

The NAA Naval historian, Dr John Carroll PhD, has researched the significant work of a number of Naval Surgeons who served during WW2. Because of WEM magazine size constraint, the story of Dr Allan Campbell was published in the 2023 Blue (Spring) edition of the White Ensign Magazine (WEM). The contribution of the other surgeons was also of great significance and in recognition of their humanitarian work, the WEM has requested that their stories be published on the NAA website. The WEM editorial committee hopes that the stories are of great interest to the readers of the NAA website.

Wartime Experiences of Temporary Gentlemen Surgeons

Surgeon 1 - Allan Gordon Campbell (1916-2011), was born on 4 May 1916, at North Croydon, Hindmarsh, South Australia, the eldest child of Gordon Cathcart and Iris Emma Campbell (ne Fisher). His sister, Judith, was born in 1920. Campbell was educated at the prestigious Anglican Collegiate School of Saint Peter, Adelaide. He entered the University of Adelaide Medical School at age 16, where he was awarded the Harold Fisher Scholarship. He was top of the leaving honours examinations in 1932, and gained first credit and the Elder prize in first year medicine in 1933. In 1934, he secured fifth credit in second year medicine, and was awarded an all-Australian University Blue for athletics. After graduating Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) in 1938, Campbell became a Resident Medical Officer (RMO) at Royal Adelaide Hospital. His registrar, Dr Ina Fox, three years his senior, later became his wife. In 1940, he was an RMO at Adelaide Children's Hospital. His grandfather, Dr Allan Campbell, had founded this hospital in 1876.

On 1 April 1939, Campbell volunteered for service with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), as a Surgeon Lieutenant, Royal Australian Naval Reserve (RANR), and was inducted into naval service at his home Port division of Port Adelaide. On 15 July 1940, he was mobilised for full-time service by proclamation, and was granted the antedated seniority of 1 April 1939. On 15 July, he was appointed to HMAS *Cerberus IV*, before being appointed to the destroyer HMAS *Vendetta* on 21 July 1940, as the ship's medical officer. Following a lengthy refit at Malta dockyards, *Vendetta* resumed escort and screening duties, a routine broken on 18 August by her participation in the bombardment of Bardia, in company with HM battleships *Warspite*, *Malaya* and *Ramillies*. During the withdrawal from this action, the fleet was subjected to heavy enemy air attacks, but fighter cover by the RAF and Fleet Air Arm managed to destroy eleven Italian aircraft without any losses of their own. Engine room problems again forced *Vendetta* back to Malta for repairs, from 11 October until 9 November.

On 3 January 1941, *Vendetta* participated in the bombardment of Bardia for the second time. Bardia was then occupied by Australian troops the next day. The Italians surrendered on the 5th, with forty-five thousand made prisoner. *Vendetta* then joined the inshore squadron and was engaged for a short spell on Libyan patrol duty. In early March 1941, the destroyer played her part in the Commonwealth reinforcement of Greece as a unit of 'Lustre Force'. This operation involved the movement of fifty-eight thousand troops with their unit transport, equipment and stores, all of which were transported without loss. On 27 March, *Vendetta* joined Light Forces, made up of HM Cruisers *Orion*, *Ajax*, *Gloucester* and HMAS *Perth*, and HM Destroyers *Ilex*, *Hasty* and *Hereward*, to rendezvous with the RN Battle Fleet south of Crete. However, at 08:00 next morning, *Orion* sighted four Italian cruisers, screened by three destroyers. The Battle of Matapan had started. For just under an hour the ships on both sides blazed away, but to little or no effect. At 08:59, the Italian ships turned away and headed for home at their best speed, with the four RN Cruisers in hot pursuit. By 09:30, *Vendetta* was unable to keep pace, and was ordered to detach and join with the battle fleet. After joining with the battle fleet, the aging destroyer developed more engine problems and was ordered into Alexandria for repairs before rejoining 'Lustre Force' on 21 April. However, by the 24th, the situation in Greece had gone from bad to worse, so much so that it was decided evacuate as many Allied troops as possible.

On the evening of 25/26 April, *Vendetta* was joined by the anti-aircraft light cruiser, HMS *Calcutta* and four other destroyers, then ordered to proceed to Megara, just north of Corinth Canal and evacuate troops. During the evacuation *Vendetta's* motor cutter broke down and had to be rowed in the same fashion as her whaler and skiff. *Calcutta* and the other destroyers soon filled up with troops. As *Vendetta* had no working motor cutter, and there had been a field hospital ashore with wounded still on the beach, it was decided by *Vendetta's* CO, Lieut. Commander R Rhodes, RAN - at Campbell's insistence - to move closer to the shore and clear the beach of wounded, eventually leaving at 04:00 with four hundred and sixty-nine wounded and exhausted troops on board. The more seriously wounded were made as comfortable as possible in the wardroom accommodation and mess decks, but quite a few managed as best they could on the upper deck, with little or no protection from ongoing enemy action. It was a situation where Campbell came into his own. He insisted quite strongly to Rhodes that the seriously wounded be given priority, and then set about doing what he could to alleviate their agony and dress their wounds. The twenty-five-year-old RANR Surgeon Lieutenant did amazing life-saving work under heavy air raids, and in less-than-ideal conditions. It was also noted that it was Campbell's calm manner which provided constant reassurance to the seriously wounded, and they were heartened by his caring professional attitude and his natural calmness.

In recognition of his service, Campbell was recommended for the award of the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). On 3 June 1941, The Supplement To The *London Gazette* has recorded the following:

'The King has been graciously pleased to approve the following Rewards for gallantry and distinguished service in the withdrawal from the beaches of Greece under fire and in the face of many and great difficulties of many thousands of Troops and Allied Armies. His Majesty has also been graciously pleased to give orders for the following Appointments to the Distinguished Service Order, and to approve the following Awards for like services: - To be Companion of the Distinguished Service Order: Surgeon Lieutenant Allan Gordon Campbell. MB, BS, RANR.' The Citation for this award reads thus: 'For gallant and distinguished service rendered to the wounded who were evacuated by HMAS *Vendetta* from Megara Beach on the

night of 25/26 April 1941, during the withdrawal from the beaches of Greece in the face of many and great difficulties of many of thousands of troops of the Allied Armies.’

Due to the constant air raids by enemy aircraft, *Vendetta* had exhausted all of her small arms ammunition. The embarked troops who were able, and still had their weapons and ammunition, were organised into serried ranks alongside the guard rails and fired volleys of 303s at the diving aircraft. It was quite spectacular to see one dive bomber hit by their fire and plunge into the water, amidst loud cheering from the embarked troops. Arriving at Suda Bay the next morning, *Vendetta* discharged her passengers ashore, refuelled, and then set sail for Navplion, south of Megara, again in company with *Calcutta* and other destroyers. In all, four thousand five hundred troops were evacuated on the night of 27/28 April. While it was deemed essential to sail by 04:00 so as to be clear of the coast and beyond the range of bombers, *Vendetta* did not clear Greek waters until 06:00, when the *Luftwaffe* came over with thirty dive bombing *Stukas*. The Dutch steamship, SS *Slamat*, loaded with troops, was attacked and hit by these aircraft. HM destroyers *Wryneck* and *Diamond* went to *Slamat*'s aid, but then all three ships were attacked, bombed and sunk with a resultant huge loss of life.

The Germans launched the invasion of Crete in May 1941, and despite the RN's best efforts against Luftwaffe air supremacy the island fell, but not before some seventeen thousand troops had been successfully evacuated. During this operation, *Vendetta* performed screening duties on the battle fleet south of Crete, from 21 to 26 May. At the same time, Tobruk was under siege in the Western Desert campaign, and the task of supplying the tenacious Australian 9th Division was taken up by the 10th Destroyer Flotilla. All up, the Flotilla made one hundred and thirty-nine logistic and support runs, in and out of Tobruk, during the period this service was in place. The record number of thirty-nine individual passages went to *Vendetta*, with twenty into Tobruk, made up of eleven from Alexandria and nine from Mersa Matruh, and nineteen from Tobruk, with eight to Alexandria and eleven to Mersa Matruh. All of these logistic and support runs were carried out during the period 29 May and 2 August 1941, when *Vendetta* entered Tobruk for the last time. On 11 July 1941, during a return run to Alexandria on a bright moonlit night, enemy bombers attacked *Vendetta* and HMS *Defender*. A near miss exploded beneath *Defender* causing catastrophic damage to her underwater hull. *Vendetta* went alongside and embarked two hundred and seventy-five troops and their equipment from her consort, then took the crippled destroyer in tow. However, due to the damage she had sustained, *Defender* started to settle, so *Vendetta* took off her crew and finished her off with a torpedo.

Vendetta's service in the Mediterranean came to an end on 20 October 1941, when she departed Alexandria for the last time, bound for Singapore and a long overdue refit and refurbishment. Her respite, however, would prove to be all too brief, after Japan entered the war on 7 December. On *Vendetta*'s departure, Campbell was appointed to the 'N' class destroyer, HMAS *Napier*. In the closing months of 1941, *Napier* took part in supplying the besieged Tobruk, provided protection to Mediterranean and Red Sea convoys, and served on the screen of the fleet at sea. During November, *Napier* was also employed in the transfer of troops between Cyprus and Haifa, and on 31 December, *Napier* and *Nizam* bombarded Bardia before its capture by the British 8th Army. In January 1942, in company with HMA Ships *Nizam* and *Nestor*, *Napier* left the Mediterranean theatre of operations for the Indian Ocean, but on reaching Aden the three destroyers were ordered to escort the aircraft carrier HMS *Indomitable*, which was ferrying aircraft to the Malaya-Java area. When this assignment was curtailed, *Napier* was attached to the Royal Navy's Eastern Fleet, operating out of Trincomalee, Ceylon.

Napier returned to the Mediterranean briefly in June 1942, acting as escort for an Alexandria-Malta convoy. It was during this operation that her sister ship, HMAS *Nestor*, was sunk. In late August 1942, Campbell was appointed to HMAS *Cerberus*, to join upon his eventual arrival in Australia.

It was while he was on leave that he married Dr Ina Fox of Strathalbyn, at Saint Peter's College chapel. He was evacuated from Darwin to 105 Military Hospital, Adelaide, in August 1943, suffering from a pleural effusion. Campbell was promoted to Surgeon Lieut. Commander on 1 April 1945, while serving in the *County* class heavy Cruiser, HMAS *Shropshire*. After refit at Garden Island, the cruiser returned to the operational area in June 1945, supporting the landings at Brunei and Balikpapan in early July, and then returned to the Philippines, serving there until the Japanese surrendered. *Shropshire* then sailed for Tokyo Bay, and was present for the official surrender ceremony. She remained in Japanese waters until 17 November 1945, when she departed for her home port of Sydney. Campbell remained a member of the RANR after he was demobilised in December 1945. He was promoted Surgeon Commander, RANVR on 31 December 1954. He also appears in *The Navy List* of September 1967, as Surgeon Captain, RANVR. It is assumed with some certainty that Campbell would have continued in his profession, and beyond, until his retirement, whenever that may have been. Allan Gordon Campbell, DSO, VRD, RANVR, passed away peacefully on 29 June 2011, aged 95. He was buried in the same vault as his wife at North Road Cemetery Nailsworth, Prospect City, South Australia, at Plot South Path 5 West-Vault DM6.

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Surgeon 2 - Shane Andrew Clarke Watson (1915-1994), was born on 21 July 1915, at the village of Broughshane, County of Antrim, Ulster, Northern Ireland, the eldest son of Andrew and Kathleen Watson, and brother to Kathleen and Godfrey. The Watson family emigrated to Australia in the *White Star* Line vessel, SS *Ceramic*, departing from Liverpool on 21 April 1921, sailing via Cape Town, Albany, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Watson was educated at The Scots College, Warwick, Queensland, from Preparatory to the Matriculation prerequisite for entry to the University of Queensland. In 1932, Watson received excellent results at this level in English, French, Latin, Mathematics A, Mathematics B, Chemistry and Physics. Due to unknown circumstances, in 1933, Watson was admitted to the University of Sydney, Faculty of Medicine. In 1939, he graduated Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery with honours, and was also the recipient of the Hinder Memorial Prize for clinical surgery. On 1 May 1940, the New South Wales Medical Board deemed '6283, Watson, Shane Andrew Clarke, General Hospital, Brisbane MBBS, 1939, University of Sydney, to be a Legally Qualified Medical Practitioner.'

In June 1940, Watson volunteered for service with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) as a Surgeon Lieutenant, Royal Australian Naval Reserve (RANR), and on 15 June 1940, he was inducted into naval service at his home port Division of Brisbane. On 11 November, Watson was appointed to HMAS *Cerberus* to attend short courses, be issued with certain items of kit, and await passage by sea to England in the *Blue Funnel* line vessel, SS *Nestor*. Upon arrival on 9 January 1941, he was appointed to Royal Navy Barracks, Portsmouth, and on 28 January he was appointed to the 'N' class destroyer, HMAS *Nestor*, 'on commissioning', as the ship's medical officer. On 3 February, *Nestor* was commissioned for service in the RAN as HMAS

Nestor. On 12 February, construction was completed and acceptance trials commenced. On 1 March, *Nestor* sailed from Clyde on completion of trials and storing to Scapa Flow for work-up with ships of the Home Fleet. During work-up, *Nestor* was deployed as part of the escort for HMS *Hood* for passage from Rosyth to Scapa Flow after her refit. On completion of work-up *Nestor* joined 6th Destroyer Flotilla for Fleet duties. In early April, *Nestor* took passage to Clyde for essential repairs, boiler clean and installation of the new Type 285 Gunnery Control radar equipment. She was taken in hand for these at Fairfield Yard, Govan. On 1 May, *Nestor* returned to Scapa Flow on completion of radar trials, and on 3 May she joined 6th Destroyer Flotilla for fleet duties. On 5 May, *Nestor* was deployed with HM Destroyers *Somali*, *Eskimo* and *Bedouin* as screen for HM Cruisers *Edinburgh*, *Manchester* and *Birmingham*, to intercept the German weather ship *München* and capture intact its *Enigma* coding machine with all its associated documentation. On 7 May, *Nestor* remained with the screen during the boarding of *München*, then embarked the captured equipment and detached forthwith from the escort, taking passage to Scapa Flow at best speed to deliver this material for detailed analysis by expert authorities.

On 23 May, *Nestor* was deployed as part of the screen for Home Fleet capital ships, during the search and tracking of the German battleship *Bismark* and her consort *Prinz Eugen*. On 25 May *Nestor* detached to Iceland to refuel during the search for the two enemy ships. On 27 May, *Nestor* was present at the sinking of *Bismark*, and on 28 May, formed part of the escort for HM battleships *King George V* and *Rodney* during their return passage to Loch Ewe. On 8 June, *Nestor* returned to Clyde for installation of a four-inch anti-aircraft gun in place of her after set of torpedo tubes, and on completion, rejoined her Flotilla for Home Fleet duties. During July, *Nestor* was nominated for detached service with other Home Fleet ships as escort for a Malta relief convoy, codenamed Operation *Substance*. On 12 July, *Nestor* deployed with HM Destroyers *Cossack*, *Māori*, *Lightning* and *Sikh* as escort for HM Battleship *Nelson* and HM Cruisers *Manchester* and *Arethusa*, providing Ocean escort for military convoy **WS9C** during passage from Clyde to Gibraltar. On 17 July, *Nestor* detached from **WS9C** to escort the troop transport HMTS *Pasteur* in company with HMS *Lightning* and HMS *Manchester* to Gibraltar. HM destroyers *Avonvale*, *Eridge* and *Farndale* joined **WS9C** to supplement the escort during passage in the western Mediterranean. On 19 July, *Nestor* arrived at Gibraltar with *Pasteur*. On 21 July, *Nestor* was deployed with the screen for HMS *Nelson*, HMS *Manchester*, HMS *Arethusa* and HM Cruiser *Manxman*, with HM Destroyers *Cossack*, *Māori*, *Sikh*, *Fearless*, *Foxhound*, *Firedrake*, *Eridge*, *Avonvale* and *Farndale* as Force 'X' to provide the escort for the passage to Malta of a relief convoy. The next day, *Nestor* attacked and drove off the Italian submarine *Diaspro* which had fired torpedoes at ships of Force 'H' providing cover for passage of the Malta bound convoy in the Mediterranean. As a result of *Nestor*'s detection and intervention, the torpedo attacks by *Diaspro* failed. On 23 July, the convoy came under aerial attacks, during which *Manchester* and *Fearless* were hit. *Fearless* was disabled, and later had to be sunk, while *Manchester* had to be escorted back to Gibraltar. Following further aerial attacks after Force 'H' detached, *Firedrake* was disabled and had to be towed back to Gibraltar. The very next day, the convoy was under attack by a flotilla of eight Italian *E* boats. The merchant ship MV *Sydney Star* was hit by torpedo, and was unable to remain with the convoy. *Nestor* was detached to assist the damaged merchantman, and began embarking the four hundred and sixty-seven troops she had on board, along with some of the crew. Although drawing almost forty feet forward because of the damage to number one and two holds, *Sydney Star* was able to restore power to her engines, and proceeded at reduced speed to Malta,

escorted all the way by *Nestor*. After disembarking almost five hundred ‘passengers’, *Nestor* joined with the remaining ships of Force ‘X’ and returned to Gibraltar.

Upon arrival at Gibraltar on 27 July, *Nestor* joined with HM Destroyers *Faulkner*, *Foresight*, *Fury*, *Forester*, *Foxhound*, *Cossack*, *Māori*, *Encounter* and *Eridge* as screen for *Nelson*, HM Battlecruiser *Renown* and HM Aircraft Carrier *Ark Royal*, as well as providing cover for the passage of HM Cruisers *Hermione*, *Arethusa* and *Manxman*, HMS *Lightning* and HMS *Sikh* during their passage from Gibraltar to the Sicilian Narrows. These ships were carrying troops and logistics to Malta from the troop transport *Leinster*, which had been part of the *Substance* convoy, but had run aground off Gibraltar. *Nestor* remained with the screen for ships of Force ‘H’ west of Sicilian Narrows, when the ships carrying logistics and personnel detached with escort by Force ‘X’ to pass through the dangerous waters off Sicily. On 1 August, *Nestor* was deployed with the screen for Force ‘H’ ships when Force ‘X’ rejoined, and took passage back to Gibraltar. On 10 August, *Nestor* was part of the escort for Convoy **HG70** during the initial part of the passage to England from Gibraltar, along with HM Sloop *Deptford* and Destroyers *Faulknor*, *Encounter* and *Avonvale*. Two days later, they came under attack by U-boats, but none of these attacks were successful. When detached from **HG70**, *Nestor* returned to Gibraltar. On 22 August, *Nestor* was deployed with *Encounter*, *Forester*, *Foresight* and *Fury* as screen for *Ark Royal*, *Nelson* and cruiser *Hermione*, during air strikes on Italian installations at Tempo, Sardinia, and as cover for minelaying off Livorno by *Manxman* (Operation *Mincemeat*). *Nestor* returned to Gibraltar on 26 August with ships of Force ‘H’. On 31 August, *Nestor* was deployed with *Encounter* as part of the screen for HM Battlecruiser *Repulse* and the armed merchant cruiser *Derbyshire* to provide Ocean escort for military convoy **WS11** during Atlantic passage from Freetown to Clyde. On 13 September, *Nestor* sustained damage from the premature explosion of a depth charge when escorting **WS11**. She detached from **WS11** and took passage to England, after first calling in at Gibraltar. At the start of October, *Nestor* was taken in hand at HM Dockyard, Devonport, for an overdue refit and repairs. While undergoing refit, *Nestor* was fitted with additional 20mm Oerlikon guns to improve her close-range anti-aircraft defence. At the end of her time in dockyard hands, *Nestor* was nominated for further escort duties with military convoys. On 5 December 1941, *Nestor* sailed from Devonport to Clyde, and on the 9th joined with HM Destroyers *Foxhound* and *Gurkha* as part of Ocean Escort for Convoy **WS14** during that part of the Atlantic passage from Clyde. On 13 December, the three destroyers detached from **WS14** and took passage to Gibraltar. The next day, they were joined by the destroyer HMS *Croome* for an anti-submarine search west of Gibraltar, following intelligence reports of U-boat deployments entering the Mediterranean. On 15 December, *Nestor* sighted U-127 on the surface and carried out depth charge attacks with her consorts, sinking the U-boat in position South-East of Cape Saint Vincent. There were no survivors. On 20 December, *Nestor* was transferred to the Mediterranean Fleet to join 7th Flotilla based at Alexandria. On 22 December, *Nestor* took passage from Gibraltar to Malta via the Sicilian Narrows in company with HM Cruiser *Dido* and HM Destroyers *Arrow*, *Foxhound*, *Gurkha* and *Zulu*, arriving at Malta two days later. On 26 December, *Nestor* sailed from Malta in company with HM Cruisers *Ajax* and *Dido*, and HM Destroyers *Arrow*, *Foxhound*, *Gurkha*, *Lance*, *Lively* and *Zulu*, as escort for four empty merchant ships taking passage to Alexandria as Convoy **ME8**. The next day, **ME8** came under sustained aerial attack, but despite this reached Alexandria two days later without loss or damage to any ships of the convoy. On 29 December, *Nestor* joined with HMA destroyers *Napier* and *Nizam* of the 7th Flotilla, to carry out bombardments off Bardia, then returned to Alexandria on 1 January 1942.

On 3 January 1942, *Nestor* was transferred with *Napier* and *Nizam* for service in the Indian Ocean, and took passage to Aden, arriving there on the 7th. On 9 January, the three destroyers were deployed for escort of HM Aircraft Carrier *Indomitable* during passage from Port Sudan in the Red Sea for delivery of aircraft to Singapore, codenamed Operation *Opponent*. On 26 January, after calling at Addu Atoll, *Nestor* remained with her two consorts as escort to the Carrier during the first launch of aircraft near Cocos Island. In view of the deterioration of events at Singapore, these *Hurricane* aircraft were diverted to land at Batavia. On completion of the second aircraft launch, *Nestor* and her consorts remained with *Indomitable* as escorts during passage to Trincomalee, arriving there on 2 February, and joining the Eastern Fleet with the same ships. Soon thereafter, *Nestor*, *Napier* and *Nizam* were once again escorting *Indomitable* back to Port Sudan, arriving there on 24 February to embark another delivery of aircraft for Batavia, and sail on completion of loading. However, on 3 March the delivery of aircraft was cancelled. *Nestor*, *Napier* and *Nizam* were then deployed with the Eastern Fleet for screening of major units. On 31 March, *Nestor* was deployed as part of the screen for HM Battleship *Warspite*, HM Aircraft Carriers *Indomitable* and *Formidable* and HM Cruisers *Cornwall*, *Dorsetshire*, *Emerald* and *Enterprise*, with HM Destroyers *Foxhound*, *Napier*, *Paladin*, *Panther* and *Hotspur* deployed as Force 'A'. On 4 April, Force 'A' arrived at Addu Atoll after an unsuccessful search for Japanese forces reported to be on passage to carry out aerial attacks on Colombo. The next day, *Nestor* sailed with screen of Force 'A' to carry out a further search for Japanese forces. During this search - which was carried out to far westward - both *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire*, which had detached from the main force, were sunk by heavy Japanese aerial attacks. On 8 April, *Nestor* returned to Addu Atoll with Force 'A'. The next day, *Nestor* made passage with units from Force 'A' to provide escort protection for shipping between Indian ports and the Red Sea. On 11 April, *Nestor* detached from escort duties with *Napier* for docking and essential repairs. On completion, *Nestor* took passage to rejoin the Eastern Fleet at the port of Killindini, Mombasa, for convoy defence. *Nestor* was then nominated for transfer to the Mediterranean for escort of a planned Malta relief convoy from Alexandria. On 27 May, *Nestor* took passage to Alexandria for detached service with HM Cruiser *Newcastle* and Destroyers *Napier*, *Inconstant*, *Paladin*, *Hotspur* and *Griffin*, deployed at Alexandria. *Nestor* was then nominated for escort of Malta relief Convoy, codenamed Operation *Vigorous*. On 12 June, *Nestor* sailed from Alexandria as escort for Convoy **MW11B** comprising of eleven ships, of which two were tankers. Other escorts for **MW11B** were HM Destroyers *Hasty*, *Hero*, *Inconstant*, *Javelin*, *Jervis*, *Kelvin*, *Napier*, *Nizam*, *Norman*, *Pakenham*, *Paladin*, *Sikh* and *Zulu*. HM Battleship *Centurion*, disguised as a *King George V* class battleship, was also part of the escort, with Destroyers *Fortune*, *Griffin*, HM Corvettes *Erica*, *Delphinium*, *Primula* and *Snapdragon*. Cover was provided by HM Cruisers *Arethusa*, *Birmingham*, *Cleopatra*, *Dido*, *Euryalus*, *Hermione* and *Newcastle*. On 13 June, *Nestor* joined escorts for Convoys **MW11A** and **NW11C**. On 14 June, Covering Force joined combined convoy under heavy and sustained aerial attacks during which two merchant ships, SS *Bhutan* and SS *AAgtekerk* were sunk. On 15 June, the convoy was ordered by C-in-C Mediterranean, Admiral Sir Henry Harwood, at Alexandria, to reverse course because of threats from an Italian Battle Squadron known to be on passage to intercept the convoy. Attacked by German *E*-boats, the Cruiser *Newcastle* was hit by torpedo. While this was not fatal, she had to be withdrawn from covering duty. The destroyer *Hasty* was also hit by torpedo, and once her crew was removed, she was sunk by her sister ship *Hotspur*. The combined convoy was then ordered to resume passage westward following optimistic reports of successful aerial and submarine

attacks on Italian ships. Orders by C-in-C were then rescinded, and the combined convoy again reversed course. Following later reports, Harwood signalled Rear Admiral Phillip Vian, Flag Officer commanding the convoy escorts, that the decision to proceed to Malta or retire to Alexandria, rested with him.

At 18:06 on 15 June, during a high-level bombing attack, *Nestor* was straddled by three one thousand-pound bombs. One landed about six feet from the port side, a second about fifty feet to starboard, both landing about amidships; and the third landed about fifty feet astern and off to port. It was later thought that the first bomb had probably struck the masthead radar as it fell, because after the attack, it was noted that its scanner had been shattered. The enormous force generated by three bombs exploding simultaneously lifted *Nestor* wholly out of the water, crashing back heavily as she fell. The upper deck area between the open bridge and funnel flexed violently, and the Captain and bridge personnel in the near vicinity were flung to the deck. While *Nestor* wallowed heavily in the swell, her crew went about ascertaining the extent of the damage the ship had incurred. All light and power had been lost. But the worst damage was in both boiler rooms. The near miss on the port side amidships had torn a large hole in the hull below the waterline, adjacent to No. 1 Boiler Room. It was believed at the time that all four men in that area would have been killed instantaneously, their bodies being immersed in the oily waters filling the compartment. Water had also flooded No. 2 Boiler Room, making it impossible to raise steam. *Nestor*'s crew - shocked at first by the noise and blast of the exploding bombs - remained focussed. Immediately after the attack, engine room personnel had rushed to the Boiler Room to help their shipmates. But they were driven back by a cloud of superheated steam escaping from a ruptured steam line. They waited until the steam had dissipated, then, led by Surgeon Lieutenant Watson - who had rushed from his action station - felt their way into the doomed compartment.

The citation for the award of the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) to Watson, ever so briefly describes the conditions under which he and his team had to work when trying to rescue their shipmates from an area which had been blown to smithereens:

'For gallantry and devotion to duty when HMAS *Nestor* was lost on 15/16 June, 1942. This officer displayed outstanding bravery in immediately entering No. 1 boiler room in order to rescue the crew who he knew must be either killed or seriously injured. Of the conditions in the boiler room, he had no idea, when he entered it, he found it in darkness and flooded. In spite of this, he dived repeatedly until all the men were recovered. Unfortunately, they had all been killed.' These were:

Blight, Leslie J, Stoker, RANR, F3546, Western Australia.

Bulmer, Jack B, Petty Officer Stoker, RAN, 19982, Victoria.

Burns, Mathew, A/Leading Stoker, RN, C/KX94897, United Kingdom.

Hill, Campbell, Leading Stoker, RAN, 21751, Western Australia.

While Watson and his team tried to revive the four casualties by artificial resuscitation, damage control parties were at work throughout the ship. Shipwright Alexander Coole entered the wrecked compartment, and he and his team immediately began to plug the gaping hole in the hull, and shore up damaged bulkheads. The flooding had settled *Nestor* by the bows, and listed her to port. On the upper deck, parties went about methodically ditching torpedoes and depth charges, and any other readily removeable top weight. When the engineer, Lieut. Cdr. (E) Roger Parker, reported to Commander Rosenthal that *Nestor* was as seaworthy as she could be

- taking into account all repairs now in place - and she could be towed. But attacks continued without respite until nightfall. The tow was passed to HMS *Javelin* under these hazardous conditions. *Javelin* gradually worked up to 14 ½ knots, and for a while all went reasonably well. The two destroyers, and the three *Hunt* class destroyers sent to escort them back to Alexandria, became targets for German aircraft, which seemed to sense some easy prey. The five ships between them fired off a barrage, which spoilt the pilots aim. High altitude bombing was followed by torpedo bomber attack. However, the five destroyers emerged unscathed from these, with two aircraft shot down. One was attributed to *Nestor*'s gunners. Nightfall brought further problems. *Nestor* was yawing wildly, with the towline parting twice. The trim without power to correct it, was making her unstable. Time was running out for *Nestor*. A third towline was passed, but the stricken destroyer was yawing even more. *Nestor* and *Javelin* could not survive another day of attacks. If the aircraft did not succeed in destroying her, enemy submarines might. Then there was a third threat. German *E*-boats were sighted circling the flotilla. On 16 June, at 05:30, Rosenthal asked *Javelin* to make contact with C-in-C and advise him of the situation. A short while later, the decision was made; *Nestor* was to be scuttled. *Nestor*'s ship's company were taken off as *Javelin* set about the job of sinking the crippled ship. An hour and seven depth charges later, *Nestor* rolled over and sank beneath the waves.

On 17 June 1942, Surgeon Lieutenant Watson was transported back to Australia for a period of survivors leave, and to avail himself of a period of accrued overseas service leave. On completion of leave, he was appointed to HMAS *Penguin*, additional. On 5 February 1943, Watson was appointed to the Armed Merchant Cruiser (AMC), HMAS *Manoora*. In March 1943, the Australian Cabinet had approved the withdrawal of service of three RAN AMCs - *Manoora*, *Westralia* and *Kanimbla* - and for their conversion into Landing Ship Infantry (LSI), capable of transporting and landing over twelve hundred troops each. In addition to its naval crew to run the ship, man the weapons and operate the boats, each RAN LSI also carried an Army detachment of about one hundred as ship's Army staff. Their job was to do most of the stevedoring tasks on board, driving winches, loading and unloading stores, stowing holds and so forth, but they also lent a hand with normal shipboard tasks.

In March 1943, *Manoora* proceeded to Port Stephens for a few days where an amphibious training facility had been established, before returning to Sydney. She then departed for Melbourne where, until June, she was involved in further amphibious training with United States troops. A/Captain Cecil Baldwin MVO, RAN, assumed command of *Manoora* on 29 June 1943 and throughout July she operated in the Sydney/Port Stephens area, after which she departed for Milne Bay, transporting Australian troops. *Manoora* returned to Port Stephens on 16 August remaining there until 2 October. She then visited Sydney and afterwards returned to Port Stephens for a short stay, then transported troops to Oro Bay, New Guinea, a voyage she repeated in early November. In November 1943, Watson was appointed to the *Tribal*-class destroyer, HMAS *Arunta*. For the period of time Watson was to serve in *Arunta*, the main highlights of her involvement in the Pacific area of Operations consisted of the following:

On 30 November 1943, *Arunta* bombarded Japanese ammunition dumps at Gasmata, New Britain.

On 15 December, *Arunta* provided naval gunfire support (NGFS) for landings at Arawe.

On 20 December, *Arunta* provided NGFS for Cape Gloucester landings.

On 1 January 1944, *Arunta* provided NGFS of landings by the US 32nd Division at Saidor, New Guinea.

During March, *Arunta* transported and landed the 7th US Cavalry at Hayne Harbour, Admiralty Islands.

During April, *Arunta* provided NGFS for Allied landings at Hollandia.

During mid-May, *Arunta* provided NGFS of Allied landings at Wakde Island; took one prisoner and verified the deaths of 859 Japanese.

On 27 May, *Arunta* provided NGFS of Allied landings at Biak Island.

On 2 July, *Arunta* provided NGFS of Allied landings at Noemfoor Island, Dutch New Guinea.

On 30 July, *Arunta* provided NGFS of Allied landings at Cape Sansapor.

On 15 September, *Arunta* provided NGFS for landings at Morotai Island.

On 25 October, *Arunta* was involved at Leyte Gulf - Battle of Surigao Strait, the final and most decisive surface engagement of World War 2. Fought in darkness, the Japanese were routed with the loss of two Battleships, four Heavy Cruisers, one Aircraft Carrier, three Light Cruisers and four Destroyers. The USN lost two Escort Carriers and three Destroyers. Part of this action was described by Watson when he wrote:

‘Soon after 03:00 the destroyers of the eastern flank were ordered in to attack *Yamashiro*. The six destroyers divided into two groups of three, *Arunta*, with USN ships *Killen* and *Beale*, and *Arunta* acquitted herself well, sending off four torpedoes before we turned into our own smoke and retired at speed.’

Early November 1944, Watson was appointed to HMAS *Rushcutter*. Then on 5 February 1945 he was appointed to HMAS *Kuttabul*. On 2 March 1946, Watson was appointed to HMAS *Rushcutter*, ‘to shore, appointment terminated.’ On 8 March 1946, he was appointed Surgeon Lieutenant Commander, RANVR. Following the establishment of the RAN Diving Branch at HMAS *Rushcutter* in 1951, underwater medicine support was initially provided by Surgeon Lieutenant Commander Shane Watson DSC, RANVR. Between the years 1953 and 1962, Watson completed various periods of annual continuous training (ACT). On 18 November 1957, Watson was awarded the Officers Volunteer Reserve Decoration (VRD). On 1 December 1960, he was appointed as the District Naval Medical Officer, New South Wales. On 8 April 1962, Watson resigned this position.

It is assumed with some surety that Watson continued his medical career until he was of an age to retire from the profession. Shane Andrew Clarke Watson, DSC, VRD, RANVR, passed away peacefully on 25 November 1994, aged 79. He was buried at the Springvale Botanical Cemetery, Springvale, Greater Dandenong City, at Cassia Plot, Garden 3, Tree 26.

*

Surgeon 3 - Charles Frederick Harrington (1914-1941), was born on 22 June 1914, at Eagle Junction, Brisbane, the son of Herbert Ernest and Laura Irene Harrington, nee Barton, the younger brother of Wilfred Hastings Harrington, later to become Rear Admiral, RAN. Charles Harrington was educated at Kings School Sydney, from 1921 to 1931. He was the recipient of Remove Form Prize 1926, Form III Prize 1927, Wentworth Bucknell Memorial Scholarship 1928, Form V Prize 1929, University Exhibition and Distinction Awarded in the Leaving Certificate Examination 1931. In 1932, Charles F Harrington was admitted to the Faculty of Medicine at Sydney University. During his time at Sydney University, Harrington was an active member of the Sydney University Regiment. The skill-at-arms he was instructed in while a member of the Regiment would stand him in good stead during his naval service. In

1938, Harrington graduated from Sydney University, Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery. He was then appointed to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, and later to the Royal Alexandria Hospital for Women. Before volunteering for naval service in 1939, he was a resident medical officer at Newcastle Hospital.

On 1 September 1939, Harrington volunteered for service in the Royal Australian Navy as a Surgeon Lieutenant, RANR. He was mobilised by proclamation on 5 October 1940. He was then appointed to HMAS *Rushcutter*, additional, and then HMAS *Penguin* for the auxiliary HMAS *Wyrallah*, before joining HMAS *Parramatta* on the East Indies Station by Troop Convoy **US8**, and then by service transport. At the time of his joining on 11 February 1941, *Parramatta* was employed as convoy escort to the following for part or all of the voyage noted:

Convoy **BN.13**, departing Aden on 17 January 1941, arriving at Suez on 24 January 1941.

Convoy **BS.13**, from Suez 19 January 1941 until dispersal on 27 January 1941.

Convoy **BNF.1**, departing Bombay on 26 January 1941, arriving Suez 6 February 1941.

Convoy **BN.16**, departing Aden on 17 February 1941 until dispersal on 20 February 1941.

Convoy **BS.20**, departing Suez on 18 March 1941 until dispersal 26 March 1941.

On 1 June 1941, *Parramatta* was transferred to the Mediterranean. The journey to Alexandria from the Red Sea via the Suez Canal was without incident. The sloop entered harbour on 3 June, securing to a buoy after fuelling to find she was in harbour with HMA Ships *Perth*, *Stuart*, *Voyager* and *Vendetta*. *Waterhen* was at sea, but arrived the next day from Tobruk. On the night following *Parramatta*'s arrival, a large-scale air raid took place on Alexandria. The barrage put up over the harbour was impressive, and the ship's company also heard the sound of shrapnel falling consistently into the water with a steady zipping sound, occasionally hitting the steel deck and fittings. After this experience, the ship's company of *Parramatta* were to treat their steel helmets with great respect. An extensive and prolonged air raid took place on the evening of 7 June. It lasted most of the night, with bombs and mines causing casualties in the city, fires, along with some damage ashore. *Parramatta* took an active part in the various barrages. On the night of 10 June, an experiment of making funnel smoke from the ships in harbour was seen to be quite effective as cover by observing aircraft. This evolution became standard procedure during later night air raids. *Parramatta* was brought to short notice for steam on 15 June for Operation *Battleaxe*. This operation consisted of naval assistance to an Army advance against an enemy position in the Western Desert. During the day, *Parramatta* embarked a Naval Port Party intended to occupy Sollum after its capture, sailing at dusk with two small HM Ships; anti-submarine whalers *Setra* and *Southern Sea*. The voyage was uneventful, and the three ships arrived and berthed at 12:00 on 16 June. HM Ships already at Mersa Matruh were HM Gunboats *Gnat* and *Cricket*, a Tug, and a small merchant ship. Operation *Battleaxe* was cancelled on 18 June, so *Parramatta* left Mersa Matruh for Alexandria at sunset, escorting the Tug *St. Tsay*, with HMS *Southern Sea* towing a captured Italian schooner. The voyage was uneventful, except that *Southern Sea* had some problems with her tow, dismasting the schooner off Alexandria when turning the tow over to *St. Tsay*.

Parramatta arrived at Alexandria at 12:00 on 19 June, refuelled, then landed the Naval Port Party. HM Ships *Flamingo* and *Auckland* and HMAS *Parramatta* were then transferred to the operational control of Rear Admiral, Alexandria - Rear Admiral George H Creswell - for escort duties on the ferry supply service to the 'invested fortress of Tobruk.' The fourth ship, HMS *Grimsby* - recently part of the Red Sea Force - had been sunk by bombers several weeks before,

close to Tobruk. The RAN destroyers *Stuart*, *Voyager*, *Vendetta* and *Waterhen* had been taking supplies into Tobruk and carrying personnel and evacuating casualties for some time. Their routine was to sail into Tobruk at high speed after dusk, unload during the night, then sail in time to be as far away from the coast as possible before dawn. Even so, each of them had been frequently attacked. Intensive air raids were experienced on the nights of both the 21st and 22nd of June. Some of the aircraft glided in from seaward, their engines silenced, with several passing close overhead. As a consequence, close range weapons were continually in use.

On 22 June, *Parramatta* in company with her senior ship, HMS *Auckland*, left Alexandria at 19:50, to escort the small British steam tanker, SS *Pass of Balmaha*. This vessel was loaded with a cargo of seven hundred and fifty tons of aviation fuel and petrol, intended for the besieged garrison at Tobruk. The ordered route was followed, and traversed without incident, on 23 June. On the morning of 24 June, *Auckland* was on station ahead, and *Parramatta* was astern of the tanker. Both escorts carried out independent zigzags. At 08:40, a single enemy reconnaissance aircraft was observed to the west and was fired upon by *Auckland*. At 09:15, an Italian S.79 aircraft came out of the sun from astern, dropping a stick of bombs which fell ahead of *Parramatta*. At 11:48, three S.79s attacked with torpedoes, two being on either quarter of *Parramatta*. Bursts of fire at each of these aircraft from both escorts caused them to drop their weapons early. *Parramatta* turned to starboard to avoid the torpedo on the starboard side. At 13:45, an attack was made from the port side by a single S.79, which dropped four bombs, straddling *Parramatta*. At 17:35, *Parramatta* opened fire at maximum range on a large formation of enemy aircraft. Two more large formations were observed working their way westward at maximum range towards the sun. Observers in *Parramatta* identified these aircraft as German JU88 *Stukas*, flying at fourteen thousand feet, with sixteen aircraft in each formation. One of these formations attacked *Parramatta*, whereas the other two formations homed in on *Auckland*, both escorts engaging with long range and close-range guns. At 17:50, *Auckland* became obscured in dense smoke, indicating that she had been hit. When she emerged from the smoke, she was heading directly towards *Parramatta*, forcing the latter to make a rapid change of direction to avoid a collision between her and *Pass of Balmaha*. *Auckland* had taken on a list to port and started to swing to port. As she passed down *Parramatta*'s starboard side, it was obvious that she was a blazing wreck aft of her mainmast, with no stern or quarterdeck visible, but her forward guns were still firing. The attacks continued for another fifteen minutes, then the enemy retired. *Pass of Balmaha* appeared unscathed, and was ordered by *Parramatta* to keep to seaward and remain underway. *Auckland* had stopped, and her crew was abandoning ship. She continued to lie with a heavy list to port, blowing off steam, with smoke streaming from fires inside her. Several officers were still onboard destroying the confidential books and any other secret documentation. *Parramatta* stopped to windward of the men in the water, and lowered her whaler, a dinghy, lifebelts and floats.

At 18:28, another aerial attack was observed forming, but *Parramatta* could not immediately move. Due to survivors from *Auckland* in the water in the vicinity of her propellers, she could not go ahead. The attack, when it came, caught *Parramatta* while she was still gathering speed. This was a level bombing attack by a V formation of six Italian S.79 aircraft, flying from east to west, at five thousand feet. Steady gunfire at these aircraft appeared to not deter them, as they pressed home their attack on *Parramatta*, dropping many bombs. Some were close but short, which lifted the ship bodily out of the water. However, *Paramatta* remained unscathed.

After flying past *Parramatta*, the attacking aircraft turned and concentrated their attention on *Pass of Balmaha*. Fortunately, this effort also missed. Heavy fighter support of some twenty or thirty ME 109s and 110s were seen forming up as the bombers finally withdrew. As these aircraft made their attacking passes, they also strafed *Auckland*'s helpless survivors in the water. Shortly after, there was a loud internal explosion caused by *Auckland*'s boilers exploding, which lifted what was left of her clear out of the water. Her back was broken, with a visible crease down her starboard side, she eventually settled with a pronounced list to port, which gradually got greater, until she rolled over and sank. *Pass of Balmaha* had lowered her boats, as if they intended to help pick up survivors, however, this was not the case, they were wisely abandoning ship as her cargo of fuel was highly explosive. It was obvious that *Parramatta* and the small tanker could not get into a position of safety from dive bombers before dusk. Then there was the need to pick up the survivors from *Auckland*, who would have to wait until after nightfall to be rescued. *Parramatta* moved to seaward to give herself some manoeuvring room, while still remaining in the immediate vicinity. As the sun got low on the horizon, several aircraft formations could be seen. The enemy was coming from the south-east, working around towards the sun, then overhead to attack. At 19:55, the attack began with three formations of JU88 *Stukas*. *Parramatta* zigzagged at her best speed, endeavouring to turn beam on to each attack, all the time putting up defensive fire with all the guns at her disposal. These inflicted at least three direct hits with four-inch shells on aircraft, and pieces of a fourth were seen falling into the sea. Each dive bomber appeared to release one large bomb and four smaller ones. Although *Parramatta* was showered with shrapnel, she was not structurally damaged, and, fortunately, there were no casualties. All available weapons were constantly firing, and the men who manned them fought with purpose. This included the aft Vickers machine gun crew, manned by sick bay staff, and trained by Harrington. The Surgeon's time served with Sydney University Regiment was put to good use, under actual combat conditions.

The last few aircraft did not attack, and finally withdrew as the sun began to set. *Parramatta* then turned westward towards the darkening horizon, ever alert for the possibility of a torpedo attack from this direction. With the aerial threat diminished, *Parramatta* slowly approached the boats and *Auckland*'s survivors still treading water waiting to be rescued. HMAS *Waterhen*, and later HMAS *Vendetta*, came into view. *Parramatta* signalled the position(s) and distance(s) of *Auckland*'s survivors, and was picking them up when *Waterhen* arrived. The destroyer then circled the area, carrying out an anti-submarine patrol. *Pass of Balmaha*, now manned, reported that she was damaged in her boiler room and could not 'flash up' her boilers. *Waterhen* was then assigned the task of taking the tanker in tow to Tobruk. Having embarked all of *Auckland*'s survivors *Parramatta* left at 21:40 on 24 June for Mersa Matruh in accordance with instructions received. However, being low on ammunition, and having onboard several seriously wounded survivors, the command in *Parramatta* decided to then head directly to Alexandria, and signalled these intentions to Rear Admiral, Alexandria. Meanwhile, the wardroom and the petty officers' mess were turned into sick bays. Harrington, with the assistance of Leading Steward Richard Bampton, and the two Sick Berth Attendants, SBA George Poyser and SBA John Warner, worked through the night among *Auckland*'s wounded and suffering. They treated men black with oil, and men burned by the fierce fires in *Auckland* before she sank. They also treated men sick with shock; men vomiting from the ingestion of fuel oil; men fighting to get air into lungs concussed by the effects of underwater explosions; men with broken limbs and ruptured body parts; men blind with gases from toxic fumes; exhausted men from struggling among spouting columns of water thrown up by exploding bombs; men at the last stages of

human endurance. They sprawled on chairs, on the deck, or on tables. One man, who appeared uninjured, sat calmly smoking in a chair until he quietly died. To add to their misery, the atmosphere in the ship below decks was foul and putrid with the fumes and stench of battle, and underfoot, the decks were dark and slippery with a slurry of blood and water. But because of Harrington and his hard-working assistants, the injured and sick were reasonably calm and cheerful. Harrington in particular was described by an officer shipmate, 'as a magnificent character, drily humorous, keenly intelligent and very efficient.' *Parramatta* arrived alongside at Alexandria at 19:45 on 25 June with one hundred and sixty-two survivors from *Auckland* on board. Of these, twenty-two were serious medical cases. Two men had died of their wounds, and were properly buried at sea with due reverence.

In recognition of this service, Harrington was recommended for the award of the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), the citation for which - in part - reads thus:

'For outstanding gallantry, fortitude and resolution whilst serving in HMAS *Parramatta*. This officer on his own initiative trained a crew from his staff in the use of a Vickers Machine Gun, mounted aft. During several actions he took charge of the gun and crew with calm efficiency and he set an inspiring example, not only to the crew of his own gun, but also to the men in nearby action stations. When wounded and survivors were embarked into *Parramatta*, he worked with splendid devotion in their care, and when the men from *Auckland* were finally landed, he had himself reached exhaustion. His excellent organisation contributed to the saving of lives and the comfort of the wounded. His example was inspiring to all onboard.' On Thursday, 8 January 1942, Surgeon Lieutenant Charles Frederick Harrington, MB, BS, RANR, was awarded the DSC. Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond his control, he would never receive it in person.

Parramatta was ordered to immediately prepare to sail again on another convoy, heading westward at 06:00 the next morning. The need for escort ships was desperate. The ship's company fought against exhaustion to work through the night. *Parramatta* was cleaned of the debris, grime and blood of action. She refuelled and quickly restocked her magazines with her full complement of ammunition. Before dawn of 26 June, the sailing was cancelled. However, the crew continued to work through the 26th. Wireless aerials destroyed by bombs were renewed; two Oerlikon guns were fitted amidships, and just after dusk they sailed. At 06:25 the next morning, off Mersa Matruh, a rapidly approaching 'contact' was made by Asdic, followed by a torpedo track under the ship's keel amidships. *Parramatta* had not recently been degaussed, but the enemy for his part had failed to fit the torpedo with a magnetic firing pistol, plus the weapon had been set too deep. *Parramatta* turned on the still visible track made by the torpedo. Contact was then made by Asdic, followed by three separate patterns of depth charges. Asdic then indicated that the submarine was moving very slowly. Oil came to the surface, then contact faded and was lost. *Stuart* met up with *Parramatta* towards mid-day to continue the search. *Parramatta* then went into Mersa Matruh and *Voyager* came out to replace *Stuart*. *Parramatta* transferred twelve depth charges to *Voyager* to help them 'have a go at their submarine.'

By the end of August 1941, *Parramatta* had been commissioned for over seventeen months. Her main armament and essential fittings and fixtures had been worn and worked almost to breaking point. The ship's company as a whole had borne the strain of war as best they could, but now they were really feeling the effects of continuous active service. Lack of sleep had

worn them down as much as continuous action had. Night after night the air raids had given them no respite. As an anti-aircraft ship, *Parramatta* always joined in the barrage. This had become quite tedious, and the crew were more or less living on their nerves. The ship was at Famagusta on 29 August, returning to Alexandria on the 30th, and the next few days were spent cleaning boilers. Raids were almost constant. On the night of 5 September, a JU 88 swept close above *Parramatta*'s foremast and dropped a large bomb between her and HM Ships *Woolwich* and *Kandahar*. On 7 September, *Parramatta* went to sea for a shoot at a sleeve target. At 18:00, she was in transit to Port Said as escort for the merchant ship SS *Clan Forbes*. There were many aircraft aloft throughout the moonlit night. *Parramatta* anchored in the Great Bitter Lake to act as anti-aircraft ship for the assembled merchant ships. The Suez Canal was heavily raided to the south from 23:55 to 05:30. *Parramatta* held her fire to avoid drawing attention to the merchant ships in her charge. The next day, she proceeded past sunken wrecks to Tewfik. At Tewfik, *Parramatta* anchored each night at Attaka, mooring each morning in the Tewfik Roadstead. Nearly every night she was duty anti-aircraft ship. She was kept at one hour's notice for steam, or at immediate notice during raids. Raids were experienced at the Canal on the 9th, 12th, 13th and 14th at Suez, coming in from many directions. On 13 September, *Parramatta* was fitted with new four-inch gun barrels to replace the worn-out old ones. During this time, there were many departures from the ship. Experienced men went to new ships. Several of the officers were sent on courses, and one was invalided out. Although a hard core of officers remained with the ship, including Surgeon Lieutenant Harrington.

With new gun barrels and several new crew members, *Parramatta* completed her tour as duty anti-aircraft ship at Suez, and left for Hurghada airfield with one hundred and thirty air force personnel embarked. She then went on survey duty in the Gulf of Suez. German propaganda radio claimed that *Parramatta* was taking soundings for a refuge for the Mediterranean Fleet which the Germans proposed to eventually drive through the Canal. The Gulf is circled by mountains, and when attacking German bombing aircraft would come in from the desert and down the mountain sides in long dives before they could be spotted. The observers at Ismailia usually gave warnings of their approach, but the mountains prevented the ship's gunnery directors from giving accurate bearings while attacking aircraft were in their shadow.

On 15 November 1941, *Parramatta* returned to Alexandria in company with HMAS *Yarra*. On the 18th, they gathered together a small convoy for Tobruk. That same morning, British High Command opened their offensive, code-named *Crusader*, on a front fifty miles wide front from Sollum to Jarzbug. The whole North African theatre (land, sea and air) had exploded into battle. It had been preceded since October by an intensive aerial and naval campaign against the Germans lines of communication. At the height of this effort the Germans had lost sixty percent of their shipping on the Mediterranean crossing. The Navy continued to provide supplies and logistics, not only for the Tobruk garrison, but to also feed and supply the main Army push after the relief of the beleaguered garrison. The fortunes of war swung either way for several weeks. In those few weeks the ships carried enormous quantities of stores and logistics to Tobruk; fighting their way in and fighting their way out.

On 26 November, at 11:00, *Parramatta*, in company with HM destroyer *Avon Vale*, was escorting an ammunition ship. The first day at sea was quiet. But during the second day an enemy aircraft overflew the small convoy. By midnight of the 27th/28th, *Parramatta* was about twenty-five miles north of Bardia. At about 00:30, she went alongside the ammunition ship to give directions by megaphone her directions and orders for Tobruk. *Avon Vale* was at some

distance away in the all-encompassing dark. *Parramatta* slowed to manoeuvre alongside the ammunition ship, then once the instructions were passed and acknowledged, speed was increased. A few seconds later, at 00:35, *Parramatta* was hit with two torpedoes. One struck amidships, the other struck underneath the quarter-deck. The two explosions had broken *Parramatta*'s back. She rapidly rolled over to starboard and sank. Only those on deck at the time had any chance of survival. About thirty, including two officers, clung to an *Oropesa* float amongst a mass of debris. They could hear shouting close by in the darkness. Suddenly, as if she was reluctant to take the final plunge, *Parramatta*'s stern broke the surface. Some distance off, a vague black shape was visible. Two sailors decided to take a chance and swim towards it. After a while and near exhaustion, they were rescued by *Avon Vale*. The destroyer had, by 03:05, rescued nineteen survivors from the wreckage strewn sea. No others were found, and although she had searched a wide area the destroyer could find no trace of the *Oropesa* float or any of its human cargo. Three more sailors from *Parramatta* reached the Libyan coast unaided, and were rescued by advancing British troops, making twenty-four survivors. One hundred and thirty-eight lost their lives, including each and every one of her officers.

Surgeon Lieutenant Charles Frederick Harrington, DSC, RANR, aged 27, is commemorated at the Plymouth Naval Memorial, Plymouth, Plymouth Unitary Authority, Devon, England, Panel 60 Column 2. Memorial ID 13294364.

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Surgeon 4 - Eric Mortimer Tymms (1906-1942), was born in Rockhampton, Queensland, on 28 March 1906, the son of Herbert George and Helen Therese Tymms; later husband of Louisa Marion Tymms of Elsternwick, Glen Eira, Victoria. Tymms was educated at the prestigious Hale School, an Anglican day and boarding school for boys, at Wembley Downs, Western Australia, as a ten-year-old in 1915. His father conducted a medical practice in West Perth. After leaving Hale School in 1924, Tymms moved to Melbourne to study medicine at Ormond College, University of Melbourne. Tymms received First Class Honours in Public Health in both 1926 and 1927, and subsequently obtained a Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree and a Bachelor of Surgery (BS) degree. He was Superintendent of the Children's Hospital, Melbourne for three years, and Senior Surgical Registrar of the Royal Melbourne Hospital for four years. In December 1934, Tymms volunteered for service with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). On 1 January 1935, he was appointed Surgeon Lieutenant RANR. On 13 May, Tymms was appointed to HMAS *Cerberus* for thirteen days' annual continuous training (ACT). On 6 June 1936, he was appointed to the *County*-class heavy cruiser HMAS *Canberra* for a period of thirteen days ACT. On 31 May 1937, Tymms was appointed to HMAS *Cerberus* for an extended period of ACT. On 30 June 1939, he was appointed to HMAS *Canberra* for a further extended period of training. On 27 August 1940, Tymms was mobilised by proclamation, then appointed to HMAS *Lonsdale* (additional). Two days later, he was appointed to HMAS *Canberra*. On or about 27 November 1940, Tymms was appointed to the *Leander*-class light cruiser, HMAS *Perth*. On 1 January 1941, he was promoted Surgeon Lieutenant Commander, RANR. Tymms was then re-appointed to *Perth*, on promotion.

During the month of November 1940, *Perth* made passage to New Zealand to join as the escort of a military convoy. She then joined convoy **US7**. This convoy was composed of the Polish former passenger liner, *SS Batory*, and three British former passenger liners, *Orion*, *Stratheden*,

and *Strathmore*. These four ships had been converted to troop transports, and were now transporting a total of ten thousand six hundred and twenty-nine New Zealand troops, destined for the Middle East. On 22 November, *Perth* detached from **US7** in the Tasman Sea to carry out a search for the German Raider *Penguin*. On 28 November, *Perth* rejoined **US7** at Fremantle as ocean escort. On the 29th, *Perth* departed Fremantle with Convoy **US7**, arriving at Colombo on 4 December. It was here that the ship received orders to depart the next day for Aden. *Perth* was headed for the Mediterranean, where the Royal Navy was facing mounting tensions. She passed Aden on 6 December, and escorted convoy **US7** through the Red Sea. *Perth* transferred **US7** to ships of the RN, and returned to Aden on 17 December, to rendezvous with convoy **BS10B** of thirteen ships, closely followed by another convoy of thirty-seven ships. On the morning of 23 December, *Perth* entered the Suez Canal, and on Christmas Eve she arrived in Alexandria. It was not much of a Christmas for anyone serving in the Middle East in 1940.

Perth, in company with six destroyers, sailed into the Mediterranean to stand off Tobruk during an Allied air raid, a precursor to the British and Australian land force attack on the Italian stronghold of Tobruk. After returning to Alexandria on 30 December, *Perth*, in company with the light cruiser HMS *Ajax*, sailed the next day for Crete, to embark soldiers for service in the Adriatic. *Perth* reached Suda Bay on the north coast of Crete on New Year's Day 1941. Over the previous two months Suda Bay had been established as a British naval base. The one hundred- and sixty-mile-long island provided an advanced base for the RN Fleet, as well as a useful air base for bombing the Romanian oilfields, upon which the German forces were very dependent. The ships were welcomed by Italian aircraft overhead, although no bombs were dropped. *Perth*, *Ajax*, and the resident shore batteries opened up on the aircraft but without success. More aircraft returned a short while later, but no hits were registered. The next evening, *Perth* left Suda Bay for Piraeus, the main seaport of Athens, where she remained for three days before returning to Suda Bay with *Ajax*. While at Piraeus there had been two air raids so *Perth* had gone back to sea to clear the harbour confines. *Perth* arrived back in port the next day, only to experience two more air raids. *Perth* left port again and joined up with HM cruisers *Orion* and *York* supporting a convoy south of Italy, headed for the RN Naval Base at Malta. While in transit, they exchanged identities with the aircraft carrier *Illustrious*, the battleships *Warspite* and *Malaya*, and eight destroyers. The following day, they carried out the same routine with HMA Ships *Sydney* and *Stuart* heading east. On 9 January, *Perth* came under two air attacks. By now the anti-aircraft gunnery crews were well practiced. Signals received in *Perth* indicated that *Illustrious* had been bombed and had suffered damage, but was still afloat. On the 10th, the three cruisers fought off two more air attacks before they met a convoy of six ships from Malta, and escorted them until darkness fell. On 11 January, *Perth* was escorting a convoy of six ships when, at 15:30, she was ordered to proceed at best speed to assist HM cruiser *Southampton*, which had been heavily bombed, and was ablaze from stem to stern. *Perth* was steaming to the position given in company with cruisers *Orion* and *Gloucester*, and three destroyers. At 20:00, they sighted the burnt-out, derelict, *Southampton*. She was abandoned at 21:00, then sunk by two torpedoes from HMS *Diamond* soon thereafter.

On 12 January, *Perth* and *Orion* proceeded at their best speed to Suda Bay, arriving there at 15:00 to pick up Royal Air Force personnel and take them to Piraeus. Upon their arrival at Piraeus at 03:00, they disembarked their passengers. They then embarked two hundred Royal Army Medical Corps personnel, and at 05:00 the two cruisers departed at their best speed for Malta. They arrived at Malta on the morning of 14 January, and berthed alongside the wharf at

Valetta. *Illustrious*, with the merchant ship, SS *Essex*, close astern, were in dry dock, opposite *Perth*. From 21:45 until 00:15, they fought off a night air raid. On the 16th, there was a series of air raids. The first of these was made by six aircraft which released their bombs from about four thousand feet, scoring a direct hit on *Essex*. Some twenty minutes later, twenty dive bombers attacked, with *Illustrious* sustaining a direct hit on her port quarter. Twenty-four men were killed in the engine room of *Essex*. She was also on fire, which threatened to ignite the four thousand tons of ammunition still on board. Volunteers from *Perth* helped in retrieving the dead, as well as fighting the fires. It was later speculated that the men from *Perth* saved Malta, as well as saving their own ship and shipmates. If the ammunition in *Essex* had exploded, it would have flattened a fair portion of Malta as well. At the same time, a one-thousand-pound bomb had lodged between *Perth* and a pontoon holding her clear of the wharf. If it had not been for the pontoon, it would have been a direct hit. Even so, the bomb blast was devastating. It had put a large indentation in *Perth*'s underwater hull on the starboard side, sheering rivets and springing her shell plating. It had also blacked out the ship, except for the emergency lighting.

Enemy pilots, knowing they had damaged *Illustrious*, came back a second time to attack the docked and damaged aircraft carrier. Sixty aircraft took part in this attack, and for twenty-six of them it was their last mission. The *Illustrious* anti-aircraft gunners were deadly accurate, especially from the stable platform on which they found themselves. However, one dive bomber still managed to lob a one-thousand-pound bomb into the carrier's hangar deck, causing death and destruction amongst the carrier's crew. Even so, *Illustrious* gunners still managed to drive off the remaining aircraft, but not without considerable cost. Casualties incurred on *Illustrious* that night amounted to something like two hundred killed, with many more wounded or injured. *Perth* went back to sea that same night with a noticeable list to starboard. Due to a serious scarcity of ships, she had been instructed to go out on patrol with quick drying cement in a cofferdam covering the section of damaged hull keeping the water out. *Perth* then set sail for Alexandria where she arrived on the afternoon of 18 January. Four days later, *Perth* was heading back to Malta in company with HM battleships, *Barham* and *Valiant*, and eight HM destroyers to escort *Illustrious* to Alexandria. On 25 January, *Perth* arrived back at Alexandria with the escort for *Illustrious*. The next day, *Perth* sailed to Suda Bay, and for several days was deployed for patrol and escort of convoys to Piraeus. On the last day of January, *Perth* received a signal reporting the torpedoing of the Greek tanker, SS *Desmouillea*. She proceeded to close the stricken tanker and made preparations to take her in tow. *Desmouillea* had very little freeboard, and her engine room was flooded. *Perth* stood by until a tug more suited to the task arrived, then left to continue her patrol. After further convoy escort work, in early February, *Perth* was ordered to return to Alexandria to undergo a refit. On the 9th, she had all her ammunition discharged to lighters before entering a floating dock for survey of the damage incurred at Malta during the 16th of January air raid. That same day, Prime Minister Robert Menzies visited the ship.

On completion of the hull survey, *Perth* was in dry dock for ten days, undergoing repairs and refit, during which a two-pounder pom-pom gun was fitted to improve her air defences. During her time in dry dock, there were air raids on five of these days. On 24 February, *Perth* was deployed with HM destroyers *Mohawk* and *Nubian* to escort HM monitor *Terror*, which was under tow to Alexandria after being badly damaged by air attacks. On the 27th, *Perth* was deployed with HM cruiser *Bonaventure*, and HM destroyers *Decoy*, *Hasty*, *Hero* and *Jaguar*

to take troops to the remote island of Kastelorizo in support of a landing by commando units. (Operation *Abstention*). After the troops were landed, *Perth* carried out a patrol north of the island. The next day, *Perth* was called upon to provide cover for the evacuation of these troops after the operation was abandoned. On 1 March, *Perth* made passage to Alexandria with the destroyers *Decoy* and *Hasty* after calling in at Suda Bay. On 7 March, *Perth* embarked six hundred and fifty troops at Alexandria for passage to Piraeus (Operation *Lustre*). *Perth* was accompanied by *Ajax* and *Orion*, with both cruisers carrying a similar number of troops. On 17 March, *Perth* was again deployed with *Ajax* and *Orion* for the transport of more Allied troops to Greece, this time with five hundred Australian and New Zealand troops in *Perth*. After disembarking these troops at Piraeus on 19 March, *Perth* escorted the six ships of Convoy **AG 7**, in company with HMA destroyer *Vampire*. On 20 March, *Perth* joined with HM cruisers *Ajax*, *Orion*, *Gloucester* and *York*, HM aircraft carrier *Formidable*, HM battleships *Barham*, *Valiant* and *Warspite*, with a destroyer screen, to protect a convoy of four ships; SS *City of Lincoln*, SS *City of Manchester*, SS *Clan Ferguson* and SS *Perthshire*, with vital supplies for Malta. On 26 March, *Perth* sailed from Piraeus with cruisers *Orion*, *Ajax* and *Gloucester*, and destroyers *Hereward* and *Vendetta* as Force 'B': The plan was to meet with units of Mediterranean Fleet on passage from Alexandria to intercept a major Italian Fleet, known to be intent on attacking military convoys in the Aegean. There were more aerial attacks suffered by *Perth*, and she increased her score of victories by bringing down at least one, probably two dive bombers.

The Battle of Matapan.

On 27 March 1941, after a few more days of convoy and supporting activities between Malta, Suda Bay and Piraeus, *Perth* departed Piraeus with orders to make contact with the Italian Fleet, which was believed to be coming out to sea. Allied intelligence had indicated the enemy was about to attack poorly protected convoys to Greece, as a precursor to a German invasion. The British fleet would be waiting at a prearranged position at dawn on the 28th. At 07:50 that day, *Perth*, in company with *Ajax*, *Orion* and *Gloucester*, sighted Italian warships off the coast of Sicily, consisting of two eight-inch cruisers and two six-inch cruisers. *Perth* immediately went from defence stations to action stations. At 08:00, the Italians opened fire, thereby commencing the Battle of Matapan. The battle itself lasted for twelve hours. It covered almost two hundred nautical miles of sea, and took place between Sicily and Cape Matapan, the most southerly point of the Greek Peninsula. The British battle fleet, with the battleship *Warspite* wearing the flag of C-in-C Mediterranean, had left Alexandria at their best speed as soon as the Italians were sighted, and *Orion* had sent a sighting signal giving the enemy's position. *Orion* then reversed course to draw the Italian fleet towards the approaching British forces, managing at the same time to dodge fifteen-inch shells at sixteen miles distant throughout the forenoon. *Perth* and *Ajax* and the other two cruisers managed to do the same. Their hound and hare tactics drew the Italian fleet towards the slower moving British battleships, *Warspite*, *Valiant* and *Barham*, and the aircraft carrier *Formidable*. Several of the Italian cruisers opened fire with eight-inch guns at extreme range as the four decoys raced towards their fleet. For all that, their shooting was not accurate. Contact with the Italian fleet was then lost until dusk when Allied reconnaissance aircraft discovered that major units of the Italian fleet were in full retreat, sailing for their home bases. Although, at 22:10, several enemy cruisers and destroyers were sighted by a British destroyer, which lit them up with searchlights and opened fire at four thousand yards. One of the first Commonwealth ships to join the battle was the Australian

destroyer, HMAS *Stuart*, under the command of Captain H M L Waller, RAN, who would later take command of *Perth*. *Stuart* managed to fire on three Italian cruisers, and assisted in sinking two enemy destroyers, *Vincenzo Gioberti* and *Maestrale*.

Even though the Italian force had three reasonably modern (1934) battleships, eleven cruisers, and fourteen destroyers, they chose to beat a tactical retreat rather than encounter the Allied fleet. Be that as it may, it still cost them dearly. Their losses included the heavy cruisers *Zara*, *Fiume* and *Pola*, each of ten thousand tons, which were sunk by British battleships' fire from less than five thousand yards. Other losses included the destroyers mentioned above. Cruiser *Giovanni Della Bado Nere* and destroyer *Vittorio Alfieri* were also believed to have been destroyed. The battleship *Vittorio Veneto* was hit several times with aerial torpedoes and was last sighted making for Taranto at eight knots. When overtaken by ships of her own force, she had opened fire on them, mistaking them for pursuing British ships. The Allied Mediterranean fleet suffered no losses or damage to ships. The only losses incurred were five Fleet Air Arm aircraft; the crew of one of these were rescued. At close of battle, C-in-C Mediterranean, Sir Andrew Cunningham radioed Italian Naval HQ to send a hospital ships to pick up Italian survivors clinging to rafts and floating wreckage. The next morning, more than one thousand Italians were rescued by British ships. Attacks by *Luftwaffe Stukas* prevented the rescue of hundreds more. *Perth* was ordered to Piraeus, arriving there at 13:30 on 30 March. She departed at 09:00 the next day, escorting another convoy.

During the first four days of April 1941, *Perth* continued to carry out convoy escort operations between Suda Bay and Piraeus. There was increasing enemy action, particularly from the air. One ship, MV *Northern Prince*, was bombed and set on fire by *Stukas*, blowing up early on the 4th. On 5 April, the Germans invaded Greece. They declared war on the Greek nation the next day, launching a merciless aerial attack on the port of Piraeus, dropping bombs and magnetic mines. SS *Cyprian Prince* blew up and sank within five minutes by a bomb dropped one hundred and fifty yards away from *Perth*. SS *Clan Fraser* was also hit and set on fire after being bombed. She was loaded with two hundred and fifty tons of TNT, and a lighter alongside her held another one hundred tons. In all, fifteen ships were sunk, and many more were set on fire. All through the night, explosions could be seen everywhere as ammunition and petrol dumps were set ablaze. Next morning the wharves and sheds were in flames, and the port was covered in a haze of smoke. For the next two weeks, *Perth* carried out escort and other duties between Piraeus and Suda Bay. On 24 April, *Perth* deployed with HM cruiser *Phoebe* to escort Convoy **AG13**, comprised of HM Landing Ships Infantry (LSI(L) *Glenearn*, *Glengyle* and *Glenroy*, from Alexandria to Suda Bay, then carried out a patrol in Kythera Channel. On the 26th, *Perth*, in company with *Orion*, *Phoebe*, and HM destroyer *Defender*, carried out an offensive sweep off Nauplia, Greece, then embarked troops at Nauplia. The next day, *Perth*, in company with *Phoebe* and HM destroyers *Hasty* and *Decoy*, escorted evacuation Convoy **GA14**, comprised of requisitioned troopships SS *City of London*, SS *Costa Rica*, HMS *Glengyle*, SS *Khedive Ismail*, and SS *Salween*. On 28 April, *Perth* was involved in the evacuation of Allied troops at Kalamata in company with *Phoebe* and HM destroyers *Decoy*, *Hasty*, *Kandahar*, *Kimberley* and *Kingston*. When fires ashore silhouetted the evacuation ships it forced them to depart, leaving many soldiers behind at the mercy of the invading forces. The next day, *Perth* was part of the escort of the final evacuation convoy during its passage through Kasos Strait to Alexandria, in company with the anti-aircraft cruiser, HMS *Carlisle*, HM sloop *Auckland*, and HM destroyers *Kandahar*, *Kingston*, *Decoy* and *Defender*.

At 08:00 on 1 May 1941, the evacuation fleet arrived at Alexandria. For the next few days, *Perth* was alongside at Alexandria, having multiple pom-pom quick firing anti-aircraft guns fitted. While they were in port, there were more air raids, including a night raid on 4 May. On 6 May, *Perth* sailed from Alexandria with *Formidable*, *Barham*, *Valiant*, *Warspite*, *Ajax*, *Orion*, the minelaying cruiser HMS *Abdiel*, and the requisitioned logistic/troop transport ship, HMS *Breconshire*, as covering escort to Convoy **MW7A**, comprised of four fast supply ships, MV *Amerika*, SS *Settler*, MS *Talabot* and MS *Thermopylae*, heading for the beleaguered island of Malta. On 9 May, *Perth* remained off Malta with Fleet units and Joined **Tiger** Convoy. This convoy was bringing tanks and supplies to the Eighth Army in Egypt from Britain. On 10 May, *Perth* took up station to the north of **Tiger** Convoy to provide cover during its passage to Alexandria. On the 14th, *Perth* was deployed with HM cruisers *Naiad* and *Phoebe* and HM destroyers *Greyhound* and *Hasty* as Force 'D' to cover the passage of a reinforcement convoy to Crete.

The Battle of Crete

On 16 May 1941, *Perth* received orders to proceed to Crete and block any attempted German landing by sea at Canae. The German bombing of Suda Bay and the airstrip intensified from the 15th, and by the 18th, the Royal Air Force presence on Crete was eliminated. The *Luftwaffe* Air Fleet IV, given the task of taking Crete, consisted of some one thousand, three hundred and thirty aircraft, comprising of six hundred *Junkers* troop carriers, two hundred and eighty bombers, one hundred and fifty *Stukas*, two hundred fighters, and sixty reconnaissance aircraft. Early on 20 May, these aircraft descended on Crete and dropped the *Storm* Regiment of the German 7th Airborne Division by parachute

C-in-C Mediterranean, Admiral Cunningham, was given the responsibility of blocking a seaborne invasion. On the nights of both the 20th and 21st two cruiser forces - one of which included *Perth*, *Calcutta*, *Naiad* and *Carlisle*, and four destroyers, *Nubian*, *Juno*, *Kandahar* and *Kingston*, commanded by Rear Admiral E L S King, RN - patrolled the northern approaches to Crete. No invasion force was sighted, and at dawn the cruiser forces withdrew to the south. However, just after midnight of the 22nd, a fleet of twenty-five large caiques and small steamers escorted by Italian *Spica*-class torpedo-boat *Lupo* and *E*-boats were sighted about seven miles off Suda Bay. The British ships switched on their searchlights and opened fire. For almost three hours it was carnage. The German landing convoy was decimated by the naval firepower. The next day saw hundreds of dead German troops scattered over the waters of the Aegean Sea. At 10:00, the main German troop-carrying armada was sighted. This convoy of about four thousand troops decided to turn back, escorted by the Italian *Spica*-class torpedo-boat, *Sagittario*. At this point in time Rear Admiral King decided to withdraw rather than annihilate the retreating German force, because he was concerned more about aerial attack. King was later criticised at length by Cunningham - and then replaced - for not attacking the invasion force. Four thousand more dead Germans as well as the five thousand killed or drowned the night before, may have been too high a price to pay in human lives at that stage of the war. As it was, on the first day of the Battle of Crete, the Germans lost more men than they had in the first nineteen months of the war. King's withdrawal also proved rather pointless, as his ships still came under heavy aerial attack.

It was later reported that the Germans had committed at least five hundred bombers into the continual fifteen-hour aerial attack. They came in waves, taking terrible punishment from the

fierce anti-aircraft fire as they bombed and strafed the ships below. The superstructure of *Perth* and the ship's side were riddled with holes. Following the sinking of a fishing boat laden with enemy troops, the *Stukas* directed their attention on two HM cruisers, *Fiji* and *Gloucester*. They were taking a great deal of punishment, and both were badly damaged. When *Perth* arrived, she was able to draw off the attacking aircraft, and by rapid changes of course and nimble manoeuvring, *Perth* was able to escape the fate of *Fiji* and *Gloucester*, and HM destroyer *Greyhound*, which, at the end of the day, were all considered total losses. Much the same was afforded two HM destroyers in *Kelly* and *Kashmir*. Both were sunk, with the survivors being rescued by HMS *Kipling*, along with many other men from other sunken ships.

On 28 May, *Perth* proceeded to sea from Alexandria in company with *Phoebe*, *Calcutta*, *Coventry* and destroyers *Hasty*, *Janus* and *Jervis*, as well as HM Auxiliary *Glengyle*, to evacuate troops from Crete. After repulsing the German sea invasion, the Navy had to return and assist in getting the Allied Army out, after the German paratroop forces had surged across the island from Suda Bay to Spakia. *Perth* moved stealthily into Spakia on the south coast just after midnight, and was back at sea, enroute to Alexandria, at 03:00. Over two nights, *Perth* embarked over one thousand three hundred troops, and took them to safety in Alexandria. All embarkations were carried out in darkness, on unknown coasts, using charts of dubious accuracy and reliability. They were also difficult because of the uncertainty as to the exact location of German forces, and any mines which may have been laid by Allied forces. The total number of troops evacuated by all ships involved on this occasion was estimated at between ten and twelve thousand. On 29 May, air raids were resumed, and this time *Perth* suffered a near miss on the port side, which smashed the 6-inch and 4-inch gunnery control systems, and both master gyro compasses. As a consequence, *Perth* returned to Alexandria for quick repairs, and then went back out again that same night to Spakia to evacuate more troops. On this return voyage out of Crete, *Perth* had almost twelve hundred soldiers on board when she took a direct hit by a bomb between the bridge and the forward funnel. It was fortunate that it landed where it did, as it just missed the flag deck. Had it exploded there, the casualties might have been horrendous. As it was, it pierced the upper deck, exploding in 'A' boiler room beneath the galley. It put the forward boiler room out of action, and the explosion killed two cooks, two stokers and seven rescued soldiers. It was during these trying times that Surgeon Lieutenant Commander Eric Mortimer Tymms, RANR, was recognised for his service to others, and to the ship in which he served. The recommendation for the award of the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), reads thus:

'For outstanding gallantry, fortitude and resolution in HMAS *Perth*, during the Battle of Crete. This officer showed untiring energy and conspicuous devotion to duty in his care of wounded troops embarked at Spakia on the night of 29/30 May 1941, although he might easily have left them for attention later in hospital. He personally re-dressed or supervised the re-dressing of the wounds of every soldier on board in addition to attending to the casualties resulting from the ship herself being hit by a bomb. Although quite exhausted, his action considerably increased the chance of recovery of the wounded and constituted conspicuous devotion to duty.'

The *London Gazette* of Thursday 8 January 1942, has recorded the following: 'The King has been graciously pleased to give orders for the following Appointments to the Distinguished Service Order and to approve the following Rewards and Awards for outstanding gallantry,

fortitude and resolution during the Battle of Crete': The Distinguished Service Cross. Surgeon Lieutenant-Commander Eric Mortimer Tymms, MD, BS, RANR, HMAS *Perth*.

Due to circumstances beyond his control, Tymms would never receive this award in person. At the request of his wife, Mrs Marion Tymms, the DSC was presented to his son, Master Anthony Mortimer Tymms, aged six, on 21 April 1944, by the Governor of Victoria, His Excellency Major General Sir Winston Dugan, KCMG, CB, DSO, at Government House, Melbourne.

On 2 June 1941, *Perth* was taken in hand for repairs at Alexandria. On completion of these repairs, on 25 June, *Perth* took passage to join support operations with Fleet units of the Syrian coast under the broad auspices of Operation *Exporter*. On the 26th, *Perth* relieved HM cruiser *Leander* and took part in an offensive sweep to intercept Vichy warships. The entire operation was supported in the air by Allied fighter and bomber squadrons, focused on destroying Vichy air bases, and at sea by the 15th Cruiser Squadron, Royal Navy, which prevented Vichy French reinforcement, and bombarded Vichy coastal areas. The fighting ended with a ceasefire on 12 July. Operation *Exporter* was an Allied victory. On 12 July, while in Alexandria, *Perth* was nominated for return to RAN service following Japanese threat of attacks. On 18 July, *Perth* sailed from Alexandria and made passage back to Sydney, Australia. On 12 August 1941, *Perth* rejoined the RAN, and was immediately taken in hand at Garden Island dockyard for an extensive refit. However, between 18 August until 24 September 1941, *Perth* was at Cockatoo Island dockyard for repairs to her tanks, and shaft alignment due to bomb damage.

In early December 1941, *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 *Achillies*, and on 22 December returned to Sydney with *Canberra* and *Achillies*. On 29 December, *Perth* escorted military convoy **ZK5**, comprising of requisitioned ships SS *Aquitania*, SS *Herstein*, and SS *Sarpedon*, from Sydney to Port Moresby, New Guinea, in company with HMA *County*-class cruisers *Australia* and *Canberra*, HMNZS *Achillies*, and HMA sloops *Swan* and *Warrego*. The convoy was carrying four thousand 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.

In January 1942, *Perth* was nominated for service with the newly formed American, British, Dutch and Australian (ABDA) Naval force, for convoy defence duties. On 13 January, *Perth*, in company with *Achillies*, 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. On 31 January, *Perth* took passage to Fremantle for convoy defence duties. On 15 February, *Perth* escorted military convoy **MS4** for passage to Singapore. On 21 February, after the fall of Singapore, *Perth* and **MS4** were ordered to return to Fremantle. Shortly thereafter, *Perth* refuelled and took passage to join the Western Striking force of ABDA Command in the East Indies. On 24 February, *Perth* joined with HM 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 air attacks. On 27 February, *Perth* joined Combined Striking force comprising of Dutch cruisers *De Ruyter* and *Java*, HMS *Exeter*, US cruiser *Houston*, HM destroyers *Electra, Encounter* and *Jupiter*, Dutch destroyers *De-Witte* and *Kortenaer*, US destroyers *John D Edwards, Alden* and *John D F Ford*. Action was taken against Japanese warships, covering the passage of invasion convoys to Java, during which the flagship *De Ruyter* and destroyer *Kortenaer* were sunk. Both USS *Houston* and HMS *Exeter* were badly damaged and unable to contribute to further action. Waller in *Perth* took over command of Allied ships after the loss of *De Ruyter*. He then ordered a withdrawal from the action and took passage to Java. On 1 March 1942, *Perth* was in action with Japanese cruisers *Mogami* and *Mikuma* escorting an invasion fleet with destroyers. Two Japanese ships were sunk in this encounter.

During the action at first there was nothing either Tymms or Stening could do but wait. But things soon began to change. It started as a trickle, then a rush of men with ghastly wounds arrived. Those who were slightly wounded were still at their action station, fighting as best they could. Tymms and Surgeon Lieutenant Sam Stening were soon all but overwhelmed; treating men as best they could who had arms and legs missing; riddled with shrapnel; burned beyond recognition. The few available Sick Berth Attendants made rapid judgement calls; men who could be saved; others who just had to be left to die in comfort, consigned to a section of the passageway where bodies were waiting for eventual burial.

Perth was disabled by surface gunfire and three torpedoes. A fourth torpedo struck *Perth* while she was being abandoned and then sunk. Over three hundred of the ship's company went down with the ship, and three hundred and seven became prisoners of war. Tymms went down with *Perth*, while Stening would spend the next three and a half years as a prisoner of war. Surgeon Lieutenant Commander Eric Mortimer Tymms, DSC, MD, BS, RANR, is Commemorated in Perpetuity at the Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 75, Column 2.

*

Surgeon 5 - 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. As a consequence, 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 particular 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 *Grimby*. 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 *Kassandra 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, *Kassandra 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 *Slamat*, and *Khedive Ismael*, anti-aircraft cruiser *Calcutta* and destroyers *Isis*, *Hotspur*, *Griffin*, *Diamond* and *Havock*. *Slamat* 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 *Slamat* 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 *Slamat* 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*, *Herward*, *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*, *Herward* 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 disembarkation 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. At 1945 on the 29th, the two destroyers were off Sollum when they came under attack from 19 **JU87**s, 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 on 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 to 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 Stening 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 prisoners 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 Cunninham, 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 improvised 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 perhaps 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, RANVR. 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.

Non-Sibi Sed Patriae

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