

**HMAS SYDNEY II COI**  
**Statutory Declaration of Mr Allen C. Guthrie**

**Commonwealth of Australia**

**STATUTORY DECLARATION**

*Statutory Declarations Act 1959*

I, ALLEN CHARLES GUTHRIE of [REDACTED] retiree,  
make the following declaration under the *Statutory Declarations Act, 1959*:

1. My name is Allen Charles Guthrie and I was born on 30 Mar 20. I am currently 88 years of age.
2. I enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy on 26 Apr 38. My official number is 22029.
3. I did initial training at HMAS CERBERUS which took about eight months during which time I trained as a steward. I left there as an Assistant Steward. That was my rank. Being an Assistant Steward, I was a member of the Miscellaneous Branch. (Cooks, stewards, writers, stores assistants, sick berth attendants and bandsmen were all part of the Miscellaneous Branch which was separate to the other two branches, the Seaman Branch and the Engineering Branch.)
4. My first ship was HMAS SYDNEY and I joined on 16 Dec 38. In SYDNEY, my Captain was CAPT J.W.A. Waller, RN. I served in the Warrant Officers' mess which was aft of the rear turrets. I also served in the Wardroom for a short while.
5. During my time in SYDNEY, we frequently exercised going to action stations. We often exercised with HMA Ships HOBART, CANBERRA and AUSTRALIA.
6. I served in SYDNEY until 19 May 39 when I was transferred to the Blue Funnel tramp ship, the SS AUTOLYCUS which had been contracted to the Australian Government to carry to the UK the commissioning crew for HMAS PERTH. I

  
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joined PERTH on 26 Jul 39 and she was commissioned a fortnight later. She was very similar to SYDNEY except for the 4in guns. PERTH had 4 twin mounts for its 4in guns, with gun shields whereas SYDNEY had four single mounts with no shields. There was one other, minor, difference being that PERTH had facilities for a Flag officer and staff.

7. I served in PERTH until 08 Jul 41 when I joined HMAS NIZAM and served in her until Mar 43 when I joined HMAS QUIBERON. Most our work in those destroyers were in convoys or flotillas and thus we did not have independent contact with unidentified merchant ships, as far as I can recall.
8. After five years at sea, I transferred to CERBERUS in 1944. I was back at sea in 1945. I served in further ships and shore establishments until I retired from the RAN in 1973 as a Warrant Officer Steward.

#### **Position of the Crew at Action Stations**

##### *Miscellaneous Branch*

9. At action stations, most of the members of the Miscellaneous Branch would be below decks formed up in shell magazines, the shell handling rooms, cordite rooms, the cordite handling rooms, the 4in magazines, the sick bays (as extra hands) and assisting in wireless rooms and power rooms. I would estimate that there would have been close to 100 members of the Miscellaneous Branch in each of SYDNEY and PERTH.
10. My Action Stations position was in the "B" turret cordite handling room. I had the same action stations for my entire time in PERTH.
11. At Action Stations, there would be four (4) of us in the cordite room, a senior hand (Kellick or above) and three hands. Each turret had its own cordite room. I will return to a discussion about the work in the cordite room and the guns below.



12. The other spaces for the turrets were the 6in Shell Magazines (one for "A" and "B" turrets and one for "X" and "Y" turrets) and a Shell Handling Room for each turret. I am not sure how many men were in these rooms when at action stations but I would expect there would have been about four or five (4-5) in each magazine and three to four (3-4) fellows in each shell handling room.

*Seaman Branch*

13. The Seaman branch I would estimate were of about 250 men and was made up of:

- a. Special sea duty men, known as "seaman" (about 100 men);
- b. Torpedomen (about 100 men);
- c. signallers (flags) (about 12); and
- d. telegraphers (wireless operators) (about 12).

14. The seaman would be mainly on the upper decks, manning the 6in and 4in guns, the machine guns and in the positions on the superstructure such as searchlight platforms, director tower, aft control position, and on the aircraft platform.

15. I am not sure how many men were actually in the turrets at action stations but I think there would have been about a dozen, including the trainer, gunlayer, loading numbers and the turret officer.

16. The Torpedomen were also the electricians onboard. At action stations, they were either manning the torpedoes (I would estimate about ten men per battery) or on stand-by at vital electrical positions in the ship.

*Engineering Department*

17. At action stations, the stokers - the engine room staff under the command of the Commander (E) - would be formed up in the engine rooms and boiler rooms. They would also be formed up at places where there were pumps. Going by the size of the mess and my general experience of time serving in SYDNEY and



PERTH, I would estimate that there would have been about 200 in the engineering branch, including both stokers and engineering officers.

18. There would have been about four to five (4-5) men formed up in the Steering Gear Compartment above the rudder. This would be a mix of seamen and stokers under the command of an officer.

### **Going to Action Stations**

19. Action Stations were sounded by a hooter sound over the public address system and the words, "Hands to Action Stations". If I was working in the wardroom mess, it would take about five (5) minutes to get to my station in the "B" turret cordite room. It would usually take the crew about five to seven (5-7) minutes to get to action stations.
20. When we were at sea, in either SYDNEY or PERTH, we were either at cruising stations or action stations. At cruising stations, we were always at some degree of readiness with a few people on watch in the turrets.

### **Gunnery**

21. In my action stations position of "B" turret Cordite Room, we provided cordite charges for both "B" turret guns. Each Cordite charge came in a tight silk bag and was a foot long and six inches in diameter.
22. For gunnery purposes, a "half charge" was one cordite bag and a "full charge" was two cordite bags. When the turret officer wanted cordite charges, one of the turret personnel would ring us and we would load charges onto a hoist. The hoist was in a well and we had a door which opened to the hoist well. In a prolonged action, a bell in the room would ring each time the hoist was down ready to be loaded. The doors to the hoist well would open automatically and we would place the cordite charges in, pull a handle (to close the door to the hoist well) and the cordite would go up to the Cordite Handling Room above us where detonators



were inserted into the charges. The primed charges would then go up to the turret. I think there were three (3) hands in the Cordite Handling Room.

23. During wartime, there would be a small supply of shells and some primed cordite in the turrets at all times, available for use, even at cruising stations.
24. During wartime (and obviously in peacetime) the guns were not automatically loaded when we went to action stations. They would only be loaded if the Captain ordered this. He might order this while we were going to action stations. They were not automatically loaded when we went to action stations because, if the guns were loaded, the only way to clear them is to fire them, which the Captain may not want to do.
25. When we were ready at action stations, we would report this to the turret officer and await the call for cordite.

#### **Dress at Action Stations**

26. All crew had anti-flash gloves and hoods and people on the upper decks had helmets. We all had a lifebelt which we would have on around our waist. We were not meant to inflate it until we were about to jump into the sea.
27. All seaman ratings and stokers wore blue overalls. Some of us in the Miscellaneous Branch would be wearing overalls, if they wanted to and could get them. The stewards would be wearing our work clothes; in my case, Navy issue whites or blues and I would wear that at action stations. There was no strict rule as to what we in the Miscellaneous Branch wore, as long our bodies were covered. This changed in 1943 when we changed to khaki.
28. Officers wore their uniform, whites in summer or blues in winter, even when at action stations. The engineering officers, who would be below deck, would wear white overalls. The petty officers would usually be wearing old uniforms.

#### **Fire Fighting and Damage Control**

  
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29. On both SYDNEY and PERTH, we practiced all types of drills such as fire fighting. This would involve practicing "Emergency Stations". In Emergency Stations, if the main armament was not being used, the hands that would normally be working on the guns would be tasked with fire fighting and damage control. We in the Miscellaneous Department would practice using fire extinguishers, buckets of sand and hoses. We learnt how to attach hoses to the main service (male and female connections) and were taught about flooding and stability of the ship. Shipwrights and seamen parties would practice damage control and they had tools, planks of wood and smaller pieces of wood for the purposes of shoring-up damaged doors, hatches and bulkheads. We also learned that our hammocks could be used to plug holes.

30. We also practiced mustering at "abandon ship stations". Everyone had an abandon ship station and mine was one of the cutters on the port waist.

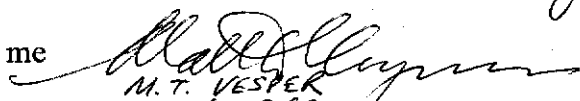
**Approaching Unidentified Merchant vessels**

31. During my time in PERTH, I recall a number of times when we encountered merchantmen. As this was wartime, we would go into action stations which meant that I would be below decks. Therefore, I can not state exactly how the Captain was dealing with the situation. In the cordite room, we would be relying on snippets of information coming from the turret ratings over the telephone.

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 Melbourne <sup>22</sup> on <sup>22</sup> ~~20~~ <sup>22</sup> of May 2008  
<sub>MV MV</sub>

Before me   
M. T. VESPER  
Legal Officer, RANR

