in most warships, was responsible for the electrical system in the ship. We were called torpedomen but our role was more than preparing and manning the torpedos and torpedo tubes. We would also, as part of our duty at sea, be responsible for fixing and maintaining all of the electrical circuits and appliances throughout the ship including the phones.
15. After qualifying as a torpedoman, my action station was again "A" turret but my duties were to check the electrical fittings, lights and phones. For three months in mid-1941, my action stations position was manning one of the Torpedo mountings.
16. The make-up of the torpedo teams and the part of the ship we were stationed when we went to action stations often changed, to keep things interesting and to gain experience. But I spent most of my time in "A" turret.

17. Safety Forks were been fitted to the tubes on SYDNEY (and I guess ships of similar class) in the late 1930s because, I understood from my training, there had been a problem with firing of the tubes accidentally.
18. At action stations, a Torpedo Gunner's Mate would be in charge of the two crews. Each crew would be made up of five men. In each crew, a Leading Torpedo Operator would be in the seat in the middle of the tubes controlling the firing of the tubes. He would be in telephone contact with the bridge and ready to fire the torpedos on the Torpedo Officer's orders. Another Leading Torpedo Operator would be on the deck behind the tubes, controlling the releasing of safety forks which were fitted to the firing charges of each tube. Then there would be two ratings, each one standing-by two torpedo tubes to set depth settings of the torpedoes.
19. The torpedo tubes are stowed fore and aft at cruising stations. During periods when we were at Cruising Stations, some men would usually be working out of the torpedo workshop and maintaining and testing the torpedoes and tubes.
20. At action stations, torpedomen wore anti-flash headgear and gloves and steel helmets (the helmets were always stowed at our action stations position). We also carried our "Blow up type" life belts – we were required to always wear them. I remember getting a blast from the Commander for being on the upper deck and not having my life belt on.
21. In the month of November, if we had been on the Australian Station, we torpedomen would have been in overalls – Some sailors wore the rig of the day but most wore overalls at sea.
22. The call to action stations was sounded *during the day* by bugle for exercise action stations and, by night a ringing bell sound over the public address system. Its sound was similar to the frequency of a ringing call on a telephone. If it was an emergency call to action stations, alarm bells were always used.

23. In the Mediterranean, only the 4 inch guns were fully manned at all times at sea while only two turrets were manned at cruising stations.
24. From memory, under CAPT Collins, the ship was generally at one of two grades of readiness, cruising stations in three watches, Red White and Blue and action stations, that is, away from the war zones. Going to and from the Mediterranean, we were pretty relaxed and at Cruising Stations. We would, though, exercise going to action stations in addition to the dawn stand-to.
25. Under CAPT Collins, when the ship went to emergency that is non-practice action stations, all of the guns and torpedos were manned with full teams.
26. At sea in the Mediterranean, we were often at action stations but only in emergencies or going into action. Also, in the Mediterranean, we were divided into two watches, which were called Defence Stations. We just went on watch and came off at our scheduled times I cannot recall watches being piped to close up. We had just got into a routine.
27. During my time under his command, I cannot recall any specific instance where CAPT Collins had to challenge a merchant ship. Most merchant ships we encountered in the Mediterranean were on convoys. After SYDNEY left the Mediterranean, we went to Mogadischio, East Africa to see if there were any raiders there. There were none.
28. I recall going to the Seychelles Islands. It looked so beautiful, pristine and so different to the environment that we had just come from. I recall that we went chasing for a raider. Apparently the ship received a W/T message that a merchant ship was under attack. The Captain was ashore at the time with the band and the 4" gun was fired to recall him to the ship. I cannot now recall whether I heard this from a pipe from the Captain or from a rumour that was circulating.
29. Some of the men had bought canaries an when the 4 inch gun was fired to recall the Captain, all the canaries died due to the concussion.

## **CAPT Burnett**

30. I had numerous occasions to observe CAPT Burnett on the bridge of HMAS SYDNEY while I was in the ship. One of my duties on the ship was the phone number on the Bridge for streaming paravanes and recovering them every time we left or returned to harbour, also for leaving and entering harbour. The Bridge phone was connected to foc's'le phone for instructions from the Bridge from the Captain. On other cruising watches at sea I was on the Bridge 'depth charge release lever' connected to the depth charge rails on the Quarterdeck in the event that a depth charge attack on an enemy submarine was ordered.
31. I found CAPT Burnett to be a friendly man with a calm manner. Each time I saw him give an order it was in a cool, calm and natural speaking voice. I don't recall anything unusual about his interaction with other officers in the ship. CAPT Burnett was very well regarded by the men in my mess, he was considered to be a good man and a good ship handler. I never heard anyone say a bad thing about him. I didn't notice any particular changes in the ships routine between Captains Collins and Burnett. I must point out that the torpedomen were trained men with at least several years at sea.
32. In hindsight I recall that under CAPT Burnett we appeared to do more evolutions than under CAPT Collins, that is training exercises such as getting out all gear for towing other ships, or being towed ourselves (known as towing aft and towing forward), fire drills and damage control exercises.
33. During my time in SYDNEY under CAPT Burnett as far as I am aware the ship never approached an unidentified ship without standing about ten miles off at least and using the 18 inch signalling projector on the rear of the Bridge to identify her.

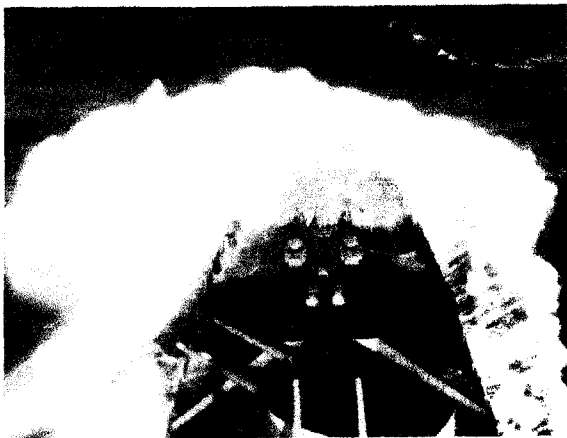
## **Alleged damage to A Turret**

34. I am aware that it has been alleged that A turret suffered some damage whilst in the Great Australian Bight in September 1941 (see Montgomery, Who Sank the Sydney? at pp208-209).

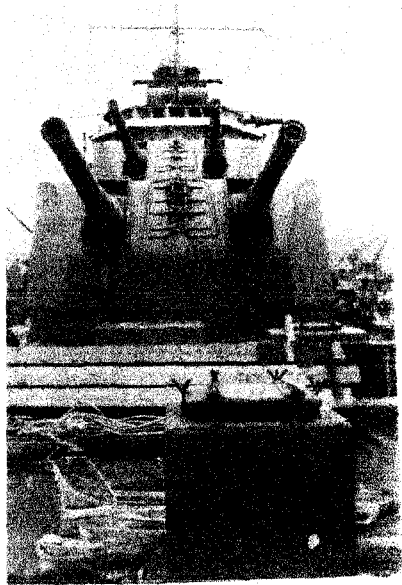
35. The version recounted by Mr Montgomery has it that 'A' turrets roller bearings on which the gun house rested were damaged by the heavy seas that lifted the turret and forced it over on a port bearing, and in Fremantle it had to be manhandled back to a fore and aft position.

36. I recall the voyage across the Great Australian Bight in September 1941. SYDNEY was travelling west with a convoy. The weather was rough but the speed of SYDNEY was held back by the speed of the convoy. I recall that the ship had travelled faster in stormier weather.

37. In my experience in SYDNEY 'A' turret was always trained on the outboard bearing to prevent water entering the area where the gun barrels leave the gun house. The photo below is one I took aboard HMAS HOBART in 1942 showing "A" turret on an outward port bearing in heavy seas.



38. Below is a photo I took of "A" turret on HMAS SYDNEY in dock in Malta Christmas 1940. This photo illustrates the reason why "A" turret is placed on an outboard bearing in rough weather – so as to prevent water entering the turret past the gun barrels where they leave the gun house which are not watertight.



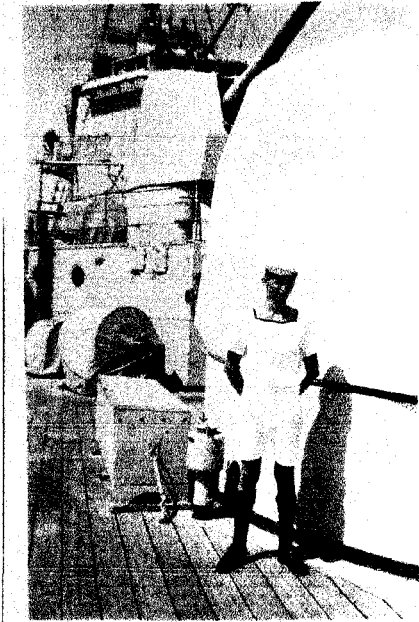
39. In September 1941, I was the bridge phone number to the foc's'le for streaming and recovering paravanes and entering harbour and both forward turrets were in full view. If "A" turret was not trained fore and aft, which is always the case on entering port, I would have noticed it. The Commanding Officers and Gunnery Officers of all ships that I served on were very strict on gun positions and the correct elevation of barrels.
40. Further, following the voyage across the Bight, SYDNEY sailed north from Fremantle to Sunda Straits in late September 1941. Part of my maintenance work included the assisting of testing of phones and firing circuits in all turrets and no malfunction in "A" turret was known to me. The Ordinance Artificer who worked with us would start the turret motor and train the turret on its different bearings daily and test the hydraulics.
41. I consider that for the turret to have been lifted off the bearings in Fremantle and the rollers ground as alleged, it would not only have been a major undertaking but impossible at Fremantle in 1941 for the following reasons:
- (a) The turret comprising the gun house, guns and machinery space and all the revolving structure weighed approximately sixty tons and there was a surface

only at the rear of the gun house where water could have any leverage to lift it as it swirled around the rear of the turret;

- (b) I rang the Fremantle Harbour Trust after reading Montgomery's book and enquired as to the lifting capacity of wharf cranes in 1941. I was informed that the lifting capacity was 3 tons. Since then I have been informed that the lifting capacity was 3 to 6 tons;
- (c) The whole turret structure would have to be lifted some six feet to enable the roller bearings, which were barrel shaped, to be removed for grinding. The rollers for the 6 inch guns were inside the base of the barbette according to Modified Leander Class cruisers shown on the Internet;
- (d) If cranes were not available to hoist the turret, heavy hydraulic jacks would be required, however, I consider that SYDNEY's decking was not solid enough to withstand the pressure required to lift 60 tons. Jacks could only be placed at the rear to lift the turret from the rear which would tend to tilt it over due to the weight of the barrels on the opposite side; and
- (e) It would not be possible to grind only some of the bearings as all rollers were the same size and if some were grounded, they would be smaller than the other rollers and would not come into contact with the race.

42. In my experience such an unusual undertaking would have been of such interest that all the ship's company off watch would have been sight seeing and I have no recollection of such work being carried out. It would take days.

43. If the seas were big enough to lift a 60 ton turret off its mounting, I would expect there to be some damage to other fittings in the area. However, I recall that on arriving in Fremantle there was no damage to ventilators, the aluminium broom and scrubber lockers alongside the turret or drums holding the wire hawsers and the breakwater in front of the turret was not damaged. Below is a photo of me alongside "A" turret in May 1940 showing the aluminium broom and scrubber lockers.



**October 1941**

44. In early October 1941, on return from an escort duty trip to Sunda Strait, I recall that the ship went to action stations. Shortly afterwards, we went back to cruising stations and the ship came to a stop. I then saw the motor pinnace being lowered. I was informed, I can't recall by whom, that a floating object had been spotted and that the motor pinnace was going to recover it. I was standing on the port waist and the ship stayed about six miles away bows on to the object. I believe I saw the motor pinnace signal the ship with an ALDIS lamp. The pinnace then came back with the object which was hoisted aboard by the seaplane crane. My observation of the float was that it was comprised of four 44 gallon drums with a wooden platform on top and a wooden mast about six feet high with a small swallow tail flag on top. As the float was hoisted out of the water a length of rope about 3 inches in diameter and about ten feet in length was hanging down. The end of the rope was badly frayed. When the float was hoisted inboard it was stripped down by the shipwrights. Annexed hereto and marked "A" is a copy of a photo of the object.

45. The following Sunday, CAPT Burnett addressed the ship's company at Sunday Divisions. I recall him saying words to the effect "I must tell you that there is an enemy raider out there and I intend to get it. I want all of you to be very alert and on your toes at all times." I recall that he spoke as he normally did, in a calm manner, he didn't thump his chest or seem gun-ho about it. He said it quite matter

of factly. If he had an occasion to lift his voice it would have been caused by the fact that he was on an open deck, no amplifier and some wind due the ship steaming at about 16 knots and the quarterdeck being above 4 propellers.

46. On a couple of occasions I was on the bridge during a trip to Sunda Strait (I was on the depth charge lever for a couple of months), when a ship was spotted by a lookout. On each occasion SYDNEY signalled with her lamp and shortly after steamed away – I assumed that the ships had correctly identified themselves. On each occasion SYDNEY was a considerable distance from the other ship.

#### **The torpedoing of HMAS HOBART**

47. I was in HMAS Hobart when it was torpedoed on 20 July 1943 off the Solomon Islands. I was brushing my teeth when the torpedo hit. There was an immediate blackout due to cables shorting out and branch breakers (electrical switches) falling off. It took some ten minutes to restore power to the ship.

#### **The effect of a loss of power**

48. If there was a similar blackout in SYDNEY the loss of power would leave the ship defenceless as far as the main armament was concerned with only about 4 shells in each loading hoists and tray. As I recollect there were about 6 or 8 CPBC (common pointed ballistic capped) shells on the bulkhead racks in the gun house. These types of shells were used against steel ships where the shells penetrated before exploding. Unfortunately, the cordite hoists would not operate until changed over to hand operations in the shell handling room below the revolving section of the turret and this operation would take time, especially if the crew were caught unawares and would be working in total darkness. There were no cordite charges in the turret, only in the hoists where it was possible to extract the top one from each hoist by hand. Thus when the torpedo hit and all power failed there would only 2 cordite charges available in the gun houses to load the guns, the top one from each hoist which could be pulled out.

#### **Fire risk of oil based paint**

49. I recall that sometime in 1942, all the paintwork in HOBART was stripped back to bare metal and painted with yellow chromate instead of oil based red lead. All compartments below decks as well were stripped back to bare metal. Then only one coat of colour was applied. All corticene, which was the deck covering, and the heavy duty linoleum below decks was removed and we lived on bare metal. We were informed that this was to reduce the fire risk. HOBART still had bare steel decks when I left in October 1943 as she was going into dock for a long refit after being torpedoed.

50. During my time on her, SYDNEY never had its oil based paint stripped back in this fashion.

I understand that a person who intentionally makes a false statement in a statutory declaration is guilty of an offence under section 11 of the *Statutory Declarations Act 1959* and I believe that the statements in this declaration are true in every particular.

Declared at Perth on 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2008

T. P. Fisher

THOMAS PATRICK FISHER

Before me



M. T. VESPER

Barrister - at - Law

