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*The First Fateful Shot:
Port Phillip Bay, August 1914*

One Day Conference
9.30 am - 4.30 pm 2 August 2014
Queenscliff, Victoria

THE FIRST FATEFUL SHOT: PORT PHILLIP BAY, AUGUST 1914



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Australian Naval & Military Expeditionary Force & the Battle of Bita Paka, a Different Perspective

Toni Munday

This paper is written to honour the memory of all who left on the Berrima 19th August 1914 bound for German New Guinea. The deeds of those who fought in the Battle of Bitapaka set the tone for all that followed.

11th September 2014 will mark the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of Bita Paka, Rabaul, German New Guinea. Australia's first fighters, the men of the Australian Naval & Military Expeditionary Force, (ANMEF): Their achievements include:

- First Australian force to leave Australia – 19th August 1914
- First Australian unit in action in the 1914-1918 war – 11th September 1914
- First casualty: Able Seaman William Williams
- First Australian killed Able Seaman John Walker/Courtney
- First Military officer killed in this war: Captain Brian Pockley
- First Naval Officer killed in this war: Lieutenant Commander Charles Elwell
- First Bayonet charge: only one recorded in the history of the Royal Australian Navy
- Australia's first Medals and Citations awarded: 14 in fact
 - Lieutenant Thomas Bond – D.S.O.
 - Commended for Service
 - Captain Reginald Travers
 - Captain Brian Pockley
 - Commander Claude Cumberland
 - Commander Joseph Beresford
 - Lieutenant Commander Charles Elwell
 - Lieutenant Rowland Bowen
 - Lieutenant Gerald Hill
 - Midshipman Reginald Buller
 - Gunner George Stevens
 - Gunner Samuel Yeo
 - Gunner Charles Bacon
 - Gunner George Stevens
 - Petty Officer Frederick Sandys
 - Petty Officer Robert G Palmer
 - Petty Officer Archibald Bones

Such a significant date in our history, yet until 2005, I had no knowledge of the event that my nation once held in high esteem: until I read a copy of "*Heroes before Gallipoli*" by Kevin

Meade.¹ Not a large book, you could read it in a day. It was one of those stories that generated many questions. Even now I still don't have the answers that I for one, want to know. Working at the HMAS *Cerberus* Museum in the years that followed I came across many items that connected naval personnel who "Took part in the taking of German New Guinea".

In April 2011 I made a chance phone call to Mr Murray Wright to ask if he had anything his Grandfather Rear Admiral Frederick Tickell might have collected from the Rabaul campaign of 1914. Even though I knew Tickell hadn't served in this conflict, being high up, 2nd in charge to Rear Admiral Creswell, he may have one of those navy "rabbits": something small I thought. Murray said "I have nothing but my sister has the flag taken from Rabaul". After six years of looking for anything that related to Bitapaka I was speechless, to me this was like finding the "Holy Grail".

In the September, Murray and his sister Yvonne came to HMAS *Cerberus* to show me the flag; there wasn't any thought it was to be donated to the Naval Heritage collection.

My first question, how did this flag get to Australia, there has to be a story?

The newspaper section of the TROVE website <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper> became my daily paper, surely this flag's capture and journey was documented! It took several search phrases to finally find a starting point for the "German Imperial Flag captured from Rabaul".

F.S. Burnell the war correspondent of the Sydney Morning Herald who left on the Troopship *Berrima*, published the story in the paper. In 1915 he received permission from John Fairfax to republish the story in book form: "*Australia v Germany, The taking of German New Guinea*". The *Cerberus* library staff found a copy held at Duntroon and to my amazement on page 184 there it was in writing that Lieutenant Basil Holmes (son of Colonel William Holmes) took down the flag from the flag pole and hoisted the British flag in its place to make the occupation of German New Guinea complete. A few pages on, there it was, a sketch of the flag being held by two military men outside the treasury building in Friedrich Wilhelm. I was then able to track the flag being shipped back to the Mayor of Sydney from Colonel William Holmes, asking it be paraded for patriotic purposes. By November the Defence Department told the Mayor to hand it over, it travelled down to Melbourne to be paraded in the Queens Hall. Come 1918 it was being displayed in the Exhibition Buildings with other war trophies: 1st September 1919 it went to South Australia, the Druid Society had requested the German Imperial Flag as something special to welcome home their soldiers. This is when it was last mentioned in a newspaper.

If the flag donated was to be that same flag I can only surmise it came back to Victoria and was given to RADM Tickell or maybe he went with it to South Australia. Tickell died 19th September 1919. When the family were cleaning up his possessions believing the flag had been given to their father, the family kept it. On the 4th November 2011 the flag was officially received as an item in the Naval Heritage collection.

¹ "*Heroes before Gallipoli: Bita Paka and the One Day in September*" by Kevin Meade. Milton Queensland: John Wiley & Sons Australia, 2005

Finding the people:

Following the journey of the flag not only increased my interest, it also uncovered many names. I wanted to know these men; they weren't names to be forgotten. Some may say that finding more about the ANMEF has become a bit of an obsession; for me it has been a wonderful journey of insight into the men who were our first fighters. While names were coming to light, finding pictures to go with these names wasn't so easy.

I have been very fortunate that families have given me the opportunity to copy documentation with their ANMEF member's story. What I found remarkable is that each has a different perspective on the chain of events and what they considered important to put pen to paper.

One of the items within the Museum was a model of the plain and simple War Memorial that was built near the Bita Paka road. On the 20th anniversary of the landing, a foundation stone for the memorial in memory of those Australians who lost their lives on the first day of conflict was laid by a former Administrator of the Trust Territory, General Griffiths. At an official unveiling on Saturday 25 May 1935 various speakers related the events that occurred when war came to a lonely section of this New Britain jungle road many years before. The most moving words were those of Mr R.L. Clarke M.L.C., President of Rabaul Branch of R.S. & S.I.L.A when he addressed the several hundred people gathered for the ceremony.

“Here – perhaps in this very dust in which we are now standing – men went to their death, filled with that sense of duty, love of country, of mother, sister and sweetheart, as those men who fell at Gallipoli, Romani, Bullicourt, Poziers, the Somme and other scenes of valiant deeds.”

The banner in which these men marched behind each ANZAC day was donated this year (2014) to the Museum and along with it was the story that each year on the 11th September a service had been held at the Shrine. I could not comprehend that this was the first time I was hearing this. Had I just missed seeing this on the news each year, surely not? At the same time I was asked to prepare this paper on the very subject that I had a passion for. Saying yes to write 6000 words meant for me producing something different, not so much about the Battle, more about the men who played their part.

Six men names are etched into the Bita Paka War Memorial, yet there were only 3 whose faces were known. Captain Pockley and AB Williams their photos were iconic images for all to see, Lieutenant Commander Elwell, we had one of him in the Museum. The others, AB Street, AB Walker and AB Moffatt were faceless: this didn't sit comfortably with me. My mission was to complete my paper and present to the conference their images, 100 years was long enough for them to be unidentified to the Nation.

Finding their images and making a connection with their families meant countless hours of research. Thankfully my mission was completed 7 days before I was to give my speech. Not only finding the images of the 3 men whose lives were cut short, but also the images of 3 who were wounded, they too were faceless men.

It has only been three months since I accepted the task of writing my paper. I have made many connections with families along the way. Most were not aware that their ancestor was part of the Navy let alone leaving Australia to fight in German New Guinea. Sharing the story with the families has uncovered items and paperwork that has been filed in an old box or the odd letter that has never been read since it was read and reread by a mother waiting news from her son. It has answered some of the questions I had been seeking.

The Men:

Able Seaman William George Vincent Williams RANR killed— a member of No 4 Company and Official No. 284. William was born in Richmond, Victoria, and was living with his mother and sister at 26 Beaver's Rd Northcote at the time he joined up. He was 28 years of age, and was in his final week of his 5 years Reserve service. His sister said in a statement to the paper when the family was given the news, "*It is a great honour for him to go that way, and Father would have been proud of him*". Things were so hurried at the time to join active service, after being a sea for some days he sent a letter to a friend apologising for not keeping an appointment. He gave no indication where he was heading but he did write "*he would be jolly glad to get ashore and have a good feed*". William was a member of the Richmond Rifle club, well known throughout the area and a very popular young man. "He was a lad enthusiastic in the cause of duty, and he probably met his death in his anxiety to get to the German Wireless Station to demolish the apparatus" remarked his sister. The telegram read "*We regret to say that the rear-admiral commanding reports that your son has been killed in operations against the German islands. The Minister of Defence and Naval Board offer their deepest sympathy*"

Able Seaman Henry "Harry" William Street RANR killed – Henry often known as "Harry Malley" was a member of the South Australian contingent, No 6 Company under the command of LEUT Bond. He was seriously wounded in the bayonet charge lead by LCDR Elwell. Harry's mother Mrs. Alice Street of Harvest Rd Eaglefield Green, Egham, Surrey UK. Sister Miriam Isabel Gooch, brother-in-law Frank, niece and nephew Rowland Frank and Marjorie Edith. Henry's WWI medals are still held by Australian's Honours and Awards Department: His mother Alice never recovered when she was given the news of Henry's death.

Able Seaman Robert David Moffatt RAN killed – turned 20 in the May, was living with his mother and sister at "Melrose" Kensington Sydney. Born in Cornwall he came to Australia with his family when he was seven years old. He had one brother and 5 sisters. Educated in the Superior Public School in Waverley, he was an apprentice to Messes Blakeney and Goldie, an Engineering company of Washington St Sydney. Young Moffatt joined the Naval Cadets under the compulsory training system joining in 1911, Official No 121. He was one of the first to volunteer and having made proficiency in signalling, was accepted and proceeded to the front with the force, a member of No 3 Company. He was taken aboard HMAS *Australia* and died the next day 12th September of his wounds. He was given a sea burial. The ships company assembled on deck and the service was conducted by Chaplain Canon Frederick Riley. Up until her death in 1918 Mrs. Moffatt never recovered.

Robert's relatives weren't keen on him volunteering, yet he said "I can't shirk my duty. I am not a coward."

Able Seaman John Edward Walker RANR killed – John joined the Reserve as John Courtney, was a member of No 3 company. His wife and child lived at Bank St Nth Sydney. After making contact with a member of the Moffatt family it has turned out the Moffatt and Walker families were connected before the boys joined the Navy. John came to Sydney to live with Mrs. Courtney who was the girlfriend of John's mother. Both ladies came to Australia from Scotland on the same ship. Mrs. Walker was a nurse in Townsville. When her son left to live with the Courtney family, Mrs. Courtney told him to call himself John Courtney, as there were 6 Courtney boys he would fit in and no one would know he wasn't part of the family.

Able Seaman Timothy Sullivan RANR seriously wounded - Sullivan, was married with two children, Official No 407. He landed at Rabaul with LCDR Elwell, and 70 men No 6 company members of the Australian fleet. They had come to relieve the small party that had landed previously under command of LEUT Bowen. The road had dense bush on either side, an ideal cover for an ambush or sniping. They hadn't gone more than 200 yds, when a bullet fell short, scouts were then sent out. The word got back that the road was being entrenched, where upon Elwell ordered all to fix bayonets and rush it. Within moments Elwell was mortally wounded, followed by Able Seaman Courtney/Walker. Able Seaman Sullivan received nine wounds from direct hits or fragments of explosive bullets. His left hand was scorched from a rifle shot received at close range, shattering several fingers. Two bullets struck his left arm; one found the point of his chin, a piece of lead from an explosive bullet was lodged under the left side of his jaw; two of his teeth were blown out; his chest escaped with a charge of gun-shot, the pellets of which remained under the skin, and could be rolled about with the touch, while another bullet did no more harm than to rip away half of his belt and bandolier, exploding half his ammunition.

As told by Sullivan when he arrived home

"The trench surrendered with two Germans and 30 natives. Here an incident worth noting occurred, as it no doubt saved a big disaster to us. Captain Harkin, of the machine gun section, who was present, asked one of the Germans if there were any rifles, ammunition, or other explosives on the spot. The German replied that there was nothing of the kind about to his knowledge. Being suspicious, however, we searched the surrounding bush, and found a large case of ball ammunition. Captain Harkin placed his hand menacingly on the butt of his revolver, and coolly approached the German. "I understood you to say there was nothing of this kind hereabouts? The German stammered a reply to the effect, that he had overlooked the ammunition: it had slipped his memory. "Well replied Captain Harkin calmly, tapping his revolver, take care that your memory doesn't fail you again."

Able Seaman James Henry Tonkes wounded – born 1880 Port Adelaide to James and Marian Tonkes, he was married with 4 children and lived in Claire St Portland, Port Adelaide On returning from New Guinea he joins the AIF Field Artillery Brigade. James and his 4 brothers all joined served.

Able Seaman Daniel Skillen RANR wounded – born 16th September 1886 in Ardrossan, Ayrshire, Scotland. Parents Robert and Elizabeth Skillen, he had 4 brothers and 1 sister. Daniel was a member of No 6 Company, it appears that he joined the Royal Navy before coming to Australia. He died in 1943 in Hunters Hill, New South Wales. He was employed at Mort's Dock Sydney, well known in the Ironworker's Assistants Association.

Lieutenant Commander Charles Bingham Elwell RN killed – at his own request he was attached to the Expeditionary Force. He had been stationed as the gunnery instructor at RAN College in Geelong. Elwell, lost his life by a German bayonet on 11th September, Signaller Alfred "Bert" Reed a member of HMAS *Australia*, wrote home to his parents in Drouin in Victoria. "You may have read in the papers that Lt-Commander Elwell was run through with a bayonet. Well, I am very pleased to know that I shot the man who killed him. I was signalman of No.2 Company, and was with Lt-Commander Elwell at the time. I used my rifle and pistol a lot, but how many others I killed or wounded I do not know."

Captain Brian Pockley Army Medic killed - a member of the Army Medical Corps, his next of kin DR F Anthill Pockley of Macquarie St Sydney. Pockley before joining was on the staff of the St Andrews hospital in Sydney.

While it was easy to find information for those who were killed or wounded it wasn't so easy to connect others to the Battle let alone all who were members of the ANMEF.

A click on the Australian War Memorial website should have led me to a full list of the ANMEF members who left Australia on the 19th August aboard HMAS *Berrima*. While 1050 names came to light, not one naval personnel: is it reasonable to ask why they now can't be added?

A further search on the National Australian Archives uncovered, in most cases, unless after returning from New Guinea the naval personnel of the ANMEF joined the full time Australian Navy or transferred to the Australian Imperial Force there wasn't a paper trail, it was as if their service in the ANMEF didn't exist. It has been by chance over the years that I have come across Naval Service records that have the words "Took part in the taking of German New Guinea" or "Took part in the operations of German New Guinea". An A.I.F record showing previous service in the ANMEF gives families some idea, but most don't understand what it meant.

How do we work as one to identify these men and see their story lives on well into the future?

Maybe when the next edition of the "Official History" is rewritten a few extra words might not go astray.

Preparation:

For the Naval Reservist of the ANMEF their journey began long before WWI. Most born 1893/94 and were in their 5th and final year of reserve time.

The news of the prospect of war in Europe was being felt in Australia; we needed to prepare our defence strategies. Being surrounded by water the threat from an enemy power was going to come by sea.

From the 13th – 16th December 1913 the Examination Service in Victoria held a series of practice runs at Port Phillip Heads. Two pilot steamers were used as the Examination vessels. The pilot steamer *Victoria*, was the outside steamer and the *Alvina* was the standby pilot vessel used as the No 1 inside Examination vessel. The *Countess of Hopetoun*, the old Victorian Navy torpedo ship was to enter the defended port in a variety of rolls: as a merchant ship, an Australian warship, a neutral warship or god forbid as a possible hostile warship. Rocket tubes were rigged to fire a sound signal rocket. The rocket to go high into the air; going off with a tremendous bang. This was to attract the Examination Vessel of merchant ships ignoring their signals as there were no guns on board.

By the end of July, the Australian fleet was reported to be out patrolling the waters in readiness. On the weekend of 1st & 2nd August the young men of the Victorian R.A.N. Reserves were finishing their gunnery course on HMAS *Pioneer* but before leaving for shore they were all asked to leave their addresses. The Naval Reservist from all states were on alert.

War was just around the corner:

Monday the 3rd August 1914 the prospect of war was becoming more serious, the Naval Examination Service of Port Phillip was set up in the early hours. The Port War Signal Station was established at Cheviot Hill, Point Nepean. There was a naval signal crew at Fort Nepean set up, known as the Examination Supporting Battery.

The *Alvina*, the No 1 Examination Steamer flying the Australian Blue Ensign at the stern and the Examination Service flag with a blue border at the foremast head, was anchored clear of the South Channel off Observation Point.

On 5th August, the Chief Examination Officer in the *Alvina* received a signal from the District Naval Officer at Port Melbourne to delay the German merchant ship *Pfalz* as long as possible as Britain's ultimatum to Germany would expire at 9:00 am our time.

On 6th August, the Port War Signal Station sent a signal to the two Examination Steamers and the Naval Signal crew at Fort Nepean asking for volunteers for service in an unspecified overseas area. What was happening in Victoria was happening in all States. Then men of the Royal Australian Naval Reserves, Royal Naval Reserves & EX-Royal Navy were signing on for six month voluntary service.

The Military authorities printed out application forms, these could be filled in by the volunteers, at Victoria Barracks, and country forms were sent out to any who were offering their service. By the report in Sydney Morning Herald on 8th August 735 applications had been received for enrolment in the Expeditionary Force from all parts of the Country. The whole permanent force in NSW had volunteered.

Captain Brownlow under the direction of the District Naval Board had things under control. The Examination service was running smoothly. Brownlow issued the following proclamation: *“all members of the Royal Australia Naval Reserves (M) and (O) adults are hereby called out by proclamation to muster at the Naval Depot, Rushcutters Bay on Thursday 6th August, at 8a.m., bringing all uniform and accoutrements, including towel, soap, brush, and spare underclothing, except whites and hats, and also one meal, No leave will be given.”* *The whole of the reserves turned out, except those on sick call to enlist*.² The Senior Naval Cadets all anxious to volunteer this was a feeling taken in all states.

Captain Tickell, Director of the Commonwealth Naval Forces, travelled north to inspect naval centres. He spoke of the proposed naval contingent for service, between 40-60 percent of the Naval Reserves were on active service.

The men of the newly formed ANMEF were already well underway to making plans for departure.

On the 12th August three newly appointed Midshipmen Veale, Buller and Willian hurried to be outfitted by Lincoln Stuart on the corner of Degraives and Flinders Street. They put in their orders for “a new blue cloth uniform, three duck uniforms of khaki material, and the necessary badges, cap covers and uniform boots. The order needed to be filled immediately for on the 17th August they were to leave by train for Sydney.

The girls at the shop worked overtime to have everything ready and even added all sorts of notes in the pockets to wish them well.

No leave was granted, the only way the men got to say good bye to their families was to those who came to the Depot under special permission.

On 14th August LEUT Rowland Bowen R.A.N from Taggerty Victorian, son of Mr. & Mrs. D G Bowen was married. LEUT Bowen was the Senior Officer of the Victorian contingent of naval volunteers.

The contingent had been kitted up, issued their short .303 MLE rifle RAN issue of 1913. A large kit bag in which to stow all their gear and to tie their sennit hats to. They caught the ferry to Williamstown. This group consisting of 104 men included LEUT Bowen, SBLTs Charles Webber and Avenel Percival Hext and Midshipmen Charles Hicks, Charles Cock, Richard Veale, Reginald Buller and Harry Willian.

A special train from Port Adelaide carried some 80 of the South Australian volunteers to Melbourne to join the Victorian Contingent. Able Seaman Henry William Street and Timothy Sullivan were two of the members of the South Australian contingent. Midshipman Veale was given charge of the South Australian allotment, later to be known as No 6 Company of the Naval Battalion.

² This event is extensively discussed in histories association with the Queenscliff Fort, e.g. <http://www.fortqueenscliff.com.au/page7.htm>

The following morning Monday 17th August these two contingents caught the special train from Melbourne en route to Sydney.

While the Victoria and South Australia Naval Reserves were preparing to leave, the men of the Queensland contingent were also making their way to Sydney. On the 16th August the first fighting men of this state passed through Ipswich by way of the Sunday morning mail train: one hundred in fact. The Naval authorities like in Victoria had acted quickly in mobilising the men, no one knew of the projected departure. It was only by chance that someone knew many of the navel men coming from Maryborough just happened to be standing on the platform of the Ipswich station. LEUT Thomas Bond the only Queensland name I can identify as taking part in the landing. Three New South Welshmen, Able Seamen John Edward Walker alias John Courtney, Daniel Skillen and Robert Moffatt volunteered their service.

On arrival in Sydney all made their way to Cockatoo Island to join the Armed Merchant Cruiser HMAS *Berrima* along with the 1054 military personal arriving around 1300. Later that afternoon time was spent detailing the men off into different companies. The Officers were also detailed off to their respective companies. Eng MIDN Harry Willian was attached to a company but was approached to be part of the Staff of Commander Beresford.

The ships and the voyage:

The *Berrima* was a 10,000 ton merchant ship; she was refitted and armed with two 4.7 guns forward, one on each fo'c's'le head and one on each quarter, aft. The ship was under the command of Captain Stevenson RAN, with a handful of Royal Australian Naval Officers and ratings. Captain Stevenson previously held the position of commanding the Williamstown Naval Depot. From various paperwork I know LEUT George Prideaux, LEUT Gerald Hill were among the *Berrima* crew.

According to then Midshipman Buller it was meant to accommodate five companies of Naval Reserve hurriedly recruited from 4 States. I am yet to find any article of a New South Wales Naval Reserve group assembling for the Expeditionary Force.

Midshipman Buller also mentions that the “*Kyarra*” was converted to accommodate some eight hundred Military personnel and the “*Aorangi*” was a stores ship. While the *Aorangi* was never taken up into RAN service she does serve as the supply ship in New Guinea. The *Kyarra* was used to transport the Kennedy Regiment from Queensland, the first Australian Infantry unit mobilised. The Regiment made it to Thursday Island, but due to the civilian stokers refusing to work, as they hadn't signed on for war, the ship was sent back to Australia.

Another ship acquired by the RAN on 7 August 1914 was the HMAS *Grantala*, Australia's first hospital ship and the only RAN hospital ship of the First World War. She was fitted out at Cookatoo Island in a mere 17 days and had the capacity to carry between 250 – 300 patients, with a staff of 59. Many nurses from St Andrews signed up for an adventure. The

Kyarra, *Aorangi* and the *Grantala* are not recorded as leaving Australia in August 1914. Are they not all part of the ANME Force?

Australia had undertaken to seize certain enemy territories in the South West Pacific and the ANMEF was to pursue these objectives. The *Berrima*'s departure was to be a "secret", leaving at noon on 19th August. As the ship made its way down the harbour the sounds of continually tooting of whistles from the ferries could be heard. From the windows facing the harbour could be seen sheets and towels waving a goodbye. Far from a secret exist.

On board the men were issued with clothing, webbing gear; an army felt hat and other uniform items. During the day they carried out drills or were given lectures on drills. MIDN Willian was kept busy with Command as there were lots of rumour details to be fixed. MIDN Veale was trained in signals yet he was made "Officer –of-the-Quarters" for the two forward guns. Test gun-firings were carried out to calibrate the guns. Being so close to shore, the people of Sydney believed a naval engagement was taking place. When the ship cleared the heads and turned north the rumours of German New Guinea as the destination became more real.

The weather turned foul making the voyage uncomfortable, overcrowding was an issue. Midshipmen Buller, Veale and Hicks shared a cabin with a civilian Mr. James Service Whittle the Intelligence Officer with the Naval Section. Whittle had spent some time in Papua and was supposed to have acknowledge of the German territories.

The ship stopped off in Brisbane for a mail run, and then sailed on to Townsville, then to Palm Island. Along the journey the sailors dyed their white duck uniforms a reddish tan by soaking them in a mixture of Condy's crystals.

For the next ten days the Expeditionary Force spent time practicing landing troops in the ship's lifeboats by the ship's boats on supposedly hostile shores. A rifle range was setup. As well, musketry competitions were held with a good number of the Victorian company coming out on top.

I note that Veale has the visit to Palm Island listed as 10 days where Buller only mentions a day's field exercises.

In a report to Captain John T Richardson head of the Victorian District Naval Board from MIDN Willian has the group arriving 24th Aug and staying a week, where the men were instructed in shooting and attack and defence work. On the Saturday the left half battalion went ashore and Willian went along with LCDR Elwell.

While at Palm Island HMAS *Encounter* and the two submarines *AE1*³ & *AE2*⁴ joined the visit.

Willian's report goes on to have the force leaving on 2nd September confirming Veale's 10 days.

³ AE1 lost with all hands 13th September 1914 somewhere in Rabaul Harbour.

⁴ AE2 was the first allied submarine to penetrate the Dardanelles in 1915.

Heading for Port Morseby, arriving on the 4th September where the Australian Fleet consisting of Cruisers HMAS *Sydney* and *Encounter*, Destroyers HMAS *Warrego*, *Yarra* and *Parramatta*, the two submarines, Troopship *Kanowna*, Colliers *Koolangia* and *Whoranga* and Stores ship *Aorangi*.

According to Buller a portion of his company was transferred to the *Sydney* to continue onto Blanche Bay, at a point near Russell Island to meet up with the “*Montcalm*” and “*Adguma*”.

Willian reports that all the Victorian Contingent transferred to the *Sydney*.

On the 7th September Willian still with the *Berrima* sailed to meet up with HMAS *Australia*. The large convey for the *Berrima* was due to the unknown whereabouts of the German Pacific Fleet.

The Landings:

Sydney, *Warrego* & *Yarra* sailed on during the night of the 10th. Early in the morning half the Reserves were distributed between the two destroyers. With this accomplished *Sydney* proceeded to Herbertshoe and landed SBLT Charles Webber and his twenty-five Victorian Reservists of No 4 Company along with a 12 pounder field gun from *Sydney*. They headed toward Toma to the south west getting as far as Gire Gire some 4 miles away. Nothing was found, and not wanting to stay the night in unknown lands returned to Herbertshoe around 1700. 4 companies of infantry landed sometime in the afternoon.

In Willian's report, Colonial Holmes met with the officers to relay the proposed plan of action. That night (10th) all prepared their gear in case they were to land the next morning. Waking they found themselves in St George Channel making for Rabaul. The *Australia* who was astern, signalled a message to the *Berrima* that LEUT Bowen and his men had met with force and in need for reinforcements.

As *Warrego* and *Yarra* landed their group of 25 Victorian Reservists under the command of LEUT Bowen and MIDN Buller at the stone jetty at Kabakaul at 700 the ships guns were manned at the ready. The morning was crisp and clear the objective was to locate and destroy the newly built Wireless Station which was reported to be powerful enough to communicate with Berlin directly. Crates could be seen at the shoreline and wheel marks in the road, Bowen felt it indicated this was leading to the wireless station.

Bowen's company proceeded southerly towards Bita Paka, the road barely 20' wide. In the first bungalow they noted signs of a hurried retreat, unfinished breakfast and telephone lines cut.

So as to maintain contact and report progress of the advance, Bowen placed 10 men within sight of each other so as to use visual signals to act as a line of communication between the company and headquarters.

They continued along the jungle road to a small roughly built trading post, occupied by a Chinaman and his wife. The Chinaman was pressed into being their guide until they were

satisfied they were on the right track. Preferring to proceed through the jungle rather than the road as it was felt it was under observation.

“Official History Page” 58 “Able Seaman Williams – observed a number of natives in a coconut plantation beside the road. He called up the man next behind him, Stoker Kember, who, covered Williams, went up to the natives and found that they were hoeing among the palms. Williams accordingly went on, but had not advanced far when he was fired on from the bush and fell mortally wounded, the first Australian, so far as is known, shot in the war. Kember carried him for nearly half-a-mile back along the road.”

The sound of the scattering of muskets could be heard, Bowen sent word that he needed reinforcement. For you see the bush was full of coconut trees and thick prickly scrub. Up until this point the men of the ANMEF hadn't fired a shot. As they pushed their way up the road the enemy struck, the company was close together except that the road divided them. They had just been allowed to have a biscuit and drink from their water bottles when shots were heard on the other side of the road. “Take cover men” came the order and the fight begun.

At the moment communications ceased to function Buller went back to see what had happened. He found the first man in the chain AB William Williams of Northcote had been wounded.

By the time Buller had returned from checking on Williams, Australia's first shot rang out then the firing ceased for a few minutes. One of the scouts Able Seaman Bob Palmer returned with a prisoner with his hand practically blown off. Palmer is reported to be the first to fire a shot from the Australian contingent.

Dr. Pockley, the Army member of this first unit took charge of the prisoner and amputates his hand on the spot. Wearing the regulation Red Cross Brassard, he took it off to give to his assistant, a Naval Steward who was without one. Pockley bandaged the prisoner and sent him back to the rear. With the news from Buller regarding Williams being shot through the stomach, Pockley went back to assist. Then again the fighting begun, in this wave of fire according to Buller's diary “Pockley was shot dead on the road by a sniper”: not so.

In the meantime

The *Warrego* and *Yarra* were given orders to land every man available. LEUT Hill was placed in command of 7 riflemen and some 20 pistol men from each ship. A bag of ammunition, a rifle or pistol and cutlass and a bottle of water were issued to each man. They proceeded in the clothes they stood in, a motley crew, some stokers in boilers suits and even 2 seamen without boots: the Cook of *Yarra* with his white hat and apron.

In the meantime

Berrima on receiving the message prompted CMDR Beresford to order further reinforcements; Naval Reserve 3 & 6 companies and one machine gun section were landed.

On arrival No 3 company lead by LEUT Gillam marched up to the firing line. Right-half of No 6 Company and the Machine Gun section under the command of LEUT Bond and MIDN Veale remained at the base. Before leaving the ship Veale issued his men 2 days rations and 150 rounds. On landing they came across Williams and Pockley both seriously wounded. They were transferred to the *Berrima* by stretcher.

About 1300 No 3 company and LEUT Gillam marched to a point to later be referred to as the “cross roads”. Finding 2 German prisoners under guard, one an officer, and set about telling them they must surrender unconditionally.

Advance was ordered but had scarcely started when LEUT Bowen was shot through the head, but not killed. LEUT Hill then had to take command.

Moments later the reinforcements had arrived. The left half battalion of No 6 Company led by LCDR Elwell landed to take charge of the jungle operations. 6 from the *Berrima* with Elwell crossed the road to meet up with 6 of the *Yarra* men under PO Frederick Robert Sandys: the remainder under Hill on the left side looking inland. All worked their way through the jungle, Elwell slightly ahead of his men, almost in line with the trench, suddenly fell. Sandys seeing this rolled to him and tried to pull him under cover nearly losing his own life in the attempt. The body was later recovered by one of the men reaching out with his rifle and pushing the body down the slope. Soon they were within 50 yards of the trenches, as they prepared to rush the enemy hoisted the white flag.

Command reverted back to LEUT Hill

By now LEUT Bond and MIDN Veale men were making their way up the road. They were passed by the wounded men of the *Yarra*, Signalman Robert Moffatt so severe that he died later that day and was buried at sea aboard *Australia*. The other man was Bowen, he had been shot in the head and bleeding quiet badly. LEUT Bond and his company pushed on only to arrive just as LCDR Elwell was shot dead in the bayonet charge. With pistol and sword in hand, his bullet riddled body taken was back to the jetty.

CMDR Beresford had landed, Bond received word to take command of Bowen’s company and some of 3 command and half of his own and proceed to the wireless station some 4 miles up the track: with Captain Travers and German Officer Kemp in custody.

Veale and the rest of No6 company stayed back at the “cross roads” with Beresford and the remaining no3 & 4 men. Hill and the men of *Warrego* and *Yarra* returned to their ships, there was no further need for the pistol and cutlass swashbucklers; they had done their job.

In the meantime:

The shed at the jetty had been turned into a makeshift hospital.

Leading up the trunk of a tree, an observation mine buried under the road, and a native waiting to signal, lucky the wires were noticed and cut. All the time fighting continued, AB Faulkner nicknamed “Buffalo Bill” because of his marksmanship with a revolver,

encountered about 12 natives and fired. They then made a forced march of about 7 miles and sighted a 2nd trench, ahead of them a German prisoner with a bluejacket carrying a white flag: one German and 26 natives responded and surrendered. AB Timothy Sullivan was placed in charge of them. The German Officer offered him a drink of mineral water. The men of the Wireless Station seemed to be surrendering but when they got within 100 yards they opened fire. Sullivan's prisoner stampeded, at this point Sullivan was hit over the eye, but kept on, every now and again feeling something hitting him. It was getting close enough to be hand to hand combat. Sullivan brought his rifle to his shoulder for the third time. And then a final hit that shattered his left hand finished him. He was placed with two others wounded, AB Harry Street and AB James Tonkes, all lying without bandages from 1600 till 2300. Street was in a terrible state, continually praying he might die. His prayer was answered; Sullivan and Tonkes were finally taken on makeshift stretchers to the flag ship. Up went the white Flag and the enemy surrendered and were marched back to the rear; the taking of the wireless station was accomplished.

An anxious night was spent, Veale had charge of the guard until midnight, and then Willian took over. Beresford was growing anxious of news and sent MIDN John Stirling and men of No 3 company to seek out Bond.

At first light all were at action stations, Veale and his right-half No 6 company set out for the station. They came upon the bodies AB Street and a German Officer.

There had been further fighting during the night for Bond and his men. While the Germans had surrendered the N.O.C. incited the prisoners to attack Bond's composite party. Bond and Captain Travers the Military Intelligence Officer, (and Colonel Holmes son-in-law) were questioning the officers as to the whereabouts of the wireless station.

CMDR Beresford had returned back to the "cross roads" while Bond and his party had spent the night at the captured wireless station. The two masts were on the ground and the equipment had been partially damaged. 1900 the station was in the hands of the ANMEF contingent. The following day Bond his men and prisoners returned to the "cross roads" where the entire contingent moved to the jetty.

Australian's first action was over

All returned to *Yarra* and *Warrego* and came round to Herbertshoe.

At Herbertshoe No 5 and E and F companies of the Military were there, having landed the day before. On the Sunday all were up at 0500, trenches had to be dug and the place reddled in a state of defence.

This piece is something that is certainly not found in the "Official History" book:

Bond and a party of Sailors with Army Sergt Shaw as a bicycle messenger set out to retrieve a bogged lorry. Shaw came back with news that naval men had been cut off by a large force. Shaw demanded to see CMDR Braceford, but Willian calmed him down and asked "*Now who do you really want to see Commander Beresford or Lieutenant Bracegirdle*"?

SBLT Webber took the 12 ½ pounder field gun and Veale his right half company to rescue Bond and his party. But when they arrived they found Shaw's large enemy force turned out to be a party of Roman Catholic Missionary Fathers and their converts. The firing was the sound from burning bamboo. Holmes heard the news and dispatched *Warrego* and *Yarra* with Lieut Colonel Watson and 200 soldiers back to Herbertshoe. They arrived late that night to a false alarm. The sailor's dubbed this "The Battle of Red Cross Hill".⁵

Monday about 0800 the ANMEF marched to Toma some ten miles inland. The objective to search for the Governor: he sent a message to say he would come in Tuesday to discuss the terms of surrender. News had been received during the day that the German Governor and the German forces had withdrawn to Toma seven to eight miles from the ANMEF base. No 6 and 5 companies set for Matanatau. Lt Colonel Watson with 200 soldiers and Webber and the Naval Gun and crew proceeded to Toma.

A small glimpse of what life was like for the following six months:

- 7th Oct – unfortunate accident caused by some men handling signal rockets, which exploded causing serious injury to Pte G James & W Guard both of A Comp. Attended by Dr Wicks and sent to Namanula and operated on by Captain Maguire A.M.A.
- Reveille at 0500 and the usual daily routine until "1st post" at 0915. The occasionally football match between Army and Navy.
- Oct 14 Pte Waite age 17 passed away when taking down his rifle the trigger released and the charge entered his leg, shattering the bone. The only course of action was to amputate, unfortunately Waite died from shock.
- A letter from D Company 4th Nov – some members of this Company returning from patrol, passing the Germany club. A few Germans on the veranda drinking poked fun at the boys and jeered at them as they passed. Not being able to do anything while on duty returned and took possession of the club, forcing the Germans to line up at attention and sing "God Save the King" and "The Marseillaise". The D's hoisted the French tricolour on the club mast. On departing made it clear it wasn't to be taken down, The Germans preferred to spend the night under the hated ensign of France, rather than run the risk of an English bullet. When the Secretary laid a formal complaint to Colonel Paton he asked why he had not taken it down "Oh" was the reply "I was ask my gentleman to take eet down, but zey was not willing My gentlemen do not like to be shot"
 - a. J Paton was a Newcastle golfer and ran second to Howden in the Country Championship 1914 - a Colonel in the first Expeditionary force and was in charge of the Rabaul Garrison
- W Toohey wrote home – it is a terrible place, no news of the war, only getting mail from Sydney very 3 or 4 week. Doesn't know when he will be returning home, the sooner the better. 10th Nov the Nusa left with 15 soldiers and a machine gun. Captain Strasburg was in command. On their way to Kawieang to hoist the Union Jack and

⁵ Autobiographical Recollections of a Naval Reserve Officer by Commander R.S. Veale VRD** RANR 1893-1987: page 58

claim New Ireland and release Consul Mr Jolly who had be detained as a prisoner. The Expedition put to sea at 9 the same night, leaving Lieut Basil Holmes and 10 men as a garrison.

- The “Siar” was soon captured and brought to Rabaul. The “Samoa” also captured 25th Nov in Kalibi Bay: a fine big four-masted schooner
- Pte F J Carthew wrote home – having had a quiet time with exception of a few parties going out to the different Islands. Life was monotonous, there was talk of soon leaving for Sydney in time to join the third batch to Europe, F Company going to Bougainville. Tom Sketheway left Rabaul with half of H Company to Kawieang and G Company to New Ireland and captured six prisoners. Conditions improved, a big storeroom to sleep in, another for meals with a rough table and stools. It is 115 degrees in the shade. H company had their cheese rations outside tied up to a stake, C company had theirs buried with a headstone “Rest in Peace” with flowers on the grave as we thought it was dead. This is the place of thunder and lightning and when it rains it simply pours. Several earthquake shocks, it would shake the stone houses to the ground.
- 6 Germans were flogged for having ill-treated a missionary – They were brought to Rabaul and stretched across a large travelling trunk. The doctor and two others given 20 strokes and three others 25 strokes
- LEUT Rowland Bowen and 30 members of the ANMEF returned to Brisbane –12 of which were invalids –Senator Pearce, Minister of Defence received another memento of the Australian occupation, a German service rifle – Mauser brought back by LCDR Bowen.
- Nurses Gibbon and Henry left for Rabaul on Steamer Morinda
- A rifle range was established at Rabaul to maintain the shooting efficiency of the troops

Returning to Australia:

February 1915 the men of ANMEF contingent that left in August 1914 had served their six months it was time for them to return home; to return home as Heroes. A great welcome was given to the sailors and soldiers who served in Pacific, arriving home aboard the steamer *Navua*. A large crowd gathered at the wharf, crowds lined the route to Victoria Barracks in Sydney. The men were sent ashore but their possessions needed to be thoroughly disinfected. Those well enough were marched down one gangway. The 14 too ill and injured had been placed in ambulances wagons. The naval men were taken by launch to the Naval Depot at Rushcutters Bay and the Military men were marched off to the tram. As the ambulance moved off those well enough to sit up found friends to greet them. In the last wagon one young man able to sit seemed to be known by many in the crowd. Between the sheds and reaching Circular Quay a hundred well –wisher had recognised him calling him by name. All that were there could sympathise and yet be happy with the mother who, finding her son able to sit up, just called his name as she saw him pass by, breaking down with happy tears.

The Naval contingent of Queensland arrived home 21 February by the mail train. They arrived in Brisbane to a hearty welcome by friends who gathered at the station. At a gathering of Queensland Naval Association at the Café Majestic added more interest with the presence of 50 men of the New Guinea campaign. Lieutenant Stewart Cameron R.A.N.R. presented a rifle and a clip of ammunition captured at the taking of the wireless station. Lieutenant Cameron, who was in charge of the 1st Queensland Naval contingent, spoke of the honour of holding that position.

The South Australian bluejackets returned home in dribs and drabs, the Adelaide crowd turned out on March 5th to welcome them home. Under Gunner Mills and Chief Petty Officers Thompson and Nelson the men mustered on the Adelaide Railway and marched down King William Street lead by the May's Adelaide Band. The balconies decorated with banners "Welcome Well done, Jack Tars" the message stood out among the mass of coloured flags decorating the Imperial Hotel. Hearty cheers went up for the sailors as they swung along the city streets. They were welcomed not merely as "their Australian boys, but as brave defenders of the Empire. As brave in the hour of duty as any other sailor and soldier who had ever lived in the Empire before or since the days of Nelson. They welcomed them also because the proceedings of the day were historic. They were the first men of the Royal Australian Navy to take part in an action against the enemy."

Learned historians would have said the answers I was looking for could be found in vol X of "Official History of Australia in the War of 1914 1918". For most that would be true, nothing is more satisfying to find the unfindable.

"official History" Page 73-74 "In a dispatch dated 13th September, 1914 Colonel Holmes, after giving the names of the officers and men who fell and of those who were wounded, states : From information received by me up to the present in the absence of Commander Beresford's report, the three officers referred to "Captain Pockley, Lieutenant Commander Elwell and Lieutenant Bowen" also Lieutenant Bond who accepted the surrender of the wireless station and Captain Travers (Intelligence Officer) who accompanied him, acted in a very gallant way. Captain Pockley removed the Red Cross badge from his arm and handed it over to one of his men who was without one, and paid the penalty with his life. I wish to specially mention these five officers"

In my mind there were many more who were worthy of a "special mention"

If at the least this paper inspires one person to take up the gauntlet: to see one day the names of the Naval Contingent added to the AWM site. Or to grow the number of images of the man who "Took part in the Taking of German New Guinea" then I will have achieved what I set out to do.

104 Victorian's with the South Australian contingent left Flinders Street Station 17TH August 1914 for Sydney to depart 19th August 1914 aboard the troopship *Berrima*. It is hoped that one day a full list of names of the naval contingents leaving from South Australian, Queensland and New South Wales will be added.

The First Fateful Shot: Port Phillip Bay, August 1914

Taking on the writing of this paper I hoped to find the 5 missing photographs of the two sailors killed and three sailors wounded whose images have not been seen. I am very happy to say I accomplished this.



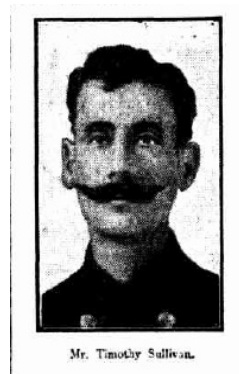
Able Seaman John Edward Walker / John Courtney



Able Seaman Harry William Street



Able Seaman Daniel Skillen



Able Seaman Timothy Sullivan



Able Seaman James Edward Tonkes



Newspaper report [Sydney Morning Herald, page 8 14th Oct 1914](#) my journey to confirming the origin of German Flag on display at the HMAS Cerberus Museum

Victorian Contingent

Lieut. R G Bowen, Naval Office Melbourne
S. Lt. Chas Webber, Albert Park,
S. Lt. Avenal Hext, Albert Park,
Gnr. Young, Naval Office, Launceston
Mid. Chas Wm Hicks, Northcote
Mid. Richards Stanley Veale, Albert Park
Mid. Reg Langdon Buller, Moonee Ponds
Sto. 1 William John Looby, St Kilda.
Sto. 1 Frederick Taylor, Farnley
P.O. 2 George Hunt, North Carlton
M.A.A. John Hartley Beaton, Williamstown
Sto 1 Thomas Cardoe, Broadmeadows
A.B. Mordicia Bower Smith, Yarragon
A.B. Claude Bensley, Albert Park
L.S.1 Ernest Robert Midley, East Malvern.
Sto. Charles Allen Harris, Port Melb.
A.B. William Robert Turner, Carlton
Sto. Ralph Wickham, Brunswick East.
A.B. Robert Lawrence Martin, North Fitzroy.
L.S. William McLoughlan, South Melb.
A.B. Charles Keiller, Portland.
A.B. John Webber, South Yarra.
A.B. Gordon Dundstrom, Albert Park.
A.B. William Everest, Port Melb.
Painter Harry Herbert Porfrey, South Melb
A.B. Cecil Peel Thoresby, St Kilda.
L.S. Robert Curwen, Moonee Ponds.
A.B. George Alford, Port Melbourne.
Sto. Leslie Sinclair Eastman, North Fitzroy.
L. Sto. Neil McDonald, East Melbourne
Sto. 2 Walter Taylor, North Carlton.
A.B. Frank Elliott, Richmond.
Sto. P.O. William Geo. Thomas Richardson,
Williamstown
Sto 1 Alexander Allison, South Melb.
A.B. Donald McLachlan, North Fitzroy.
Shipwright Robert Boyd, Newport.
A.B. Donald Ross, Middle Park.
Sto. 1 Charles Arthur Cook, North Melb.
Sto. Thomas Smith, Williamstown.
Sto. James Fraser, Melbourne.
A.B. William Geo Vincent Williams,
Northcote
Engr Thomas James Hughes, Port Fairy.
A.B. William Knox, Prahran
Acting Artif. Francis Geo Caborne,
Footscray.
First Writer Ronald Fowler, Williamstown
A.B. Robert Williamson Goldie, Port Fairy
North.
A.B. Frederick Horace Hale, Melbourne.
O.S. Geo Archd. Allen Guthrie, Williamstown
O.S. Ed. Michael Smith, North Brunswick

O.S. Oswald Geo McLaren, Albert Park.
O.S. William Nathaniel Gothard, Fairfield.
O.S. Charles Craig Philpot, North Carlton.
Second Writer Leslie William Trickey,
Richmond.
O.S. Alfred Henry Holmes, Oakleigh
Sto. 1 Alex Joseph Congues, Port Melbourne.
Second Ck. Albert William Hudson, Sth
Melb.
O. Sig. Oscar Vincent, Hawthorn.
Second SS William Charles Parlett,
Glenferrie
Sto. 2 George Jarrett, Percy, Portland
Act. Art. Raymond S. Hammerburg, Port
Melb
O.S. Frederick Jackson Sinel, Yarraville.
O.S. Sydney Lewis Patterson, Portland
O.S. William Higgin, Middle Park
Blacksmith's Mate, Percy Reginald Harrison,
Footscray.
P.O. Henry Richd Orpen, Moreland. –
A.B. Rupert Leslie Bourne, Rossville,
Northcote
A.B. George Revington Spinner, Kensington
L.S. William George Redfern, Portland
L. Sto. Edward James Butler, West Melb
A.B. Vivian Pithouse, Portland
A.B. John Stubbs, West Melb
R.M.L.I. Alfred Mitchell, Malvern
A.B. Joseph Henry Watford, Williamstown.
A.B. Cyril Frank Hall, Melb
R.M.L.I. Sydney Edward Bunelow, Kew.
A.B. Thomas McCarron, Moonee Ponds.
L. Sig. (R.N.V.A.R.) William Arthur Vale,
Collingwood
T.S. Fred Knight, South Melbourne
A.B. Frank Caulton, Williamstown.
A.B. Herbert Campbell, Williamstown
A.B. Charles Burgess, Williamstown
A.B. Leslie Miles, North Fitzroy
A.B. George Royston McDonald,
Collingwood
A.B. Theodore Sydney Hooks, Carlton
O. S. Frank Melbourne Robertson, Albert
Park
C.P.O. George Robert Palmer, Parkville
A.B. Harry Mumford, Yarraville
A.B. Sidney Edward Staines, North Carlton
A.B. George Henry Elkin, Ascotvale.
A.B. William Walter Allen, Portland
A.B. Nelson Blair Beglin, Portland
A.B. James Dumbleton, Yarraville.
A.B. William Thomas Tonkin,

A.B. Arthur William Robinson, Beaumaris.
A.B. Frank Currie, Carlton
Mid. Colin Laurence, Woodleigh, South
Gippsland
Eng. Mid. Harry Alexr. Willian,
Williamstown
Eng. Mid. Charles Matthew Cock, Moonee
Ponds

Ag. Yeo. Sig. Cyril Motton Urquhart, Albert
Park.
Ag. Yeo. Sig. Wilfred Jamieson, Albert Park
L.S. Percy Collier, Port Melbourne
Sto. Arthur William Bennett, Melb
O.S. Henry James Merrick, Port Melbourne.
A.B. William Robert Hartwell, Heidelberg