

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.

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47

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.



1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47

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 --

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47

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

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47

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 fore-castle, 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?

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47

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.

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47

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