

**Samuel Edward Lees Stening (1910-1983)**, was born on 14 May 1910, at Bondi, NSW. the second son of George and Muriel Stening. At the time, the family resided at 'Kambla', 248 Bondi Road, Bondi. His older brother George was born in 1904, and his younger brothers Malcolm and Warwick followed in 1912 and 1914 respectively. His older sister Lorraine was born in 1909, and his younger sister Muriel was born in 1917. Like older brother George, Sam attended the Bondi Superior Public School. In 1920, Sam obtained the Qualifying Certificate which gave him entry to Secondary education at the prestigious Sydney Boys High School, a government school which had developed as a centre of excellence in secondary education. Consequently, entry into SBHS was reserved for high achievers, among whom numbered the four Stening boys. Sam started at SBHS in 1922 and was a diligent student. He completed his secondary education at the age of fifteen, qualifying for a Public Exhibition which gave him entry into Sydney University's School of Medicine in 1926, on a scholarship, with all fees paid. After six years of study, Stening graduated in December 1932, Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) (Hon). As Stening himself was to write: 'Still a doctor at 21, with Honours, wasn't bad. A new life was to begin, a new chapter away from home.' He served his residencies at Royal Prince Albert and Royal North Shore hospitals before spending a further year at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children. To become a specialist paediatrician, Stening had to go overseas to obtain postgraduate qualifications and experience and be admitted to the pertinent college of medicine - the College of Physicians. So, Stening left Australia in mid-1936 and travelled to England. He paid for his passage by signing on as the ship's doctor in the passenger cargo ship SS Nellore. Once Stening arrived in London, he settled down to his studies. By the end of 1938, Stening was back in Sydney with a Diploma of Child Health (DCH) attained from the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Surgeons, along with membership of the Royal College of Physicians.

In March 1939, Stening volunteered for service with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), and on 29 September, he was commissioned as a Surgeon Lieutenant in the Royal Australian Naval Reserve (RANR). He expected to be called up almost immediately. In fact, it was 14 May 1940, before he was mobilised by proclamation, and directed to join the shore training establishment, HMAS Penguin, Balmoral, Sydney. Stening's first few days in uniform were a confusion of trying to learn about the service he had joined, its rules and regulations, and his duties 'on-the-job', while at the same time trying to close his medical practice. The RAN had the perfect answer to all of these perceived problems - it appointed Stening to HMAS Perth. At 07:15 on 19 May 1940, Perth was steaming north to ensure that the Italian merchant ship, SS Romolo, did not make a break for the open sea of the Pacific Ocean. At any moment, Italy was expected to declare war on the British Empire. On 22 May, while Romolo kept her current heading, Perth was ordered to return to Sydney. On 25 May, Perth was docked in Sutherland Dock at Cockatoo Island Dockyard for repairs to leaking rivets and her Asdic dome, which had been

damaged by a paravane. On 26 May, Perth was undocked. The next day she departed Sydney for Western Port Bay, then on to Melbourne, returning on the 28th to anchor overnight in Western Port. The next day, Perth departed Western Port and proceeded to Port Philip Bay for gunnery, torpedo firing, and anti-aircraft exercises. These exercises would continue apace until Perth returned to Sydney on 5 June. On 16 June 1940, Stening was appointed to the heavy cruiser, HMAS Canberra. His duties were the routine ones associated with health and hygiene of the ship's company, the training of action stations' first aid parties, and of all things, the censoring of sailors' outgoing mail. At the time, Canberra was engaged in escorting convoys around the Cape of Good Hope, as they sailed to and from Australia and other British controlled ports, via the Indian Ocean. Stening meanwhile, was learning more about the traditions and customs of naval service and enjoying his time in Canberra. But the contingencies of service would soon take precedence. On 29 August, Stening was appointed to the 10th Destroyer Flotilla 'for HMAS Stuart', now serving in the Mediterranean. He had to travel to join his ship in one of the troop convoys taking logistics and troops to the Middle East. Convoy US4 is noted on his service card as that in which Stening was embarked in. US4 was comprised of four large, converted passenger liners, SS Aquitania, SS Empress of Japan, SS Mauretania and SS Orcades, departing Fremantle on Thursday, 5 September, arriving at Bombay on Sunday, 15 September 1940, escorted all the way by Canberra. Stening, and other RAN officers in transit, would have made their way from Colombo, Ceylon, to Egypt, by whatever service transport was available at the time. Suffice to say that by the time they reached Alexandria by train, they had to wait for their ships to return before joining. Although Stening was officially appointed to Stuart, the flotilla leader, Captain H M L Waller, RAN, was of the view that he should be borne in one of the other destroyers, so he found himself billeted in the elderly (1918) V&W destroyer, HMAS Waterhen.

After Canberra, the accommodation and facilities in Waterhen were at best, basic. The Sick Bay, as such, was Stening's miniscule cabin, and, as he was the first doctor the ship had borne, it was bereft of any medical equipment and stores he needed. Be that as it may, Stening was pleased with his new appointment, and impressed by the attitude of the ship's company. On 3 October, Waterhen proceeded to sea for operations off the south-east coast of Crete and Kithera Channel in company with the battleships Malaya and Ramillies, the aircraft carrier Eagle, and the 10th destroyer flotilla. No enemy units were encountered, so the force returned to Alexandria on the 6th. On 8 October, Waterhen formed part of the escort for convoy MF3 to Malta, consisting of four merchant ships, SS Clan Ferguson, SS Clan Macaulay, SS Lanarkshire and MV Memnon. The Mediterranean Fleet acted independently and as a covering force. Some contacts were obtained by Asdic. Single depth charges were dropped, but no contacts were confirmed. Convoy MF3 arrived at Malta in the afternoon of 11 October. Waterhen then replenished. That same day, Waterhen formed part of the escort for convoy MF4 from

Malta to Alexandria, consisting of the gunboat HMS Aphis, RFA tanker Plumleaf, and SS Volo. During the afternoon of the 14th, when south of Crete, the convoy was twice attacked by high level bombers. No hits were sustained, and the convoy arrived at Alexandria during the forenoon of 16 October, unscathed. From 16 to 28 of October, Waterhen was alongside at Alexandria, undertaking repairs to her condensers. However, on 28 October, the Italian Army invaded Greece, so the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet gave the Greeks its support. Stening's first time at sea in Waterhen was when his ship was part of the escort of a convoy taking troops to Suda Bay, Crete, arriving there during the afternoon of 31 October. Other ships of the escort were HM anti-aircraft cruisers Coventry and Calcutta, destroyers Vampire, Voyager and HMS Wryneck, the net layer HMS Protector, and the minesweeper HMS Fareham. Waterhen spent seventeen days at sea during the month of October 1940.

On 1 November, Waterhen was employed on anti-submarine patrol at the entrance to Suda Bay, Crete. An air raid by Italian bombers was carried out during the afternoon. No damage was reported. From 2 to 4 November, Waterhen formed part of the escort of convoy returning from Suda Bay to Alexandria. Other escorts included HMS Coventry, Vampire, HM destroyer Defender, and HMS Protector. All arrived at Alexandria during the forenoon of the 4th. From 5 to 9 November, Waterhen formed part of the escort of convoy MW3 to Malta, via north of Crete, consisting of five merchant ships, MV Devis, RFA Plumleaf, SS Rodi, SS Volo and MV Waiwera. On the 7th, Waterhen parted company from the main body of the convoy to escort ships bound for Suda Bay. After replenishing at Suda Bay, they then overtook and rejoined MW3, which arrived at Malta during the afternoon of 9 November. Waterhen then replenished. The Mediterranean Fleet was at sea covering this convoy. On 8 November, FAA fighter aircraft from the aircraft carrier, HMS Illustrious, shot down an Italian reconnaissance aircraft which had been shadowing convoy MW3.

In the forenoon of Sunday 10 November 1940, Waterhen sailed from Malta as part of the escort for convoy ME3, consisting of four merchant ships, SS Clan Ferguson, SS Clan Macaulay, SS Lanarkshire and MV Memnon. Other escorts to convoy ME3 consisted of HMS Ramillies, HMS Coventry, HM destroyers Decoy and Defender and HMAS Vampire during passage from Malta to Alexandria, arriving there during the forenoon of Wednesday 13 November. The next day, Waterhen proceeded to Port Said to rendezvous with the troop transport SS Johan de Witt to join a convoy from Alexandria to Suda Bay, Crete, on the 15th. This convoy was made up of the troop transports SS Clan Macaulay, SS Imperial Star and SS Nieuw Zeeland. On 15 November, Waterhen and Johan de Witte made rendezvous with this convoy, arriving at Suda Bay the next day. During the afternoon of 16 November, Waterhen replenished, then sailed in company with Vampire, and HM destroyers Mohawk and Nubian. At dusk, the destroyers carried out an anti-submarine search of the Aegean Kaso Strait. At 22:00, the four destroyers

resumed course for Alexandria, arriving there at 12:00 on the 18th. From 19 to 24 November, Waterhen was at Alexandria. On the night of 20th /21st, she was at sea as part of a screen for Illustrious during night flying exercises. On the 25th, Waterhen proceeded with the capital ships Warspite, Illustrious, Malaya, and ships of the 14th destroyer flotilla on passage to Suda Bay, arriving there on the 26th. In the afternoon, Waterhen proceeded to rendezvous and escort the troop transport, HMT Ulster Prince, to the Greek port of Piraeus, arriving there during the forenoon of 27 November. In the afternoon of the 27th, Waterhen sailed from Piraeus for Port Said with convoy AS7. The next day, HM destroyer Diamond made rendezvous with Waterhen as an additional escort to AS7. During the forenoon of the 30th, convoy and escort arrived at Port Said, where both escorts immediately replenished to escort the destroyer depot ship, HMS Woolwich to Alexandria. Waterhen had spent twenty-five days at sea during November 1940, and steamed over seven thousand five hundred miles in the process.

On 1 December 1940, Waterhen arrived at Alexandria from Port Said. From 1 to 15 December, she was either at sea on exercises, or alongside at Alexandria, carrying out short periods of self-maintenance. On 16 December, Waterhen sailed to join Inshore Squadron operating in support of British and Commonwealth Army forces while steaming off the Libyan coast. The next day was spent screening the Erebus-class monitor HMS Terror while she bombarded Bardia and carrying out anti-submarine sweeps in the immediate area. On both 18 and 19 December, both Waterhen and Vampire carried out anti-submarine sweeps. Returning to Alexandria during the forenoon, then sailing westwards in the afternoon. The next day, Waterhen spent patrolling between the coastal areas of Mersa Matruh and Sollum, escorting HM armed boarding vessel (ABV) Fiona, arriving at Sollum the following day. On 21 December, Waterhen continued escorting Fiona, then carried out anti-submarine sweeps with Voyager. On 22 December, Waterhen made rendezvous with HM ABV Chakla and escorted her to Sollum, then set course to return to Alexandria, arriving there on the 23rd. Waterhen then replenished, took on stores and set course back to Sollum, arriving there the next day and anchoring off Sollum to unload stores. Once she had completed unloading, Waterhen commenced an anti-submarine patrol off Sollum. During the 25th-26th of December, while on anti-submarine patrol off Sollum, the port was subjected to an air attack by Italian aircraft at 15:45 when bombs were dropped near Chakla. There was another aerial attack at dusk during which all bombs were dropped on shore. Waterhen sailed at 19:00 to endeavour to intercept an Italian supply schooner, Tireremo Dirrito, running personnel and logistics between Mersa Tobruk and Bardia. The schooner was sighted at 00:30 and sunk by gunfire. Waterhen then rescued twenty-nine survivors, resuscitating one who had almost drowned, and dealing with the horrific burn injuries of another. As Stening later wrote:

‘The sailor had swum for over an hour with practically raw hands - the skin had lifted off and the boarding net had scored the naked flesh in climbing up practically unaided. When I saw him he was nearly dead with the shock and exposure and his hands were dripping blood ... he was one of the bravest men I have ever seen. He suffered and never whimpered while he was being dressed, though trembling with pain in spite of the morphia, and was trying to help me and thanking me for the attention I was giving. I don’t know what happened to him; he stood a good chance of dying from his injuries, but I hope not.’

On the afternoon of 26 December, Waterhen transferred her prisoners to Vendetta in Sollum Bay. There was a further aerial attack by Italian bombers, escorted by fighter aircraft. No damage was incurred, and there were no casualties. On the same day at dusk, Waterhen and other ships at Sollum were attacked by torpedo bombers, but no torpedoes were seen to drop. That night, Waterhen carried out an anti-submarine patrol offshore. At dawn on the 27th, bombs were seen bursting ashore. However, Waterhen continued with her anti-submarine patrol. Ships in Sollum were once again attacked by bombers in the afternoon, but all bombs fell at least two hundred yards short of all vessels. Waterhen, and the other ships at Sollum, were again attacked by torpedo bombers at dusk, and while the destroyer engaged one of these, it was without any result. On the 28th, Waterhen escorted MV Cingalese Prince from Sollum to Alexandria, arriving there during the afternoon, then replenished. The next day, Waterhen sailed for Sollum. Upon arrival, she commenced an anti-submarine patrol. At 21:15, the destroyer collided with HM anti-submarine trawler Bandolero, which foundered at 21:50. There were no casualties, and Waterhen was able to rescue all of the trawler’s crew. But Waterhen had incurred some serious damage to her stem which was now badly buckled, with the forepeak forward of the collision bulkhead flooded. But with the forward bulkheads now shored up and sealed, Waterhen was able to continue with her anti-submarine patrol off Sollum. At dawn on New Year’s Eve, Waterhen received a signal from HM mine-sweeping trawler Moy, stating she was aground and requesting assistance. At daylight, Waterhen anchored as close as possible to Moy, then passed her a 3½ inch wire. At 12:30 the trawler was refloated in an undamaged state and sailed for Alexandria escorted by Mohawk. Waterhen had spent twenty days at sea during December 1940, steaming almost five thousand two hundred miles in the process.

Stenning later scrawled the following letter to his fiancé:

‘This is 9:30 pm. New Years Eve and we are returning to harbour after the most exciting 19 days of my life. In the last 17 days we have been at sea except for 3-4 hours for fuelling. Consequently, we are on biscuits and beef, no water except for shaving and washing face & no clean clothes. We haven’t even had any Xmas dinner. I can’t say I enjoyed our 15 or 16 days, in fact, I was becoming very nervy and would go cold all over & stomach disappear when alarm bells went. We have been fired upon by shore

batteries, bombed by Italians, daily and sometimes twice daily, been attacked by torpedo bombers at dawn and dusk. We are still here and untouched by the enemy.’

During the forenoon of New Year’s Day 1941, Waterhen arrived at Alexandria from Sollum after her collision with HMT Bandolero, escorted by Mohawk. Once the damage to Waterhen’s stem had been surveyed by naval constructors, approval was given for her to make passage to Port Said, enroute to Port Tewfik (Suez), for repairs to be carried out. The next day, Waterhen arrived at Port Said and passed through the Canal to Port Tewfik. From 3 to 31 January, she was taken in hand for repairs to her stem, and to have her boilers partially retubed. The aft set of torpedo tubes (1 x 3), were removed, replaced by a twelve pounder (3-inch) Mk. 5, gun, and an Italian Breda machine gun was mounted. Various other defects were also made good during her time in dockyard hands. For the first twelve days of February, Waterhen remained at Port Tewfik, completing repairs. On 13 February, she sailed from Port Tewfik and arrived at Port Said. During the forenoon of 14 February, Waterhen sailed in company with HM destroyer Greyhound as escort for convoy AN15, consisting of twenty merchant ships bound for Piraeus. AN15 arrived at Piraeus on the 19th. During the forenoon of the 20th, Waterhen sailed in company with Greyhound as escort for convoy AS15, consisting of twenty-one merchant ships bound for Port Said. On 24 February, AS15 arrived at Port Said. Waterhen then sailed for Alexandria, arriving there the next day. She then sailed for Tobruk on the 26th to join the Inshore Squadron, arriving there on the 27th. Waterhen was then employed on anti-submarine patrol and local defence. This routine duty would continue until the 3rd of March.

On 4 March 1941, Waterhen departed Tobruk for Alexandria in company with HM destroyer Wryneck. At 08:45 on 5 March, the two destroyers arrived at Alexandria from Tobruk. On 6 March, Waterhen sailed with the battleships Barham and Valiant, and HM destroyers Jervis, Janus, Jaguar, Hotspur and HMAS Voyager, to operate as a covering force to convoys between Alexandria and Greece. Anti-submarine (A/S) patrols were maintained off Suda Bay by the six destroyers. On 8 March, the force departed Suda Bay to cover the passage of convoys through the Kithera Strait. Joined at sea by HM destroyers Nubian and Mohawk the next day. On 10 March, Barham, Valiant, Jervis, Janus, Nubian, Mohawk, Hotspur, Voyager and Waterhen all returned to Suda Bay. On 12 March, the force departed Suda Bay to cover the passage of convoy through the Kithera Strait. They were joined by HM destroyers Ilex and Greyhound travelling from Piraeus. Hotspur and Waterhen were later detached for convoy escort duties with convoy AS19, then joined by the Flower-class corvette, HMS Hyacinth. Convoy AS19, made up of eleven merchant ships departed Piraeus on 14 March. At 18:00 on 16 March, the convoy was split up into a section for Alexandria, with Waterhen as escort, and a section for Port Said, with Hyacinth as escort. Hotspur was detached to Haifa. On 18 March, convoy AN21 departed Alexandria and Port Said in two sections. The Alexandria

section was made up of eleven merchant ships, and escort was provided by destroyers Decoy and Waterhen. The Port Said section was made up of three merchant ships, with escort being provided by the corvette Hyacinth. The two sections merged at sea on 19 March. Sometime thereafter they were joined by the anti-aircraft light cruiser, HMS Coventry. At 08:00 on 21 March, the cruiser parted company. At 16:00 that same day, the tanker Marie Maersk was attacked by five JU88s off the west coast of Crete, set on fire by bombs and abandoned by her crew. Lieutenant C G Hill, RANR, and ten sailors from Waterhen volunteered to board the tanker, extinguish the fires, then steam the tanker to Suda Bay in Crete, with HM Trawler Amber standing by just in case. Waterhen rejoined the convoy at 21:00 on the 21st, arriving at Piraeus the next day. On 24 March, Waterhen proceeded from Piraeus to Suda Bay to re-embark the salvage party from Marie Maersk. She was bombed and machine gunned by a JU88 off Milo Island. However, there was no damage to the ship and no casualties incurred. After re-embarking the salvage crew at Suda Bay, Waterhen sailed for Piraeus. Convoy AS22 departed Piraeus on 25 March. It was made up of nine merchant ships, and was escorted by the anti-aircraft cruiser Coventry, destroyers Decoy and Waterhen and the corvette Hyacinth. Both destroyers detached on 27 March to proceed ahead of the convoy to Alexandria. Convoy AS22 arrived at Alexandria on 28 March unscathed. Meanwhile, Waterhen sailed with HM destroyer Decoy to join the fleet, which was in contact with the Italian fleet during the Battle of Ionian Sea. She remained at sea on the 29th but returned to Alexandria on the 30th for boiler clean. Waterhen had spent twenty-eight days at sea during March 1941, and steamed over six thousand eight hundred miles in the process.

For the first three days of April 1941, Waterhen was at Alexandria completing her boiler clean. On 4 April, she sailed for Tobruk in company with Vendetta for operations with the Inshore Squadron, arriving at Tobruk the next day. At 10:45 on 6 April, both destroyers departed Tobruk for an anti-submarine patrol along the coast towards Sidi Barrani, and then back to Tobruk. On the same day, the troopship Ulster Prince and the transport ship Thurland Castle departed Alexandria for Tobruk, as convoy AC3. They were escorted by the anti-aircraft cruiser HMS Calcutta, and destroyers HMS Defender and HMAS Voyager. Waterhen and Vendetta conducted an anti-submarine sweep ahead of this small convoy. AC3 arrived at Tobruk on the 7th. At 09:15, Vendetta and Waterhen arrived at Tobruk from patrol. They departed again at 18:15 for an anti-submarine sweep to the east, then to escort the ABV HMS Fiona to Tobruk. The two destroyers parted company at 03:00 on the 8th to search for Fiona. The two destroyers joined company again at 09:00, having been unable to locate Fiona. They had been given the wrong coordinates for the rendezvous with the ABV. Vendetta and Waterhen returned to Tobruk at 18:45. Less than an hour later, the two destroyers departed Tobruk on patrol from which they returned at 09:15 the next day. At 17:10 Vendetta and Waterhen departed Tobruk, escorting the transport Thurland Castle to Sollum and then

onwards to Alexandria. They arrived at Sollum at 01:50 on the 10th, and unloading of Thurland Castle commenced, with the two destroyers conducting an anti-submarine patrol off the anchorage. They departed Sollum at 06:15 for Alexandria and arrived there at 22:15. At 05:40 on 11 April, Waterhen departed Alexandria for Tobruk, arriving there the next day.

Operation MDB 3, Offensive sweep along the Cyrenaican coast.

At 20:00 on 11 April, the light cruiser HMS Orion, and the destroyers Stuart, Griffin, Hasty, Jaguar and Juno, all departed Alexandria. The destroyers were to conduct an offensive sweep along the Cyrenaican coast during the night of 12/13 April. Cover for this operation was provided by the light cruisers Orion, Ajax and Perth. At 17:00 on the 12th, Jaguar and Juno parted company, followed half an hour later by Stuart and Griffin. These four were detached to conduct the sweep, while the cruisers remained to seaward as cover. Hasty remained with the cruisers for anti-submarine protection. The destroyers swept in pairs; Jaguar and Juno from Ras Toyones to Ras Tolmeita; Stuart and Griffin from Ras Tolmeita to Ras el Hilal. Two more destroyers from the Inshore Squadron, Vendetta and Waterhen, swept along the coast from Ras el Hilal to Ras el Tin. The sweep was continued until about dawn, but nothing was sighted. The destroyers then rejoined the cruisers, except for Vendetta and Waterhen which rejoined the Inshore Squadron. Perth and the destroyers then set course to Alexandria, while Orion and Ajax proceeded to a position west of Crete to provide cover for convoys to and from the Aegean. Stuart and Griffin were detached during the afternoon of the 13th for duty with the Inshore Squadron. At 17:00 on 12 April, Vendetta and Waterhen departed Tobruk for an offensive sweep towards Tolmeitha. They returned to Tobruk just before noon on the 13th.

At 16:30 on 14 April 1941, HM Hospital Ship Vita was attacked by German dive bombers outside Tobruk harbour and was badly damaged. Both Vendetta and Waterhen went to her assistance and found she had been affected by near misses and left unable to steam. Waterhen then took Vita in tow but found her unmanageable. The destroyer slipped the tow and ordered Vita to anchor. Waterhen went alongside her at 22:30 and embarked all of her four hundred and thirty-seven patients, six doctors, six nurses and forty-one SBAs. Stenning's cabin must have been very crowded that night. He had managed to salvage a number of fine quality woollen blankets from Vita for the future comfort of Waterhen's ship's company. Having completed this task, Waterhen set sail for Alexandria, while Vendetta departed for a night patrol towards Derna. The damaged Vita was later towed into Tobruk by the steam tug, HMS St. Issey.

At 19:35 on 18 April, the transport HMS Breconshire departed Alexandria for Malta, loaded with petrol and ammunition. She was escorted by HMAS Perth and Waterhen, which was relieved early on the 19th by Hotspur, which had departed Alexandria at

23:00 on the 18th to overtake. They were to rendezvous with the Fleet south-west of Kithera at dawn on the 20th. Waterhen would then set course to rendezvous with a raiding force against Bardia. On 19 April, the infantry landing ship HMS Glengyle departed Alexandria at 02:45 for a raid against Bardia. She was escorted by the anti-aircraft cruiser HMS Coventry and the destroyers Stuart, Voyager and Waterhen; the latter of the Australian trio joined at sea, because she had been employed elsewhere on other duties. The submarine HMS Triumph acted as a guiding beacon to the landing force as they ventured into the beach. Commandos were landed near Bardia during the night of 19/20 April, and operations commenced at 22:05. These were completed at 05:00 when course was set to return to Alexandria, arriving there at 22:00 on the 20th.

### Convoy AN29

This convoy departed Alexandria/Port Said on 21 April 1941. The Alexandria section consisted of the following merchant ships; MV Araybank, SS Kirkland, SS Runo, SS Themoni and SS Zealand. The convoy was formed up at 18:00, and was escorted by Vendetta, Waterhen and HM sloop Grimsby. At 13:50 on 22 April, the Port Said section joined the main body. It was made up of the merchant ships, SS Iris, SS Cassandra Louloudis, SS Rodi and SS Rokos. They did not have an escort. At 23:00 on the 22nd, a submarine was sighted on the surface ahead of the convoy. Vendetta opened fire with 'B' gun. The submarine remained on the surface and started signalling. As it was known that Greek and Yugoslav submarines were enroute to Alexandria, fire was checked. At 12:20 on the 23rd, Cassandra Louloudis was detached to Alexandria. At 15:13, the light cruiser HMS Phoebe joined the convoy. At 17:15, Iris was detached to Alexandria. At 22:00, Phoebe parted company with AN29. During the night of 23/24 April, orders were received for AN29 to proceed to Suda Bay instead of Piraeus. It had been decided by Allied command to evacuate Greece as soon as humanly possible. At 14:15 on the 24th, AN29 entered Suda Bay. On 25 April, the merchant ships SS Pennland and SS Thurland Castle left Suda Bay for Megara, to the west of Athens, where they were to embark troops being evacuated from mainland Greece. (Operation Demon). They were escorted by the anti-aircraft cruiser HMS Coventry, and HM destroyers Wryneck, Diamond and Griffin. Pennland was badly damaged by German dive bomber aircraft south of the Gulf of Athens. Four of her crew were killed, but there were no casualties among the troops on board. The derelict Pennland was shelled and sunk by Griffin, which then took the surviving crew members to Suda Bay. Thurland Castle was also damaged by bombing but was able to continue. The destroyers Waterhen, Vendetta, Hasty, Havock and Decoy were also sent to support the Megara effort. Each destroyer embarked troops at Megara, with a total of five thousand five hundred being evacuated during the night of 25/26 April 1941.

Operation Demon continued; more troops were to be evacuated from mainland Greece during the night of 26/27 April 1941, from the Nauplia and Tolon area in particular;

landing ship HMS Glenearn, troopships Slammat, and Khedive Ismael, anti-aircraft cruiser Calcutta and destroyers Isis, Hotspur, Griffin, Diamond and Havock. Slammat was late in leaving Nauplia in the early morning, delaying the convoy's sailing. She was then bombed and wrecked south of the Argolic Gulf, shortly after 07:00. Diamond was then left behind to rescue the survivors, which she did. At 09:25, Diamond signalled that she had picked up most of the survivors and that she had set course for Suda Bay. She had also fired a torpedo into the blazing wreck, and Slammat sank shortly afterwards. The destroyers Wryneck, Vendetta and Waterhen were then sent out to assist the Nauplia group. Of these Wryneck was ordered to assist Diamond. Wryneck arrived just as Slammat sank. Both destroyers were then attacked and sunk in the early afternoon by German JU88s, resulting in a heavy loss of life. Only twenty-seven survivors were picked up the next day by Griffin.

#### Convoy GA14

This convoy was formed at sea, north of Crete, from ships which had been participating in Operation Demon, the evacuation of troops from the Greek mainland. GA14 consisted of the transports SS City of London, Costa Rica, Khedive Ismael, as well as the landing ship HMS Glengyle. Close escort was made up of the anti-aircraft cruisers Coventry and Calcutta, the destroyers Stuart, Vampire, Vendetta and Waterhen, and the sloop HMS Flamingo. While the convoy was being formed, Costa Rica was bombed north of Crete by enemy aircraft. She was taken in tow by the destroyer HMS Defender but sank north-west of Suda Bay. The troops and her crew were saved. Cover for this convoy was provided by light cruisers Perth and Phoebe, and the destroyers Decoy, Defender, Hasty, Hereward, Hero and Nubian. These ships returned to Suda Bay in the afternoon of the 27th. GA14 arrived at Alexandria on the 29th.

#### Convoy GA15

This convoy was formed north of Crete on 29 April 1941, heading for Alexandria/Port Said where it arrived on 1 May. GA15 consisted of the following transports: SS Comliebank, and Corinthia, MV Delane, Ionia, Itria, SS Thurland Castle, and the RFA Oiler Brambleleaf. Escort was provided by the anti-aircraft cruiser Carlisle, destroyers Kandahar, Kingston, and the sloop Auckland. Cover was provided by the light cruisers Orion, Ajax, Perth, Nubian, and destroyers Decoy, Defender, Hasty, Hereward and Nubian. During an aerial attack, Nubian was near missed by bombs, sustaining minor damage.

The battleships Barham and Valiant, the aircraft carrier Formidable, and the destroyers Stuart, Vampire, Vendetta, Voyager, Waterhen and HMS Greyhound sailed from Alexandria to support GA15. The forces met south of Kaso Strait on 30 April where Perth, Phoebe and Nubian joined the force. This force was also joined by three more destroyers, Ilex, Jaguar and Juno, coming from Malta where they had sailed on the 28th.

Perth and Nubian were, however, soon detached and joined the close escort of GA15, briefly before they went on ahead to Alexandria. At 17:27 on 1 May, Jaguar and Juno attacked a submarine contact. During this attack, a depth charge exploded prematurely onboard Juno, causing some damage to the ship. Five of the crew were killed by this mishap. Eleven more were wounded. The submarine was later identified in official reports as the Italian Turchese. On 2 May 1941, HM destroyers Hasty, Imperial, Jaguar, Juno and Kandahar departed Alexandria to join the fleet and relieve Stuart, Vampire, Vendetta, Voyager and Waterhen, which then proceeded ahead of the fleet to Alexandria, arriving in the evening of 2 May.

On 1 May, Waterhen was at sea, forming part of the escort to the Fleet covering convoys from Greece to Alexandria. By 2 May, Waterhen had returned to Alexandria, where she remained until the 5th, when she proceeded to sea in company with Voyager taking military personnel and logistics to Tobruk. She arrived at Tobruk at 02:30 on the 6th, then sailed for Alexandria at 05:45 with many wounded, and units being relieved, before arriving back at Alexandria at 19:30. On 7 May, Waterhen sailed with Stuart as escort to convoy AN30 for Suda Bay, Crete. This convoy had sailed in two sections, one from Haifa and one from Port Said. The Haifa section sailed on 5 May. There was only one ship, the transport SS Cape Horn, escorted by HM sloop Grimsby. The Port Said section sailed on 6 May and consisted of the transports SS City of Canterbury, Lossiebank and Rawnsley. On departure from Port Said, they were escorted by HM sloop Flamingo. Vampire had departed Alexandria at 21:50 on the 6th to go to the aid of City of Canterbury, which had broken down while on AN30 from Port Said to Suda Bay. City of Canterbury was sighted at 01:55 on the 7th. She was making repairs, which were completed by 02:15. Course was then set to rejoin AN30. During the forenoon of the 7th, Vampire encountered Flamingo with the remainder of the Port Said section. They had been delayed due to defects in Rawnsley. Vampire then proceeded with the other two ships to rendezvous with the Haifa section, which on the 7th had been joined by Stuart and Waterhen coming from Alexandria. HM sloop Auckland also joined on the 7th, as Stuart had developed defects and had to part company later that same day. AN30 was in formation by 13:00 on the 7th, and by 20:00 Flamingo and Rawnsley had caught up. During the afternoon of 8 May, AN30 was attacked by torpedo bombers near Kaso Strait. Rawnsley was hit, and then taken in tow by Grimsby with Waterhen as escort. On the 9th, Grimsby had towed Rawnsley to an anchorage south of Crete. On the 10th, Waterhen parted company, and proceeded to Suda Bay. During the afternoon she sailed to escort City of Canterbury to Alexandria, arriving there on the 12th. From 13 to 17 May, Waterhen was at Alexandria, replenishing fuel, ammunition and stores, and attending to an ever-increasing list of defects. At 01:30 on the 18th, the infantry landing ship Glengyle departed Alexandria with troops for Crete which were to be landed at Messara Bay, near Tympaki on the south coast. She was escorted by the anti-aircraft cruiser HMS Coventry and the destroyers Voyager and Waterhen. At 23:30 that same

day, they arrived off the dis-embarkation beach. By 04:00 on the 19th, landing of troops had been completed and course was set to return to Alexandria where they arrived at 08:00 on the 20th, but not before being bombed and strafed by aircraft at 10:20 the day before.

From 20 to 22 May, Waterhen attempted to undertake a boiler clean, but due to the urgent requirements of the day, this was never completed. On 22 May, Waterhen departed Alexandria with troops and logistics for Tobruk, arriving there at 23:50 the next day. At 02:30 on the 24th Waterhen departed Tobruk for Alexandria. In the ship were many wounded soldiers and units being relieved. As Stenning noted:

‘It was essential to leave Tobruk before 02:00 - then, with the numbers of wounded (varying from 30 to 170) and unwounded troops (from 50 to 250) on board (the stretcher cases were always placed on the seamen’s messdeck) seamen had to find somewhere to rest. This they did in odd corners of deck space, often exposed to spray, wind and cold. They also had to continue their watches as required. Some seamen even spent their watch below helping to care for the wounded. On return to port, they had to start and unload again and then clean their mess decks. This went on for three consecutive nights and days. Everyone on board felt the strain but particularly the seamen and sick berth attendants upon whom most of the work descended.’

From 25 to 29 May, Waterhen remained at Alexandria to complete her unfinished boiler clean. On 30 May, Waterhen departed Alexandria with troops and logistics for Tobruk where she arrived at 23:00 on the same day. At 02:00 on the 31st Waterhen departed Tobruk with wounded for Alexandria where she arrived at 17:00. There are no further detailed Reports of Proceedings available for Waterhen, due to the loss of the ship on 29 June 1941.

However, before that fateful day, life continued to be busy and tiring for all I Waterhen. On 1 June, Waterhen departed Alexandria for Tobruk. She returned to Alexandria at 16:20 on the 4th. At 21:00 on 10 June, Voyager and Waterhen departed Alexandria for Mersa Matruh, where they arrived at 06:30 on the 11th. After embarking logistics, they departed for Tobruk at 13:00. They arrived at Tobruk some ten hours later and unloaded their logistics. They departed again at 00:15 with evacuees, including members of the pro Allies Senussi tribe. The two destroyers arrived at Mersa Matruh at 09:30 on the 12th. At 13:00 on 13 June, Voyager and Waterhen departed Mersa Matruh loaded with logistics for Tobruk where they arrived at 23:45. Unloading of stores took just over an hour to complete. At 00:50, both destroyers departed for Alexandria/Mersa Matruh. Voyager arrived at Alexandria at 14:50, while Waterhen had been detached off Mersa Matruh sometime earlier. At 13:55 on 15 June, Vendetta and Waterhen departed Mersa Matruh with troops, ammunition, logistics and mail for Tobruk, arriving at 23:15 that same day. They departed again at 01:55 on the 16th with troops to take to Alexandria

where they arrived at 16:30. At 06:00 on 17 June, Vendetta and Waterhen departed Alexandria for another run to Tobruk arriving at 23:30 that same day. They departed again with wounded and troops for Mersa Matruh at 00:50, arriving at Mersa Matruh at 0930 on the 18th. At 14:10 on 19 June, Vendetta and Waterhen departed Mersa Matruh for Tobruk. They had embarked ammunition, mail and troops. After arriving at Tobruk at 00:10 on the 20th, they departed again at 02:20, with wounded and some troops on board. At 06:00 on 22 June, Vendetta and Waterhen departed Alexandria for another run to Tobruk where they arrived at 23:20. They departed again at 01:20 with prisoners of war (POW) for Mersa Matruh, arriving there at 09:20. On 24 June, at 13:40. Vendetta and Waterhen departed Mersa Matruh for Tobruk, having embarked ammunition, logistics and troops.

At 19:30 while in transit, they were ordered to proceed to the aid of the two sloops, HMAS Parramatta and HMS Auckland. During aerial attacks, Auckland had been sunk, and the small tanker - Pass of Balmaha - they were escorting had been damaged. When the destroyers arrived on the scene at 21:00, Parramatta was in the process of picking up survivors from Auckland, so Waterhen took the damaged Pass of Balmaha under tow and headed towards Tobruk, screened by Vendetta until the destroyer parted company to proceed to Tobruk to unload the much-needed ammunition she had on board. Vendetta arrived at Tobruk at 02:15 and departed at 02:55, with a few troops on board. Due to her delayed arrival, she had been unable to unload all the ammunition. On departure, Vendetta encountered Waterhen in the searched channel, passing the tow to a small tug. Both destroyers then set course to Alexandria, as there was no time left to safely unload Waterhen. They arrived back at Alexandria at 17:00.

On 28 June, HMS Defender and Waterhen departed Alexandria with logistics for Tobruk, where they arrived later the same day. During the night of 28/29 June, Defender and Waterhen landed the logistics at Tobruk. They sailed from Tobruk for Alexandria, carrying soldiers from the 6th (Australian) Division. In 1945 on the 29th, the two destroyers were off Sollum when they came under attack from 19 JU87s, twelve of which were German, and seven Italian. It was one of the Italians who scored the fatal hit on Waterhen, dropping a thousand-pound bomb onto the stern of the destroyer. The explosion caused the immediate flooding of the engine and boiler rooms. The situation appeared desperate from the outset, and Waterhen was abandoned, all the crew being taken aboard Defender, which had first attempted to tow the damaged ship, before it became apparent that she was beyond salvage. In the immediate area, the Italian submarine Tambien had witnessed the attack, and attempted to close the cripple to deliver a coup-de-grace but was detected by Defender and forced to fire her torpedoes blindly, thereby missing the intended target. Waterhen finally capsized and sank at 01:50 on the 30th, seven nautical miles north of Sidi-el-Barrani. Defender returned to Alexandria later on the 30th with HMS Jackal which had been sent from Alexandria to

help the crippled Waterhen. There were no casualties on Waterhen, save for one sailor with minor injuries. Through official channels, Stenning was permitted to reassure his immediate family that he was safe and not injured, before news of Waterhen's sinking was released to the media some eight days later.

From 30 June to 16 July 1941, Stenning was temporarily appointed to HMAS Stuart. Then, on 17 July, he was appointed to HMAS Perth as assistant surgeon to Surgeon Lieutenant Commander E M Tymms, RANR. Seventy Waterhen survivors took passage in Perth as she headed home to Australia to be taken into dockyard hands for a thorough refit and upgrade. In six months of continuous active service with the Mediterranean Fleet, Perth had been involved in several fleet actions, attacked several times by enemy aircraft, and had transported British, Australian and New Zealand soldiers to Greece, then evacuated many of these men following a massive German offensive. Perth had also relocated some of these men to Crete. She had further been involved in the defence of that island, before taking part later in the hasty withdrawal of its defenders. Perth had also suffered serious damage by German bombing on her last voyage when heading away from Crete but had been temporarily repaired enough to support the British push on Syria and Lebanon, and their capture from the Vichy French. However, it was way past time for Perth to be properly repaired, updated and modernised in an Australian dockyard. At 17:00 on 18 July, Perth slipped and proceeded out of Alexandria Harbour for the final time. On 12 August, the cruiser entered Sydney Harbour, and at 08:45 secured to No. 1 Buoy at Farm Cove. The next day, Perth was de-ammunitioned, with work continuing this task until it was completed that afternoon. Perth was then ready to be cold moved alongside Garden Island, so that the dockyard workers could begin her refit. These were the times when Garden Island was still an island, and there was no graving dock. While Garden Island could repair damage to her hull above the wind and waterline, and her superstructure, dismantle and calibrate her armament, the repairs to Perth's underwater hull and fittings had to be undertaken at Cockatoo Island's Sutherland Dock. These were undertaken from 18 August to 24 September 1941, when repairs to tanks, underwater structure, and shaft realignment due to bomb damage, were carried out. It was also the logical time for the hull to be cleaned of marine growth and repainted with anti-fouling paint, on the external underwater hull, up to and including the boot topping.

On Tuesday 19 August 1941, the marriage of Olivia, the only child of Mr and Mrs Herbert Themson, Adelaide Street, Malvern, and Surgeon-Lieutenant Samuel Edward Lees Stenning RANR, second son of Mr and Mrs G S Stenning of Bondi, Sydney, was quietly celebrated in the Angel Chapel at St. John's Church, Toorak, Victoria. The Rev. Dr A Law officiated at the ceremony and the bride was given away by her father. Both the bride and bridegroom were unattended. A small informal reception was held at the home of the bride's parents.

In early October, Perth was again cold moved from Cockatoo, shifting back alongside Garden Island, with the refit scheduled to be completed by the end of the month. However, on 18 October, there was a fire onboard, which destroyed the electrical cables leading to the director control tower atop the bridge, delaying the refit by a further four weeks while the cabling was replaced. On a brighter note, one of the refit requirements with a direct effect on both Stenning and Tymms, was the fitment of an air-conditioning system to Perth's sickbay. Captain H L M Waller DSO\*, RAN, assumed command on 24 October. On 24 November, Perth conducted full power sea trials off the eastern seaboard of New South Wales. In early December, Perth undertook a series of post-refit trials and tilt-testing before rejoining the fleet. On 8 December, Perth was deployed with the County-class heavy cruiser, HMAS Canberra, for patrol duties in the Tasman Sea. On 12 December, Perth escorted a US troop convoy in company with Canberra, for the final part of its voyage to Australia. On 19 December, Perth escorted a US troop convoy to New Caledonia, in company with Canberra and the New Zealand light cruiser HMNZS Achilles, and on 22 December returned to Sydney with Canberra and Achilles. Then on 29 December, Perth escorted military convoy ZK5, comprising of requisitioned ships SS Aquitania, Herstein, and Sarpedon, from Sydney to Port Moresby, New Guinea, in company with County-class cruisers Australia and Canberra, HMNZS Achilles, and HMA sloops Swan and Warrego. The convoy was carrying over four thousand five hundred troops, including Citizen Military Forces (CMF) men, who thought they were going on manoeuvres for their training. Instead, they and their equipment were landed in Port Moresby. On 13 January 1942, Perth in company with Achilles, escorted TEV Rangatira, transporting B Section of B Force Extension of the 2nd New Zealand Army Expeditionary Force, embarked at Auckland on Rangatira, TSS Monowai, TSS Wahine, and the Port cargo-liner MV Port Montreal, then headed for Fiji. On 29 January, Perth transferred to ANZAC Force with RAN cruisers Australia, Adelaide, Canberra and Hobart, under overall command of US naval command.

Perth was originally scheduled to remain in eastern home waters within what was then designated as the ANZAC Area, while Canberra underwent a refit. However, the Australian War Cabinet of the day agreed to meet a request by the United States for the deployment of Perth to the American-British-Dutch-Australian (ABDA) area immediately, and while doing so to escort a convoy proceeding to the ABDA area. On 31 January, Perth sailed from Sydney, reaching Fremantle on 10 February, to relieve the elderly light cruiser HMAS Adelaide on the 15th, as escort for convoy MS4 of four empty oil tankers and two cargo ships on a mission to retrieve as much oil from the Dutch East Indies as they could, before Japanese forces invaded. On 21 February, after the fall of Singapore, Perth and MS4 were ordered to return to Fremantle. Shortly thereafter, Perth replenished and took passage northwards to join the Western Striking force of ABDA command in the East Indies. On 24 February, Perth joined with HM County-class cruiser Exeter, Hobart and HM destroyers Jupiter, Electra and Encounter at Tanjong Priok. The

next day, Perth and the ships mentioned above, were transferred to the Eastern Striking force at Surabaya, with the exception of Hobart, which had been damaged by recent air attacks. On 27 February, Perth joined the Combined Striking force, consisting of the Dutch cruisers De Ruyter and Java, HMS Exeter, US cruiser Houston, HM destroyers Electra, Encounter and Jupiter, Dutch destroyers De-Witte and Kortenaer, and US destroyers John D Edwards, Alden and John D F Ford.

Waller reported to Navy HQ for a conference with the Dutch Admiral, and the other ships' commanding officers. It would be the first and last of these. When Waller returned to Perth it was obvious to his own officers that he was not pleased with the hasty and confused instructions he had been given. How could a multi-national fleet with no previous operational service combine into an effective fighting force? But despite that, morale in Perth was good, and the ship's company, although tense, believed the Allied force would engage the elusive Japanese as soon as possible and do the greatest amount of damage to their invasion force. Very few in Perth were privy to the concerns Waller had regarding the lack of preparation and cohesion of the multi-national Allied fleet. Service with the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean had given him hard earned battle experience, lacking in many of the COs of other Allied ships. However, now he needed to reassure his own ship's company when he conveyed to them the following message, 'We hope to meet the Japanese tonight and give them hell.' The Japanese were not sighted that night, or the following morning. While closed up at action stations the ship's company sweated profusely in the tropical heat, and exhaustion increased exponentially, as the temperature rose. With regards to these conditions, Stenning was to write: 'I place special stress on the appalling conditions in those places under action conditions in the tropics.' Of those days in Perth during February 1942, he also wrote, 'conditions were at their worst.'

### Battle of the Java Sea

In the ensuing battle of the Java Sea, fought over the night of 27/28 February, the Allied force was soundly beaten by a Japanese force which was able to exploit its superiority over the four-nation Allied (ABDA) force, in terms of long-range gunnery, modern torpedoes, night fighting experience, crews which had been rested, and its uniformity in signalling and communication. The two Dutch cruisers were sunk and Exeter badly damaged, while most of the destroyers were either sunk or withdrew as their torpedoes were exhausted. Waller, as the senior surviving officer, assumed command, and without hesitation ordered a retreat to Tanjong Priok. In an official report, Commander H E Eccles, USN, CO of the destroyer USS John D Edwards later wrote of his impressions of the battle:

'A tragic commentary on the futility of attempting to oppose a powerful, determined, well-equipped and organised enemy by makeshift improvisation. It was evident that the

Dutch had little tactical experience: their knowledge of communications was rudimentary; and they went under the assumption that a hastily organised, uncoordinated force of ships, from three navies, could be assembled and taken into a major action.'

Perth's crew was very fatigued. There had been little chance of a rest in four days. The battle of the Java Sea, constant aerial alarms and enemy contacts, required much by way of vigilance, plus physical and mental exertion. Action Stations had been manned for more than half the period. Meals had been irregular. There had been no time to shower or for a change clothes. Engineering personnel were exhausted by the sustained effort, as were the gun crews, and ammunition supply parties. The tropical conditions also intensified the time spent at first and second states of readiness. Stenning was in the wardroom, having just called in from seeing Commander Martin, Perth's Executive Officer (XO), who had sprained an ankle, but was nonetheless cheerful and confident. He reiterated to Stenning that: 'We've just had a signal from a Dutch recce flight that Sunda Strait is clear. We're going to Tjilatjap to fuel. We're alright now.' Stenning was in his white overalls, festooned with medical paraphernalia; scissors, hypodermic syringes, and vials of morphia. Returning to the wardroom, he looked around at the emergency casualty station set up there. The portable operating table, and a smaller table holding surgical instruments, had not been used. Stenning and his assistants had waited out the previous day's battle without any casualties, and no one present regretted this at all. Taking heart from his conversation with the XO, and a recent broadcast made by Waller, Stening told his medical team they could relax, and that he was going to his cabin to get his head down for a while, some small recovery after almost thirty hours of constant endogenous trepidation.

Perth and Houston had been able to break-off the action, and sailed to Tanjong Priok, where they were only partially replenished. Orders were then received for the two cruisers to sail through the Sunda Strait on Java's south coast. They sailed at 19:00 on 28 February and set course for the west of the Strait, Perth leading, with Houston five cables astern. At 23:00, Perth arrived at the entrance to Sunda Strait. At 23:05, a vessel was sighted at about five miles distant, close to Saint Nicholas Point. When challenged, the vessel proved to be a Japanese destroyer, and was immediately engaged. A short time later, other destroyers were sighted to the north. The main armament was ordered to take independent control, so each turret officer could choose his own targets. Perth and Houston had met the Japanese invasion force assigned to western Java. Intelligence reports had been either outdated, or completely wrong. Sunda Strait was not clear. In fact, it was full of ships, none of them friendly. The two cruisers had inadvertently stumbled into a huge armada. Just a few miles away, in Bantam Bay, close to Saint Nicholas Point, large numbers of Japanese transports were disembarking troops who would quickly overwhelm and occupy Java.

Stenning was woken from a deep sleep. For a moment he wondered where he was. The loud booming of the 6-inch guns soon brought him back to reality. Pulling on his white overalls, he ran to the wardroom. His team was looking apprehensive; and Chaplain Mathieson asked what he could do to help. Stenning replied to everyone generally, 'We just wait.' There was nothing to do just then, but soon there would likely be much to do. It started with just a few, then a torrent of men with gruesome wounds arrived. Those slightly wounded were still at their action stations, fighting as best they could. Stenning and Tymms were soon swamped, treating men with arms and legs missing, riddled with shrapnel, and those burned beyond recognition. The SBAs made quick decisions regarding who had a fighting chance of being saved, and those who didn't. While Tymms had served as a commissioned surgeon on a part-time basis since 1935, nothing could have prepared either doctor for the carnage they were vainly trying to deal with in Perth.

The first of four torpedoes hit forward on the starboard side, destroying the forward boiler room and damage control headquarters. The explosion was felt throughout the ship, with men blown off their feet. With half her means of propulsion lost, Perth slowed considerably, making her almost impossible to manoeuvre. The possibility of breaking off the action and making for Sunda Strait was most unlikely. Then the second torpedo hit. Waller was heard to say, 'well that's torn it', before he gave the order to abandon ship. Many were slow to react to this order; it seemed rather strange that this was the end of their ship. Those who made it to the upper deck in response to the order, found only mangled wreckage. Then, two more torpedoes hit Perth's tortured hull, which was now gradually sinking.

Stenning ordered his team to obey the order 'to abandon ship' and make their way to the upper deck, where he joined them after first checking that adjacent compartments had been vacated. Many of the most serious casualties had been taken to the sick bay forward, which was a grisly vision of dead and seriously wounded. Neither Tymms nor the dentist, Lieut. Commander Trigear, were seen to abandon ship. As soon as the wardroom was cleared, Stenning made his way aft to a now unfamiliar quarterdeck, joining those men about to leave their ship. When the third torpedo hit, Stenning decided to abandon ship via the stern, clear of the still turning propellers. However, as he went to leap over the side, a fourth torpedo hit, blasting him back onto the quarterdeck, knocking him senseless. As luck would have it, he was washed overboard by the deluge of water caused by the exploding torpedo. Medical examination would later ascertain that as a result of this dumping he had been badly concussed, was now suffering from a broken nose and a badly wrenched right knee and was only able to focus properly with his left eye. To say that Stenning was confused is probably an understatement. He had a demented view that Perth was going to roll over him as it sank. He became extremely irrational and had to be rescued and put back on a raft several times before a punch from one of his shipmates knocked him out. When he regained consciousness Stening was

his usual affable self. Perth sank at 00:30 on Sunday, 1st of March 1942, when she settled on the bottom of Bantam Bay. She took with her about two hundred of her ship's company, including her commanding officer, Captain H L M Waller, DSO\*, RAN, and one of her two doctors, Surgeon Lieutenant Commander E M Tymms, DSC, RANR. Those who survived floated in a warm sea coated with a slick, glutinous layer of furnace fuel oil, scattered with several rafts, the visible heads of survivors, wreckage, and the corpses of former shipmates. They watched as USS Houston gave her all, on fire from stem to stern, but defiant to the end, finally sinking at just on 00:45. The unequal Battle of Sunda Strait was now over.

At dawn, several of the Japanese destroyers came close to the groups of survivors, some to gloat, yet others to rescue some of the survivors. Stening was one of the fortunate ones who found himself rescued by a Japanese destroyer. As each man came aboard, they had to take off their oil-soaked clothes and toss them overboard. The captain was particular about staining his decks with oil residue. However, he sent his now prisoner's buckets of warm water, soft soap and kerosene to remove some of the oil from their bodies. After explaining he had no doctor onboard, he also provided a bottle of lotion with which to treat the worst of the oil-burnt eyes. The survivors were herded aft and sprayed with disinfectant from a stirrup pump, like so many bugs or insects. Each man received a bag of biscuits, a few cigarettes and a G-string styled Fundoshi, then spent the afternoon as best they could on the unshaded steel deck. Stening managed to crawl under the torpedo tubes and stayed there until a Japanese sailor forcibly removed him. Before the survivors were transferred to a larger destroyer in the late afternoon, the Japanese captain summoned John Harper, the senior Perth officer, along with Neville Lyons and several other officers forward, seated them at a table, and gave them tea and made a speech. 'Your country will be proud of you. You have been heroes. It is seldom that two ships have done so much damage. You need have no fear of your future, for we Japanese recognize brave people.' But later, as Len Smith was going over the side to the other destroyer, the Japanese captain put his hand on his arm, and said, 'You put up a good fight, I am very sorry, but now you are handed over to the military.' Smith was under no apprehension that the captain's words were meant as both an apology and a warning.

The survivors were transferred to the other Japanese destroyer at sunset in Bantam Bay. As they entered the bay, thousands of Japanese soldiers, still waiting to go ashore from the troopships, waved their caps and shouted 'Banzai!' However, the men from Perth noted with grim satisfaction, the ruins of five ships, including a seaplane carrier and a big transport either sunk in the shallow water or beached, recipients of attention from Perth and Houston's guns and torpedoes from the night before. On the larger destroyer, Japanese treatment varied. Crew members with fixed bayonets guarded their prisoners and stabbed at anyone who attempted to move forward of a cord strung across the

quarterdeck. One of the Japanese sailors brought a bucket of water and sneered as he splashed it on the hot deck in front of the thirsty prisoners. Another struck a prisoner with his fist, and another kicked a wounded man. And yet others, when they opened a packet of cigarettes, offered them to the Australians. John Harper asked for an awning to offer some shade for the prisoners, particularly the wounded, but when the Japanese guards tried to force him back by stabbing at him with their bayonets, he brazenly brushed them aside with both hands and walked through the shocked guards to a small group of Japanese officers. He again asked for an awning - and got one, frapped up by the ship's quarterdeck party. That night, almost two hundred near naked, hungry and thirsty men, some of them wounded or injured, and many ill, tried to sleep in a space suitable for perhaps fifty. John Woods dozed, squatting with his knees under his chin, back-to-back with someone else. Len Smith managed to stretch out, but with men lying across his legs. Stening slept on a plank over the water at the stern, not realising that his bed had been the Japanese Navy's crude form of toilet on board that destroyer. For the prisoners, time spent on the two Japanese destroyers had little or no real meaning. Time was taken up with pain from wounds, burnt eyes, aching muscles, blistered feet, hunger, thirst and lack of sleep. Men had little need in those first few days of captivity to think of their future as prisoners of the Japanese. Living then meant having the willpower to survive, and not much else. Only later did these men begin to query their chances of survival as prisoners of war of the Japanese.

At dawn on 3 March, they were moved to the hold of the Japanese transport, *Somedono Maru*, where they were kept for the next four days. The prisoners were provided with water and food - a bucket of rice and a few sardines between twenty men - but many could not eat the rice and went hungry. They now had time to get some of the oil off their bodies and rest their damaged eyes in the dim light of the open hold. Some slept continuously for two days. Then, suddenly a stroke of good fortune came their way which made their lives just a little more bearable. On the day the Japanese invaded Java, the Royal Navy auxiliary minesweeper, *HMS Rahman*, was at Tanjong Priok under the command of a Lieutenant Commander Upton. Upton decided he would attempt to run the gauntlet through Sunda Strait, even though he knew his ship would probably be sunk. But before he departed Tanjong Priok, he fully provisioned the abandoned yacht *White Wings*, and put some of his crew on board her, ordering them to follow him out. As Upton had suspected, the Japanese sank the *Rahman* in Sunda Strait. Upton, and several members of his crew, survived the sinking, and, in turn, were rescued by *White Wings*. However, the Japanese captured *White Wings* and brought her to Bantam Bay, where they permitted Upton to transfer most of its stores and provisions to the prison hold of *Somedono Maru*. It was because of these provisions and stores that the prisoners got small amounts of sugar, tea, jam, milk, cigarettes and clothing, and even some curtains and tablecloths with which to make some clothing items. In the *White Wings* lucky dip, it was Stening who got a pair of blue shorts and made himself a shirt by cutting a hole in

a green tablecloth. He took charge of the tinned milk and doled it out to the wounded. He could not walk properly because of his injured knee and was still very ill from concussion; there were periods of that time in the hold which were still very vague. He remembered, however, crawling across to look at Petty Officer Steward William Davis's broken leg, and helping another badly wounded man, but apart from these two, the wounded and sick were brought to him by Sick Bay Petty Officer James Cunningham, who gave so much of his time to these men, that he never appeared to rest. Without drugs or instruments, and with only strips of curtains to bind wounds, Stening did what he could to alleviate the pain. Some, however, were beyond even basic first aid, and one with serious internal injuries, died in agony. Stening could do nothing to make his dying easier except hold his head. He sat for an hour holding this person, ruminating to himself as he felt the man's life slipping away, 'How long will it be before we also die?'

Five days after Perth's sinking the survivors were taken ashore at Merak, on Java, opposite Toppers Island, and lined up against the cliffs facing six machine guns. Davis, still naked, lay on a plank he had been brought ashore on. His leg, with the bone ends sticking out, was festered and flyblown. Stening's injured knee had stiffened, and he also lay prostrate on the ground. Able Seaman John Woods, Gunner Len Smith, and Schoolmaster Neville Lyons stood. Lyons had a strip of lace curtain draped around his middle, Smith wore shorts, and Woods was still naked and still black with oil. They waited. The rain swished across them and stopped, then swished again. They waited, watching the black malicious barrels of the machine guns and the blank inscrutable faces of the Japanese formed up behind them. The prisoners waited to be massacred - to fall at the base of the red cliffs along the shoreline of the grey expanse of the Sunda Strait. Without warning, a Japanese officer, speaking through a Javanese interpreter, snarled at them, 'If you behave like English gentlemen, you will be well treated. If you try to escape, you will be shot.' A whisper, a collective sigh, rippled through the Australian prisoners, but no one uttered a sound, as the rain started to pour again. But much worse than anything they had faced thus far, worse even in many ways than facing those machine guns and thinking, 'I'll be dead soon,' was a poster Lyons saw soon after as they were being loaded into trucks near Merak railway station. The poster was of the Blue Mountains, emblazoned with the wording 'Come to Sunny New South Wales.'

From Somedono Maru, the prisoners were taken to the town of Serang in western Java, heckled and jeered at by the native populace enroute. It was here that about half their number were housed in the local native jail, and the other half were accommodated in the local cinema. The jail was built of concrete, and they found it very difficult to rest on the concrete without clothing or pillows. Doctors were locked behind bars and could not tend their patients for at least ten days, during which clean wounds became infected. After ten days, Stening's daily medical duty took him, barefoot over a hot tarred road to the cinema about six hundred tortuous yards away, where he did a daily

'sick-call' for well in excess of a hundred men. Medical supplies and dressings were extremely scarce. Stening had one pair of dressing forceps and one pair of scissors, and with these he removed shrapnel and did other minor surgery. For the treatment of dysentery and diarrhoea he was provided with a half kerosene tin of magnesium sulphate and a small supply of charcoal. Then there were cases of malaria, and for this Stening was provided with a bottle of two hundred tablets of quinine - for over six hundred men. Food was provided twice a day, but in miniscule amounts. Thankfully, there were only two deaths in the so-called camp for the four weeks Stening was there. Then on 4 April 1942, Stening and twelve other naval officers from Perth and Houston were taken to Batavia, where they were embarked in the requisitioned troop transport IJA 980, *Atsuta Maru*, sailing for Japan the next day. Stening noted that the voyage via Singapore, Saigon and two Taiwanese ports took a month, and that the food and treatment onboard were 'much superior to anything we had yet had and greatly helped us regain strength on the way.' Once they arrived in Japan, Stening's party was taken straight to an interrogation camp near Yokohama. In this camp, communication with the other prisoners was strictly forbidden; their diet was about twelve hundred calories a day, and it was here that Stening's party languished for five months. Stening attempted to assume the duties of camp medical officer, until a difference of opinion with a Japanese naval medical orderly led to both Stening and his patient being severely beaten with sticks as the main event of a special parade. Soon after this episode, deficiency diseases began to appear. Some men developed oedema (fluid retention), and some developed signs of pellagra (niacin deficiency). Pellagra was almost always intolerably itchy.

It was while Stening and his small group were in this camp, they were informed that they were not prisoners of war, but still the enemy; the only difference being they were now unarmed and would not become prisoners until they entered a recognised prisoner-of-war camp. They officially became prisoners when Stening and his group were fortunate enough to be sent to the next camp, Zentsuji POW camp at Kagawa, Shikoku. There were several medical officers in this camp, American, British and Australian; but only two American doctors were permitted to practice. After almost two months of rest and recuperation at this camp, a special party of doctors and medical orderlies was hurriedly organised by their captors. They were to be sent west to Moji on the Island of Kyushu, for the relief of prisoners brought to Japan in IJA 28, *Singapore Maru*. On 30 October 1942, this ship had left Singapore for Takao, Formosa, with one thousand and eighty-one POWs aboard. By the time *Singapore Maru* arrived at Moji, on 25 November, sixty-three POWs had died at sea as a result of the deplorable conditions they were forced to endure, and a further two hundred died before the ship reached Japan. Three hundred and twenty POWs were left on board, many of them dying of starvation, dysentery and other diseases. Only six hundred and seventy-seven POWs disembarked at Moji. On 29 November 1942, the medical party formed at Zentsuji, consisting of eight

medical officers, one dental officer and thirty medical orderlies, left by train for Moji. Arriving at Moji, this party was divided into three sections. Stening was a member of Lieutenant Commander T Moe's party, composed of Moe himself, Lieutenant J Eppley USN, Stening, and eight USN corpsmen. The three parties were sent in different directions. Moe's party proceeded to the dockside to the ship, Singapore Maru, which was flying Flag Q. On the dockside beside the ship were stacked piles of rough coffins, and besides these, small groups of haggard, sick and disconsolate men. This confronting situation was described by Stening when he wrote:

'We were told that we had to shift the men still remaining at and in the ship to a small ferry and then to convey them to a hospital, well stocked with everything we were likely to require and then care for these men and restore them to health. We climbed up a very rickety ladder and descended into the forward holds of the ship and there we were taken aback by the indescribably horrible scene which met our outraged eyes.

'By the time Lieutenant Commander Moe's party arrived, all the fit prisoners and the majority of patients had left or been removed from the ship. The remainder (to be our responsibility) were the very sick men in the ship and those watching us with sad eyes on the dockside. None of these men had any winter clothing and many had no long trousers. Our party divested itself of our heavy overcoats and put them over the patients. Then, after leading those men we found on the dock to the small junk, which was to be our ferry, we proceeded to board the ship again.

'Down in the forward hold once more and gazed upon a filthy odorous mass of rubbish, excreta, food, clothing, equipment amongst which we could see here and there a body which may or may not have been still living. Quickly we ran over the inmates of that forward hold. We found four dead and two almost dead. The remainder were in varying stages of sickness from moderately severe to hopeless cases. There was one man there who was not suffering from illness but solely from complete exhaustion. This man, single handed, had cared for, fed, comforted and nursed the sick men in that hold until he could do no more. He had watched men die and had nursed some to near health again.

'With scanty materials we had to try to nurse back to health men suffering from the most severe dysentery and malnutrition. Our party stayed three months on that job, and less than sixty percent of our patients walked out with us. The remainder are buried somewhere in Japan. For the next few months our small party of eleven travelled to several other camps for similar emergencies. The Japanese civilians never interfered with us, and our guards always made sure we always had a comfortable seat by forcibly ejecting the appropriate number of civilians. Touring Japan came to a close in October 1943, when I was sent to a new camp on the north coast of Honshu Island.'

From October 1943 until June 1944, Stening was senior officer, and the only Allied medical officer at Osaka POW Camp, Oeyama. This camp was on the Island of Honshu, near a nickel mine, in which prisoners in worn out clothing carried out heavy manual work in rain and mud. When they returned to camp at night, they were soaked to the skin but had no change of clothing. One gang of prisoners worked for over seven days, up to their knees in freezing cold water. Japanese guards pushed these men to the limit of their endurance, and often sick men were forced to work, causing the death of many. While the food provided was good initially, it was soon reduced, not only in quality, but in quantity as well. The fortunes of the prisoners were improved somewhat when the Japanese medical officer decided to provide them with 360 grams of grain per day, although this meant cutting down the ration of those men unable to work to 250 grams. These conditions were improved by the arrival of Red Cross parcels in December. However, the food in those parcels, added to the extra for Christmas provided by the Japanese, upset the metabolism of many prisoners. In March 1944, more Red Cross parcels arrived, but most of these set aside for the sick were kept by the Japanese, who also kept some of the general supply for the camp until an appeal to the camp commander was successful. As Stening was to later write:

‘In June 1944 the Japanese doctor produced a ration scale of 3,700 calories for the workers and 3,400 for resting men. However, as most of the items on the scale were never received regularly, the actual figures were well below this. As hunger increased the men in the camp became more difficult to handle. They would steal from each other and from the Japanese, and these thefts, if detected, led to severe punishments. In May 1944 I was empowered by the camp commandant to take control on the discipline and all the punishments. On the whole, this system worked well.

‘Hygiene was rigidly enforced by the prisoners’ administration. Notwithstanding, diarrhoea was rife; it frequently became a chronic and was often a terminal event. As was to be expected, malnutrition was prevalent, particularly beri-beri with or without oedema. Thoracic and abdominal effusions occurred, and often followed the administration of sulphonamides, even in low dosage such as 1 gram daily for two days. ‘Painful feet’ resisted treatment, and skin affliction, due to local conditions, were very common.

‘Taisho camp was also in the Osaka area. I was sent there in June 1944. Previously the medical care of prisoners at Taisho had depended on a medical orderly who had worked and fought well for his patients. Some of the prisoners were doing labouring work and others more specialised tasks at the Osaka ironworks. Food was good at first but deteriorated when a new Japanese quartermaster was appointed. Red Cross food came in November and helped the men through the winter, while their diet was further supplemented by the products from their own garden. Another improvement was the provision of a midday meal for men who were working. Still malnutrition was rife in the

camp, a predisposing cause being the prevalent diarrhoea. Beri-beri of all kinds was common.

‘At the time of my arrival a Sergeant Nakate was the camp commandant, and the prisoners were treated well. When he was replaced by Sergeant Kakuia harsh and capricious treatment became the rule. All Japanese, including civilians, were given licence to indulge their sadism, men were punished, often severely, for minor offences or for no offences at all. One man was stripped and made to stand in the open with the temperature below freezing point. A Japanese sergeant then threw buckets of water over him after first breaking the ice from the tops of the buckets. The sick were often ordered to work and appeals on their behalf by the medical officer were mostly disregarded. Conditions improved from November 1944, the improvement being coincident with the beginnings of air raids over Honshu Island and especially over Osaka itself. A never to be forgotten sight was the flight of American heavy bombers over Osaka in broad daylight, and later the big fire in Osaka, when incendiaries also rained on the camp. As the confidence of the Japanese was sapped, so the prisoners gained heart. The food supply both legal and illicit increased, work decreased, and the Japanese officers began to live at the camp.’

The following two extracts concerning Stening were located in Max Venables’ book, ‘From Wayville to Changi and Beyond:

‘The Quartermaster of the camp (Taisho Sub Camp - Osaka) Matsumoto, commonly known as ‘Matsy’ openly expressed his hatred of prisoners of war because of their continual protests in regard to the poor quality and inadequate supply of food. He always appeared eager to establish friendly relations between himself and the few prisoner of war officers in the camp, and except on one occasion when Lt Surgeon Stening objected to an order given by ‘Matsy’ in that a party of prisoners of war who were suffering from cardiac beri-beri, oedema, boils, diarrhoea and minor injuries received at the Osaka Steel Works, were required to shift a large dump of coal (about five tons) a distance of approximately two hundred yards, in buckets and impro-vised baskets. ‘Matsy’ resented Stening’s interference and attacked him with a length of one inch hose pipe (approximately two feet six inches in length (80cm)). He struck at least six times, then ordered Stening to join the party and shift the coal.’

The following appears to be a report written by Major R V Glasgow or Lieutenant Evans about Taisho POW Sub Camp - Osaka, which gives further insight into Stening’s character and courage.

‘Surg/Lieutenant Samuel E Stening, Medical officer of HMAS Perth, arrived in camp on 24 June 1944. He arrived at a time when morale was weakening and spirits low, generally. His advent was the dawning of a new era in our existence and too much cannot be said of his medical ability – his help and encouragement to the sick and later

when he administered the camp from 31 March '45 until 3 September '45, his leadership and example was of material assistance to everyone during what was probably the most difficult of their incarceration. It is desired to place on record the gratitude of myself and all member of 'G' Force for what Surg/Lieutenant Stening accomplished. He was also beaten up on several occasions while voicing his protests re medical matters.'

Stening himself added to the record with his writing, continuing to provide detail and insight:

'On 17th May [1945], the entire camp with the exception of a few who were sick or otherwise useless to the Japanese moved to Takefu about 70 miles to the north-east of Osaka. From 17th May until the end of the war there were 167 Australians from Taisho and 33 Americans from Umida in Takefu. I was the only medical officer there, and in fact the only officer. As was per-haps unavoidable in a camp of mixed nationalities, there was occasional friction. Work in the nearby carbide factory was heavy; there were many accidents and increasing numbers of men failed in health through being driven incessantly on inadequate rations though Red Cross food was in the store, it was not forthcoming when requested, and, in May, June and July 1945, the food ration was reduced; it was further depleted by the thefts of the Japanese camp staff. As at other camps, sick men were often forced to work. Intervention on their behalf was sometimes successful but more often than not led to a worsening of their plight.

'Punishments were frequent, and I too suffered many indignities. One barbarous form of punishment was popular with the Japanese. A man would be forced to kneel on bamboo with crossed legs; another bamboo would be placed behind his knees, and a 4 gallon can of water on his thighs, which he would have to hold without spilling. This would continue for an hour and a half. One man after suffering this punishment had to be carried back to camp and was unable to walk for four hours. In one respect, however, Takefu was an improvement on other camps; once the prisoners had returned from work and had entered their sleeping quarters they were usually left alone. They did not suffer the mental strain of incessant intrusion by the Japanese looking for trouble and distributing punishments. There were few serious illnesses in this camp, but skin diseases caused by the chemicals with which the men worked were prevalent. Some medical supplies were available having been brought surreptitiously from Taisho, and though the Japanese took Red Cross supplies to their quarters, they allowed modest requisitions to be filled, usually after furious argument.'

The cessation of hostilities came surprisingly quickly at Takefu. There had been small but significant signs of leniency in the Japanese attitude; from the first week of August 1945, they started by suggesting men attend the sick bay run by Stening. From about 5 August onwards, several of the Japanese workers at the carbide factory had spoken about a devastating aerial attack on Hiroshima, and then on 9 August, they told the

prisoners that a similar aerial attack on Nagasaki had taken place. A significant aspect of these two attacks was that only one large aircraft had been used. A stolen newspaper tended to confirm these reports. Some of the factory workers admitted in confidence that they thought the war would soon be over but could not say for sure when that would be. The POWs themselves had noticed the sudden lack of Allied aircraft in the skies over Takefu. Then, on 15 August, after the work party had lined up to be counted before returning to work for the afternoon shift, the Japanese declared the rest of the day as a 'factory holiday'. Stening was informed that the 'holiday' per se, was actually caused by a shortage of raw materials. That same day, the Japanese delivered the food wagon to the camp, a duty which was usually carried out by the prisoners, who also noted that the rations had been increased. The next day, personal items such as razor blades and soap were issued, which improved the prisoners' morale immensely, as well as fuelling speculation that the war was definitely coming to an end. On 19 August, some two days after the Japanese had agreed to surrender, Stening read in a newspaper - brought into the camp surreptitiously by one of the prisoners - confirmation that the speculation regarding the surrender of Japanese forces was true. He then shared this welcome news with his fellow POWs. The war with Japan was over, and they had managed to survive.

Stening had survived two sinkings, one of which had taken place in the middle of an extensive, one-sided naval battle, where many of his shipmates and friends did not see the light of day again. For three and a half years, he had borne with dignity the worst personal degradation, retribution, lack of sustenance and depravation handed out to almost all Allied prisoners by the enemy. He had witnessed men being physically tortured and beaten for no apparent reason, as well as acts of kindness and humanity by the Japanese. He had also experienced the full spectrum of human behaviour, from ignorance, sordidness and greed, to integrity, dedication and consensus during hardship. Because of his status as a doctor, he had been expected to assume a leadership role over many hundreds of men, often from other Allied nations and branches of service other than his own. It was his strict adherence to the Hippocratic oath he had taken when graduating that enabled Stening to demonstrate the highest degree of integrity, moral and physical courage - even when confronted by adversity - and not shy away from his responsibilities to his fellow man. Stening had been faced with medical conditions and situations way beyond any he had hitherto encountered - or been exposed to - coping with illnesses and diseases which did not exist in Australia, and for which he had little or no effective treatment to offer. The practices and procedures Stening adopted for the medical care and attention of his patients had been hampered on almost every occasion, by the ignorance and malicious behaviour of his captors. He had seen men in his care die from the lack of proper medical treatment which may have saved their lives or made their condition more bearable while they recovered.

Over the years in captivity, Stening had argued vociferously with the Japanese on many occasions, while trying to exempt his patients from gruelling work and physical activities which would, in his view, exacerbate their injuries or illnesses. For his efforts on their behalf, he had been assaulted both physically and mentally for even trying to do so. However, he had developed immensely in the respect he was held by significant others, and not just by the prisoners in his care. His captors also had a grudging respect for him, for here was an officer of some repute, who was not afraid to stand by his convictions. In similar fashion to most other POW doctors, Stening was straightforward in his opinions towards the Japanese approach to medical practices and treatment and was uncompromisingly opposed to the criteria by which they determined any prisoner's fitness for work. As his involvement in the health care of his patients had grown, so had his rate of patient survivability; none in his care had died since March 1944. Many of his fellow prisoners, and more than likely many Japanese as well, had come to depend on his professional ability and experience, as well as his inherent determination to look after them as best he could.

Stening had also enjoyed some success in persuading the Japanese authorities to grant him freedom in formulating camp administrative procedures. They had also given him substantial latitude in creating, maintaining - and most importantly - preserving his medical and other relevant records. These were advantages rarely, if ever, offered to other Allied doctors under their control. Whether or not Stening realised the respect he had earned from the Japanese is unknown, nevertheless, it was authentic. In due course, Stening left with other POWs for Yokohama on 10 September 1945. Following interrogation by the Allied War Crimes Unit in Manila, Stening was temporarily appointed to the destroyer HMAS Quiberon for the voyage home to Australia, arriving in Sydney on 9 October. On 29 September, Stening was promoted to Surgeon Lieut. Commander, RANR. On 9 October, he was appointed to HMAS Penguin, then in December he was appointed to HMAS Rushcutter, additional, to shore, appointment terminated. On 6 December 1945, Stening was appointed Surgeon Lieutenant Commander, RANVR. In March 1946, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), 'for gallantry and devotion to duty in HMAS Perth in her action against superior Japanese forces on 1 March 1942.' On 31 March 1958, Stening was transferred to the CNF Retired List.

Post War, Dr. Samuel Stening resumed his life as a doctor, specialising in Paediatrics. The Intensive Care Ward at the Crown Street Women's Hospital was named after him. In St. Kilda Road, Melbourne, in the Shrine of Remembrance precinct, there is a bronze statue of Sir Edward (Weary) Dunlop, a World War 2 Army Medical Officer, who became a legend as a Prisoner of War, and did significant work in other areas post war. On the face of the treads of the stairs leading to the statue has been added the names of another one hundred and twenty-one Medical Officers who were also Prisoners of War of the Japanese. One could be excused for thinking they were added as an afterthought.

In fact, one total oversight was that of Surgeon Lieutenant Commander S E L Stening, DSC, RANR. This error was rectified in 2007 when his name was included and dedicated in the presence of his daughter and other family and friends.

Samuel Edward Lees Stening, DSC, FRACP, DCH, RANVR, passed away peacefully on 9 March 1983. A service of commemoration was held in the South Chapel of the Eastern Suburbs Crematorium on Monday 14 March 1983.