

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

I, Frederick Henry HOUSE, of [REDACTED] retiree, make the following declaration under the *Statutory Declarations Act, 1959*:

1. My name is Frederick Henry HOUSE and I was born on 12 July 1917. I am currently 90 years of age.
2. I enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy on 21 August 1934.
3. My official number is 20308. Attached to this statement is my Record of Service in the RAN.
4. A brief history of my service in the RAN is:
  - a. In 1934 – 35, I did recruit and seamanship training at Flinders Naval Depot at HMAS CERBERUS. I left there as an Ordinary Seaman;
  - b. In mid 1935, I travelled to the UK in HMAS BRISBANE I to be part of the commissioning crew for HMAS SYDNEY;
  - c. In Sep 35, SYDNEY was commissioned and I served in her until April 1940;
  - d. In April 1940, I was injured during a practice firing of the 4in guns, suffering deafness in the right ear. I was posted ashore in Fremantle and subsequently discharged out of the RAN. I then returned to civilian life.



## **My early time in HMAS SYDNEY**

5. I recall first laying eyes on SYDNEY at Wallsend-on-Tyne as we, the commissioning crew, walked to the wharf to join her. She was beautiful and white. We all thought she was bristling with guns. As we came aboard, we were all given a card that set out our various duties and stations. My card told me that I was to be a Ship's guard, was to be a member of the Boarding Party, that my Cruising Station was the High Angle Director (HAD) and that my Action Stations was also to be the HAD.
  
6. In HMAS SYDNEY, CAPT Fitzgerald, RN was my first CO and the then CMDR John Collins was the second in charge, who we called 'the Commander'. I recall CAPT Waller replacing CAPT Fitzgerald in 1937.
  
7. In late 1937/early 1938, I completed a 3-month Gunlayer's course at CERBERUS and then re-joined SYDNEY. My Actions Stations position was now Gunlayer in "X" turret. At that time, there was already a gunlayer in "X" turret so I would form up next to him and stand-by to act as emergency personnel. From my time working in the turrets, I can offer the following observations about the firing of the main guns:
  - a. When the ship went to action stations, the turret crews who were not already on duty in the turrets, would run to the turrets and prepare the guns. Shells and cordite would be hoisted up into the turrets. The hoists would deliver the shells and cordite to the tray at the rear of each gun. When the guns were ready, we would advise the turret officer;
  
  - b. The guns would not be loaded unless we heard the order, "All guns load". We would then load the guns. As the shells and cordite were already placed in the trays ready to be rammed home, the time taken between receiving the order to load and having the guns loaded was about five to ten seconds;
  
  - c. Once the guns were loaded, we would report this to the turret officer who would advise the gunnery officer.

8. My Action Stations position remained in "X" turret until about April 1940 when I transferred to the 4in guns. I was only briefly a member of the 4in gun crews as I suffered my hearing injury in my first shoot of the 4in guns. I can offer the following observations about the firing of the 4in guns:
- a. The 4in guns were could be used for close anti-ship action. I know this because the guns could be depressed to the horizontal. In fact, they had to be loaded at the horizontal;
  - b. Like the 6in guns, when we went to action stations on the 4in guns, we would not load the guns unless ordered to. As the shells would be ready to be loaded, it would only take a few seconds to load a 4in gun after the order was given;
  - c. The HAD communicated with the 4in gundeck by means of a telephone. The range and bearing was passed down to the transmitting station who would pass the firing solution which would then be displayed on the dial on each 4in gun; and
  - d. There were about seven men servicing each 4in gun. In addition to the four 4in gun crews, there would be an officer in charge of the 4in gun deck and a senior sailor as second in command.

**SYDNEY under CAPT Collins**

9. When at sea under CAPT Collins, the ship was either at Cruising Stations or Action Stations. At sea, before dawn each day, the ship would go to Action Stations before breakfast. We aimed for getting to Action Stations within three minutes but usually it would take about five minutes for everyone to get to their station.
10. We were frequently exercising the guns. I recall once or twice having a floating target – a rigged up framework of wood – which was on the horizon, about 15,000

yards away. I am quite sure that we did not do any close firing at anything like 1,000 or 1,500 yards

11. During late 1939 and early 1940, SYDNEY was engaged mainly in patrolling shipping routes and convoy escort duties with our base being Fremantle. I can remember two occasions where SYDNEY went to action stations when we sighted an unidentified ship.
12. The first occasion was in early 1940 when a lookout saw a ship that turned out to be the AQUITANIA. I recall that the call came over the Public Address system for all of us to go to action stations and, as I was running to "X" turret, I could see the smudge of funnel smoke on the horizon. I would have estimated that it was about 10,000-12,000 yards away (after five years at sea, I had developed a fairly good ability to judge distances to the horizon).
13. How CAPT Collins then approached and challenged the other ship I cannot say as I was in the turret until we received the pipe to revert to Cruising Stations. However, I recall being told by many of the upper deck crew that we stood off at about 10,000-12,000 yards until the identity of the other ship was established.
14. The other incident occurred about a month or so later, when SYDNEY got the report that the GRAF SPEE was patrolling in the Indian Ocean and SYDNEY was one of the ships dispatched to search for her. One night, a lookout sighted the bow wave of another vessel. Again I recall the ship going to Action Stations and glancing out into the night and seeing the bow wave of the other ship. I could not accurately estimate its distance.
15. Again, I cannot say how we approached and/or challenged the other ship although I spoke afterwards to some of the signalmen and 4in gun crews who said that, while we were challenging it, the other ship identified herself as the ORONTES after which, the searchlights were flipped on for a quick look.

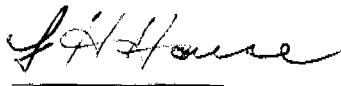
#### **Dress at Action Stations**



16. All 4in gun crew wore anti-flash whilst at Action Stations. This consisted of a white hood ~~and gloves~~.
  
17. In the turrets, we would be wearing our uniforms, whites in summer, blues in Winter. I do not know if this changed when the ship then went to the Mediterranean under CAPT Collins. We were issued with lifebelts but only some of the crew would have it on.
  
18. As for the 4in gun crews, I have been asked whether any crew wore leather aprons. I have no memory of this and my memory is that the 4in crews never wore these.
  
19. At sea, the Officers wore their uniform, whites in summer or blues in winter. This was also the case for the senior sailors. No-one would change out of what they were wearing when we went to Action Stations – we did not have time to.


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 Hobart on 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2008



Frederick Henry House

Before me



M.T. VESPER

Witness' name

