



President's Musings – April 2020

Unfortunately we are unable to catch up with each other at our meetings of late, but be assured that when our leaders give the go ahead, we will be back in action, full ahead!

I spoke with WO Ray (Pedro) Rich, our Speaker for our 25 May meeting, and we decided that given that the 'Emergency' has been extended for another month, it was best to postpone his address about the HMAS *Voyager* tragedy until later in the year. This is also the case with our March Speaker, Leigh Webster and his subject 'Off shore and Specialist ships Australia'. We appreciate their co-operation.

Our Editor, Frank Cronin and I were chatting about our respective family involvement in WWI, and it struck me that we both have tales to tell which are worth sharing as we reflect about ANZAC. We are mindful that their exploits may not be extraordinary for that particular period of history, but they are important to both Frank and I, and our families and we would like to share them with you. In my case there were six members of my Mother's family, and a further six Allwoods from WA who served in the AIF, and an adopted 'Uncle' of mine served in the RN/RAN during the conflict.

'Uncle Bob': Robert Henry Hucks enlisted in the Australian Naval Forces/Royal Australian Navy on May 10, 1910 in Wellington NZ and was discharged there on April 19, 1919. Bob was rated as Leading Seaman/Seaman Gunner and served in HMAS *Pysche* and *Pioneer*, amongst others. His official number was 1501; however a search of AWM records for WW1 revealed nothing of Bob at all. He subsequently turned up in RN records. The only explanation I can think of is that in 1910/11 *Pysche* was HMS and was commissioned into the RAN on July 1, 1915. Both *Pysche* and *Pioneer* were Pelorus Class Light Cruisers (3rd Class Protected Cruisers) of 2200 tons displacement, a top speed of 19.5 and 20 knots respectively plus 8x4-inch (25 pounder) guns, 8x3-pounder guns and 2x14-inch torpedo tubes. The early months of the war were busy for *Pysche* as she was involved in the capture of the German Protectorate of Samoa as well as other German assets in the Pacific. She also formed part of the escort force for troop convoys bound for the Middle East from New Zealand. *Pioneer* was more heavily armed than *Pysche* in that she also had 2x field guns and 3x.45 Maxim guns.

Commissioned into the RAN on 1 March 1913 after a refit, she joined the fleet on 1 January 1914 and when war was declared on 4 August she was in Port Phillip Bay and the

following day she sailed to Fremantle to operate on patrol on the Western Australian coast. Operations began on 16 August, and on that day, some eight miles west of Rottnest Island, *Pioneer* captured the German steamer *Neumunster* (4994 tons) and took her into Fremantle. On 26 August she captured a second ship, the 4994 ton *Thuringen*, also off Rottnest Island. On 1 November 1914 she sailed as part of the escort to the First Australian Convoy comprising 38 transports but just as she was taking up position between the Australian and New divisions, her engines broke down and the Flagship HMS *Minotaur*, ordered her to return to Fremantle. **Thus she probably missed encountering *Emden* instead of *Sydney I* as she was under orders to diverge from the convoy route to inspect the Cocos Islands!!** On 24 December 1914 the Admiralty requested the aid of *Pioneer* as a blockading ship on the German East African coast, where the German cruiser *Konigsberg* was sheltering up the Rufigi River beyond the range of effective fire from the sea but it was thought that she might attempt to break out. Thus the British forces at sea had a double duty, firstly the maintenance of a blockade to prevent supplies reaching the German forces ashore in East Africa; and secondly, the neutralisation of a dangerous warship which had already destroyed *Pioneer's* sister ship *Pegasus*. The British force consisted of four light cruisers, an armed merchant cruiser, 4 armed whalers and an armed steamer and a tug. Blockade was set up on 1 March and 5 days later VADM King Hall RN arrived in the old battleship *Goliath* to take charge. Several attempts to drive *Konigsberg* from her lair having failed, it was decided to tow to the scene two monitors, HMS *Severn* and *Mersey* and to take them upstream within range of the enemy. The attack began 6 July 1915 and while *Pioneer* and another light cruiser HMS *Hyacinth* bombarded the area of the main mouth of the river, the monitors steamed up to the northern arm, anchored and began firing alternative salvos. Surgeon Lieutenant Melville-Anderson in *Pioneer* described the scene:

"In the meantime they (the Monitors) were steaming up the river under heavy fire from the banks, but they went on and soon were within range of the Konigsberg. They then began to fire, the range being about 5 miles. Aeroplanes assisted the Monitors in locating the position but were not very successful. The Konigsberg fired salvos of five guns with good accuracy but soon she dropped to four then to three and two and finally one. During the last hour and a half of the engagement she ceased fire all together."

The Monitors however had not destroyed the German ship and she in turn had damaged *Mersey's* foremost gun, killing 6 men. The operation was repeated on 12 July and this time *Konigsberg* straddled the *Severn* as she prepared to drop anchor, but *Severn* quickly got the range and hit the German several times, setting her on fire and forcing the enemy to complete demolition after removal of the guns.

An incident occurred on Christmas day 1915; *Pioneer* was anchored in the Lindi River off the Lindi Township in East Tanzania. LEUT Melville-Anderson commented, "*As the day progressed the Germans on shore signalled Christmas greetings and we reciprocated and added, 'Send boat for presents. They signalled back, 'Thank you, will try', but for some unexplained reason no boat came from the shore.*"

Ordered back to Australia in August 1916, *Pioneer* paid off in Sydney on 7 November 1916, bringing her seagoing career to a close.

Of the six members of my Mother's family from the Warrnambool area who enlisted in the AIF, and the six other members of the family from WA who enlisted in the AIF, I have selected two to tell you about.

CPL William Allwood MM, 5757, 14th Battalion AIF: William Allwood was nearly 28 when he enlisted on 1 February 1916. He was a plumber and lived at Wangoom just out of Warrnambool.

He was wounded in 1917 receiving a gun-shot wound to his face and recovered in hospital in England. In 1918 he was again hospitalised, this time in France. He returned to his unit in June 1918. His Mother received a letter from Base Records Office, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne dated 17 March 1919:

Dear Madam,

I have much pleasure in forwarding hereunder a copy of extract from fourth Supplement, no. 30962, to the "London Gazette" dated 21 October 1918, relating to the conspicuous services rendered by the undermentioned member of the Australian Imperial Force.

AWARDED THE MILITARY MEDAL. *HIS MAJESTY THE KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Military Medal for bravery in the field to the under mentioned: No 5757 Lance-Corporal W. Allwood.*

The citation read: 'For conspicuous gallantry at HAMEL WOOD SOUTH EAST OF CORBIE, on the 4th July 1918. This N.C.O. was in charge of a Lewis Gun moving up to consolidate and noticed a dangerous gap between two front line companies. Grasping the position he rushed forward and established in the gap thereby considerably strengthening the position. Later in the operation he was conspicuous for his prompt and effective anti-aircraft work. He set a fine example throughout.

He was promoted to Corporal 6 May 1919 in France and returned to Australia 20 August 1919.

Private William John Allwood, 2866, 29th Battalion AIF: William was 31 when he enlisted on 14 February 1916 and arrived in France 17 January 1917. He was a labourer and lived at Allansford, just out of Warrnambool. He was married to Enez. Arriving in France in the winter he would have encountered the terrible conditions in the front line. By February he was hospitalised with laryngitis and bronchitis.

Discharged back to duty on 3 March he was wounded in action on 27 October 1917 and on 12 November he was dangerously ill having been transferred to the 8th Stationary Hospital at Wimereux in northern France.



He died of his wounds on 15 November 1917, having fought in the Battle of Polygon Wood in late September and he received the scalp wound soon after the Battle which proved fatal. I had been aware of his sacrifice since I was a young child and felt an obligation to pay homage to him. To my knowledge no one from our family had visited his

grave, and I felt an obligation to do so. My ambition was fulfilled in 2016 when I boarded the Euro Star at St Pancras in London and went to Wimereux in Northern France where WJ Allwood is buried. In the same cemetery is John McCrae, the Canadian Doctor who wrote 'In Flanders Fields'

Yours Aye!

Rex Williams

