

**HMAS SYDNEY II COI**  
**Statutory Declaration of Mr Harold Adams**

**Commonwealth of Australia**

**STATUTORY DECLARATION**

***Statutory Declarations Act 1959***

I, HAROLD ADAMS of [REDACTED] retiree, make the following declaration under the *Statutory Declarations Act, 1959*:

1. My name is Harold Adams and I was born on 25 Nov 17. I am currently 90 years of age. My service number was B2255.
2. On 09 Oct 39, when I was almost 22 years of age, I joined the Royal Australian Naval Reserve. I was recruited at HMAS PENGUIN in Brisbane and from there, sent to Flinders Naval Base (HMAS CERBERUS) for basic and gunnery training.
3. On 16 Jan 40, I joined HMAS WESTRALIA, a converted merchant ship but less than two weeks later, on 28 Jan 40, was transferred to HMAS SYDNEY II, joining her in Sydney. I remained with SYDNEY until the 11 Nov 41 and therefore served under two Captains, CAPT J.A. Collins, RAN and CAPT J. Burnett, RAN.
4. My service record is still in the possession of my son, Allan Adams, and a copy is annexed.
5. I did not serve again at sea after leaving SYDNEY. I worked in Navy stores for the rest of the war.
6. On 09 Feb 40, following training aboard ship, I was promoted to Able Seaman.

**My service under CAPT Collins**



7. I served in SYDNEY in a variety of positions. Most sailors were moved about a bit to receive broader training. By the time SYDNEY arrived in the Mediterranean in May 1940, my cruising stations position was on the poop deck manning the 0.5cm multiple machine gun mount and my action stations position was as a gunner in "A" turret. This was the case during all of the time SYDNEY served in the Mediterranean.
8. In early 1941, as SYDNEY was leaving the Mediterranean to return to Australia, my Action Stations position changed to being the Captain's runner, based on the bridge. As part of that job, if CAPT Collins wanted to launch the aircraft, I would run down to the catapult and don a pair of headphones where I could hear the Captain's voice. I would pass any extra comments from the Captain to the aircraft commander or the spotter and then pass on the Captain's order to launch.
9. Also, as the Captain's runner, I might be required to stand-in for one of the look-outs or one of the rangefinders, should they need to leave the bridge for any reason. As preparation for these duties, I read the identification books which were made available in the seamen's recreation room. These books contained information about possible enemy raiders such as silhouettes, diagrams and commentary. It was not compulsory for us to read these books but most of the boys would have a look through them.
10. CAPT Collins ran a tight ship. Discipline was strict but he had the respect of his crew to a man because of his leadership and daring. He earned the respect of his crew when in the Mediterranean Sea with his coolness under fire.
11. I kept a diary through my time serving in the Mediterranean and during the trip home, which I have shown to LEUT Vesper, Counsel Assisting the Commission of Inquiry. My son, Allan, has reproduced the diary as a computer document and incorporated it into a document Allan has written called, "*A Sailor's Diary of HMAS SYDNEY II*". That document is annexed to this statutory Declaration.

*Action Stations*

12. Action Stations were sounded by a bugle sound over the public address system.
13. Under CAPT Collins, there were only two states of readiness when we were at sea. We were either at action stations or cruising stations. That is, we never went to some intermediate state. If we went to action stations, all of the armament, including secondary armament, was manned.
14. At cruising stations, there were some personnel manning the guns: usually a few men in each turret, one of the 4in guns would be manned and the machine guns would have a man nearby.
15. When we were in the Mediterranean and on the way back to Australia, my memory is that, whenever we were at sea, CAPT Collins would always call the ship to action stations during dawn and dusk. This would be in addition, of course, to those times when we might be going in to action or when we encountered a suspicious ship.

#### *Gunnery Drill*

16. At action stations, I was part of the ten man team in "A" Turret. I am not 100% sure about each man's role but my memory is that there were a crew of four men for each gun. On each gun, there was one man whose job was to ensure sure that the shell and cordite, as it was hoisted up from below, was lined up and ready to be rammed into the breach of the gun. Another man opened and closed the breach (that was my role) and the job of the third and forth men were to ram home the shell and the cordite, by use of a long pole.
17. In addition to the two gun crews, in each turret there was the Gunlayer, who sat between the two guns, and the Turret Officer.
18. We would form up and, when we were ready, the turret officer would report to the gunnery officer that we were formed up.

19. There would be no shells pre-positioned in the turrets – shells were only hoisted into the turrets if and when we were ordered to load.
  
20. The guns were not automatically loaded as part of going to action stations. The guns would only be loaded if we were ordered to do so by the turret officer. The guns were not automatically loaded when we went to action stations because, if the guns were loaded, the only safe way to clear them is to fire them, which the Captain may not want to do.
  
21. Upon an order being given to load the guns, it would take about 30 seconds to load them for the first time. After that, and if we were in a prolonged engagement, we could fire at ‘rapid fire’ and I reckon we could manage about three to four rounds a minute.
  
22. I can still recall the Turret Drill. The process for firing the guns was as follows:
  - a. the Director Control Tower DCT would announce to Gunlayer over his headphones, “Target sighted...Range “x” yards...Deflection xxx”.
  - b. the turret officer would then give the order, “Load, Load, Load” and he would signal to the shell handling rooms and the cordite rooms to send up shells and cordite;
  - c. the breech would be opened, the gun loaded and this reported to DCT;
  - d. the Turret team would then yell, “Breech & Interceptor correct. Hang fire Latch to Action. Check-Check-Check”; and
  - e. the DCT would then control and fire the guns.
  
23. The Turrets could be operated and sighted independently by folding back two centre-mounted steel view doors located between the gun barrels. This would only become necessary if the DCT were to go out of action or there was an order for

independent fire. I have no memory of ever firing the guns in local control, even in exercises, but it may be that I simply have forgotten.

24. For close-action firing, the guns could be depressed slightly when firing to port or starboard.
25. Under CAPT Collins, I recall we would practice firing the main guns. We would have a floating target which was sometimes towed. As I was in the turret most of this time, I did not know what the range was. Under Captain Burnett, I can not remember any practice firing of the main guns but this may have happened.
26. In the various engagements in the Mediterranean, we were often firing in action every few days and became very efficient at firing the guns. It was also extremely hard work and exhausting. I can recall going on 3 days leave in Malta. I booked into a room with my intentions to rest up for a short time then site-see and relax a bit. So I placed my shoes and uniform on a chair in my room and lay down for a short nap but I slept continuously for about 2 ½ days. I didn't realize how tired I had become. I awoke to find my uniform pressed and my shoes polished. It was a pleasant surprise but I ended my leave seeing fewer sites than I had intended.

#### *Encounters with Unidentified Merchant Ships*

27. Under CAPT Collins, I can only recall a few times that the ship came across unescorted merchant ships and had to challenge them to ascertain their identity. This is because in the Mediterranean, most ships were in convoys. Also, I was closed up in "A" turret and could not see what was going on outside the ship.
28. I remember at least one occasion early on in the Mediterranean campaign where CAPT Collins challenged a merchant ship. I can not find a reference to this in my diary. We went to action stations. I did not see the other ship but all the crew afterwards spoke about the fact that we approached it so that our bow was always pointing towards it. I remember hearing "B" turret fire a shot. This must have been a warning shot as I was told that this was directed to be over the other ship's

bow. I do not know how close we were or what signals passed between SYDNEY and the other ship. SYDNEY soon went back to cruising stations.

29. I can vaguely recall an incident in Oct 40 when we were on our way to the Dardanelles. The ships we were in convoy with intercepted some Greek cargo ships but I can not recall SYDNEY actually challenging any of these ships.

30. In my diary, there is the following reference to challenging a merchant ship on 18 Jan 1941:

18 JAN 0700

Sighted an oil tanker which was flying the Swedish flag. We intercepted her & she was able to prove her identity so she was allowed to proceed. She looked so much like a supply ship for the German raider. Part of the convoy left us and proceeded to Bombay. The ships who parted company were carrying Italian prisoners. The Sydney continued to cover the remaining five ships to the east African port of Mombassa.

31. We were east of Aden at this time. I know this because the entry for 16<sup>th</sup> Jan, shows that we had left Aden travelling east and the entry for the 17<sup>th</sup> is "Heading east". I recall that the 18<sup>th</sup> was a misty day and I was acting as a lookout on the bridge wing. When we first saw the other ship, it was on our port bow. I cannot recall whether or not we were at action stations, or if not, whether the ship went to action stations but we must have been at action stations because I was on the bridge wing which, as the Captain's runner, was part of my action stations. Also, my memory is that CAPT Collins, if he ever had any doubt about a ship, he would go to action stations and therefore, I am quite certain that the ship would have been at action stations when CAPT Collins challenged this ship.

32. I cannot state with confidence how far away the other ship was when I first saw it or when it was first seen by one of our lookouts. It was not on the horizon (about ten miles from the bridge wing) but maybe half of that - five (5) sea miles - distant. All the officers got their binoculars out. I do not recall what I had heard that made me wonder whether she might be a German raider. I cannot now recall what people were saying.



33. I recall CAPT Collins having signals flashed to the other ship and getting a satisfactory response. I cannot recall whether the other ship responded by lamp or flag. There was about 5-10 minutes between seeing the other ship and SYDNEY getting a satisfactory response. I stayed on the bridge the whole time which must mean that CAPT Collins did not wish for the aircraft to get ready.

34. About a week later, we were diverted to the east Coast of Africa. I recall that we were told that it was suspected that there was a raider in the area. I have a vague memory of those days. My diary entries for these days are:

23 JAN           Hearing that a suspicious vessel had been seen in the Italian port of Mogadishu we decided to investigate. Heading towards the coast of Italian east Africa timing our arrival there at sundown. Hands were at action stations. No ship being sighted in or near the port so we withdrew at high speed.

24 JAN 0900      Arrived at Seychelles for fuel. Band landed and played a short programme in the town square. A message was received saying that a ship was being attacked by a *Raider*.  
1500      We left in a hurry to look for the *Raider*.

25 JAN           Smoke sighted soon after dawn. Caused some excitement but it was a false alarm. A quiet day sweeping south at high speed.

26 JAN           Sweeping for *Raider*. All quiet.

27 JAN 0900      Arrived at Seychelles for fuel.  
1400      Left again for Fremantle.

28 JAN           Proceeding at 20 knots to Fremantle. Modified defence watches introduced.

29 JAN           At sea. Weather beautiful. Sun very hot.

35. During these days, every morning, before or after breakfast, we would go to action stations. However, I cannot recall ever coming across a ship that CAPT Collins needed to challenge.

#### **Service under CAPT Burnett**

36. In May 41, in Sydney Harbour, CAPT Burnett replaced CAPT Collins as the Captain. I cannot recall any ceremony to mark CAPT Burnett joining SYDNEY. The only reason that I knew that there was a new Captain was due to comments made by my ship mates.

37. My cruising stations position remained on the poop deck on the multiple 0.5 machine guns which I would have to fire in an emergency.



38. My action stations position was still as a Captain's runner, based on the bridge.
39. Under CAPT Burnett, the drill for going to action stations remained the same and I assume the gun drill remained the same although I was no longer working in the turrets.
40. Under CAPT Burnett, there tended to be less public addresses by the officer of the Watch about what the ship was doing. He was quieter than CAPT Collins. CAPT Burnett appeared to be very good at conning the ship.
41. I can not recall any occasion where CAPT Burnett only ordered some of the gun crews (and not others) to close-up at their positions but this may have happened.
42. The first trip under CAPT Burnett I can recall was to Fremantle via the Great Australian Bight escorting a convoy. I have no memory of any other sea time under CAPT Burnett.
43. There were a few episodes on that trip involving gunnery that greatly surprised me. They were:
- a. One evening at dusk, I was standing on the port deck near the catapult when the port four inch guns both fired a star shell. I was shocked because we were not at action stations nor was there a pipe warning the crew that there was to be firing. I think it was an exercise; and
  - b. A day or two later, the ship was piped to action stations and I was making my way to the bridge when "X" turret fired, throwing me off the ladder as I was coming down from the poop deck. I injured my back. I was surprised that the turret would fire before the ship had come to action stations. I have no idea what it was firing at, if anything.
44. I cannot recall any encounters CAPT Burnett had with unidentified merchant ships. I am not saying that there were none – I may have been below deck or it

may be that I have simply forgotten. I cannot recall any speech given by CAPT Burnett about raiders – he could have given one but I simply can not recall. I can not recall any disagreements among the senior officers (including CAPT Burnett) when I was on or near the bridge, which is where I would be when at action stations.

45. I left SYDNEY on 11 Nov 41 when I was sent to hospital in Fremantle to remedy an ongoing and troublesome medical complaint, "Deep Tropical Tinea".

46. I think I was last off SYNDEY before she sailed. I had come to know a great number of sailors on this ship over almost two years aboard it and can recall the parting words one of my shipmates who said to me as I departed: "Bad luck about going ashore, Harry, we're going on leave when we get back". I was later able to watch my ship sail away but I was not to know it would never return.

**Carley Floats**

47. I can recall SYDNEY carried two sizes of Carley Floats. These can be seen on the picture of SYDNEY taken from its Walrus which is annexed to this Statutory Declaration. I got this photograph through the family of an RAAF serviceman, Frank Parton, who served in the SYDNEY in early 1940.

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 Kawana Waters, Queensland

on 21st of May, 2008

*M. Adams*

Before me,

*Barbara Key  
Acting Assat*

on 21st May 2008

