



Victorian Chapter

President's Musings – August 2020

"We are all in this together" in the words of the jingle, but I guess that we are all surprised and disappointed to be at stage 4, and in lockdown! Personally, I have been heartened by the number of phone calls I have received from my NHS friends. Thank You! The society overall still receives queries concerning 'Uncle Fred' who was in the Navy in the 1920's and any enquiries Sydney receive about Victoria's Colonial Navy they handball to us. We find long time member CMDR John Wilkins a ready source of information on this subject and it was one such query about a crew member of HMVS Victoria which led to John sending us the material I found most interesting and which I have included excerpts from in this 'Musings.'

Remember December 6 last year and the great time had by all at Waverley RSL? It was indeed an honour for us to have our CN as our guest speaker and amongst my memories of the function is the pleasure Des Shinkfield had at being seated by Marty, next to CN. CN takes particular delight at meeting our WWII veterans and hearing their stories. Des's wife, Betty was not able to be with us that night and it with sadness I advise Des's friends that Betty has 'crossed the bar' and a number of people were able to view her funeral recently through it being streamed. On behalf of the Society I extend our deep-felt sympathy to Des and his family. Betty was a lovely, caring lady and will be sorely missed.

NHSA Speakers Program is proving most successful and a number of you received your invitation and viewed Commodore Bob Trotter's Presentation 'Identifying Friend or Foe, the Hilfskruezers. Bob covered the Exploits of four of the eleven German auxiliary cruisers active in the early days including Kormoran and his address was an interesting prelude to the Presentation in November by Gillian Lewis and Noel Phelan entitled 'The Sydney/Kormoran Battle and Locating the ships. An excellent presentation, and if you would like to be invited to the next presentation September 15 at 1000 on HMAS Australia I, please advise me and I will forward one on to you. The current system is that our Co-ordinator Noel Phelan sends the master copy to me and I on-forward it to our Victorian colleagues.

1884 Defence of Port Phillip

HMVS Childers - HMVS Albert - HMVS Victoria II

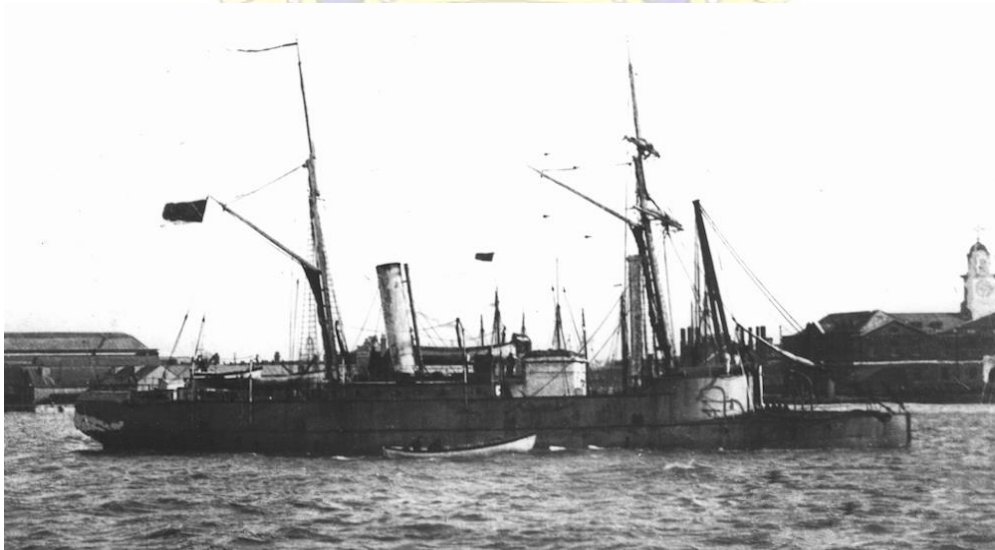
By 1884 Colonial Victoria purchased three new warships to join the rapidly growing naval fleet of

22 Naval and armed Naval Auxiliary vessels. These first two were named after HM Queen Victoria and HRH Prince Albert and the third to honour Childer's past work for Victoria.

13 August 1883 - HMVS Victoria II and HMVS Albert were fitted out under the Command of Colonial Victoria's first full time Naval Commandant Jr Post Captain Alan Broderick Thomas, RN.

The Governor of Victoria prepared an Order in Council for HMVS Victoria II, HMVS Albert and HMVS Childers to sail to Melbourne, Australia, under the "Colonial Naval Defence Act, 1865," in order that they possess the status and privileges of ships of war of the Royal Navy, whilst on the high seas.

HM Queen Victoria presented HMVS Victoria II with her portrait and Prince Albert presented his portrait to HMVS Albert before they sailed on 14 February 1884.



HMVS Victoria with one of her boats alongside. Note the low foc'sle.

HMVS Victoria II 530 tons, 145 ft. overall, beam 27ft., engines 800ihp, speed 12knots, cost £40,000.

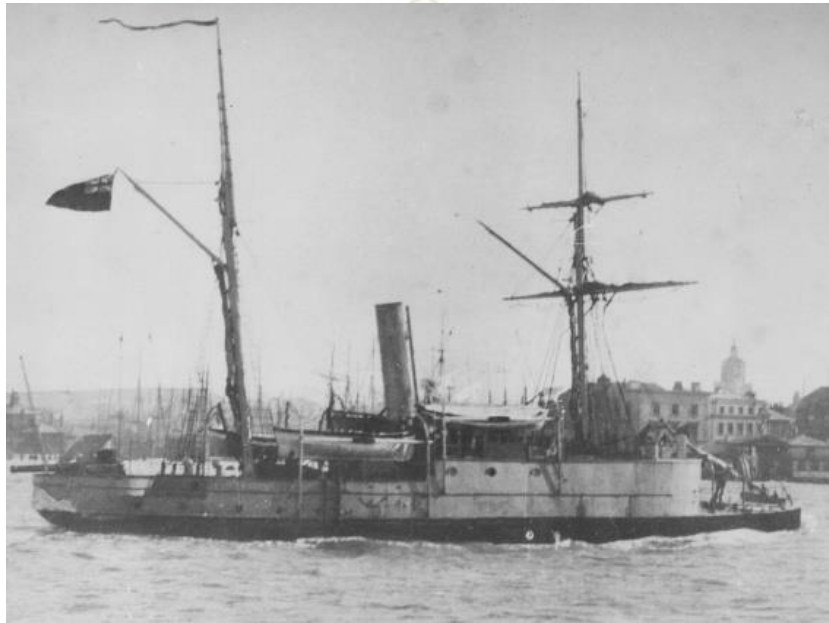
HMVS Albert slightly smaller at 360 tons, engines 400ihp, speed 10.5 knots, cost £30,000.

CAPT Thomas in January 1884 signed on his crew of active RN and retired list RN personnel at Newcastle. He was effectively a temporary Commodore in command of the three ships.

For the voyage to Melbourne HMVS Childers, LEUT T. Jerram RN, in command, was fitted out with a temporary standard three-masted light sailing rig for use in any emergency. Childers on sailing from Portsmouth received CAPT Thomas RN's instructions to "make the best of her way to Gibraltar . . . as sending her ahead would enable her to arrive in the Mediterranean in a much shorter time than would be possible if she accompanied the gunboats, and consequently run less risk of encountering bad weather".

HMVS Childers crossed the Bay of Biscay in comparatively fine weather arriving at Vigo where LEUT Jerram took on 8 tons of coal for the 800 NM to Gibraltar. Off Cadiz her coal supplies ran low and HMVS Childers was kindly offered a tow to Gibraltar by SS Pathan.

Sailing from Gibraltar to Malta her coal supplies were low but Childers arrived Malta safely. The Portsmouth - Malta run saw basic screw feathering apparatus 'ringing like a bell' as her stern lifted. On arrival at Malta she was refitted with a new screw before the arrival of 3rd Class Gunboats HMVS Victoria II and HMVS Albert.



Albert leaving Portsmouth, England for sea trials, January 1884.

On arrival at Malta on 26 Feb. HMVS Victoria II and HMVS Albert, joined the refitted Childers and CAPT Thomas received an Admiralty telegram instructing him to sail Childers to join Rear-Admiral Sir William Hewett VC KCB KCSI Commander-in-Chief East Indies' Station at Suakin in the Red Sea as part of the Sudan Campaign. The gunboats to follow as soon as possible. CAPT Thomas instructed LEUT Jerram to call enroute at Suda Bay, Crete for coal and proceed to Suakin and report himself to Admiral Hewett. (Suda Bay had served as a doubtful refuge for RAN ships in 1941 and became a target for German dive bombers during the days of the Battle for Crete).

At Port Said, HMVS Childers ran aground due to the quartermaster's drunkenness, delaying the vessel two days. Entering the Red Sea Childers arrived in Suakin on 16 March and reported to Admiral Hewett, and three days later it was joined by Victoria II and Albert. The Sudan fighting had withdrawn inland and the Victorian warships were not now required, 'very provoking', commented LEUT. Jerram RN, who was keen for action.

CAPT Thomas forwarded a letter to the Premier and Treasurer of Victoria on 21st March stating "I arrived this port on 19th inst with Albert in company, Childers having arrived three days previously, and reported myself to Rear-Admiral Sir W. Hewett, the Commander-in-Chief. I regret to say that since the recent victories of the Imperial troops there is no further necessity for our presence with the fleet . . . I shall leave tomorrow, 22nd inst and continue my voyage to Melbourne."

This letter was forwarded together with a letter from the C-I-C on HMS Euryalus, the C-I-C commenting "I have much pleasure in conveying to the Victorian Government the thanks of the

British Board of Admiralty for the generous offer of services of the ships under your command. I have the honour to inform you that they will not, however be required though I have to thank you for their presence at Suakin."

HMVS Childers' passage in company with Victoria II and Albert, now in the in the Red Sea, saw her rolling so badly she took water down her funnels. HMVS Victoria took her in tow, the tow line breaking once, but they arrived in Aden safely.

Childers was now towed across a smoother Indian Ocean and on arriving Colombo they sighted a Russian transport with 500 convicts bound for Vladivostock creating renewed concerns about future Russian intentions.

The ships, over the next five days, ran into heavy weather, the towline parting twice as it chafed against Childers's forward gear. The line was 'parcelled', no easy job with the ship constantly swept by sea. An anxious Captain Thomas on HMVS Victoria observed that Childers 'at one moment a glistening prow would be seen emerging from the body of an immense wave at the angle of 45 degrees, while at another a quivering stern with a wildly whirling screw would appear jutting into mid-air'.



Childers did not have good open sea-keeping qualities and conditions onboard, particularly during her delivery voyage to Australia, were arduous.

The Squadron's voyage was without further incident except that Childers crew experienced considerable discomfort. CAPT Thomas wrote that "great praise is due to Lieutenant Jerram commanding the torpedo boat Childers. He has most ably and zealously performed his duties often under very trying circumstances. His energy has surmounted every difficulty and he has been fortunate in having been seconded and assisted by such excellent officers as Lieutenant Williams and Mr Stewart, Chief Engineer, and also by the Petty Officers and crew, all of whom have borne

the close confinement, great heat, especially when under steam in the tropics, and constant drenchings, with the greatest good humour and without the slightest complaint."

The flotilla proceeded via the Sunda Strait in the Netherlands East Indies to Java and the Arafura Sea and Torres Strait, arriving Thursday Island by the Queen's birthday holiday.

The three ships sailed via Townsville to Sydney where they were docked to paint ships and before arrival at Melbourne. The NSW Colonial Governor and Premier took the opportunity to inspect Victoria's new naval ships.

Sailing south the flotilla experienced bad weather off Cape Schanck arriving Port Phillip Heads 9am, 25 June 1884, after a 135 days passage, sailing 13,323 miles. 84 Members of Victoria's Colonial Parliament, having been given prior warning from lighthouses enroute, had boarded HMVS Cerberus, in Port Phillip to welcome their new additions to Victoria's Colonial Naval fleet. Colonial Victoria's three new naval ships on arrival now replaced the RN White Ensign with the Colony's Naval blue ensign.

In 1886, Childers, was refitted with the Whitehead torpedo side dropping gear permitting it to carry six torpedoes into action instead of four and the two new 2nd Class torpedo boats, Nepean and Lonsdale, which arrived shortly after HMVS Childers. Victoria II and Albert were also refitted with the new side dropping gear.

Victoria's defences had now rapidly reached a level to enable it to defend Port Phillip and Victoria.

*Our thanks to CMDR John Wilkins 0AM RFD*RAN Rtd. for providing this material for us.*

Yours Aye!

Rex Williams

