

1
2 SHORT ADJOURNMENT
3
4 THE PRESIDENT: With me is Mr John Neal Brown, as I said, the cousin of the
5 previous Mr Brown who also served on Sydney.
6
7 <JOHN NEAL BROWN, sworn
8
9 <EXAMINATION BY LEUT VESPER
10
11 LEUT VESPER
12
13 Q. Sir, can you tell us your full name?
14 A. John Neal Brown, N-E-A-L, Brown.
15
16 Q. Sir, do you live at [REDACTED] ?
17 A. I do.
18
19 Q. Sir, have you made a statutory declaration in respect of the matter
20 before the commission dated 6 June 2008?
21 A. I do, I have.
22
23 Q. It follows from swearing that that the contents of it are true and correct?
24 A. I do.
25
26 THE PRESIDENT: That will be exhibit 12.
27
28 EXHIBIT #12 STATUTORY DECLARATION OF JOHN NEAL BROWN
29 DECLARED 06/06/08
30
31 LEUT VESPER
32
33 Q. Mr Brown, with the commission's leave, I'm just going to ask you a few
34 questions arising out of the matters touched upon in your statutory declaration.
35 You served in Sydney from July 1939 until leaving it in December 1940. Is that
36 so?
37 A. That's right.
38
39 THE PRESIDENT
40
41 Q. You were about 18 years of age when you were on board?
42 A. Yes, going on 19.
43
44 LEUT VESPER
45
46 Q. What was your rank when you served in Sydney?
47 A. Telegraphist. I was promoted from ordinary telegraphist to telegraphist.

- 1
- 2 Q. When did that promotion occur?
- 3 A. I cannot really remember.
- 4
- 5 Q. Was it whilst you were serving on the ship?
- 6 A. Whilst we were on the Sydney, yes.
- 7
- 8 Q. Perhaps you could just explain to the commission, what was the
9 structure of the wireless telegraphy department. That is how many sailors at
10 each rank, roughly speaking?
- 11 A. You mean at one time, the complement of the communication?
- 12
- 13 Q. Yes?
- 14 A. About 20, 25, from the chief, chief telegraphist, from POs, leading
15 telegraphist down - right down the ranks to ordinary telegraphist.
- 16
- 17 Q. During cruising stations at sea, where would you close up when you
18 were on duty?
- 19 A. At cruising stations you'd be off duty. You wouldn't be on duty, but you'd
20 be - at cruising stations, I think you would be wearing a life jacket and safety
21 gear.
- 22
- 23 Q. Was the telegraphy branch, were you broken down into watches; some
24 would be on watch, some would be off watch?
- 25 A. Yes.
- 26
- 27 Q. When you were on watch where would you close up at?
- 28 A. Mainly in the main office. There's the main office, the second office and
29 the third office.
- 30
- 31 Q. That's the main wireless office?
- 32 A. Yes, the main wireless office.
- 33
- 34 Q. What were the wireless sets in the main office; can you recall?
- 35 A. Not really.
- 36
- 37 Q. Okay. There were also wireless sets in the other wireless offices?
- 38 A. Yes, yes.
- 39
- 40 Q. When you went to action stations where would you close up at?
- 41 A. Well, the only one that I remember, as I recall I mentioned to you, was in
42 A turret; gun turret.
- 43
- 44 Q. You had a period that you served in that turret?
- 45 A. Yes, yes.
- 46
- 47 Q. As far as your action stations position it was always in A turret?

- 1 A. No, no, but that's the first one that I can recall that I served on my action
2 station. The other action station would have probably been in the second or
3 third office; wireless office, yeah.
4
- 5 Q. When you were at sea in Sydney, do you ever recall Sydney transmitting
6 a wireless message?
7 A. No, no.
8
- 9 Q. Why are you so sure about that?
10 A. Because we probably wouldn't have the reason to. It would be done by
11 a senior officer, or senior ship. We were bound to wireless - W/T silence when
12 at sea.
13
- 14 Q. I take it therefore that essentially at sea your job as a wireless operator
15 was to listen?
16 A. To listen, yes, yes.
17
- 18 THE PRESIDENT
19
- 20 Q. Throughout the Australian coast you would normally listen to Harman?
21 A. Yes, yes.
22
- 23 Q. As you went north into the Indian Ocean you would change to
24 Singapore, would you?
25 A. Yeah, probably Singapore, yes.
26
- 27 LEUT VESPER
28
- 29 Q. Do you remember from time to time Sydney would receive intelligence
30 signals?
31 A. Yes.
32
- 33 Q. Would they be coded signals in Morse?
34 A. Yes.
35
- 36 Q. What was the procedure for handling intelligence messages when they
37 were?
38 A. They would go straight to probably the cipher officer, yes.
39
- 40 Q. Were they decoded by the wireless personnel?
41 A. No, no.
42
- 43 Q. Do you remember from time to time or daily, indeed, receiving any
44 signals to do with known shipping in your area of operations?
45 A. No, I wouldn't know what they were, no, but I would think that that would
46 be a daily exercise, reception. We'd get a daily informing of what ships we
47 could expect, yes.

1
2 THE PRESIDENT
3
4 Q. That was received in code --
5 A. In code.
6
7 Q. And in Morse, by Morse rather?
8 A. Yes, yes.
9
10 LEUT VESPER
11
12 Q. Did you know whether that signal or that type of signal had a special
13 name or a specific name?
14 A. No, I cannot recall. It probably would have had, but I don't recall.
15
16 Q. Is your recollection that that type of signal was received every day?
17 A. As my memory serves me correct I think it would have been received
18 every day as identification of merchant ships and what have you, yes.
19
20 Q. In your statement you also mention that Sydney had a radio telegraphy
21 capacity. That's so, isn't it?
22 A. Yes, RT, yes.
23
24 Q. In your time in Sydney do you ever remember the radio telegraphy
25 system being used?
26 A. Not really, no, not really.
27
28 THE PRESIDENT
29
30 Q. It was for very short range communication?
31 A. Very short range, yes. Mainly it was done by Aldis lamp or signals, light
32 for lamps, yeah.
33
34 LEUT VESPER
35
36 Q. If the radio telegraphy system was used, in what scenario was it used;
37 was it used for ship to land or ship to ship?
38 A. Just ship to ship, yeah.
39
40 Q. Did you know what the range for the transmission of a radio signal was?
41 A. Probably a matter of a few mile, yes.
42
43 Q. Was that something you were taught or something you learnt or while
44 you were working?
45 A. Must have been while we were in the Med because I don't recall doing
46 any previous training in our initial wireless telegraphy training in Cerberus, no.
47

1 Q. You think it was whilst you were in the Mediterranean that you learnt how
2 the radio worked?

3 A. Yes.

4

5 Q. Is it true that training that you learnt that it could only be used for ranges
6 of up to two miles?

7 A. Yes.

8

9 Q. Or a few miles, I beg your pardon?

10 A. Yes.

11

12 Q. It's been suggested when Sydney engaged with the Kormoran that she
13 made a radio broadcast from perhaps up to 120 or more miles from the
14 Western Australian coast and that radio broadcast was received in Australia. Is
15 that something you could concede ---

16

17 THE PRESIDENT

18

19 Q. In plain language?

20 A. Yes, it could possibly be in plain language too because there was no
21 purpose in disguising your position. It was already known.

22

23 LEUT VESPER

24

25 Q. Are you talking about a wireless transmission?

26 A. Yes, yes.

27

28 Q. But what about a radio broadcast?

29 A. A radio telegraphy, no, no, absolutely not.

30

31 THE PRESIDENT

32

33 Q. So voice --

34 A. No voice.

35

36 Q. -- messages could not be sent over 100 miles?

37 A. No. To the best of my knowledge I would say no, absolutely no.

38

39 LEUT VESPER

40

41 Q. Throughout your war service did you become familiar with direction
42 finding equipment?

43 A. Not really. It wasn't in our department, it had a special branch. As the
44 years progressed during the war it became more of a special branch. The first
45 one I recall - first of direction finding is what they call RDF, radio direction
46 finding, but that was in its more or less infancy in the Mediterranean. I don't
47 think we had it.

1

2 Q. As far as you're aware, did HMAS Sydney have direction finding?

3 A. To the best of my knowledge, no.

4

5 Q. Did any of the ships you served in after you left HMAS Sydney have
6 direction finding equipment?

7 A. In later years, I think so, yes. Getting back to the Med I think one of the
8 aircraft carriers had RDF, radio direction finding, to the best of my knowledge.

9

10 Q. Is that something you have learnt since the war or did you know that at
11 the time?

12 A. At the time, yes.

13

14 Q. How did you know that?

15 A. Just general knowledge in the communication field, yes.

16

17 Q. When you say later on in the war you became familiar with direction
18 finding equipment, was it the case that the fellows in the wireless branch, were
19 they responsible for operating the direction finding equipment?

20 A. No, they had a special branch, special operators trained in direction
21 finding.

22

23 Q. I think part of your training also included how to do jury aerials. Is that
24 so?

25 A. Yes.

26

27 Q. Can you give us a summary of what you were told about how in, say, a
28 cruiser, one goes about the process of rigging a jury aerial? How does one do
29 it?

30 A. First of all you had to have some structure there to rig it. In other words
31 the mast, the foremast and the aft mast. If there was nothing there to rig it on
32 you couldn't rig it, but that's what we were trained to rig it on the existing mast
33 heads.

34

35 THE PRESIDENT

36

37 Q. Without masts, you couldn't have rigging and therefore you couldn't send
38 any signals at all?

39 A. No, no. You could probably try but I don't think the range would be very
40 good. You could probably try, but the range wouldn't be good.

41

42 LEUT VESPER

43

44 Q. If a cruiser, say, like Sydney, still had its two masts or the better part of
45 two masts how long would it actually take to rig a jury aerial, a transmitting
46 aerial?

47 A. This would only be an educated guess, probably an hour or half an hour,

1 not very long in an emergency.

2

3 Q. Did Sydney carry spare cable for that purpose?

4 A. Yes, yes.

5

6 Q. Spare rigging gear?

7 A. Yes.

8

9 THE PRESIDENT

10

11 Q. Where would that be kept, below deck somewhere?

12 A. Probably, yes, probably one of the offices, probably the second or third
13 office, yes.

14

15 LEUT VESPER

16

17 Q. Receiving aerials, were they different to transmitting aerials?

18 A. Yes, yes.

19

20 Q. Were receiving aerials also able to be jury rigged?

21 A. That's a good question. I would think so, yes, I would think so. They
22 were already directed down from the mast, just abaft; well abaft of the bridge.

23

24 Q. Again, would you estimate that it would take perhaps half an hour to an
25 hour to rig a receiving aerial?

26 A. Yes, no more than half an hour, yeah.

27

28 Q. It would be a bit easier because you'd only need one mast for a receiving
29 aerial?

30 A. Yes.

31

32 Q. If, say, Sydney lost one or most of its masts and the jury aerial for
33 transmitting had to be rigged very low to the superstructure of the ship perhaps
34 using part of the superstructure of the ship for the anchor point, any idea how
35 far it could transmit?

36 A. Not really, but the range would be considerably reduced.

37

38 Q. When one has full height of the masts to rig its receiving aerials, as you
39 say, you could be sitting out in the Indian Ocean and you could receive Harman
40 quite easily?

41 A. Well, off the Western Australian coast. I don't think we transferred to,
42 say, Singapore until we were well into the Indian Ocean, but the other point is it
43 can be - messages could be relayed, say, from Darwin to Harman or Harman to
44 Darwin to the ship if it couldn't be raised, you know, direct.

45

46 THE PRESIDENT

47

- 1 Q. There were transmitting stations at Harman, we know?
2 A. Yes.
3
4 Q. And at Darwin?
5 A. Yes.
6
7 Q. What about Applecross?
8 A. Applecross.
9
10 Q. In Western Australia, in Perth?
11 A. Never heard of it.
12
13 Q. Never heard of that?
14 A. We never - to my knowledge we never had any direction contact with
15 Applecross.
16
17 Q. You think you had contact with Harman and with Singapore, you recall?
18 A. Yes.
19
20 Q. Any others in Australia?
21 A. No, probably on the distress side of it we would probably listen out on a
22 distress all the time and that was - if we were in the Indian Ocean or off the
23 Western Australian coast we would listen to Perth, but that's the civilian station.
24
25
26
27 Q. The distress band was 500 kilocycles?
28 A. 500 k's, yes.
29
30 LEUT VESPER
31
32 Q. In an emergency situation would you broadcast on the distressed
33 frequency?
34 A. I don't ever recall doing so.
35
36 Q. Later in the war you were involved in an action referred to in your
37 statutory declaration?
38 A. In Timor.
39
40 Q. On that occasion, do you recall whether your ship made an emergency
41 broadcast?
42 A. Yes, in plain language.
43
44 Q. Firstly, why was it you broke radio silence in that case? Obviously, you
45 were ordered to, but do you understand why?
46 A. Because, we were in a very, very hot seat and our ship was damaged
47 and we were heading back to port.

1
2 Q. So you broadcast in plain language. Was that on the distress
3 frequency?
4 A. No, on the ship-shore frequency, and I can't recall what it was.
5
6 Q. As I understand it, the reason you broke wireless silence is because not
7 only were you in a very hot situation, but the enemy already knew where you
8 were; that's the case?
9 A. That's right, and we all relied on authority, the captain's authority, he
10 gave the authority.
11
12 THE PRESIDENT
13
14 Q. But when you sent that emergency message, as you say in plain
15 language, it was still sent in Morse?
16 A. Yes, yes.
17
18 Q. Not by voice?
19 A. No, no.
20
21 LEUT VESPER: Thank you, Mr President. They are all the questions I have.
22
23 THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I don't have any more questions. Thank you very
24 much indeed, Mr Brown, you've been very helpful to the Inquiry?
25
26 THE WITNESS: Thank you, Commissioner.
27
28 <THE WITNESS WITHDREW
29
30 SHORT ADJOURNMENT
31
32 THE PRESIDENT: I've come to the house of Mr Frederick House [REDACTED]
33 in Tasmania to take his evidence in this Inquiry.
34
35 Mr House is 90, almost 91 years of age.
36
37 <FREDERICK HENRY HOUSE, sworn
38
39 <EXAMINATION BY LEUT VESPER
40
41 LEUT VESPER
42
43 Q. Sir, can you tell us your full name?
44 A. Frederick Henry House.
45
46 Q. You live at [REDACTED] in Tasmania?
47 A. Yes.