



President's Musings – May 2020

The words of the song 'Until we meet again' apply to our current situation, and, if this virus scourge has achieved anything worthwhile it caused us to speak to our neighbours and enjoy their fellowship. We all talk to each other in my particular neighbourhood, and I'm getting to know ALL the neighbours after living there since 1975. Our colleagues in Sydney are to be congratulated on their endeavours to use 'Zoom' technology to extend the outreach of each of our Speaker programs and we find it most encouraging that a number of our members logged on to the test presentation, conducted on May 14. We look forward to sharing the first actual NHS Presentation with our Sydney colleagues.

Our T H D Editor, Frank Cronin's father served with the Australian Flying Corps in WW1, and his Uncles served in the AIF. I've prevailed upon Frank to share with us their exploits. Personally, I have always been fascinated by WWI in particular, and I wish to share another story from that conflict.

When I was a youngster I received 'Ten Bob' (\$1) per week to deliver 80 copies of the 'Warrnambool Standard' each day, 6 days a week. My area encompassed the Flagstaff Hill, light house area and surrounding streets. Two of my customers became mentors, namely Captain Carrington the Harbour Master / Lighthouse Keeper and Arch Deacon TP Bennett. Captain Carrington shared many a tale of the sea with me knowing of my desire to join the Navy. The Arch Deacon spoke to me of his time with the Royal Navy as a Chaplain in the later stages of the war and briefly touched upon his time at Gallipoli and it wasn't until later life that I learned of his devoted stewardship to his 'flock' amongst the horrors of trench warfare.



Chaplain Captain Thomas Pearce Bennett joined the 22nd Battalion as Chaplain on 14 April 1915. I quote from the 'Anzac -Spirit-Collection. June 18, 2014:

"Victoria's 22nd Battalion landed at Anzac Cove in September 1915, after months aboard a troopship and in Egypt. Chaplain Bennett, known to the men as 'Padre', lived in a dugout in 'Shrapnel Gully' where he spent his days burying the dead, writing to their loved ones and conducting services. Every day he went into the trenches, his 'parish', to visit the battalion. He was, wrote Patsy Adam-Smith in 'The Anzacs', the paragon among men.

Letter from Chaplain Bennett to Gustav Stelling senior 30 October 1915

ANZAC, GALLIPOLI

30th October, 1915

Dear Mr Stelling

Although we have never met, may I write to you to say how much we sympathise with you in your loss. Your son only came to us here with the third reinforcements on Monday last - he was in excellent spirits and splendid health and glad to be at last in the firing line. And yesterday with 5 of our men, his body was laid to rest in Shrapnel Gully Cemetery. He died a hero's death in a sap which was exploded yesterday morning. I hope on my return to be able to give you full particulars, the Military authorities prevent me from doing so now. In my work as Chaplain I come into close contact with the men, and I am able to say how much your boy was thought of by his comrades, especially those who knew him best.

May god help you and his mother is at this time the prayer of ,

Yours sincerely,

TP Bennett

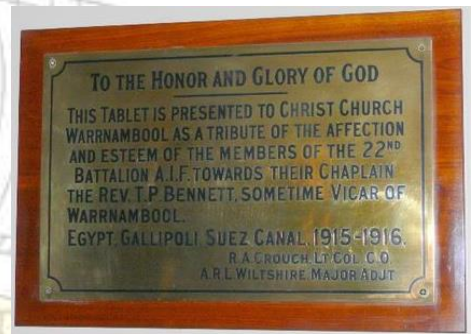
Chaplain, 22nd Battalion.

End of Quote

78 years ago, two Naval Battles were fought against the Japanese Navy which had a direct bearing on the security of Australia, namely the Battles of the Coral Sea, on May 4th-8th, and Midway on June 4th-7th and we commend the Naval Commemoration Committee of Victoria for their continuing efforts to ensure the public just how important these particular conflicts were to our survival as a nation! Bravo Zulu CMDR Terry Makings and his team!

I have been researching the Pacific War and came across an excellent piece written by RH Pelvin and JH Straczec in the RAN Website entitled 'RAN in the Pacific War' and quote from the document re the Midway and Coral Sea Battles.

On 1 May the cruisers HMA Ships *Australia* and *Hobart* and USS *Chicago* escorted by three American destroyers sailed from Hervey Bay to rendezvous with an American force built around the aircraft carriers *Yorktown* and *Lexington*. The Australian force, designated Task Force 44, reinforced with a fourth US destroyer and detached on 7 May to block the movement of any Japanese ships through the Jomard Passage. The force was bombed that day by Japanese aircraft incurring only superficial damage. Although no other enemy were sighted the presence of the Allied ships was influential in the Japanese decision to withdraw the Moresby Invasion force. Meanwhile US carrier aircraft had sunk the Japanese light carrier *Shoho* the same day.



In the action between the American and Japanese fleet carriers, *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* on the 8th, the *Lexington* was sunk and the *Yorktown* badly damaged. Neither of the Japanese carriers were sunk though the *Shokaku* was badly damaged. Although the Japanese had inflicted greater losses in ships on the Allies they had not achieved their strategic objectives. Further, the *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* had suffered such heavy losses in aircraft and personnel that they were not available for the Midway Operation in early June.

The combined effects of the battle of the Coral Sea, Midway and later the Solomon's Campaign turned the tide of the Pacific War. Although no Australian vessels were present at the Battle of Midway, Australian naval signals intelligence played an important part in helping to monitor Japanese movements and intentions and passing this information onto the Americans at Pearl Harbor.

End of Quote

The National library of Victoria has amongst its collection a number of hand coloured and black and white glass slides taken by my friend, the 'Padre' TP Bennett, whilst at Anzac, plus more copies of the letters he wrote to grieving families. Enjoy two of his photos.

Yours Aye!

Rex Williams

