

HMAS SYDNEY II COI

Statutory declaration of Mr Ian Stanley Clarence RUSTON

Commonwealth of Australia

STATUTORY DECLARATION

Statutory Declarations Act 1959

I, Ian Stanley Clarence RUSTON, of [REDACTED] retiree,
make the following declaration under the *Statutory Declarations Act, 1959*:

1. I was born 20 December 1920. I enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy on 11 January 1938 and my official number is 21804.
2. Briefly, my career in the RAN was:
 - a. I did initial training at the Flinders Naval Depot at HMAS CERBERUS for recruit training and the wireless telegraphy course (a total of 15 months);
 - b. I joined HMAS SYDNEY in April 1939, as set out in my Certificate of Service. Before the outbreak of war, I recall we cruised as far as Darwin before we were ordered to Fremantle, Western Australia immediately before the start of the war;
 - c. I served in SYDNEY until December 1940 when I was transferred to a ship transporting Italian Prisoners to Australia. I arrived back in Australia in February 1941, about a week before SYDNEY arrived home;
 - d. In February 1941, I was posted to HMAS PLATYPUS where I served until December 1941 as a wireless telegraphist;
 - e. I served in further establishments and ships, including HMA Ships SHROPSHIRE and AUSTRALIA as a wireless telegraphist until discharging from the RAN in 1948. My service in SHROPSHIRE and AUSTRALIA was

as part of CDRE (as he then was) Collins' staff. In both of those I saw action. I was in AUSTRALIA when she was hit by kamikaze planes and CDRE Collins was wounded. I was in AUSTRALIA's Remote Control Office at the time.

My time in HMAS SYDNEY

3. In SYDNEY, my role was a wireless telegraphist. There were twenty-five of us in our branch, known as the W/T Branch.
4. My on-watch Cruising Stations and my Action Stations position was in the Main W/T office. I did at times spend time in the Remote Wireless Office (RWO), almost directly under the Bridge.
5. All W/T communication was done by Morse code and coded, except where contact with the enemy was made and then the signal would be in plain language.
6. I can not recall ever actually transmitting W/T during wartime when we were at sea in SYDNEY – we were under strict instructions not to break W/T silence. This was to not reveal our presence.
7. In wartime, every communication was encrypted. When we received it, it would come out as a series of seemingly random letters or numbers. The w/t operator, with headphones on, would write down the letters and then pass that signal to the Petty Officer in charge of the watch. The signal would then go to the signal officer who would have same decoded with the plain language sheet going into the log book for that day. Wireless staff to my knowledge did not decode signals.
8. The code books were all in numerals and letters but beyond that, I cannot explain the types of codes used. There was one machine used for coding, but this was held by the Signal Officer and the coding sequence changed daily.

VAI and Intelligence Signals

9. In the lead up to war and during the war, every day, sometimes twice a day, we would receive a VAI signal. Everyone referred to it as, "the VAI signal". The VAI signal, as I understood it, told us where all the friendly ships were expected to be on that day. Each subsequent VAI signal updated the former. When on the Australia Station, it originated from HMAS HARMAN.
10. The VAI signals were in coded Morse. There would be groups of letters, or figures in groups of five. The w/t operator would write the message down then pass the signal to the w/t PO who would pass it on to the Signals Officer also known as the Cypher Officer, who would decode it.
11. Intelligence signals, which were marked Classified, were also communicated this way – in Morse code. The uncoded message would be passed up to the Signals Officer, who distributed them to those on the distribution list (eg, the Captain and the Commander).

Radio Telegraphy

12. My memory is that there was no Radio Telegraphy capacity in HMAS SYDNEY. The only electronic method for external ship communication was wireless telegraphy. Later on in the war, RAN ships were fitted with radio telegraphy (R/T) sets but my memory is that SYDNEY did not have a capacity for radio telegraphy and therefore it could not make voice transmissions.
13. When I was in AUSTRALIA and SHROPSHIRE as part of CDRE Collins' staff, I recall using R/T to call up American fighter aircraft to see if they could give us cover. I do not know what range R/T had but my memory is that I could communicate with aircraft within 20 or so miles.

Direction Finding

14. I am not sure whether SYDNEY had Radio Direction Finding (RDF). I know that other RAN ships had this capacity during the war and that the Direction Finding sailors were in a different category to the W/T sailors.

SYDNEY under CAPT Collins

15. I have been asked questions about whether and how SYDNEY encountered any unidentified ships. My memory is that CAPT Collins would usually broadcast to ship's company so as to keep them fully informed about what was happening.

16. It is very clear in my mind that, notwithstanding that the VAI for that day might have stated that a friendly ship was in our position, if we encountered a merchant ship, we would go to action stations at an approximate range of eleven miles. My memory is that SYDNEY would have a very careful look before venturing closer. I recall this happening on at least two (?) occasions in the Indian Ocean while Sydney was on convoy duties. My memory is that on both occasions I was in the RWO and I ventured outside to see what was happening.

17. In the action against the COLLEONI, strict radio silence was maintained despite pleas from ADM Cunningham to let him know where SYDNEY was. I recall we were closed up at action stations before the COLLEONI came in range of SYDNEY's guns. I was able to watch that action as I was in the RWO and did not have any specific duty at that time. SYDNEY's fire was very accurate but one shell from COLLEONI did go through our forward funnel just above where I was standing.

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.

Law Ruston

Declared at Sydney on the 5th day of August 2008.

Before me *Matthew Vesper*

M. T. VESPER, LEUT, RANR
LEGAL OFFICER,

