





THE FIRST AUSTRALIAN DESTROYERS.

by R. A. Sherlock.

The first mention of destroyers for the Commonwealth Navy was made by the Naval Director, Captain Creswell in answer to questions by the Minister of Defence on 10th October 1905, and it was proposed to acquire over a period of seven years, three cruiser-destroyers, sixteen torpedo boat destroyers and fifteen first and second class torpedo boats.

Although this programme never came to anything it was discussed for three and a half years in Parliament, particularly the advantages and disadvantages of the destroyer over the submarine for which there was considerable support.

It was not until 5th February, 1909, that the Fisher Government decided to order two destroyers to be built and completed in England and also one to be erected in England then dismantled and shipped to Australia for re-erection and launching. Tenders were called in Great Britain and on 13th March, 1909, the High Commissioner was authorised by the Government to accept tenders. The three vessels subsequently named "Parramatta", "Yarra" and "Warrego" were all ordered on 10th April, 1909, when the contracts were signed.

PARRAMATTA, built by Fairfield Shipbuilding & Engineering Co., Govan, was launched on 9th February, 1910, and underwent full speed trials on 17th June of the same year.

YARRA, built by Denny Bros, Dumbarton, was launched on 9th April, 1910, and underwent full speed trials on 17th June, the same year.

Both vessels were commissioned at Greenock on 10th September, 1910, and left for Australia the same day, proceeding via Portsmouth, Gibraltar, Port Said, Suez, Aden, Colombo, Singapore and Balikpapan, arriving at Broome on 15th November, after which they steamed to Fremantle, Bunbury, Albany, Port Adelaide and arrived in Melbourne on 10th December, 1910. They were both dry docked after their 14,211 mile voyage, which was carried out at economical speed, which proved to be 13.8 knots.

The destroyers were temporarily commissioned as units of the Royal Navy and were transferred to the control of the Commonwealth Government at Broome. On the voyage out they were escorted by H.M.S. "Gibraltar". At Fremantle, Captain Tickell of "Parramatta" who was in charge, reported to Senator Hon. G. F. Pearce, the Minister of State for Defence, who handed him his first sailing orders from the Commonwealth.

The vessels were improved "River" class and had a length of 245 feet, beam (moulded) 24'3", depth 14'9", and draught 8'6". Displacement was 700 tons, guaranteed H.P. 10,000, shaft H.P. 12,000. Speed 26 knots, speed on trials 28 knots. Radius 2,990 miles at 14 knots. Three shafts driven by Parsons turbines, steam supplied by three oil fired boilers. The complement totalled 66 and the armament was one 4" Q.F., three 12lb Q.F., three 18" torpedo tubes and both were fitted with wireless.





THE AUSTRALIAN WHALING COMMISSION.

By A. J. Starke.

On the 30th May, 1956, the Australian Whaling Commission was abolished, and the following day the Shore Station at Carnarvon W. A. and a fleet of three catchers became the property of the Nor-West Whaling Co. of Perth, the sale being made for £880,000.

The Commission was formed in 1949, purchasing two vessels from overseas in 1950; in which year it also took delivery of a vessel built for its own account.

The vessels operated in Shark Bay W.A., the whales being towed to Carnarvon for processing.

During the short time the Commission was operating, it made an operating profit of £1,163,657, which would suggest that the Nor-West Whaling Co. has made a bargain.

- "CARNARVON" 598 gross. built 1950 by A. & J. Inglis, Glasgow.  
Dimensions 179.2/167.0 x 31.0 x 16.2.  
Single screw vessel, with 4 cylinder triple expansion.  
Engine made by North Eastern Marine.
- "GASCOYNE" 344 gross. built 1936 by Bremer Vulkan, Vegesack.  
Dimensions 146.5/137.0 x 26.1 x 13.7.  
Single screw vessel, with 3 cylinder triple expansion.  
Engine made by the builders:  
Ex "SOUTHERN BREEZE" (Chr. Salvesen of Leith).
- "MINILYA" 249 gross. built 1930 by Akers, Oslo.  
Dimensions 113.0 x 23.9 x 13.2.  
Single screw vessel, with 3 cylinder triple expansion.  
Engine made by the builders:  
Ex "THORVAARD" (Bryde & Dahl of Sandefjord, Norway)  
Although purchased in 1950 this vessel was not  
renamed until 1951.

Funnel Colouring: Yellow with black ring. Letters W.C. in  
black inside the ring.



was then owned by the United States Shipping Board and had been laid up for some time. As economical operation in the days of depression was not by any means possible, the Shipping Board hired her out to Byrd for a dollar a year. The other ship, the wooden hulled "Bear of Oakland" had already a long background of work in icy waters. Built by A. Steven and Company in Dundee in 1874 as the "Bear", she spent her first years as a whaler in the arctic and in 1884, the United States Government purchased her for 100,000 dollars to search for the survivors of the Greeley Arctic Expedition. She was later placed in the Revenue Cutter service - the forerunner of the United States Coast Guard - and in this capacity she was fitted with a couple of six pounder guns. She mainly ran up the coast of Labrador and for many years she was the first ship into the Bering Sea when the ice melted. She took part in the rescue of many who were trapped in the ice fields and was known as the Angel of the Arctic. The "Bear" was active until 1928 when she was laid up and was later awarded to the City of Oakland by an Act of Congress to serve as a maritime museum. Byrd approached the City of Oakland who agreed to put her up for auction and allow Byrd to buy her for a very low figure. At the auction however, a local second hand dealer nearly put a spanner in the works when he bid 1,000 dollars. However, he must have been silenced and Byrd was able to purchase the ship for 1,050 dollars. In gratitude to Oakland, he renamed the ship "Bear of Oakland". Built of oak, her hull was about 3 feet thick and was very well sheathed and strengthened. She was 200 feet long, and had a beam of 32 feet. She was 703 tons net, top speed was 7 to 8 knots. The "Bear" left Boston on September 25, 1933, and the "Ruppert" sailed on October 11. The latter ship made Wellington on December 5, 1933. The ships of the expedition again used Port Chalmers as their base and for the next two years were familiar visitors to the port. They finally left the Bay of Whales on December 7, 1935, for the return voyage to the United States via the Port of Otago. The "Jacob Ruppert" was renamed "Cocle" in 1941 and the 6530 tons freighter ran under the Panamanian flag until she was torpedoed by a submarine north of the Azores on May 12, 1942.

1939/1941.

For the third expedition the United States Navy took over the expense account and the ships were manned with Naval crews. The old "Bear of Oakland" was again recalled for service - after a thorough overhaul and the fitting of a brand new set of diesel engines. She was renamed "U.S.S. Bear", under the command of Lt. Commander R. H. Cruzen. The other ship, the "North Star" was also wooden hulled, having been built in 1932 by the Berg Ship Building Company, Seattle. Of 1,642 tons she was equipped with diesel engines, and with both the ships in the expedition having this type of propulsion, there were no worries regarding bunkers that were a feature of the first two expeditions in which supplies



of coal became a major problem. The "North Star" was commanded by Lt. Commander I.K.T. Lystad. The "U.S.S. BEAR" went direct to the ice while the "North Star" called at Wellington and Dunedin in December 1939, before leaving the latter port on January 3, 1940, for Little America. Admiral Byrd went South with the ships in 1939, but left for the United States and did not return when the "Bear" and "North Star" came back to Dunedin in December 1940, en route to Little America to pick up the wintering party left there. They sailed direct to the United States from Antarctica.

Between expeditions, the "Bear of Oakland" had been exhibited at the Chicago World Fair. During World War II, as the "U.S.S. Bear" she went into service around Canada's Arctic frontier for the Coast Guard. In 1947 the old ship was sold to the Shaw Steamship Company and was refitted for sealing around the coast of Labrador. She was finally laid up in 1953 after 79 years of service on voyages extending both farthest North and farthest South that man, up until that time, had ever navigated. She is still registered to the ownership of F.M. Shaw of Bridgetown, Barbados, as the "Arctic Bear". The "North Star" is now owned by the Western Boat Building Company of Tacoma, Washington.

#### 1946/1947.

The fourth expedition was on the grand scale and the fleet of ships was more in the nature of a Task Force and the operation was conducted as a naval exercise. The main objective of the expedition known as "OPERATION HIGH JUMP" was to map the coast and 125,000 square miles of coast line was plotted. The group found fifteen islands of moderate size, four large bays, one of which was 125 miles wide - and two new mountain ranges, each about 15,000 feet in height. Admiral Byrd was Officer in Charge with Rear Admiral Cruzen (who was in the 1940 expedition) as Officer in Charge of the Task Force. There were thirteen ships and four thousand men in the expedition, which was equipped with latest scientific equipment. For the first time in the Antarctic high powered icebreakers were used and helicopters and amphibious aircraft were employed to great advantage. The Task Force comprised the following vessels:-

Flagship was the United States Navy transport "Mount Olympus" - a 16 knot vessel with a displacement of 15,295 tons and a complement of about 550 men. There were two transports, the "Merrick" and "Yancey". Both ships were of the standard C2 - S - B1 type cargo ship. "Merrick" was completed in March 1945 by the Federal Shipbuilding Corporation and delivered to the United States Navy as "AKA 97". She was released to the United States Maritime Commission post war and was laid up for a time at Suisun Bay. She is now in service for the Military Sea Transportation Service.



"A T A C A M A"

By R. Parsons.

On the 14th October, 1897, the ship rigged wooden Chilean vessel, "Atacama" put into Sydney Harbour flying distress signals in a very unseaworthy condition, Captain H. C. Spruit, master. Lloyd's surveyors reported large repairs were necessary - Messrs Mort's Dock tendering to do the work for £7,000. The Chilean Consul considered this too costly and ordered "Atacama" sold at auction. Messrs. Cowlishaw Bros. of Sydney bought her for £700, retained Captain Spruit in command and ordered her refitted with no expense to be spared.

"Atacama" was built 1875 by Smit Bros. Alblasserdam, was 196' 6" x 39' x 27' 6". Square stern, 3 masts, ship rigged, 1,379 tons gross and when registered in Sydney January 1898, given British official number 106,162, signal letters P.L.D.F.

The work was finished early January 1898 and "Atacama" cleared Sydney for San Diego via Newcastle, N.S.W. January 21st 1898. On February 4th, 1898, within 24 hours of leaving Newcastle, she was abandoned in a sinking condition in heavy weather, and later foundered, the Captain and four seamen being the only survivors. They were picked up by the tug "Leveret" after "severe privations" to quote the subsequent court of inquiry. One man of the Captain's boat was drowned, and the other 12 members of the crew in two boats were never again seen.

The board of inquiry sitting in Sydney prefixed its report with the observation that the evidence was very conflicting and hard to obtain and assess but stated that Captain Spruit was in no way to blame and the members of the Court were of the opinion that had the overhaul been carried out thoroughly the disaster may well have been averted.

It was revealed at the inquiry that the original surveyors indicated one of the main items to be attended was the stripping of the copper from "Atacama's" hull and having the ship recoppered. This was not done. Quite a lot of money was spent on repairs to upper works and the inside of the ship but apart from caulking a small leak nothing was touched on the hull. The court remarked upon this but also pointed out that Captain Spruit had been in command of the ship for a considerable period and had expressed himself satisfied and ready to take the ship to sea.

Another point raised was the fact that the Owners never insured their ships. Their practice was to insure the cargo only but in the case of "Atacama" they experienced great difficulty in arranging cover and only succeeded upon paying rather large

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