

HMAS SYDNEY II COI
Statutory Declaration of Mr Francis Sheldon-Collins

Commonwealth of Australia
STATUTORY DECLARATION
Statutory Declarations Act 1959

I, FRANCIS SHELDON-COLLINS of [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] retiree, make the following declaration under the *Statutory Declarations Act, 1959*:

1. My name is Francis (Frank) Sheldon-Collins and I was born on 03 Jul 20. I am currently 87 years of age.
2. I enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy on 11 Apr 38. My official number is 21948.
3. I did initial training at HMAS CERBERUS which took about eight months during which time I trained as a cook. I left there as an Assistant Cook (Officers). Being a cook, I was a member of the Miscellaneous Branch.
4. My first ship was HMAS SYDNEY and I joined on 11 Mar 39.
5. I served in SYDNEY until late May or early Jun 41. In early Apr 41, when the ship was in Sydney, I was drafted off SYDNEY to return to CERBERUS but in fact I did not leave the ship at that time. This was because a Petty Officer cook working in the Wardroom got compassionate leave and I was told to stay on board to fill his position. My best memory therefore is that I left the ship in late May or early Jun 41. I still have my service record and a copy of that I have annexed to this Statutory Declaration.

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6. I thus served under three Captains, CAPT J.W.A. Waller, RN, CAPT J.A. Collins, RAN and CAPT J. Burnett, RAN. I will below refer to my service in SYDNEY under each of the three CAPTs.

7. Briefly, my RAN career after leaving SYDNEY was:
 - a. I went to Flinders Naval Depot where I was in charge of the Wardroom Galley;
 - b. On Boxing Day 1941, I went to Darwin where I joined the staff of the senior Naval officers in Charge of Northern Forces;
 - c. In Jun 43, I returned to Flinders Naval Depot and worked in the Wardroom galley;
 - d. In Nov 43, I went to Sydney to do a gunnery course and joined the commissioning crew of the frigate, HMAS HAWKESBURY. On HAWKESBURY, I was the officers' cook and a bofors gunner;
 - e. In Dec 45, I joined CDRE Farncomb's staff as a PO cook; this was at Flinders Naval Depot;
 - f. In Aug 46, I went to Sydney as part of the staff of RADM Moore, RAN, Flag officer in Charge, Eastern Command;
 - g. In May 48, I went to England on HMAS KANIMBLA for the Commissioning of HMAS SYDNEY III. I sailed on her back to Australia arriving in Melbourne in Jun 49;
 - h. I stayed on SYDNEY III until Jan 50 and after some time in hospital, I returned to Flinders Naval Depot as Chief Instructor in the School of cooking.
 - i. On 10 Apr 50, after exactly 12 years of service, I paid off; and
 - j. I then worked for the Electricity Commission of Victoria as a messing supervisor. I spent the rest of my career in the Public Service.

My Service under CAPT Waller, RN

8. I served under CAPT Waller for about eight months, which was mostly during peacetime. I was posted to the Wardroom galley as a cook.

9. My action stations position was in the after 6in magazine.

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10. Under CAPT Waller, we frequently exercised going to action stations.
11. I have been asked whether, when under CAPT Waller, when the ship went to action stations, the 6in guns were always loaded. The guns were not automatically loaded when we came to action stations. Rather, we would be formed up in the magazine room and we would wait for the communication from the turrets to begin sending cordite up.
12. In the after magazine was the cordite for both rear turrets.
13. Under CAPT Waller, after the declaration of war, we had a few cruises into the Indian Ocean, we continued to exercise. My memory is that, when we were beyond the fort on Rottenest Island, we would be at action stations just about every day.

My Service under CAPT Collins, RAN

14. When CAPT Collins assumed command, there were some changes to the places of the various cooks and I was posted to the Captain's galley as a cook. The Captain's galley is on "X" deck near the lobby near the 4in gun deck, immediately below the aft superstructure. I served as a cook for CAPT Collin throughout his time as Captain.

Position of the Crew at Action Stations

15. My action stations remained the after Magazine.
16. 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.

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17. At Action Stations, there would be 14 of us in the after magazine, two (2) in each of the "X" and "Y" cordite handling rooms – so, a total of 18 men in the cordite team for the rear turrets. I am not sure how many men were in the shells rooms or the machine room which operated the hoists for each turret.

Going to Action Stations

18. Under CAPT Collins, Action Stations were sounded by a bugle sound over the public address system. From my position in the Captain's galley, it would take about three to four minutes to run to my station in the after magazine. It would usually take the crew about five (5) minutes to get to action stations.

19. Under CAPT Collins, when we were at sea, we were mostly at action stations, particularly at night. I can only ever remember being at action stations (with every gun manned) or cruising stations. I cannot recall any intermediate state of readiness. At cruising stations, we were always at some degree of readiness with a few people on watch in the turrets.

20. 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.

21. I do not know whether the men in the turrets would automatically load the guns as part of coming to action stations.

Watertight doors and hatches

22. Under CAPTs Waller and Collins, there was a procedure whereby, whenever we were at sea, all watertight doors and hatches were to be closed. Whenever a person had to pass through certain important watertight doors and hatches (marked either with an "X" or a "Y"), the rule was that the person would have to ring the bridge and report this.

Dress at Action Stations

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23. All crew had gas masks, anti-flash gloves and hoods and people on the upper decks had helmets. We all had a lifebelt. In the magazines, we tended not to put on our gloves and lifebelts but we would have them with us.
24. All stokers wore blue overalls. Seaman ratings, in summer, would be wearing white shorts and shirts and, at 1600, at sea, they were meant to change into night rig - blue pants and white square necked shirt - but many people did not worry about changing into night rig.
25. The cooks wore white pants, white shirts and white aprons. We cooks had white peaked caps and would wear them mostly whenever we left the galley. That was still the case when I left the ship in May 41. My memory is that we cooks virtually lived in our whites because we would be working for most of every day. At action stations, if I had been on duty in the galley, then I would go to my station in my whites. Up until about Jul 40, we were allowed to wear white singlets without our white shirt but there was a change in rules.
26. The "spud locker" was just forward of the torpedo tube on the port side. It is where the cooks would store bags of potatoes and next to it was the potato peeling machine. The cooks would mainly go to the spud locker in the mornings to prepare potatoes for upcoming meals and perhaps again in the evening around 1600 or later to prepare for the sailors' evening meal (at 1900).
27. 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.

Approaching Unidentified Merchant Vessels

28. Under CAPT Collins, I recall a few encounters with unidentified ships. In early 1940, we picked up the Queen Mary in the Indian Ocean and then did convoy escort duties in New Zealand, eastern Australia and then out of Fremantle. I have a memory of at least two occasions where we encountered an unidentified ship during this time (that is, in early 1940 before SYDNEY went to the

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Mediterranean). There may well have been more occasions but I am not definite. On both of these occasions that I can definitely recall, I have a similar memory of running out of the Captain's galley because the ship was being called to action stations. I recall that on each occasion, I saw a wisp of smoke on the horizon. I can recall that, on each occasion, the Walrus was immediately launched (I could hear its engine).

29. On both occasions, at the "all clear", we came out of action stations. On the first occasion, as I returned to the Captain's galley, I saw the other ship about 1000 yards. I could see people on the other ship. I remember our cutter on its way back from it. It was pointing in the other direction to us and beginning getting under way. We were parallel to it although slightly past it (ie, our bow was a little further west than its stern) and we had hove to. It appeared that we had come towards each other bows-on. Because I was below deck, I do not know how CAPT Collins approached the other ship nor how far off SYDNEY was when he became satisfied of the other ship's identity.
30. The second occasion was very similar to the first. Again, I saw it as I came out of the magazine. Again, my memory is that it was pointing in the opposite direction about to sail away. It was still hove to about 1000 yards – again I could see people on the deck. I do not know how CAPT Collins approached this ship.
31. During our subsequent service in the Mediterranean, we mainly encountered merchant ships when they were in convoys or under escort and I cannot recall SYDNEY challenging any.
32. I recall that, on our return from the Mediterranean, SYDNEY was diverted to East Africa and we were told by public address that C-In-C, Colombo had received an SOS from a ship saying that there was a raider. We searched in Mogadishu harbour and around Somaliland and the Seychelles for about three days. I can not recall going to action stations. We did see a British tanker in a harbour in the Seychelles which we went along to refuel. Whether we saw any other ships I would not know because I would have been working in the galley.

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Service under CAPT Burnett

33. As mentioned above, I was drafted off SYDNEY on 02 Apr 41 (in Sydney) but I did not leave the ship at that time because I had to replace Petty Officer Edward Hamilton, a cook from the wardroom who got compassionate leave. I was standing on the deck with my bag and hammock ready to leave when I was told that I would have to stay. We then sailed to Fremantle. I do not know who was Captain at this stage as I was working in the wardroom. I cannot recall any ceremony for the transfer to CAPT Burnett (nor CAPT Collins when he took over).
34. The first time I saw CAPT Burnett, we were alongside in Fremantle. This first memory is of CAPT Burnett inspecting the whole ship. I recall him coming up to the "X" deck and I was in the wardroom galley lobby looking at CAPT Burnett through a porthole when I heard him say to another officer, "Get rid of these rafts, Number One, they are non-service". He was referring to floats that CAPT Collins had had the ships' shipwrights and plumbers make out of large used tin cans when we had been in the Mediterranean. As a result, they were dumped on the wharf in Fremantle.
35. I can not recall whether or not CAPT Burnett exercised going to actions stations – he could have but I cannot recall.
36. After the incident referred to above, we put to sea. I cannot recall how long we were at sea at this time. I recall an incident in the Indian Ocean when we encountered a suspicious ship. We had not come to action stations. I had gone out onto the deck ("X" deck) between X turret and the Wardroom lobby. I cannot recall why I was out there. I could see a freighter about 1000 yards away and it was clear that it had heaved to in response to our challenge. (I do not know how far away it was when it was sighted or how SYDNEY approached it.) SYDNEY was also hove to. I could see that our cutter was half way back from the freighter. We were not at action stations – I know this because my action station was still the after magazine.

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37. I do not think there had been any pipe to the effect that some of our armament should be closed up (that is, manned). Indeed, I have no recollection of ever hearing such a pipe and I think I would remember such a thing because it would be unusual. So, my memory is that we were at cruising stations.

38. The fact that we thought there could be a raider in the area (we had chased one in the Seychelles only a few months before) yet had sailed up so close to another ship before identifying it - without going to action stations - greatly concerned me. I remember straightaway saying to the Captain's PO cook, as I stepped back into the wardroom lobby, "If this bastard carries on like this, we're dead ducks. So, I want out."

39. It was not long after this incident that I left the ship.

Carley Floats

40. My abandon ship station was the port whaler. My clear memory is that SYDNEY did not ever have the smaller type of Carley Float. My memory is that we only ever had five Carley Floats - all of the large size - two on the Quarterdeck, two on the 4in gun deck and one between the forward funnel and the bridge.

41. I have been shown a photograph of the quarterdeck of a cruiser which shows two large Carley Floats with a smaller Carley Float inside one of them. This is photo 31 in Mr Montgomery's book. Contrary to the note under the photograph in his book, the photograph is not of the stern of SYNDEY but in fact the stern of HMAS AUSTRALIA or CANBERRA. I know this because the ship in that photograph has three bollards on her stern while SYDNEY had only two bollards on her stern (see the photo at p.31 of Mr Olsen's book - a photo I took).

42. Also, when in the west of Australia in 1941, I took a photo of the starboard side quarterdeck Carley Float which had broken away from its mountings in rough seas. It had wedged between the guard rail and the base of "Y" turret and there was no smaller Carley float inside.

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43. For these reasons, I do not believe the Carley Float in the Australian War Memorial is from SYDNEY. I also believe a simple comparison of photographs 21 and 22 in Mr Montgomery's book confirms this.

44. Finally, I annex an article I wrote in Feb 08 for possible inclusion in a veteran's newsletter which sets out some of my memories of my time in SYDNEY.

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.

Glenelg, South Australia

Declared at ~~Melbourne~~ on 26th of May 2008

Before me



KATHRYN ANN CUNNINGHAM JP (25181)
*A Justice of the Peace in and for
the State of South Australia*

Francis Charles Sheldon
Kobler

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A statutory declaration under the Statutory Declarations Act 1959 may be made before—

(1) a person who is currently licensed or registered under a law to practise in one of the following occupations:

Chiropractor	Dentist	Legal practitioner
Medical practitioner	Nurse	Optometrist
Patent attorney	Pharmacist	Physiotherapist
Psychologist	Trade marks attorney	Veterinary surgeon

(2) a person who is enrolled on the roll of the Supreme Court of a State or Territory, or the High Court of Australia, as a legal practitioner (however described); or

(3) a person who is in the following list:

Agent of the Australian Postal Corporation who is in charge of an office supplying postal services to the public
Australian Consular Officer or Australian Diplomatic Officer (within the meaning of the *Consular Fees Act 1955*)

Bailiff

Bank officer with 5 or more continuous years of service

Building society officer with 5 or more years of continuous service

Chief executive officer of a Commonwealth court

Clerk of a court

Commissioner for Affidavits

Commissioner for Declarations

Credit union officer with 5 or more years of continuous service

Employee of the Australian Trade Commission who is:

- (a) in a country or place outside Australia; and
- (b) authorised under paragraph 3 (d) of the *Consular Fees Act 1955*; and
- (c) exercising his or her function in that place

Employee of the Commonwealth who is:

- (a) in a country or place outside Australia; and
- (b) authorised under paragraph 3 (c) of the *Consular Fees Act 1955*; and
- (c) exercising his or her function in that place

Fellow of the National Tax Accountants' Association

Finance company officer with 5 or more years of continuous service

Holder of a statutory office not specified in another item in this list

Judge of a court

Justice of the Peace

Magistrate

Marriage celebrant registered under Subdivision C of Division 1 of Part IV of the *Marriage Act 1961*

Master of a court

Member of Chartered Secretaries Australia

Member of Engineers Australia, other than at the grade of student

Member of the Association of Taxation and Management Accountants

Member of the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy

Member of the Australian Defence Force who is:

- (a) an officer; or
- (b) a non-commissioned officer within the meaning of the *Defence Force Discipline Act 1982* with 5 or more years of continuous service; or
- (c) a warrant officer within the meaning of that Act

Member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia, the Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants or the National Institute of Accountants

Member of:

- (a) the Parliament of the Commonwealth; or
- (b) the Parliament of a State; or
- (c) a Territory legislature; or
- (d) a local government authority of a State or Territory

Minister of religion registered under Subdivision A of Division 1 of Part IV of the *Marriage Act 1961*

Notary public

Permanent employee of the Australian Postal Corporation with 5 or more years of continuous service who is employed in an office supplying postal services to the public

Permanent employee of:

- (a) the Commonwealth or a Commonwealth authority; or
- (b) a State or Territory or a State or Territory authority; or
- (c) a local government authority;

with 5 or more years of continuous service who is not specified in another item in this list

Person before whom a statutory declaration may be made under the law of the State or Territory in which the declaration is made

Police officer

Registrar, or Deputy Registrar, of a court

Senior Executive Service employee of:

- (a) the Commonwealth or a Commonwealth authority; or
- (b) a State or Territory or a State or Territory authority

Sheriff

Sheriff's officer

Teacher employed on a full-time basis at a school or tertiary education institution