

HMAS SYDNEY II COI
Statutory declaration of Mr Gordon Claire LAVENDER

Commonwealth of Australia

STATUTORY DECLARATION

Statutory Declarations Act 1959

I, Gordon Claire ("Jimmy") Lavender, of [REDACTED] retiree,
make the following declaration under the *Statutory Declarations Act, 1959*:

1. I was born on 23 February 1920 in Bellingen, NSW.
2. I enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy in Sep 1937. My official number is 21678.
3. The following is a brief summary of my career in the RAN:
 - a. From Sep 37 to Jun 38, I did initial training at the Flinders Naval Depot at HMAS CERBERUS. This included 6 weeks of seamanship training, 4 weeks of gunnery training, two weeks of torpedo training and two weeks of signals;
 - b. I joined HMAS SYDNEY on 18 Jun 38 and served in her until 19 Sep 1941, thus serving under CAPTs Waller, Collins and Burnett;
 - c. In Sep 41, I left SYDNEY in Melbourne and went to Brisbane as part of the commissioning crew of HMAS ROCKHAMPTON, a Corvette;
 - d. On 16 Jun 43, I left the ROCKHAMPTON and went ashore sick in Brisbane;
 - e. On 5 Sep 43, I joined HMAS NIZAM;
 - f. On 04 Nov 43, I was transferred to the Boom Service at Fremantle, building submarine nets across to the north end of Garden Island;

- g. For the rest of the war, I served in various RAN Ships both in Australia and in New Guinea;
- h. I discharged from the RAN in 1950 as a Petty Officer, gunnery rating, and returned to civilian life.

My time in HMAS SYDNEY

- 4. In SYDNEY, I was an Able Seaman, Ordinary Seaman and then a Leading Seaman.
- 5. My on-watch Cruising Stations and my Action Stations position was as the trainer on Starboard forward 4in gun mount (the S1), which was above the starboard torpedo tubes. In Apr 41, my Cruising Stations position changed to being in the High Angle Director (HAD).
- 6. Under CAPT Collins and CAPT Burnett, when we were at sea, the ship was either at Cruising Stations or Actions Stations. Under both Captains, when we went to Actions Stations, all guns/torpedos were fully manned and all watertight doors and hatches were closed.
- 7. When we were in the Mediterranean under CAPT Collins, each day at sea before dawn we would go to Actions Stations. We might revert back to Cruising Stations but we would have half the Ship's company on duty and half of the guns would be manned. However, at the first hint of trouble, the entire ship would go back to Action Stations.
- 8. Under CAPT Burnett, the routine seemed to be the same as it had been under CAPT Collins: we would go to Action Stations before dawn before allowing the Ship's company to go to breakfast. Also, at sea under CAPT Burnett, the only states of readiness that I can recall were Cruising Stations or Action Stations.

Dress

9. During my war service in HMAS SYDNEY, my memory is that upper deck personnel (and stokers) would be wearing blue overalls when working at sea except for ceremonial occasions. The officers and senior sailors always wore their uniforms when at sea – white in summer.

10. The only exception to this was the action with the BARTOLOMEO COLLEONI. About two hours before that battle, when it seemed that a major ship to ship action was imminent, a pipe was made for all sailors to change into their No.5 summer uniform, which was white soft canvas pants and shirt. I understand this was because there was a concern that casualties could have had their wounds infected with the dye from the overalls we normally wore.

Challenges to Merchant Ships

11. I cannot recall any challenges to merchant ships by CAPT Collins before SYDNEY went to the Mediterranean in April 1940 although there may well have been some.

12. In the Mediterranean, the ships we encountered were escorted or in convoys so there was no individual merchant ship challenges that I can recall.

13. On the way back from the Mediterranean, SYDNEY was diverted to East Africa, in search of a Raider. I can remember sailing around the Seychelles for about three days. We went alongside a British tanker in a port and re-fuelled.

14. I recall one incident during these three days when we passed a small tanker or cargo ship which was less than half of SYDNEY's size. We passed it on opposite courses, at such close range, perhaps a couple of hundred feet, that I remember thinking to myself that I could have hit it with a potato. I do not know whether CAPT Collins ever had any concern about the identity of this ship nor do I know what challenge, if any, had been undertaken by CAPT Collins. I witnessed this other ship from the four inch gun deck which at the time was both my Cruising Stations position and my Actions Stations position so I do not know whether the ship was at Actions Stations when we passed this ship.

15. Based on my experience as someone who would be on the upper decks when merchant ships were encountered, it is impossible to pass judgment on the actions of the Captain because one simply does not know what is going on in the bridge nor what signals are passing back and forwards between the ships.
16. I cannot recall any unusual merchant ship challenges under CAPT Burnett before I left the ship in early Sep 41.
17. Indeed, doing the best I can, my memory is that the ship was handled much the same way as it had been under CAPT Collins, including challenges to unidentified merchant ships.

Torpedos

18. After serving in SYDNEY, I served in the destroyer, HMAS NIZAM. I mention this because I recall an incident with a torpedo exercise that I thought might be of interest to the Commission. The incident involved an exercise with an American submarine. It fired a torpedo at NIZAM from about 4,000 yards away (I understand). What amazed me and my shipmates was that we did not see the torpedo or its track until it was about 30 or 40 yards from the side of the ship. The practice torpedo then passed under the hull.

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.

Gib Lawender

Fremantle
Declared at ~~Melbourne~~ on the *24th* day of *June 2008*

Before me

M. T. Vesper

M. T. VESPER
Barvister - at - Law