

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE LOSS OF HMAS SYDNEY II

Before The Hon TRH Cole AO RFD QC

Held at (redacted), and
(redacted)

Counsel Assisting: LEUT M Vesper RANR

On Monday, 23 June 2008
(Day 2)

1 THE PRESIDENT: I have come to the home of Mr Thomas
2 Fisher in Perth to take evidence from him. Mr Fisher is
3 87 years of age.

4
5 Mr Fisher, thank you very much for agreeing to see
6 and to help this Commission of Inquiry.

7
8 MR FISHER: Thank you, sir.

9
10 <THOMAS PATRICK FISHER, sworn

11
12 <EXAMINATION BY LEUT VESPER

13
14 LEUT VESPER

15
16 Q. Sir, can you tell this Commission your full name?

17 A. Yes, it's Thomas Patrick Fisher.

18
19 Q. Sir, do you live at (redacted)?

20 A. I do.

21
22 Q. Mr Fisher, you understand that Mr Cole is taking
23 evidence from you in relation to the Commission of Inquiry
24 in to the loss of HMAS Sydney II?

25 A. I do.

26
27 Q. In relation to that Inquiry, did you prepare a
28 statutory declaration for Counsel Assisting that Inquiry?

29 A. I did.

30
31 Q. I show you a document. Sir, does that appear to be
32 the statutory declaration that you have prepared in
33 relation to the Inquiry?

34 A. It is.

35
36 Q. Is that the statutory declaration that you made this
37 morning?

38 A. Yes.

39
40 Q. It follows that the contents of that document are
41 true and correct?

42 A. To the best of my belief, yes.

43
44 LEUT VESPER: I tender that.

45
46 THE PRESIDENT: That will be exhibit 3.

47

1 EXHIBIT #3 STATUTORY DECLARATION OF THOMAS PATRICK FISHER
2 DECLARED 23/06/08

3
4 LEUT VESPER: Could you just pass that to Mr Cole, please,
5 Mr Fisher?

6
7 THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

8
9 LEUT VESPER: Mr President, with your leave I will ask
10 Mr Fisher some questions that arise out of his statutory
11 declaration.

12
13 THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

14
15 LEUT VESPER

16
17 Q. Mr Fisher, firstly, I will ask you to have regard to
18 exhibit 3, your statutory declaration. In paragraph 2 you
19 set out some parts of your career. In particular you
20 refer to your time in HMAS Sydney and then you refer to
21 your service in His Majesty's Australian Ships Vendetta
22 and then Hobart. After you served in the Hobart can you
23 tell us what ships or establishments did you serve in, in
24 the Navy?

25 A. Well, I must correct that first. I didn't actually
26 serve in Vendetta, I was drafted to the Vendetta in
27 Singapore but I did not arrive there. But the other ships
28 you require - sorry, could you repeat that one?

29
30 Q. I'm just interested to know what ships and/or
31 establishments you served in after you served in HMAS
32 Hobart?

33 A. From 19 - from the HMAS Sydney to the Hobart; from
34 the Hobart to HMAS Stuart, a destroyer; and from Stuart to
35 Quiberon, another destroyer; and from the Quiberon to
36 Flinders Naval Depot to do a course.

37
38 Q. When you went to Flinders Naval Depot to do that
39 course, can you recall roughly what year that was?

40 A. It was June 1945.

41
42 Q. What course was that, incidentally?

43 A. It was for the Leading Torpedo Operators Course,
44 which was a 7-month course.

45
46 Q. That saw out the rest of the war, is that so?

47 A. It did, yes.

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Q. Briefly, could you tell us what was the balance of your naval service, what did you do for the rest of your time in the navy?

A. Well, when the war finished, because I had spent nearly the whole of the war at sea, I was asked to stay on firstly as an instructor for new entries for a few months, and then on maintenance of electrical motors in the depot. That was until July 1946 when I was demobilised.

Q. Then you returned to civilian life?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. I think, it was the case you then returned to working as a mechanic, is that --

A. Apprentice mechanic, I had served two years of my apprenticeship before the war, repatriation made my pay up to full pay till I finished.

Q. In your statutory declaration you, in paragraphs 4 onwards, discuss the operation of the main guns and in particular your service in, A turret in HMAS Sydney, and I just want to now take your attention to that and ask you some questions that arise. Firstly, as I understand it, the 6 inch guns in Sydney and indeed Hobart, you may have recalled, they could actually be depressed from the horizontal for firing, were you aware of that?

A. Yes. I think it was a depression of four degrees in a straight ahead position. But on a outward bearing it could be depressed right down because the stops that control the elevation and depression of the guns were only the forward part of the barbettes and when the turrets were trained on port or starboard outboard they could be depressed right down.

Q. When they were depressed on an outward bearing, as you have described, was it your understanding that they could be fired at such a depression?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you have any recollection of firing, or the guns being fired, when they were so depressed at an outward bearing, either in action or in --

A. -- Yes, in action firing at a destroyer. They were on a bearing but horizontal bearing. To me it was a horizontal bearing because the whole turret jarred when they were fired on a horizontal, but I can't say at this

1 stage how far they were depressed or slightly elevated.
2 But I think they were slightly depressed because we were
3 very close and there's a jarring. But when the guns are
4 firing at maximum elevation it's very soft, the whole
5 shock was absorbed through the mountings.
6

7 Q. That action against a destroyer, can you recall which
8 action that was?

9 A. Yes, the Espero action, because we had gone up to
10 pick up survivors when the Espero started firing again.
11

12 Q. Can you recall, and if you're not sure, given that
13 you were in the turret as I understand it, but can you
14 recall what the range was during that action with the
15 Espero, between Sydney and --

16 A. No, no, I can't. No.
17

18 THE PRESIDENT
19

20 Q. You were with the HMAS Sydney throughout the
21 Mediterranean Campaign?

22 A. Yes, sir, I joined it in Fremantle 6 weeks before we
23 left for the Mediterranean.
24

25 Q. Were most of the battles fought there fought at
26 distance?

27 A. Yes, except the Espero when we had thought they'd
28 finished firing and went up and - as we got near it fired
29 again and that's when we had to fire at - and because we
30 were facing it, and I was in the most forward turret, A
31 turret, that we opened fire.
32

33 LEUT VESPER
34

35 Q. Mr Fisher, if I could take your attention to the time
36 it took to load the main guns, as I understand it from
37 your statement the guns could be operated either in
38 director control or local control?

39 A. Yes.
40

41 Q. I want to just ask you firstly about director
42 control. You say in your statutory declaration that the
43 guns would not be loaded as a matter of course when you
44 went to action stations, now that's correct, isn't it?

45 A. They wouldn't be loaded for normal against other
46 ships or if we went to action stations for practice even
47 because I was told by the gunnery people that if we rammed

1 a shell home that would be rammed home hard because at the
2 base of the shell is a copper band and that copper band
3 had to bite in to rifling. So when we rammed a shell home
4 and they weren't fired that the shells were actually
5 knocked out. No danger in knocking them out from the
6 forward end of the gun but the copper band could be
7 damaged. So they said they couldn't use them again
8 because they may not seal when they were reused.

9
10 Q. The guns were only ever loaded when an order was
11 given to load?

12 A. Well, when we went to action stations that looked
13 like going in to action the shells were on the tray ready
14 to be rammed in to the breech. But we never, ever rammed
15 - we didn't ram them in, that was the final thing.

16
17 THE PRESIDENT

18
19 Q. So when you went to action stations for practice?

20 A. Yes.

21
22 Q. What orders were given? The first order was action
23 stations, was it?

24 A. Yes.

25
26 Q. What happened after that?

27 A. We just closed up at action stations, no ramming of
28 shells, but the firing circuits were tested, the guns were
29 elevated and depressed - so, all the hydraulics were
30 tested. And training the gunhouse around on different
31 bearings, the orders would come through from the TS,
32 transmitting station, I assume from the director control
33 tower to the transmitting station, which was a big table
34 in the bowels of the ship. But everything was carried
35 out, all testing, even the firing circuits, without the -
36 and the firing circuits were carried out with a test tube.
37 The tubes fired the guns, it's a one 1-inch tube about
38 6 inches long, and that was a dummy one but it would let
39 the charge go through it. But we did not actually load
40 the guns.

41
42 Q. What about when you went to action stations in a real
43 situation, what orders, you were given the order to go to
44 action stations and you'd go there?

45 A. Yes.

46
47 Q. What happened then?

1 A. Well, we - when they knew that it was going to be a
2 real action like enemy ships then as soon as the ships
3 were in sight the range would be given and orders of guns
4 would come through, "All guns load, load, load". Three
5 distinct loads. And we'd load the guns then and then
6 elevations we would - whatever readings came through from
7 the director and that would be put on the guns because
8 it's like a big clock arrangement and then we'd just have
9 to wait till they - then you'd get the order,
10 "Broadsides", or, "Salvo". Salvos were single gun firing
11 to get the range, broadsides were all guns firing.

12
13 Q. Was it normal to fire a salvo when you were at action
14 stations before a real action, just to get the range?

15 A. No, sir, the only time that was carried out is what
16 they call - they had a subcalibre shoot. A sleeve would
17 be put inside the gun and they would fire a two pound
18 shell, a small one, but usually at targets. And we did
19 have target practice where a tug would tow a big target,
20 especially down Fremantle there, and you didn't fire at
21 the targets, it fired off range. They didn't want to
22 damage the target because there's a big thing on a float.
23 And so we fired ordinary shells at that.

24
25 Q. For instance, during the Mediterranean Campaign, when
26 you were at action stations and you go the orders, "Load,
27 load, load", the guns would then be loaded?

28 A. Yes.

29
30 Q. The elevations would be given to you?

31 A. Yes.

32
33 Q. They'd be adjusted accordingly. Then was there an
34 order to fire or was that just done by the director
35 control automatically?

36 A. What would happen, sir, when at broadside the breech
37 worker, as soon as he closed the breech and put the firing
38 tube in, there's another little lock, he had an
39 interceptor switch which he'd close with his hand. That
40 allowed current to go the firing circuits and also
41 illuminate the lights in the director control tower. So
42 the layer in the director control bridge would know the
43 guns were ready to be fired. And all guns were fired
44 singly from one man in the director control tower. A bell
45 would ring and we'd grit out teeth and --

46
47 Q. That's what you'd call a broadside?

1 A. Broadsides when all guns were fired, but a salvo was
2 normally what they call a ranging salvo. But often when
3 you went in to action they didn't have ranging salvos they
4 just --

5

6 Q. No, you just went straight in to it?

7 A. Yes.

8

9 LEUT VESPER

10

11 Q. Mr Fisher, you told us that the order would be given,
12 "Load, load, load"?

13 A. Yes.

14

15 Q. Then the guns would be loaded?

16 A. Yes.

17

18 Q. How long would it take between the order, "Load,
19 load, load", being given and then the gun being ready to
20 fire, that is the light being illuminated in the director
21 control tower?

22 A. I think I can say immediate. Very, very quickly,
23 we'd just - I was a rammer, so another chap and myself
24 would ram the shell in and - first of all, the tray worker
25 would push the tray across with the shell on, we'd ram it
26 in, he'd pull the tray away, the breech worker would slam
27 the breech closed and then he'd put the firing tube in,
28 close that, slam the interceptor switch up with the palm
29 of his hand, because it's about level with his face, the
30 interceptor switch, so it couldn't be closed accidentally,
31 and suddenly the - they had to wait on the roll of the
32 ship too because with the director firing sometimes in
33 what they call gyro control - but as the ship - if the
34 ship was rolling well they have to wait till the sights
35 were on the target. Can you follow me?

36

37 Q. I do. I'm just trying to get a sense of the number
38 of seconds that would pass normally between that order,
39 "Load, load, load", and the process you've just described
40 being carried out. The impression I get is that it would
41 be somewhere in the order of 10 seconds or so?

42 A. No, much closer than that.

43

44 Q. Shorter than that?

45 A. Yes, because we were told, and we didn't have stop
46 watches or anything, that the rate of fire for a 6 inch
47 gun for a good crew was eight a minute.

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THE PRESIDENT

Q. After you had loaded it, it was then up to the director to take such time as he thought was necessary before he pulled the trigger, as it were?

A. That's true, sir. He had what they call a monocular, not monocular, a single telescope type thing that is on the enemy with his cross-wires and - but they could go in to what they call gyro control that would fire as soon as the wires hit the target. I don't know, not being a gunnery man, whether there's a slight time slippage where when the target came on and the pulling of the trigger because the circuits had to - the guns had to be fired. The firing all - to me it seemed to be immediate but it might be a two to three second delay and the guns firing. So that's a timing thing that I didn't understand.

Q. Immediately after the gun had fired, you would then open the breech and then reload?

A. Quick - see, when we ran the shell in we'd pull the rammer out and drop it in to a sink of water. The reason being when the - as each round was fired there could be - when the breech was opened for the second round, third, every other round, a jet of air would shoot through the gun, that's to blow out any burning refuge. And we would have a - the rammer would be wet but also to help to cool the chamber down and I suppose to get rid of any burning refuge. But everything was done in clockwork precision, very quickly. But we did it without thinking.

Q. A lot of practice?

A. Yes.

LEUT VESPER

Q. Mr Fisher, I just want to stay with the main guns but just ask you some questions about how they were operated when they were in local control. In your statement you helpfully set out how what the process was for firing the guns in local control and you also mention that the turrets individually could be trained manually?

A. Yes.

Q. In the scenario where the director control tower was, for whatever reason, out of operation could the turrets, assuming the 220 volt circuit was still functioning, could

1 the turrets still be trained mechanically, that is by the
2 machines?

3 A. I'm a little bit confused here of what you're saying.
4 What happens is the turret motor has got a big electric
5 motor driving hydraulic pump, and those hydraulic pumps
6 control the training of the turret and elevation of the
7 guns. But if the power fails, or 220 volt fails, then in
8 the cabinet in between the two guns, what they call the
9 local control cabinet, is a big changeover switch. So
10 they just switch it over. That disconnects the main power
11 because there's none there and it brings in the battery
12 power. Now, the battery power is 24 volt. In the pump
13 space under the gunhouse is two rows of batteries, two
14 banks of batteries, giving 24 volts. Now, that supplies
15 emergency power to lighting in the turret, the firing
16 circuits, and the instruments in the firing cabinet in the
17 front because the information fed in to the instruments by
18 the instrument hand in the cabinet in the front is
19 transmitted to the layers in the gun so they know how to -
20 and I must point out that the layers are controlled by two
21 - it's like a big clock in front - the hands of a clock,
22 like a minute and an hour hand, and they are controlled
23 from the director control tower. And the layer when he is
24 elevating or pressing the guns with the big handle his set
25 of hands follow the ones around and must stay on them.
26 And the main ones from the control, from the control
27 cabinet, they work the big hands and the layer follows
28 them with his hand. Am I making myself clear?

29
30 THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

31
32 Q. Once you go to local control and you have the 24 volt
33 battery supply the power, is that power used to adjust the
34 rotation of the turrets?

35 A. No, sir.

36
37 Q. How is that done?

38 A. By hands.

39
40 Q. The same with the elevation of the guns?

41 A. It looks like a push bike pedal type of thing.

42
43 Q. You use manual power to adjust the turret direction?

44 A. Yes.

45
46 Q. Also the gun elevation, was that done manually too in
47 local control?

1 A. Yes, that was done, there's a wheel that they used to
2 spin for that. Which number 1 layer - yes.

3

4 Q. How did you know when it was necessary to go in to
5 local control?

6 A. When there's a failure of the 220 volt; 220 volt DC
7 power, direct control power. Because what would happen,
8 all the lights would go out in the turret. See gunhouses
9 with the doors closed and everything are dark and they had
10 - lights were on all the time. But there was no emergency
11 lighting in the shell handling room underneath. Later on
12 in the Hobart they had battery operated lights that were
13 hooked in to the power lines and when the power went off
14 these would come on, very dim, but just enough to - like
15 one candle.

16

17 Q. But on the Sydney once the lights went out and then
18 came on again because it went in to local control?

19 A. Yes.

20

21 Q. You knew that the director control system has failed?

22 A. Yes.

23

24 Q. Therefore the officer of that turret would say,
25 "Right, we're now going in to local control"?

26 A. Yes.

27

28 Q. He would take over and give the appropriate orders,
29 would he?

30 A. Yes, sitting on a seat, so for a periscope too, it's
31 like a periscope through the roof of the turret, and he
32 could control the firing and training and - well actually
33 when - he might say, "Shift targets", but the trainer in
34 the cabinet, local control cabinet, he had a monocular
35 sight too, as did the layer, they both had sights, they
36 could lock on the target but it was up to the officer of
37 the turret to say, "Shift targets", or to move on to which
38 section of the target. They might say, "Fire at the
39 bowels", or, "Fire at the stern".

40

41 Q. Did the 24 volt power also enable the lifting of
42 shells and cordite?

43 A. No, sir.

44

45 Q. How was that done when you were in local control?

46 A. Hand control. But not in the turrets, it was done in
47 the shell handling room below the gunhouse. So, you had

1 the gunhouse and then underneath that the big pump space
2 and the hydraulics and underneath that a shell handling
3 room.

4
5 Q. They had to be manually --

6 A. That was all manually controlled, yes. They'd have
7 big handles down there for turning. But that slowed the
8 works down a bit too.

9
10 Q. Did you practise in local control as well as practise
11 in director control?

12 A. Yes, we had done so, yes. Not often but --

13
14 LEUT VESPER

15
16 Q. Mr Fisher, in paragraph 48 of your statement you
17 actually talk about how the turrets would have to be
18 operated in local control, and you used the example of the
19 Hobart, when the electrical power was lost in Hobart for
20 about 10 minutes after it was torpedoed. You say that the
21 cordite hoists would not work and they had to be changed
22 over to hand operations in the shell handling room below
23 the revolving section of the turret. Then you say, "This
24 operation would take time, especially if the crew were
25 caught unawares", what was the difference in timing
26 between operating the turrets in local control with no
27 power as opposed to when you had electrical power?

28 A. Are you talking about the changeover of when power
29 failed to that?

30
31 Q. Yes?

32 A. It's hard to say. All I can say is it is fairly
33 quickly because we didn't stop - there weren't stop
34 watches or anything and all we know is we arrived at - and
35 just it was fairly quick, that's all I can say. So, it
36 wasn't say ten minutes or a quarter of an hour or anything
37 like that, it would only be a matter of minutes .

38
39 Q. When the turrets had to be operated completely
40 manually, that is the cordite hoists would have to be
41 operated manually, what would the rate of fire be compared
42 to the eight rounds per minute that you discussed earlier?

43 A. That's a sticky one. But I don't think it - it
44 depends on how muscular the men were on the hoists and
45 that moving. It didn't require a great amount of power.
46 It was still an effort but I don't think it'd be - I don't
47 think it could keep up the rate of eight a minute --

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THE PRESIDENT

Q. You could probably load just as quickly but you couldn't adjust the gunsights or directions --

A. You wouldn't get - no, but --

Q. -- as quickly and you couldn't get the shells and cordite up as quickly, I suppose?

A. Yes. See, when we went in to do the practise runs in local control they might only bring up two or three shells and that to us it was a game more than - it wasn't sort of life and death thing, it's, "Oh, ruddy hell, you've got to do this again".

LEUT VESPER: I might move on to another topic, if that suits you, Mr President.

Q. That is just about the shell types that were used in the 6 inch guns, as far as you can recall. Firstly, do you have a memory of the different types of ammunition that were used in your time in the Sydney?

A. Yes only two, two shells for against ships, against say doing a bombardment like Bardia. They had a - look I don't know the name of the shell but it had a little plunger in the front of it because when you're doing a bombardment if you use the CP, common pointed ballistic cap shells against ships they'd only bury themselves in the sand, but they needed an armour side or - to burst the shells so the point nose of it. But with the bombardment shells they had a little plunger. And another thing too, when you're firing the bombardment shells, I think they call the HE, high explosive, you only fired one gun at a time, in a turret like for two guns, only fired one gun at a time because the percussion if you fired both guns, we were told, that the muzzle percussion, or the big burst from the muzzle, could set the other adjacent shell off. So, they fired one gun at a time and then the other gun would fire and then we'd fire. So I mean I just did those things automatically and did what I was told and didn't go in to the real gunnery officer's knowledge of it. Sorry, the second - you asked me a question, the other one was common pointed ballistic cap shells which were used against armour piecing ship sides and things like that too. But they told me that some of those when they're hitting another destroyer could go straight through the --

1 THE PRESIDENT

2

3 Q. Amour plating?

4 A. Mm-hmm.

5

6 LEUT VESPER

7

8 Q. When, if you can recall, Sydney would go to action
9 stations when it encountered unidentified ships, and you
10 refer to that occasionally in your statutory declaration,
11 can you recall what 6 inch shells were used?

12 A. Always CPBC, common pointed ballistic cap.

13

14 Q. You would know that because they had different
15 marking on their outer casing, is that --

16 A. No. No, all they were was just a pointed shell, the
17 ones used in bombardment had a plunger, a little black
18 plunger in the nose. So, that's --

19

20 Q. I think it was called a nose fuse, is that --

21 A. I don't know. All I know, that when they hit the
22 sand that they'd go off. It would arm them.

23

24 Q. Your memory is fairly definite that other than shore
25 bombardments when high explosive shells were being used,
26 when the guns were loaded for a ship action it was always
27 the --

28 A. Always CPBC. It was the only two shells we had that
29 I know of on board.

30

31 THE PRESIDENT

32

33 Q. Sydney had 6 inch guns?

34 A. Yes.

35

36 Q. And 4 inch guns?

37 A. Yes, anti-aircraft guns.

38

39 Q. And anti-aircraft guns?

40 A. No, sorry. The 4 inch were anti-aircraft but could
41 be used for --

42

43 Q. She also had machine guns?

44 A. Yes, three mountings but of .5s, they were quadruple
45 mountings, one on top of the other, they were point 5s
46 but --

47

1 Q. Do you know the range of those?

2 A. The point 5s?

3

4 Q. Yes?

5 A. No, I don't. I would say about a - knowing a 303 had
6 a range of about a mile, these were three - I think these
7 were 303 shells too, about a mile, but whether they had
8 accuracy at that distance, I don't know, sir.

9

10 Q. In your experience while you were on Sydney, were you
11 ever in so close as that you could use machine guns?

12 A. I can't ever recollect them being used.

13

14 Q. But the 4 inch guns and the 6 inch guns were?

15 A. Yes. Well, they wore out barrels on the - had to be
16 replaced on the 4 inch guns in the Mediterranean.

17

18 Q. What was the range of your 6 inch guns?

19 A. Well, maximum range, they tell me, 23,000 yards. But
20 as we were going in to action any time I had to rely on
21 our phone number who would be calling out the ranges and I
22 remember on the Colleoni action him saying, "Range two,
23 double 0", this was 20,000 yards, and then he kept
24 dropping it down as the instructions come through, "One,
25 nine, eight; one, nine, six", that's 19,600 yards, and
26 when we got down to one nine two, broadsides. So we
27 opened fire --

28

29 Q. You fought that very famous battle at somewhere
30 around 19,000 to 20,000 yards?

31 A. 200 yards, yes, sir. Well, that's when, "Open fire",
32 but after that I was just ramming and sweating and --

33

34 LEUT VESPER

35

36 Q. One of the other matters, if I can just go on to how
37 the ship was procedurally run, the commander was the
38 officer second-in-command of the ship, is that so?

39 A. Executive officer, yes.

40

41 Q. But as I understand it, in the 1940s the executive
42 officer was commonly referred to as "the commander", is
43 that your memory?

44 A. Yes.

45

46 Q. When Sydney went to action stations do you know where
47 the commander would go to?

1 A. I understand that on the Sydney his command was in
2 what they called the lower steering position, which was
3 about six decks down from the bridge, directly down from
4 the bridge. And there was a voice pipe on the bridge down
5 there and also a phone, a phone number, but he stayed
6 there because it was about one of the better armoured
7 places of the ship. So, if the bridge got wiped out he
8 could then go to the after control position which is under
9 the after search light.

10
11 THE PRESIDENT

12
13 Q. He would have to move to take control?

14 A. Yes.

15
16 LEUT VESPER

17
18 Q. Mr Fisher, how is it you know that that was the
19 commander's actions station position --

20 A. I just know. It's just that I knew the torpedo
21 officer was on the tubes - on the bridge on the torpedo
22 control sights and it's just something that stays in your
23 mind over the years.

24
25 Q. But was that something you recall you were taught or
26 was that something that was commonly discussed amongst the
27 sailors or did you ever see him there at action stations?

28 A. No, but we were using the phones one day and - sorry,
29 not using the phones, testing the phones down there one
30 day, and someone just happened to say, "This is where
31 Commander Hilken hangs out".

32
33 Q. At action stations?

34 A. At action stations. But the Hobart, I don't know.

35
36 THE PRESIDENT

37
38 Q. When you went to action stations the 6 inch guns were
39 manned, and the 4 inch guns manned as well?

40 A. In the Mediterranean mostly - I thought everybody
41 closed up at action stations --

42
43 Q. All guns?

44 A. Yes, because later on in the Hobart, sir, I was in
45 what they called damage control which meant that if the
46 ship got hit we had to run electrical cables and that.
47 And at one time I was on the forward mess desks and there

1 was only one other chap and myself there. Nobody - and
2 even in air raids on the Hobart, even the turrets closed
3 up too.

4
5 Q. The torpedoes were also manned?

6 A. I don't know, sir. I don't know about air raids
7 because - couldn't fire the torpedoes at them but I
8 couldn't say. See, when you're at action stations you're
9 on your own or with your group or your control group
10 and --

11
12 Q. Yes, and that's all you're thinking about --

13 A. Well, not so much thinking about, you don't know what
14 else is going on because the hatchways are closed and --

15
16 Q. How did you know where your action station was; was
17 there a chart or you were just told that when you got on
18 board?

19 A. Well, no, you're detailed off first and when you're
20 doing practice runs and that you just went to action
21 station. See, each ship, like, each compartment, had,
22 like, a chief petty officer-in-charge, petty officers, and
23 you were detailed off for action stations, cruising
24 stations, and you just knew them, you know.

25
26 Q. When you went on board the first time you were put in
27 to a department and you were told where your action
28 station was?

29 A. Yes.

30
31 LEUT VESPER

32
33 Q. You spent some time at action stations as a member of
34 the torpedo party, that's the case, isn't it?

35 A. Yes, I only had about three months on the tubes but
36 that was back in Australia, that wasn't - and then you'd
37 go on errands, especially dawn stand too which was - you
38 went to action stations 40 minutes before dawn. Because
39 we didn't have radar. And that was the - we were told
40 that's the most dangerous time where you could come up
41 upon an enemy ship at the dawn. So, you'd be half asleep
42 anyway at dawn action stations around the tubes just
43 sitting there and probably talking to somebody or trying
44 to keep awake.

45
46 Q. Mr Fisher, what I'm interested in is what the fellows
47 were wearing in the torpedo crews. In your statement you

1 refer to the fact that you were wearing overall. Can you
2 recall whether most people at action stations had overalls
3 on and what colour were they?

4 A. Well, the Navy was a little bit snobbish. Officers
5 wore white overalls, warrant officers, who were a special
6 class in those days, they wore brown overalls, or - sorry,
7 not brown, more of a khaki colour, and sailors from chief
8 petty officer down all wore blue. And all the turret
9 crews, we wore blue overalls because a certain amount of
10 oil and grease in the turret from the hydraulics, they
11 would leak. But pre-war, I believe, they wore a number 5
12 thing, but - I actually wore number 5s, which was like a
13 canvas uniform, but I only ever wore them once when we
14 were storing ship and that was in Fremantle before we went
15 to the Mediterranean. I never, ever wore them after that.
16 Because later on during the war we cut them up to sew up
17 and put in parcels sending home.

18
19 Q. On the upper decks he fellows manning, say, the 4
20 inch guns, what would they be wearing?

21 A. They could have a mixture. Clothing was, I would
22 say, a little bit - I wouldn't call it slack but they
23 didn't insist on wearing uniforms at sea, it was just
24 overalls or shorts or it depends on - see on the - later
25 on in the war we had a mutiny on the - I'm digressing now.
26 We had a mutiny on the Quiberon because all we wore - as a
27 destroyer, all we wore was shorts and sandals. And
28 whereas with - then a part of the British Pacific Fleet
29 and a signal came from the admiral that all sailors, all
30 ships, will wear full uniforms, which was a shirt, shorts,
31 proper shorts, stockings, black shoes. And of course they
32 had a mutiny on the - when the hands were told to fall in
33 the morning most of the stayed on the mess decks. So,
34 then we got the okay from the admiral that we could
35 revert, the Australians could revert to their normal wear,
36 which is only shorts and sandals.

37
38 Q. The overalls, Mr Fisher, I'm not sure if I asked you
39 specifically but what colour were the overalls that the
40 sailors were wearing on the upper decks?

41 A. Dark blue. Well, actually the Navy ones were very
42 sloppy so we used to buy our own overalls ashore, not
43 tailor made, but neat ones, and you'll see photos of
44 sailors in their overalls, which I've got inside there,
45 and they were neat. But the ones issued by the navy, out
46 of what they called slops, were bib and brace and they'd
47 fit an oversized woman, you know. So, we didn't wear

1 those.

2

3

THE PRESIDENT

4

5 Q. Can I just take you back to your time on torpedoes?

6

A. Yes.

7

8 Q. When the ship was at cruising stations were the
9 torpedoes in their tubes?

10

A. All the time, sir.

11

12

Q. Always in their tubes?

13

A. We had four either side of the ship, and one spare
14 one in the workshop. The torpedo workshop was in between
15 the two tubes, between the port and starboard tubes, but
16 we had four to each tube.

17

18

Q. And one spare, as it were?

19

A. One spare.

20

21

Q. They could be fired individually or in pairs as a
22 fan?

23

A. Fired individually. Because the four firing levers
24 were there, but they could be fired from the bridge too I
25 think. There's the what they call the torpedo control
26 sight on the bridge, which the torpedo officer was on. It
27 has like two clocks on it. One was the enemy ship, one
28 was our ship, and they could be moved around showing the
29 direction of travel with a compass ring around the outside
30 of them. And the estimated range would be - could be put
31 in to it. It was like a mini computer but it was
32 mechanical. Because we didn't have the luxury of
33 computers in those days and - but the orders would come
34 from the torpedo officer on the bridge. When to fire
35 them, because - and I think because he said, "Fire one,
36 fire two". In action, the whole time I was on the Sydney
37 it had only fired two torpedoes and that is against a
38 convoy in the Adriatic Sea, they both missed.

39

40

Q. But that was a different officer to the director
41 control officer who was in charge of the guns?

42

A. Yes, it had the gunnery officer, Michael Singer, he
43 was in a director control tower. Where the torpedo
44 officer was on the open bridge, the two torpedo control
45 sights, one port and starboard, and --

46

47

Q. If the bridge was knocked out insofar as the director

1 control was knocked out, was there a reserve director
2 control or not?

3 A. No, only - to be truthful I don't know but I know the
4 commander had to leave the lower steering position and go
5 to the after control position, but I don't know what was
6 manned there in normal action stations, besides the
7 commander. But the only reason I know, I've only been up
8 there to test phones. It is like an opened cockpit type
9 thing, it had phones, it didn't have much up there, no
10 rangetaker that I can remember, only phone and a gyro
11 repeater.

12

13 LEUT VESPER

14

15 Q. Mr Fisher, I might just move on to a topic which is
16 merchant ships and times when HMAS Sydney came across
17 merchant ships. When Sydney was on its way back from the
18 Mediterranean it went via East Africa. You may recall in
19 your statement you refer to the three days Sydney spent in
20 the Seychelles, do you remember that time?

21 A. I didn't say anything about three days. We just
22 called in for fuel in to the Seychelles and while we were
23 there the captain was ashore with the band, they sent the
24 band ashore to entertainment to the people, and I've got a
25 photo of that there, and while we were there we got a
26 wireless signal that a ship was being attacked about
27 200 miles away. So, they fired a gun as a recall for the
28 captain.

29

30 Q. Obviously, you remember those few days also that
31 Sydney was operating in and around the Seychelles?

32 A. Well, we went out looking for the raider, for the
33 raider, and couldn't find it. That took a couple of days.
34 And then we came back to the Seychelles. But I'm not
35 certain whether we left the Seychelles and went up to a
36 place called Mogadiscio on the east coast of Africa to see
37 if the raiders were in there or any enemy shipping, but
38 the harbour was empty. But we only went about 7 miles off
39 the coast and then took off again. But we went in the
40 dusk, or just before dusk. But I can't remember whether
41 it was on the way from the Mediterranean or whether we
42 went to the Seychelles and went back there.

43

44 Q. There has been a suggestion by one of your old
45 shipmates that at about this time, this is late January
46 1941 when Sydney was operating in and around the
47 Seychelles, that Sydney passed a small tanker at very

1 close range, so close in fact that a sailor has suggested
2 he could have thrown something at it and hit it --
3 A. -- I can't recollect that, yes. See, sometimes
4 you're on the mess deck, you're having a meal or you might
5 be on watch somewhere below decks, repairing phones or
6 doing maintenance work that you don't see another ship or
7 you don't know what's happening up topside. But I do know
8 on the Hobart when - see I joined the Hobart at the
9 Mediterranean and come back - we were coming back in
10 December, just after the Japanese came into the war, and
11 Captain Howden went very close to a big merchant ship and
12 the boys were all standing on the upper decks screaming at
13 the bridge, "Remember the Sydney. Remember the Sydney".
14 But they must have identified it and that because we went
15 that close we could see the people all standing on the
16 upper deck of this big merchant ship.

17
18 Q. Under Captain Burnett, when he assumed command, do
19 you have any recollection of he challenging unidentified
20 merchant ships?

21 A. Yes. Can I just get that big photo of the Sydney?
22 I'll get it, sir

23
24 LEUT VESPER: Shall we adjourn temporarily, sir?

25
26 THE PRESIDENT: Yes, very well.

27
28 SHORT ADJOURNMENT

29
30 LEUT VESPER

31
32 Q. You were going to explain to us something to do with
33 one of the occasions when Captain Burnett challenged a
34 ship, is that what you're going to show us, Thom?

35 A. Well, what I was going to show you, that where I was
36 standing and I used to watch on several occasions the
37 shutters on the 18 inch signalling projector. and they
38 were at the rear end. The two signalling projectors, one
39 either side at the rear end of the bridge and the depth
40 charge lever was just near the director control tower so
41 you could see the shutters moving. And I used to think -
42 see, you remember all these little things. And I used to
43 think thank heavens I'm not a ruddy signalman.

44
45 SHORT ADJOURNMENT

46
47 THE PRESIDENT

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Q. Mr Fisher, you've shown us this picture of the Sydney when she's coming back into Alexandria after the battle with the Italian cruiser?

A. The next morning, yes.

Q. Showing the hole in the funnel which was suffered in that battle?

A. Yes.

Q. I think you were about to point out where you used to stand at a time when you were engaged in depth charge work?

A. Well, there's cruising watches, sir, for - the depth charge control lever was on the bridge alongside the director control tower and it worked hydraulically to the depth charges, you can just see them on the stern there, that little mark?

Q. Yes?

A. We carried five depth charges there. You can mark that.

Q. I will put a little, (a) for where the depth charges were?

A. Yes. And the lever was there. And one rating would be there just to pull the stops out so they wouldn't roll overboard normally, accidentally, and we had a phone there and a phone down to that person, to the rating standing down there. But my job was to pull a safety pin out of the lever, because the lever is about three foot high, and to - it was on a ratchet type thing, to pull it for safety, just pull it hard, the hydraulic pressure released the charges here.

Q. At the stern?

A. It would release one at a time or the hole five.

Q. Where you were standing doing that work, you were close to signal lamps, where you?

A. A big signal lamp, and I think that little black blob might be it there, sir. A little black blob behind the --

Q. There?

A. No, higher up.

Q. There?

1 A. Yes.

2

3 Q. I will put --

4 A. But I'm not certain if that's it or not.

5

6 Q. I will put, (b), and put an arrow down there where
7 the signal lamps were?

8 A. I've got a better photo somewhere and I'll try - when
9 we stop for morning tea I'll have a look and see if I can
10 find it. Unless that is - no it's not there it's on the -
11 it's above the bridge because we used to be standing then
12 and sort of looking up at it slightly, you know, slightly
13 elevated, two or three feet above you, with the shutters
14 on it clacking away and - and then usually a leading
15 signalman of the watch would send it. And they wouldn't
16 leave that to an ordinary signalman, they'd need a
17 practised man. And he'd be very quick. I used to think
18 at the time that they were going too quickly for merchant
19 service fleet to read it.

20

21 Q. Were signals to merchant ships normally done by
22 light?

23 A. Yes. Well, every time I saw them - that's what I
24 remembered by that, yes.

25

26 LEUT VESPER

27

28 Q. Was that the same under both Captains Collins and
29 Burnett as far as you can recall?

30 A. I can't remember - no, I can't remember. All I can
31 remember is I was spending more time on the bridge with
32 Captain Burnett than Captain Collins. The only time I
33 spent with Captain Collins was entering and leaving
34 harbour, I was the phone number, from the bridge here down
35 to the forecabin, the phone was right up forward, for
36 instructions to go down to the officer or what they call
37 streaming paravanes. That's when you got to a certain
38 speed up and a certain depth, they'd drop paravanes either
39 side of the ship. They were floats that went right out
40 with big wires on to cut any mines. And you did it till
41 they got up to what they call the 600-fathom mark and then
42 they weren't recovered. But the ship had to stop the -
43 almost stop while they did it. But all my job was to be a
44 - pass orders down by phone.

45

46 LEUT VESPER: Sir, I will tender that diagram.

47

1 THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I will mark that exhibit 4.

2

3 EXHIBIT #4 PHOTOGRAPH OF HMAS SYDNEY II SHOWING DEPTH
4 CHARGES, MARKED (a), AND SIGNAL LAMPS, MARKED (b)

5

6 LEUT VESPER

7

8 Q. Mr Fisher, I was asking you about challenges by
9 Captain Burnett to unidentified merchant ships. As you
10 say, you spent more time at or near the bridge with
11 Captain Burnett than Captain Collins?

12 A. Yes.

13

14 Q. In the time you served under Captain Burnett, do you
15 have any specific recollection of a challenge he made to a
16 merchant ship?

17 A. Yes, as I said, I do remember seeing the lamps going
18 and I don't know what the captain said or what his orders
19 or instructions were but all I can remember is the way the
20 signal lamps were - the shutters were clacking away, and
21 thinking to myself, "Gee, I'm glad I haven't got that
22 job".

23

24 Q. I might ask you about a specific incident and it's a
25 matter that's referred to in Sydney's log for 3 October
26 1941, at about 0100 hours; in the middle of the night.
27 The log refers to a challenge to a ship subsequently
28 identifying itself as the Islander?

29 A. Mm-hmm.

30

31 Q. To help you consider whether you recall this, this
32 would have been similar in time to when Sydney saw the
33 floating target, which you referred to in your statement,
34 do you have any recollection of a challenge to a merchant
35 ship?

36 A. No, I don't because at that time we went to action
37 stations, and I remember, "Oh, ruddy hell", dark hours
38 and" - see to let you know, we always slept in clean
39 overalls because you didn't have time to get dressed when
40 action stations went. You usually kept your shoes
41 underneath your hammock, so straight in to your shoes,
42 laces not done up, raced away. And at that time I was
43 action stations floating in A turret. At that time I was
44 the ship's - sorry, turret electrician because I qualified
45 as a torpedoman and - but I wasn't on the upper deck, I
46 don't remember that. I can't recall it. But as you said
47 well it's the same time as the floating target, no, this

1 was going north with the convoy and when we left the
2 convoys coming home that we found the target.

3
4 THE PRESIDENT

5
6 Q. How long did it take you to get from your bunk to
7 action stations for a thing to be closed up?

8 A. Well, what actually happened - they were hammocks,
9 sir. We didn't have the luxury of bunks. And well
10 actually you were straight out of - you got the hammock
11 bars, you grabbed those, straight out, feet in to the
12 shoes, running and you're still half asleep. It's
13 immediate, it might be - depending on how far you had to
14 go. Now, the men going to the turret could go up through
15 the trunk in the turret or round up the upper deck and I'd
16 say half a minute at the most, it was very, very quick.
17 Hands closed - as soon you closed up in the turret you'd
18 all have to number off. One, two, three, four, for your
19 things, and if somebody was adrift where was he and --

20
21 Q. Then a message would be sent back to the captain that
22 this turret was closed up or?

23 A. No, no, what would happen then it would go the
24 transmitting station and relay by a phone number, "A
25 turret closed up". And Captain Burnett was very strict on
26 that, we had to get the times right down. And of course
27 then the transmitting station would report to the bridge,
28 "A turret closed up", "B turret closed up".

29
30 LEUT VESPER

31
32 Q. Under Captain Burnett, Mr Fisher, when the ship went
33 to action stations for a challenge to another ship, as far
34 as you can recall would all of the guns be manned?

35 A. Well, I don't know about the 4 inch guns, to be
36 truthful, because I was around the turrets and you can't
37 see what's going on in other parts. But in the
38 Mediterranean all 4 inch guns are closed up all the time.
39 That's --

40
41 THE PRESIDENT

42
43 Q. Because of aircraft attacks --

44 A. Air raids. See we didn't have radar and the planes
45 would come out of the sun and the first thing you knew was
46 a string of bombs falling alongside the ship. So, we only
47 had two turrets closed up at what they call "defence close

1 shore cruising stations" but the actual - all the
2 anti-aircraft stuff was closed up at all times in the Med
3 for every convoy.

4
5 LEUT VESPER

6
7 Q. Just getting back to your service under Captain
8 Burnett, and, as you say, you're not sure whether they
9 smaller guns were manned when you went to action stations,
10 do you recall him ever, or the officer of the watch, ever
11 piping something like, "Just the main guns close up"?

12 A. No.

13
14 Q. Under Captain Burnett, as far as you can recall, the
15 pipe would be for action stations?

16 A. Yes. And at night time when this Islander one, that
17 was a real action alarm bells, there was no bugles on the
18 Australian - for going to action stations, just an alarm
19 bell. And it was a gut wrenching feeling too, you'd feel
20 your stomach tighten up from --

21
22 Q. With going to action stations, and this is under any
23 of the captains that you served under, or either of the
24 captains that you served under in the Sydney, what would
25 happen with the Walrus, the aircraft, would it typically
26 be flown off when the ship went to action stations?

27 A. Only if you sighted something. Because I used to
28 worry, well when we sighted a target they flew the
29 aircraft off, because I actually remember Pilot Officer
30 Barrey - we had a chap called Tommy Price, a
31 Mediterranean, he was very good, he was a lieutenant, but
32 Pilot Officer Barrey was a junior officer and every time
33 he went off the plane seemed to slew sideways. And it
34 used to worry me, the - I mean, I wasn't an aircraftman in
35 any way but just I thought a plane should fly straight
36 off. But Barrey seemed to not have control or straighten
37 up as he catapulted off. Of course it's a gut wrenching
38 feeling they tell me being catapulted off at - it's a
39 short catapult and it would be 60 miles an hour at the end
40 of it, it's a big acceleration. But it used to seem to
41 slew sideways and go sideways for quite a while.

42
43 THE PRESIDENT

44
45 Q. When was it used?

46 A. Well, they used it for scouting a lot. Can I digress
47 a little?

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Q. Yes?

A. Now in August, around August 1941, we were told that there's a raider, the captain announced - well our officer, our torpedo officer told us at the time, that there's a raider in the pacific. That's after we - they didn't tell us anything in harbour, it was after we got to sea, out the sight of land, and he said there was a raider in the pacific and they intend to get it. So, we had two old coal burning ships there, the really blackened the sky, the anti-pollution people would be - and what they did they had the Sydney in the centre and 15 miles either side they put these coal burners so it gave a range of 60 miles cover. And the ships, the coal burners were told to make as much smoke as possible during the day. Well, we used to have the aircraft flying off at that time each day, flying around and - to see if we could pick up any ships. But the idea with the coal burner was a bait or to attract the raider. And at night time they'd come in and move in behind us, behind the Sydney. And but we took them just east of New Zealand and they went on to New Zealand and we came back to - but they new at that time there was raider there because ships were being attacked.

Q. Who was the torpedo officer who told you that?

A. Eric Mayo.

Q. Did the captain ever speak of it?

A. Only I can - the only thing I can recollect is when we were coming down from Sunda Straits on the last trip down at Sunday divisions, that he told us about the raider. He said there was a raider there. And some young chap said he was a gung ho, that he yelled out, but then I - thinking in hindsight, well, we're doing 16 knots, there's a certain amount of wind, a certain amount of propeller noises, so he'd have to raise his voice, he's talking to probably 400-odd men because there'd be 200 on engine room and on watch and everything, could be 400 men at Sunday divisions. Sunday divisions is when you get dressed up and they have a prayer meeting and a - but I thought he was just giving us a friendly warning, you know, or pep talk and --

Q. What did he say, do you remember?

A. Roughly that there was a raider there, we had to be on our toes, I remember those actual words, and we had to be at a high degree of efficiency because, he said, "We

1 intend to get that ship". Words to that extent. That is
2 nearly 70 years ago.

3
4 Q. You have a very good memory.

5 A. Well, I washed them all, the bad ones away, when I
6 was young, sir, with grog.

7
8 Q. You were doing 16 knots on that occasion, I've read
9 elsewhere that, I think it was in the Mediterranean,
10 Sydney got up to 34 knots, I recall one account, what was
11 her maximum speed, do you remember?

12 A. Laid down, 32 knots, thirty two and a half knots,
13 which was 64 k, kilometres an hour. Fast for a ship. And
14 the reason we got up to 34, they got it from the engine
15 room revolutions, because the log on the bridge only went
16 to 32. Now, what happened, sir, was there was three
17 Italian destroyers ahead and the Ajax had been in action
18 with them during the night and we were part of the cruiser
19 squadron. But the sea was like a - like this table, and
20 we had paravanes down because we were going through
21 reasonably shallow waters around some island, I don't know
22 where, but they slipped the paravanes at full speed so
23 they just dived and some said, "Oh, the old man will get a
24 blast over this for wasting equipment". But then when
25 they slipped the paravanes the speed went up. And they
26 estimated we were doing 34 knots. Ships were faster then
27 than what they are now. And we had four propellers and a
28 lot of the ships have only got one propeller now.

29
30 LEUT VESPER

31
32 Q. Just going back a moment to Captain Burnett's address
33 about the raider at Sunday morning divisions, do you have
34 any other memory of he speaking of a raider or raiders?

35 A. No, I don't. Only that what our torpedo officer told
36 us in August going to New Zealand, or take those ships
37 away and this one, but, no, I don't - I wish I'd kept a
38 great log or something in those days. But I didn't know
39 you were coming along to see me. I didn't think I'd be
40 alive 70 years later.

41
42 Q. There's only one topic I want to deal with now,
43 Mr Fisher, if I could, and that's the damage to A turret
44 that you at great length discuss in your statutory
45 declaration. You refer to you making some enquiries at
46 the Fremantle docks as to the lifting capacity of its
47 cranes back in 1941, can you recall who it was you spoke

1 to at the docks to get that information?

2 A. No - I was just doing some research because in
3 Montgomery's book when I was reading it where he said
4 that, you know, that A turret was lifted off it's
5 mountings, slewed around and they had to manhandle it back
6 by hand from inside the turret, which I thought was
7 rubbish because one man wouldn't have as much power as a
8 big electric motor and the hydraulic system to swing a
9 60-ton turret around. And how he said it pushed the
10 thing, that's the reason I put that photo on the Hobart
11 where --

12

13 Q. You're pointing to the photograph?

14 A. Yes.

15

16 Q. At paragraph of your statement?

17 A. Yes. But it was only done there so the water
18 wouldn't go down the barrel - where the barrels leave the
19 thing.

20

21 Q. What you're talking about is the training of the
22 forward turret outboard?

23 A. Yes.

24

25 Q. Is that something you saw done frequently in Hobart
26 particularly in rough weather, rough sea?

27 A. It was always done on the Sydney and the Hobart.
28 Both cruisers always did that because otherwise water
29 would get in to, seep in to the gunhouse.

30

31 Q. You refer to gunhouse frequently throughout your
32 statement, are you referring turret structure?

33 A. Yes, the revolving part of the turret where the crew
34 were and the two guns could be loaded, that's a gunhouse.
35 That was always called the gunhouse, as we see here.

36

37 Q. At that time, and I'm referring to October 1941, and
38 in particular the voyage across the Great Australian Bight
39 in the previous month, do you have any recollection of the
40 turrets being degraded or damaged?

41 A. No. Not - well --

42

43 Q. Was there any discussion that the turrets were
44 wearing, or the fittings were wearing out or needed to be
45 maintained?

46 A. No. I do believe in the log that Wes Olson said that
47 there was a defect which was remedied. But I used to

1 every - a couple of times a day, every couple days in
2 harbour and at sea we'd test the phones, an ordnance
3 artificer would rotate the turrets and check the
4 hydraulics and - for leaks and everything. But I've got
5 no recollection at all and being on the bridge coming in
6 to harbour and streaming paravanes I would have known if
7 the guns were not positioned ahead because all officers,
8 especially captains, are most particular that the guns
9 were lined up and the barrels a certain elevation; the
10 dressing of the ship, I suppose. And I would have known
11 if they'd - notice it straight away if the - I suppose 18,
12 19, 20 I was very impressionable and---

13

14 THE PRESIDENT

15

16 Q. In this book that you have, "Lost but not Forgotten",
17 by Keith Shegog, there's been a collection of a number of
18 letters and other memories?

19 A. Sorry, the lady just lent that to me recently. It's
20 not mine unfortunately.

21

22 Q. There's a letter here from Alan Leonard Cunnington,
23 he was an ordnance artificer:

24

25 We arrive at Fremantle on Sunday morning, I
26 believe. I do not think it will be long before
27 the ship returns to Sydney as one of the gun
28 turrets is in a bad state.

29

30 But you don't remember that?

31 A. See, my memory - not my memory, sorry, I was made
32 aware of this after reading - sorry, Montague's book.

33

34 Q. Yes?

35 A. Not Montague --

36

37 Q. Montgomery?

38 A. Montgomery's book. See, Montague has written a book
39 too, which is a lot of rubbish. And he mentioned that,
40 and I've got the page in there and the book, that a large
41 wave pushed the turret around to the side and it had to be
42 manhandled back in Fremantle. The turret had to be lifted
43 and the bearings taken out and ground down. But I mean
44 that would be a major job and - so, after reading his book
45 I rang the Fremantle Harbour Trust to find out what --

46

47 Q. Lifting capacity?

1 A. What lifting capacity of the cranes and they told me
2 at the time 3 tons. But I read later it's 3 to 6 tons.
3 But the whole gunhouse weighs 60 tons. And I was talking
4 to another - Wes Olson the author, could they have used
5 jacks to lift it up, and he said no way, he said because
6 the decking wouldn't support 60 tons.
7

8 Q. How do we know it weighs 60 tons?

9 A. I've got in books there written on the Hobart that
10 gives all the weights on those too. And I think you can
11 get it on Google too, Mk XXIII turrets.
12

13 LEUT VESPER
14

15 Q. As far as you were concerned, you, at the time,
16 serving in A turret as the on watch electrician --

17 A. Well, not actually in the gunhouse itself as
18 electrician, I'd be around the shell handling room. But
19 if the phones packed up or the lighting packed up then I'd
20 be called.
21

22 Q. You would have been at that time forming up in the
23 shell rooms for A turret?

24 A. Yes. Its not the shell magazine. See, the shells
25 leave the magazine and come up to a shell handling room in
26 a big rack and there's ratings there lifting the shells
27 off. The shells are lifted off this ring and placed in
28 the hoist to go up to the guns. It's called the shell
29 handling room. And ammunition and the cordite just comes
30 through from the magazines and they all go in to hoists to
31 go up to the turret, up to the gunhouse.
32

33 Q. I gather, what you're saying is, that because you
34 would have been on duty in the shell handling room, or
35 thereabouts, in A turret in October 1941, that if there
36 was any unserviceability with A turret from that trip
37 across the Great Australia Bight then you would know about
38 it?

39 A. Well, actually when the OA is there testing the - the
40 ordnance artificer was testing that, I mean we talked and
41 he talked to me and - I wonder if this Cunnington is - did
42 he give his rating there, sir? You said Cunnington, did
43 you, Cunnington?
44

45 THE PRESIDENT
46

47 Q. Yes.

- 1 A. I can't place him. Can't place the face.
2
- 3 Q. Ordnance artificer 4th class?
4 A. Yes, well they work on guns and that, ordnance
5 artificer. 4th class means he's a - like the lowest
6 ranking because they got the OA1 is the top and chief
7 ordnance artificer, yes. But that's not in there though.
8
- 9 Q. No, that's not him, no, there's no picture of him.
10 A. I'd like to have seen that letter, I wonder if --
11
- 12 Q. I'll show you the letter.
13 A. The letter is there, is it? No, I will take your
14 word for it I was just --
15
- 16 Q. You can read it.
17 A. I'm just wondering if the wife had made something up,
18 that's all.
19
- 20 Q. That's the letter there, on page 49 of the book?
21 A. Applied for his discharge from the service?
22
- 23 Q. Yes, he wasn't very keen, he had applied for a
24 discharge and he was hoping to get off at Fremantle?
25 A. Very few chaps wanted to get out of the navy in my
26 time, it was a good life, you know. It was a rough trip
27 but - see, these are - the Sydney was a very dry ship, it
28 didn't dive under water or anything, it bobbed like a
29 cork. But it was a dry ship inside and that too. And
30 when were the gun turrets in a bad state? It doesn't say
31 which one.
32
- 33 Q. No. He'd previously written to his wife about a
34 month before on 6 October saying he was sharing a locker,
35 and he said this:
36
- 37 I've just finished a large wash, shirts,
38 overalls et cetera, and have given my suit a
39 clean as it got rather dirty on the train trip
40 over. It is one consolation to know that we are
41 not going overseas as she is not in a fit state
42 and needs a refit.
43
- 44 Whether he would have the seniority or knowledge to know
45 that, I don't know, but that's what he wrote on 6 October
46 at page 48?
47 A. How do you spell his name, sir, I - because when you

1 stop for morning tea I'll just pull up that thing and see
2 when he joined the ship.

3
4 THE PRESIDENT: There it is.

5
6 LEUT VESPER: Is that a convenient time.

7
8 THE PRESIDENT: Yes. All right, we'll take a brief break.

9
10 SHORT ADJOURNMENT

11
12 LEUT VESPER

13
14 Q. Mr Fisher, while we had that adjournment you looked
15 at the certificate of service for Alan Cunnington and you
16 saw, I think, that he joined Sydney on 2 October 1941 and
17 then was lost with the ship. has that helped you recall
18 whether or not you remember that sailor?

19 A. No, I do not remember him because I left the ship 3
20 weeks later on 26 October, and I can't recall him at all.

21
22 Q. I'll move on to a final topic, and that is Carley
23 floats in HMAS Sydney. Firstly I gather you have some
24 memory of there being Carley floats on the Sydney, is that
25 so, Mr Fisher, you remember Carley floats?

26 A. Yes, I do.

27
28 Q. Do you have any confident recollection about how many
29 Carley floats Sydney had and where they were stowed on the
30 ship?

31 A. No, I have no recollection except one on the 4 inch
32 gun deck which you could see walking around. There were
33 some on the --

34
35 Q. You're pointing to that on exhibit 4?

36 A. Yes.

37
38 Q. Being aft of the aft after funnel?

39 A. Yes. And along - adjacent to a P2 4 inch gun.
40 That's the P2 gun there, port 2, and the Carley float is
41 standing on its side.

42
43 Q. I might just get you to mark it with the letter, (c)
44 and an arrow, that Carley float you're referring to? Do
45 you have any recollection of other Carley floats?

46 A. Yes, other Carley floats were laying down on the
47 quarterdeck.

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Q. You're indicating just forward of where you've already put the letter, (a), all right. And you've marked those with a, (c)?

A. Those two. I think there's two or three Carley floats there.

THE PRESIDENT

Q. Just put, (c2), put 2 beside it?

A. I think there's three, sir.

Q. (c3).

A. I didn't take - see it didn't ever go through our minds we were going to be sunk and where we'd rush for a Carley float and - we were indestructible.

LEUT VESPER

Q. Did you have a leaving ship station, or a --

A. No. Abandon ship?

Q. Abandon ship station?

A. No.

Q. Just finally, do you recall whether when Sydney returned from serving in the Mediterranean whether there was any change to the number and type of Carley floats it had on board?

A. No, I can't, I've got a - I cannot recollect anything about Carley floats except there was some on the quarterdeck, some on the 4 inch gun deck. But I can't remember any being forward up here. As later on, on the Hobart we had them.

THE PRESIDENT

Q. What about lifeboats and cutters and the like?

A. Two cutters, sir. One either side on davits, or davids we'd call them.

LEUT VESPER

Q. And you're pointing to?

A. The port cutter. It's a 32-foot cutter. And there's one either side on davids, the rest of the whalers and motor pinnaces were on cradles which are lifted off by the

1 crane.

2

3 THE PRESIDENT: Mark those two (d), will you?

4

5 LEUT VESPER: I'll do that, just where you've pointed I'll
6 put a (d) and an arrow.

7

8 THE PRESIDENT

9

10 Q. That's the two cutters on --

11 A. One port and one starboard.

12

13 Q. Davits?

14 A. Yes.

15

16 Q. Then were pinnaces --

17 A. There's motor pinnaces. What they call the motor
18 cutters I think.

19

20 LEUT VESPER

21

22 Q. I will mark those with an (e)?

23 A. Yes.

24

25 Q. Can you see any other --

26 A. And there's a whaler here.

27

28 Q. I will mark the whaler with an (f) and an arrow?

29 A. There's a motor pinnacle there and then there's what
30 they call a jolly-boat, it's a small boat that the captain
31 used to go ashore in. It was only a very small thing with
32 a fairly powerful engine. We used to use it for the
33 postman going ashore and that. But those --

34

35 Q. Did that jolly-boat sit on top of the pinnacle?

36 A. I can't remember.

37

38 Q. But as far as you can recall it was stowed in the
39 area?

40 A. It was stowed in this area. All stowed around where
41 the crane could lift them off and --

42

43 THE PRESIDENT

44

45 Q. Apart from the jolly-boat, were there four other
46 types of cutter or pinnacle --

47 A. There were two big motor cutters that I can remember,

1 and there's two whalers. And there's a small skiff, what
2 they call a skiff, it's what officers used to take way
3 sailing. That's all I can remember.

4
5 LEUT VESPER

6
7 Q. After the service in the Mediterranean can you recall
8 whether there was any change in the number or type of the
9 ship's boats; whether any were removed or added?

10 A. No, I can't, no. I can not remember that. I didn't
11 think there was but - see at that time I was a torpedoman.
12 Now, torpedomen are the ship's electricians. And I was
13 sort of wasn't involved in the part of the ship running,
14 what they'd call the seaman's running.

15
16 LEUT VESPER: Well, Mr President, they are my questions.

17
18 THE PRESIDENT: There is only one other thing.

19
20 Q. Mr Fisher, do you know anything about the wireless
21 telegraphy system on the Sydney?

22 A. No, sir. In what way, sir?

23
24 Q. I just wanted to know about her capacity to send and
25 receive signals?

26 A. A blank book, sir.

27
28 THE PRESIDENT: All right, well then I think that will
29 conclude what we have to ask you. Thank you very much
30 indeed for you help to this Commission. It's been
31 invaluable, thank you?

32
33 THE WITNESS: Thank you, sir.

34
35 <THE WITNESS WITHDREW

36
37 LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT

1 THE PRESIDENT: I've come to the home of Mr Ernest
2 Briddick in (redacted) to take evidence. Mr Briddick is
3 88 years of age.

4
5 Mr Briddick, thank you for seeing me today and
6 agreeing to assist this Commission in to the loss of HMAS
7 Sydney II.

8
9 <ERNEST WILLIAM BRIDDICK, sworn

10
11 <EXAMINATION BY LEUT VESPER

12
13 LEUT VESPER

14
15 Q. Sir, can you tell us your full name?

16 A. Ernest William Briddick.

17
18 Q. Do you live at (redacted)?

19 A. That's correct.

20
21 Q. Mr Briddick, I just show you a two-page statutory
22 declaration, is that the statutory declaration which you
23 declared just a few moments ago?

24 A. Yes.

25
26 Q. It follows that the contents of it are true and
27 correct?

28 A. That's so.

29
30 LEUT VESPER: I tender that, Mr President.

31
32 THE PRESIDENT: That will be exhibit 5.

33
34 EXHIBIT #5 STATUTORY DECLARATION OF BY ERNEST WILLIAM
35 BRIDDICK DECLARED 23/06/08

36
37 LEUT VESPER: Mr President, with your leave I may ask some
38 questions which expand upon exhibit 5?

39
40 THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

41
42 LEUT VESPER

43
44 Q. Mr Briddick, could you tell us when was it that you
45 served in HMAS Sydney II?

46 A. When was it, is it from - well it's recorded here on
47 my, you know --

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Q. You joined her in October 1939, is that your recollection?

A. Yes, it's written here. And as I said in my testimony, the arrival dates of the Sydney in Fremantle would be accurate. Any reference to a departure date would be not accurate.

Q. You served in HMAS Sydney II until May 1941, is that your recollection?

A. 1 May 1941.

THE PRESIDENT: So the date in paragraph 3 is wrong, isn't it?

LEUT VESPER: I think it is.

THE PRESIDENT: What should that be?

LEUT VESPER: That should be 1939, Mr President.

THE PRESIDENT: I will amend that in the copy.

LEUT VESPER: Thank you.

Q. Your category as a sailor in Sydney was as a signalman, is that so?

A. Ordinary signalman, then signalman and I went to Canopus, which is the name for the Gibraltar Service Station, and I passed there for the VS3 lower grade. That's also recorded in this sheet.

Q. Mr Briddick, one of the things that the Inquiry is interested in the manner with which Sydney was challenging other ships that it came across from time to time. As you say in your statement in paragraph 5, warships, as far as you can recall, how were they challenged by Sydney?

A. I can't even remember.

Q. For example, if a warship, as far as you can recall when you were on duty on the flag deck, if a warship was encountered and its identity --

A. Was not known.

Q. -- not known, can you recall what method or methods were used to send a signal to that other ship?

A. Well, usually you would find that the signalman was

1 responsible for the lookout for other ships. And
2 generally speaking they were sighted by Sydney generally
3 before they were sighted by anybody else. And I can't
4 remember what we used to - what we used to do to ask them
5 to identify themselves. As I recall they would send back
6 their fleet number. It depends on who was responding to
7 the signal that I was making and what their particular
8 procedure was. But if there were a number of ships then
9 presumably the head of the convoy, in the case of a number
10 of warships, would respond with their - perhaps their
11 number or VIP light fleet or something like that.

12
13 Q. Is your memory that those signals were coming back by
14 way of lamp or flag?

15 A. Generally speaking, you'd be too far away to do
16 anything else. Because most of the time you would, from
17 the crow's nest in particular, you would see oncoming
18 ships or ships on a diverging course. You would see them
19 from the crow's nest before the bridge saw them. And you
20 would communicate by voice pipe that this was the voice
21 pipe speaking and there was ship at red 24, or red 25. Or
22 if you had occasion to add to that and say there's not one
23 ship there's now three, or four or five, as the case may
24 be. And in most cases the crow's nest, not at action
25 stations, would be in touch with those people and they
26 would then be challenged by the bridge. And they would
27 then pass out to the signalman on duty, which is probably
28 the chief yeoman of signals at that time, and he would
29 make the challenge by Aldis lamp.

30
31 Q. Would that be from one of the bridge wings?

32 A. Probably from one of the bridge wings.

33
34 THE PRESIDENT

35
36 Q. Do you recall what distance you could see from the
37 crow's nest?

38 A. Well, it would have to be in the horizon plus. I
39 could see ships from that lookout up to five minutes
40 before the bridge could see them. And so that's got to be
41 the horizon plus a number of miles, but I'm not sure how
42 many.

43
44 LEUT VESPER

45
46 Q. Mr Briddick, I've asked you about your memory of
47 challenges to warships. When merchant ships were

1 challenged, as far as you can recall, during your time in
2 Sydney under Captain Collins, was the challenge to
3 merchant ships done by way of flag or lamp or both?

4 A. Honestly, I can't remember challenging an uncertified
5 ship in the Mediterranean at any time while I was on
6 Sydney.

7
8 Q. Nor on its return journey when it came via East
9 Africa?

10 A. Well, you couldn't get in to the Mediterranean except
11 by the Suez Canal, that's the only way to get in. That
12 would only take one ship at a time.

13
14 Q. As I understand it, your service in Sydney was that
15 part of a training for prospective officers?

16 A. No, it was a very hurriedly put together by someone
17 in Melbourne, which was Cerberus. Now, I was recommended
18 to go for this course and there were three of us, I think,
19 from the Sydney who got into it. But of those, I think
20 from memory, four were signalman.

21
22 Q. Just so I understand it, are you talking about the
23 course you did when you left Sydney?

24 A. The course when I left Sydney had nothing to do with
25 signals at all. It was all sorts of other things, running
26 a boat, firing guns, all this sort of stuff. And in the
27 finish I was - four people were signalmen and none of them
28 made it. There were only nine in the course all together.
29 Four got made officers, sub lieutenants, and five didn't.
30 And of the five who didn't make it, of which I was one,
31 were all signalmen. Now, why the hell they sent us there,
32 I don't know. But this was a, you know, a whole room full
33 of brass there. And I don't think many of them had much
34 sea time at all between the lot of them.

35
36 Q. Was it the case that some of the sailors who had
37 joined Sydney upon its return from the Mediterranean, were
38 you aware that some of those were sailors that were doing
39 the pre-officer course?

40 A. When I was first landed in that course there were
41 only nine bodies altogether. It was the first on in its
42 class. Somebody on board the ship recommended me to go to
43 the thing, anyway. I went but didn't make it, so that was
44 that.

45
46 THE PRESIDENT

47

1 Q. What was the distance that you could signal by lamp
2 to another ship?

3 A. To another ship, well, I suppose until his
4 superstructure got in to view and that would be in many
5 cases horizon plus something, because they can return a
6 signal as soon as the lamp is visible to the sending
7 officer.

8
9 Q. They could be read at that distance?

10 A. Yes. Yes, one of them was an 18 inch lamp. And
11 that's a big lamp.

12
13 LEUT VESPER

14
15 Q. If I show you a photograph, Mr Briddick, of Sydney,
16 can you see the 18 inch lamp on it?

17 A. Nay, I can't on this one. I thought though I might
18 be able to when I looked at it in the sunlight but I
19 couldn't see it. But there was one on the starboard side
20 and one on the port side.

21
22 Q. Are you talking about of the flag deck?

23 A. Yes. Yes, they were located on the - the flag deck
24 is all sort of on the one level. Then you've got your -
25 your flag deck is in front of 4 funnel and the 18 inch
26 lamps are on the same level. And you choose which one you
27 use, depending on the circumstances which apply at the
28 time. Now, when we had that action with Bartolomeo
29 Colleoni, there's a note in here --

30
31 Q. You're referring to this book?

32 A. This book, it's called, "Cruiser Duel", and you will
33 note in there that they sent a signal to the destroyers to
34 finish it off with torpedoes. By this time the Bartolomeo
35 Colleoni was stationary with the bow blown off and I used
36 the 18 inch lamp to call the destroyer, who was no more
37 than a couple of hundred yards on our port side slightly
38 ahead of us. And the reason I used the 18 inch lamp - I'm
39 going back to conditions now - was because I thought all
40 the signalmen were on the port side which was nearest to
41 the Colleoni. And they were too busy watching the
42 Colleoni get slaughtered and weren't paying much attention
43 to what was going on. Eventually they answered. But I
44 used the international call sign, common call sign, "A0,
45 A0". And I did that because I knew they'd be all watching
46 what was happening to the Colleoni. So, that's the sort
47 of circumstances I mean when I say you used what you

1 thought was the appropriate lamp in that time. Now, I was
2 the one mentioned in the book, not by name, but it's
3 there, that a signal was sent to the head of the destroyer
4 fleet to finish off the Colleoni with torpedoes. And you
5 will see in my photographs a photograph of the Colleoni
6 being struck by two of them. Does that explain what
7 occurred?
8

9 Q. It does. What I also wanted to ask you about with
10 your photographs, if I could, Mr Briddick, was just some
11 questions about what people would wear at action stations.
12 You have kindly supplied a page of five photographs and
13 what I might do is have you explain to Mr Cole what one
14 can see in each photograph in terms of what each person is
15 wearing and where they are in the ship, if you don't mind?
16 A. Well, all of those people were signalmen.
17

18 Q. I might start with the photograph on the far left of
19 the page and then we'll go through them in clockwise
20 order. I don't know how well you can see that, but
21 firstly the fellow in that photograph?
22 A. This one was me. I don't think I can identify the
23 others.
24

25 Q. In that photograph, the one on the far left of the
26 page, you've got your gas mask on?
27 A. Yes.
28

29 Q. Your tin hat?
30 A. Yes.
31

32 Q. You're in white shorts?
33 A. Right.
34

35 Q. And a white shirt, and you look like you've got your
36 life preserver --
37 A. My Mae West there.
38

39 Q. Is the Mae West a vest?
40 A. No, that's a floatation like - you blow it up,
41 hopefully you can puff enough wind in to get afloat.
42

43 Q. Is that held to you by a belt?
44 A. It's wrapped around your neck and waist.
45

46 Q. When you served in Sydney in the Mediterranean
47 Campaign, when you were at action stations, was that what

1 you would normally be wearing, that uniform?

2 A. No, not necessarily. Unless there was actually
3 poison gas in the air somewhere that you had been advised
4 of that - then you would be told to wear - to wear the gas
5 mask.

6

7 Q. What about the other clothes, when you were at action
8 stations in the Mediterranean would you be wearing white
9 shorts and shirt or would you be wearing overalls, or?

10 A. No, well it would depend. I don't know what the
11 officer people used to wear but some of them were wearing
12 long pants and a coat.

13

14 Q. What about the ordinary signalmen?

15 A. I can't recall, actually. I know that we had very
16 little protection against misadventure, if that's the
17 word.

18

19 THE PRESIDENT

20

21 Q. That's one of the big signal lamps behind you in the
22 lower photograph, is it not?

23 A. Yes, that would be so. That looks like the 18 inch
24 to me. Perhaps that's where I saw the picture on.

25

26 LEUT VESPER

27

28 Q. You're looking at the photograph in the middle of the
29 bottom of the page?

30 A. That's right, yes. That's the 18 inch.

31

32 Q. Is that you, one of the fellows in the photograph?

33 A. No, I took the photos or most of them. Yes, that's
34 right, that is the 18 inch lamp. Well, that's big enough
35 for anybody to see. And I think it ran by a carbon
36 process, so I'm not sure. quite.

37

38 Q. Do those photographs all appear to be taken on the
39 flag deck?

40 A. Yes. Yes, all taken on there. And the 18 inch lamp
41 appears in quite a number of them, doesn't it?

42

43 THE PRESIDENT: It does.

44

45 LEUT VESPER: What I propose to do, Mr President, is
46 organise to have a set of copies of those photographs made
47 and I'll tender those.

1
2 THE PRESIDENT: Would you mind if we borrowed these and
3 had them copied and returned to you, or would you like
4 someone to come here?

5
6 THE WITNESS: Well, I'd really prefer not to let them go.

7
8 THE PRESIDENT: All right, we'll get someone to come here
9 and take pictures of them, if that's all right?

10
11 THE WITNESS: Right. If you're interested in pictures of
12 themselves, apart from the nature of the Inquiry, you can
13 take whatever photographs you like.

14
15 LEUT VESPER

16
17 Q. You mentioned before the yeoman of the signals, did
18 you ever go to action stations on the bridge or on either
19 of the bridge wings when you had served in the Sydney?

20 A. At my ranking I wouldn't be on the bridge. But all
21 the action stations other than the lower steering
22 position, where I was with Commander Hilken, they were
23 all, all on the flag deck.

24
25 Q. But as far as you were aware there were the yeoman of
26 the signals and other signal ratings closed up on the
27 bridge or the bridge wings when the ship was at action
28 stations?

29 A. We were all up there, except for the one in the lower
30 steering.

31
32 Q. That was with the commander, the second-in-charge of
33 the ship, Commander Hilken?

34 A. That's right.

35
36 Q. Is it correct to say that when Sydney went to action
37 stations Commander Hilken would have been closed up in
38 that lower steering position?

39 A. Well, I would think so. Not always - not always the
40 same signalman would go. There was a signalman and a
41 wireless telegraphist used to go with him. I can't
42 remember who else was, because it was pretty small, there
43 was a wheel in it which enabled you to give instructions
44 if the bridge got blown away. But you got in there by a
45 little manhole.

46
47 Q. In to the?

1 A. In to the lower steering position. And if they
2 sprung a leak or got hit with a shell or something they'd
3 just close it and trap in, really, an that's - you've had
4 it.

5
6 LEUT VESPER: I have just one final question,
7 Mr President.

8
9 Q. That is to do with a Aldis Lamps, Mr Briddick, as I
10 understand it there were also on the flag deck, one or two
11 Aldis lamps stowed in lockers, is that your memory?

12 A. There was about four cartons, from memory, four
13 pigeon hole cartons, each of which held a single flag.
14 And the signal flags in various reconstructions or
15 constructions were containing a message for all ships to
16 do certain things. And that's the way they operated and
17 that's the way they had to.

18
19 Q. As I understood it, Mr Briddick, there were Aldis
20 lamps in addition to the fixed signal lamps --

21 A. Yes.

22
23 Q. -- stowed on the flag deck, is that right?

24 A. I can't remember where they were stowed.

25
26 Q. When signalmen were aloft in the crow's nest would
27 they have a signal lamp?

28 A. No, the communication was direct to the bridge.

29
30 LEUT VESPER: Well, thank you, Mr President, they are my
31 questions of Mr Briddick.

32
33 THE PRESIDENT

34
35 Q. Mr Briddick, in paragraph 6 of your statement you
36 say:

37
38 A merchant ship when challenged would generally
39 reply with its name and its secret code. We
40 wouldn't automatically go to action stations
41 upon sighting another ship. Often their
42 identity was established very quickly by lamp
43 from a long distance.

44
45 Do you recall the circumstances in which you did go to
46 action stations on sighting a ship?

47 A. No, I can't remember.

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Q. You would just receive a direction from the captain, presumably, by way of a clanger or signal?

A. Yes, I can't remember who used to pass out the signal for the day, I think it must have been a daily process. I imagine someone in the signal branch would know what it was and where he got the answer as to what the correct reply would be. I can't recall ever challenging on a warship, a merchant one at all.

Q. The Mediterranean may have been closed to merchant shipping when you were there, I think?

A. Well, it pretty well was closed.

Q. Most of the challenging that you did, or identification that you did, would have been with other warships?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you recall how long it took if, for instance you were in your hammock, or wherever you may have been, it would take to get to action stations once action stations were signalled?

A. Well, if I were on the mess deck and they called action stations I would be at my service station, or my action station, within a couple of minutes.

LEUT VESPER: I just have one other matter if I could, Mr President?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

LEUT VESPER

Q. Even though, Mr Briddick, you have no recollection of Sydney challenging a merchant ship, were the signal ratings taught a particular procedure for how a challenge to an unidentified ship should occur?

A. No, I don't recall that. Someone must have been aware of the secret signal that was required to establish the whereabouts of the point of entry in the cargo. Someone must have provided a signaller with some kind of a known response which he would look for. My understanding was that the target ship, in the case of the Sydney procedure, was that you didn't know the answer. You didn't know what the reply should be.

1 THE PRESIDENT: You did say you had a photograph album,
2 would you mind if I had a look at that and --

3
4 THE WITNESS: No, not at all.

5
6 THE PRESIDENT: -- if there are any photographs that might
7 be of use to my Inquiry I'd like to have arrange for
8 someone to come and take some copies.

9
10 THE PRESIDENT: Have you seen this Lieutenant Vesper?

11
12 LEUT VESPER: I haven't, sir, no. Would it be appropriate
13 to perhaps adjourn while you look at those photographs?

14
15 THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

16
17 SHORT ADJOURNMENT

18
19 <THE WITNESS WITHDREW

20
21 THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ADJOURNED TO TUESDAY, 24 JUNE
22 2008, AT 9.30AM

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