

**HMAS SYDNEY II COI**  
**Statutory Declaration of Mr Gordon D. White M.I.D. 21725**

**Commonwealth of Australia**

**STATUTORY DECLARATION**

*Statutory Declarations Act 1959*

I, GORDON D. WHITE, of [REDACTED] retiree, make the following declaration under the *Statutory Declarations Act, 1959*:

1. My name is Gordon D. White and I am currently 87 years of age.
2. I enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy on 16 Nov 37. My official number is 21725.
3. After recruit training, I joined HMAS SYDNEY on 14 Sep 38 as a 17 year old Ordinary Seaman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class. I served on her until 01 Mar 41. I was ill at that stage and was in hospital for a while. In Sep 41, I joined HMAS ADELAIDE and served on her for two years. In 1945, I was discharge from the RAN due to being medically unfit.
4. In HMAS SYDNEY, CAPT J.W.A. Waller, RN was my first CO. He was replaced on 16 Nov 39 by CAPT J. A. Collins, RAN. I did not serve under CAPT Burnett as he did not replace CAPT Collins until May 41.
5. For my first three or four months in SYDNEY my duties were general seamanship duties. My Action Stations position was in the "Y" turret shell room. I will refer to this below under the heading, "Position of Crew at Action Stations".
6. After those first three or four months, I was told that I would be the Gunnery Officer's messenger because I was said to have a sharp mind and a good eye. I agreed. For the rest of my time in SYDNEY, I worked in the gunnery department.

7. At sea, when on watch during cruising stations, my position was in the Director Control Tower. At Action Stations, my position was also in the Director Control Tower and I was the Range to Elevation Unit Operator. I will return to this below under the heading, "Position of Crew at Action Stations".
8. I recall that, under both CAPTs Waller and Collins, we did some practice firing of the main guns against floating targets. My memory is that we would drop the target and then steam off. I have a memory of this in peacetime (under CAPT Waller) and under CAPT Collins before we arrived in the Mediteranean. We would usually stand off at about five (5) sea miles. The closest I can recall we ever got in a practice shoot was two to three (2-3) sea miles. I knew the range because I was operating the Range to Elevation unit in the Director Control Tower.
9. During late 1939 and early 1940, SYDNEY was engaged mainly in patrolling shipping routes and convoy escort duties with our base being Fremantle. This period also saw us conducting many exercises of all of our armaments, including the torpedos, and exercises with our Walrus aircraft. CAPT Collins would frequently order the ship to action stations for training purposes. We called it a dummy run.
10. Action Stations were sounded by means of a hooter sounding over the Public Address system and then a call, "Hands to Action Stations, Hands to Action Stations". The ship would take about five minutes to change to action stations.
11. We would also practice mustering at "leaving ship stations". Everyone had a leaving ship station. My station was the Number 6 Carley float. This was near where the cutters were stowed at the port waist.
12. When at sea under CAPT Collins, the ship was either at cruising stations or action stations.
13. SYDNEY docked in Sydney over Christmas/New Year 1939/40.

14. In April 1940, SYDNEY travelled to the Mediterranean theatre arriving in Alexandria on 26 May where we joined the 7<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron. I turned 19 on 13 May 1940 where upon I was promoted to Able Seaman.

### **Gunnery**

As one of the gunnery personnel, I had a good knowledge of the operation of the main guns. The guns could fire in either director control – that is, remotely controlled by the Gunnery Officer - or in local control - that is, under independent control at the turrets. I cannot recall specifically exercising the firing of the main guns in local control but I expect we would have.

15. In director control, the process for firing the guns was as follows:

- a. The crew came to action stations. (I am not sure whether or not the guns would be automatically loaded by the crews or whether they would only do so if specifically ordered to do so);
- b. each turret officer would report that their turret was formed up and ready;
- c. The Captain would convey to the Gunnery Officer the target's bearing (green or red) and other details such as apparent range and bearing;
- d. The Gunnery Department would work as follows:
  - i. The Range Taker would measure the range and send this information electronically (by pushing buttons on his console) down to the Transmitting Station;
  - ii. The Gunnery Officer would pass any corrections to the Transmitting Station by voice pipe;
  - iii. The Transmitting Station would send electronically the required elevation to the Range to Elevation Unit operator;
  - iv. The Range to Elevation Unit Operator (by turning handles) lines up two arrows on a dial on his console and this information is passed

electronically to each of the turrets where the turret officer would have a dial replicating the dial on the Range to Elevation Unit.

- e. The Captain would by voicepipe order the Gunnery Officer to fire; and
  - f. The Gunnery Officer would convey the order to the Director Layer who would pull on the handle by his right side which would pass the electric signal to the guns. This was gyro-controlled so the pulse to the guns would only be sent when the ship returned to an even keel.
16. The information above about how the guns fired in Director control partly comes from notes I made in the 1940s, a copy of which is Annexure "A" to this statement.
17. I also have prepared a diagram of the layout of the DCT personnel, a copy of which is Annexure "B" to this statement.
18. The Director Control Tower was swivel mounted by operation of an electric motor could turn to port or starboard in order to give the personnel in the Director Control Tower, particularly the Gunnery Officer, a better view of the target. The Director Tower could also be trained around manually (by the Trainer).
19. The Director Control Tower personnel and the range finder personnel would always have a target always under observation. Thus, if it was moving, even at a small speed – eg, 2-3 knots, this would have been apparent to us from the readings we were taking of its range and bearing. Also, lookouts in the crows nest and the bridge wings – as well as Bridge staff, would be able to make out movement of the target vessel although this would be harder to pick up the further the ship was. If it was close, such as only 1,500 yards, the fact that it was making headway or sternway, even at a few knots, should have been observable.

20. During SYDNEY's many engagements in the Mediterranean, I would be at action stations in the Director Control Tower. This included during the action with the Italian cruisers BARTOLOMEO COLLEONI and GIOVANNI DELLE BANDE NERE on 19 Jul 40. These ships were engaged at about 0830 hours from long range, approximately 21,000 yards, as SYDNEY and the Italian Cruisers were heading towards each other. Normally, our plotting would be assisted by our Walrus calling the fall of shot but she was out of action and ashore.
21. The Italians almost straight away returned fire. Within a few minutes, hits were being reported on the leading Cruiser, BANDE NERE, still at relatively long range. After about ten minutes, the Italians made smoke, turned 180 degrees and retreated. We knew that they were probably faster than us but we chased them, still firing.
22. In order to stop the Italians rounding Cape Spada, CAPT Collins directed that we concentrate our fire on BARTOLOMEO COLLEONI which we did and soon we were registering hits, still at relatively long range. We mostly fired from the forward turrets but we turned and fired at least one broadside (all eight 6in guns). Many of our shots were either hits or close and within about a half an hour of opening fire, BARTOLOMEO COLLEONI was seen to be on fire and stopped in the water. We carried on after the BANDE NERE and fired on her at extreme range. However, we were close to expending our 6in ammunition and the BANDE NERE was faster than us so CAPT Collins called off the chase when she was beyond visual range.
23. During my entire time on board SYDNEY, the Gunnery Officer was LCDR M. M. Singer, RN. I worked closely with him whenever on duty, including when at Action Stations.

*LCDR M. M. Singer RN*

24. I consider that our marksmanship in the Mediterranean was excellent which was because the gunnery team worked exceptionally well and were very ably led by LCDR Singer.

25. In my view, LCDR Singer was a very professional and extremely competent Gunnery Officer. He was absolutely on the ball. He knew his job and was quick. I say this with the benefit of my experience of service both on the SYDNEY and subsequently in the cruiser, HMAS ADELAIDE.

*LCDR C. Montgomery, RN*

26. I recall the navigator, LCDR C. Montgomery, RN. I did not have much to do with him but he appeared efficient with his navigation.

*LCDR M. M. Thruston, RN*

27. LCDR M. M. Thruston RAN, who was the First Lieutenant, was third in command and the Spotting Officer in the Director Control Tower. We were on the same watch during cruising stations. In my view, he was very professional and competent.

*Ammunition*

28. We fired two types of 6in shell, high explosive and semi-armour piercing. Semi-armour piercing was used for most ship-to-ship action. For instance, when on 28 Jun 40 when we were detailed off to finish off the Italian destroyer ESPERO, we would have been firing semi-armour piercing rounds. We fired at her from about 8-10 sea miles. Also, in the Cape Spada action two weeks later when we sank the BARTOLOMEO COLLEONI, we were firing semi-armour piercing rounds. In the latter action, because most of the firing was from the forward turrets, extra shells had to be carried forward from the aft magazine to replenish the stocks of shells forward. I can not recall whether we had to use the high explosive shells on account of us almost exhausting the semi armour piercing shells.

**Position of the crew when at Action Stations**

29. My experience in SYDNEY allows me to give an idea of the distribution of the ship's company when at action stations from two perspectives:
- a. as a rating in the shell room of "Y" turret and what I know of the running of the ship. This allows me to give some idea of where *some* of the below deck personnel would be; and
  - b. of being at action stations in the Director Tower. From this I can give a good idea of the location of personnel on the upper decks when at actions stations.

Below Deck Personnel

*6in Gun Personnel*

30. Although some of the Turret personnel were above decks, for simplicity, I shall refer to them all as lower deck personnel. During my first few months in SYDNEY, my position during Actions Stations was in the "Y" turret Shell Room where we operated the shell hoist. This was still in peacetime when SYDNEY had a peacetime compliment of about 500 men. At war, the compliment went up to 645 so there may have been a few extra hands in the various spaces for each turret during wartime.
31. In the "Y" turret Shell Room, there were three to four (3-4) men and, once in, the hatch would be closed. I felt as if we were locked in there but I do not know whether this was the case.
32. Immediately forward of the shell room was the 6in Shell Magazine where there would be four men. This magazine supplied both "X" and "Y" turrets.
33. Aft of the "Y" turret Shell Room was the Cordite room and there would be men in there but I do not know how many. I assume there was probably two or three.
34. For the rest of "Y" Turret, I am not too sure but I think that there were about another 12-15 men in the turret pump room/lobby and the turret itself. Thus, not

including the men in the aft 6in shell magazine, I would estimate that there were about 20 men working in the spaces for "Y" turret. This would have been the case for the other three turrets.

*Other Lower Deck Personnel*

35. I know that many of the ship's bandsmen, cooks, stewards and supply personnel, who were in the Miscellaneous Department, would have been formed up in some of the shell rooms and cordite rooms and be in stretcher parties and fire fighting teams. I would estimate that there would have been perhaps in the order of 100-150 personnel formed up below decks for these purposes.

36. There would have been about four to five (4-5) men formed up in the Steering Gear Compartment above the rudder.

37. There of course would have been personnel in the machinery spaces but I cannot accurately state how many would have been formed up there at Action Stations.

38. There would have been personnel in the various Wireless rooms, power rooms, Switchboard rooms but again I could not accurately estimate their number.

*Upper Deck Personnel*

39. I will now give my estimates of the number of people on the upper decks when at Action Stations during the war, starting forward.

*Bridge*

40. When at action stations, the personnel on the bridge would be the CO, CAPT Collins, the navigator, LCDR C. Montgomery, RN and the Officer of the watch. Obviously, the CO would be *conning* the ship from here. There would also be a lookout and two rangefinder ratings on either side of the bridge. There would have been signalmen on the bridge and manning the signal lamps on either bridge



wing but I am not sure how many. I would estimate that there would have been at least a dozen men on the bridge, including the bridge wings.

41. Immediately below the bridge is the signal (Flag) deck. On this, there were 0.5cm multiple machine guns (one on either side) and aft of that were searchlights (one on either side) and I think signal lamps. There was one seaman manning each multiple machine gun battery and signalmen manning the lights. I would estimate that there would have been about a dozen men down there, at actions stations.

#### *Director Control Tower*

42. When at action stations in the Director Control Tower, the front compartment was called the Director. In there would be four (4) personnel: on the port side would be the Director Layer, in the centre would be the Inclinometer Setter and myself (the Range to Elevation Unit Operator) and on the starboard side would be the Director Trainer.
43. Behind us, on a raised area but still in the same compartment, were another four (4) personnel: the Rate Officer, the Gunnery Officer, the Spotting Officer and "the phone number" (a person who manned the internal telephone).

#### *High-angle Control Station*

44. Above and aft of the Director Control Tower was the High-angle Control Station where the anti-aircraft spotting for the 4in guns occurred. There would have been four or five (4-5) men there.

#### *After Control Position/ Searchlight Platform*

45. In the After Control Position, there were at least three (3) personnel. The Executive Officer would be at action stations below deck in the steering position but in the event of the bridge being knocked out, he would move aft to the After Control Position and take control of the ship from there. There were searchlights there as well and thus there would have been at least two men manning those.

*4in Guns*

46. At action stations, there were about six (6) men operating each of the four 4in guns. The 4in guns were always manned when we were at action stations. I would estimate there was an officer in charge on either side thus I estimate there would have been in the order of 26 – 30 men stationed on the 4 in guns.

*Torpedo Tubes*

47. There were four tubes in each of the port and starboard batteries and I understand there was a man on each tube. There would have been a chief in charge and a torpedo officer so I estimate there would have been a total of ten (10) manning the torpedos.

*The Walrus*

48. At action stations, my recollection was that the RAAF personnel would form up near the Walrus and about five (5) stokers would be formed up ready to swing out the catapult. I cannot recall any cover being placed over the Walrus at any time.

*Depth Charges*

49. At action Stations, I would estimate that there would be three to four (3-4) men manning the depth charges on the quarterdeck.

**Dress at Action Stations**

50. All crewmembers wore anti-flash whilst at Action Stations. This was hood that came down over the shoulders and gloves that came up to the armpits.

51. All ratings wore blue overalls.

52. Above deck, Officers wore their uniform, whites in summer or blues in winter, even when at action stations. Some of the Chiefs and Petty Officers would wear their oldest uniforms when at action stations because they would not have overalls. I have no recollection of anyone wearing aprons.

53. Below deck, the ratings wore their blue overalls. The engineering officers wore white overalls and the Chiefs and the Petty Officers wore fawn overalls.

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

54. While onboard SYNDEY, we would practice fire fighting. Canvas hoses and hydrants were in various places around the upper decks and we could tap into the main service for sea water for fire fighting. Damage control stations were located at various places around the lower decks and these would include stores of timber for plugging holes and shoring up damaged doors, hatches and bulkheads.

### **Carley Floats**

55. There were Carley Floats of various sizes around both waists and usually two of the larger type on the quarterdeck. These all had a large number stencilled on them. Crew members were allocated to a boat or Carley Float for leaving ship stations.

### **Approaching Unidentified Merchant vessels**

56. Under CAPT Collins, we had only a few encounters with merchant ships. These did not occur while in the Mediterranean where all merchant ships were convoyed or in the Indian Ocean, where they were escorted. But we encountered the odd merchant ship which all turned out to be friendly. I cannot recall where these encounters took place.

57. I observed that CAPT Collins' procedure when encountering unidentified merchantmen was as follows. He would call the ship to action stations. He would then challenge the ship from about 8 sea miles with either flag or signal light and

they would usually have their proper answer. Until he got the right answer, he would keep a good distance away. In my experience, 8 sea miles tended to be the limit of signalling ability, if there was good visibility but it could be a bit longer. This was for both flags and light.

58. On our way back from the Mediterranean, we were diverted to the coast of Somaliland to attack Italian vessels in harbour but we found none. We were then diverted to the Seychelles to hunt for a Raider. I recall that the Officer of the Watch broadcast to the crew that we, "...were to search for a raider." We cruised around there for three days and, while we saw a number of merchant ships, we did not find the raider. We never got close to any merchant ships. All I can recall is that we saw one or two on the horizon.
59. During my period in ADELAIDE, we mainly did convoy duty and patrolling of shipping lanes. She escorted ships in submarine-infested waters off both the West and East coasts of Australia, to Ambon, Papua New Guinea and many South Pacific Islands. We encountered quite a few merchant ships around the Coral Sea and off the Western Australia coast.
60. During my first two months on ADELAIDE, Sep – Nov 41 (before SYDNEY was lost), I cannot recall any encounters with merchant ships, nor how we practiced for same.
61. I can recall one incident which was on 28 Nov 42 when we came across a German blockade runner leaving Japan and headed for France. We opened fire at about 8-10 sea miles. We did not go too close because we knew what had happened to SYDNEY. We took aboard 81 German and 10 Norwegian prisoners.



*Internal Ship Communication*

62. For internal communications, the ship had voice-pipes and a telephone system. There were also junior ratings who would be used as runners. For instance, they could run messages between the Captain on the bridge and us in the director tower.

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 on 4th of June 2008

Gordon White

Before me

BERYL LLOYD

Witness' name

BANK MANAGER

Name, Occupation, address

