

## CHAPTER XIII

### TRANSPORTS, HOSPITAL SHIPS, AND DOCKYARDS

[In this chapter Australian ships—(1) of the coastal service, and (2) ex-enemy vessels trading for the Commonwealth Government and ordinarily manned by Australian officers and seamen—are marked with an asterisk. Lists showing (a) Australian merchant ships requisitioned for war-service, (b) the ex-enemy vessels, (c) the cargo steamers purchased by the Commonwealth, and (d) transports requisitioned by the Australian Government, are given, together with a summary of their experiences, in *Appendix No. 6.*]

AMONG the less conspicuous, but in no way less important, war services controlled by the Australian Naval Board were the choice, equipment, and despatch of the transports in which Australian troops were conveyed to and from their European battlegrounds. This work began with the outbreak of war, and lasted far beyond its conclusion. On the 3rd of August, before Britain had actually entered the war, the Commonwealth Government offered an expeditionary force of 20,000 men; at 9 a.m. on the 5th, as soon as it was known that the Empire was involved, Commander Thring telephoned to the military authorities:—

Do you wish the Naval Board to prepare a scheme for taking up transports? If so, from what ports, and to carry what numbers, what arms and horses?

Next day, the British acceptance of the offer having been received, a committee was appointed, and the work of ascertaining Australia's resources in the way of suitable shipping was commenced in earnest. The first committee consisted of the Third Naval Member (Captain Clarkson), the Director-General of Commonwealth Public Works (Lieutenant-Colonel Owen<sup>1</sup>), Major Manser,<sup>2</sup> Commander Brewis,<sup>3</sup> Commander Biddlecombe,<sup>4</sup> and Joseph Leask,<sup>5</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> Col. P. T. Owen, C B E. Director-General, Commonwealth Public Works, 1904/22; Consulting Military Engineer, A M F, 1904/26. Of Illawarra district, N S W; b Wollongong, N.S W, 15 Sept, 1864. Died 15 June, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> Maj W. E. Manser; R E Of Hertfordshire, Eng, and Melbourne; b. Hertford, Eng., 18 Nov, 1870. Died of illness, 8 April, 1917.

<sup>3</sup> Capt. C. R. W. Brewis, C B E, R N Principal Naval Transport Officer, Victoria, 1915/20. Of Henley-on-Thames, Eng, and Melbourne; b. Ibstone House, Bucks, Eng., 7 Oct, 1874.

<sup>4</sup> Commr. J. Biddlecombe; R A N Of Geelong, Vic.; b. 1 Nov., 1868.

<sup>5</sup> J Leask, Esq. Commonwealth Naval Ship Constructor since 1911. Of St. Kilda, Vic.; b. Burntisland, Scotland, 2 Aug., 1880.

naval ship constructor, with H. B. G. Larkin<sup>6</sup> (who was borrowed from the Australasian United Steam Navigation Company) as secretary. In the subdivision of the work Brewis was made Naval Transport Officer, Owen and Manser Military Transport Officers, and Biddlecombe was given control of office arrangements. Commander Robins<sup>7</sup> was made transport officer for Sydney (in *liaison* with Colonel Lee<sup>8</sup>), having, as his principal assistant, Commander Dunn,<sup>9</sup> who, after the despatch of the A.N. & M.E.F. and of the first contingent of the A.I.F., succeeded him and for years shouldered the work in Sydney. Dunn and his staff occupied a special office at Circular Quay, and it was largely a result of his tact and care, and that of his predecessor, that the relations between the transport office and the shipping companies were consistently cordial.

Vessels in Australian ports and those known to be approaching the coast were at once listed, and at the earliest opportunity inspected and measured (where possible, by the Naval Transport Officer) with a view to ascertaining their suitability for carrying troops or horses. Those considered suitable were at once measured up by Leask, who forthwith prepared plans for their conversion into transports. Many of them were at the time fully loaded, and several already chartered for destinations beyond the Commonwealth; but agents and owners acquiesced readily in the naval decisions, and gave the committee every assistance in their power. The first list of twenty-eight requisitioned vessels included nine steamships of over 10,000 tons, the largest being the *Euripides*—an Aberdeen White Star vessel of 15,050 tons—and the smallest the *Saldanha*, a Bucknall liner of only 4,594 tons: ten of them had no provision for refrigerated cargo.

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<sup>6</sup> H B G Larkin, Esq, CBE General Manager, Australian Commonwealth Shipping Line, 1916/23, Chairman, Australian Commonwealth Shipping Board, 1923/28. Of Melbourne; b Plumstead, Kent, Eng, 6 March, 1872.

<sup>7</sup> Capt J. F. Robins; RAN. ADC and Private Secretary to the Governor of NSW, 1913/14. Of Datchet, Bucks, Eng, b. London, 29 Oct, 1875.

<sup>8</sup> Col J H. A. Lee. Of Edinburgh, Scotland, and Adelaide; b. Calcutta, India, 13 May, 1853. Died 18 Dec, 1927.

<sup>9</sup> Capt A C Dunn, C.B.E.; R.A.N. Of Gordon, NSW.; b. Adelaide, 21 March, 1863. Died 24 Sept., 1921.

The process of conversion entailed alterations of a very drastic character. In nearly every vessel the whole of the passenger accommodation had to be gutted, and often the electric wiring and water-supply systems had to be dislocated and renewed; further, the galley and lavatory accommodation needed much enlargement. Notwithstanding these hindrances, fitting proceeded expeditiously, speed grew with experience, and by June, 1915, it was found possible to equip fully in no more than sixty hours the *Demosthenes*, an 11,000-ton steamship carrying 1,500 troops, while the *Palermo*, a 7,600-ton horse-transport, was in fifty-three hours fitted to take 360 horses. The feeding of the troops was arranged on the basis of a fixed scale of rations to be provided by the ship-owners at a *per capita* rate, which after many conferences between the owners' representatives and Fleet Paymaster Treacy<sup>10</sup> was settled at sixteen-pence<sup>11</sup> per day for privates, 3s. 3d. for warrant officers and sergeants, and 6s. for commissioned officers.

By the 27th of September the last of the twenty-eight transports was completely equipped; some had been ready as early as the 12th. Three—the *Euripides*, *Hororata*, and *Suffolk*—were fitted at Brisbane, the rest at Sydney or Melbourne. They were now allotted to the ports where troops awaited them. Four went to Brisbane, eleven to Sydney, nine to Melbourne, and four to Adelaide; but Melbourne was also served by two of the Brisbane and three of the Sydney contingent, and one horse-transport (the *Hymettus*) embarked quotas at Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide. Hobart was served by the *Geelong* from Melbourne, and its horses were put aboard a Sydney transport. Two of the Adelaide ships picked up Western Australian troops at Fremantle, and at Albany a small contingent of Imperial reservists was put aboard the *Miltiades*, which had embarked others from New South Wales and Victoria. In all, Queensland embarked 2,206 men and 1,146 horses; New South Wales, 7,093 and 2,497; Victoria, 7,912 and 2,949; South Australia, 1,637 and 1,011; Tasmania, 897 and 275; and Western Australia,

<sup>10</sup> Paymaster Capt. A. M. Treacy, O B.E.; R.A.N. Of Melbourne, b. Newstead, Vic., 28 April, 1869.

<sup>11</sup> The minimum rate was after six months raised to eighteen-pence, and later to 1s. 10d. The higher rates were never altered.

1,784 and 4. That is, 21,529 men and 7,882 horses were accommodated aboard a fleet aggregating 237,885 tons—no inconsiderable achievement in view of a six weeks' voyage through tropical seas. It may be added that the loss among the horses during the voyage was only three per cent., instead of the ten or fifteen per cent. which the experience of other wars had led the authorities to expect.

## II

The story of the First Convoy has already been told.<sup>12</sup> But a few additional details are worth recording. In October Captain Gordon Smith, who was at the time Second Naval Member of the Naval Board, was appointed Naval Transport Officer to the convoy, with Staff Paymaster Parker<sup>13</sup> as his secretary. Smith left Melbourne aboard the *Orvieto* (the flagship of the transport-fleet) on the 21st of the month. At Albany on the 28th he conferred with Captain Kiddle<sup>14</sup> of H.M.S. *Minotaur*, Captain Silver of H.M.A.S. *Melbourne*, and Captain Kato of the Japanese battle-cruiser *Ibuki*. News had arrived of a revolt among the Dutch in South Africa; the Admiralty had accordingly decided to divert the convoy to the Cape route; and it was decided to send the slower ships of the convoy under escort of the *Minotaur*<sup>15</sup> direct to Cape Town, and the faster ships with the *Melbourne* and *Sydney* to the Mauritius and thence to Cape Town, the *Ibuki* (whose coal-supply would not last her, except at too low a speed) being used only to escort two transports from Fremantle to join the main body at sea. The *Ibuki* therefore sailed for Fremantle at once. The transports were for some days occupied with the tedious business of coaling and watering, for which they had to enter the inner harbour two or three at a time; the weather was bad, the resources of the port very limited, and the strain on all concerned heavy and continuous; nevertheless by the evening of the 31st all preparations were complete, and at 6.25 a.m. on the 1st of

<sup>12</sup> From the navy's side earlier in this volume (pp. 150-64, 179-81, 202-4), and from the troops' side in *Vol I (1st edition)*, pp. 94-114.

<sup>13</sup> Paymaster Commr. C. A. Parker, O.B.E.; R.A.N. Of East Kew, Vic; b Gloucester, Eng., 17 May, 1879.

<sup>14</sup> Admiral Sir E. B. Kiddle, K.B.E., C.B.; R.N. Of Alverstoke, Hants, Eng; b. Alverstoke, 2 Nov., 1866. Died 29 Apr., 1933.

<sup>15</sup> The *Minotaur* was the only warship with a coal-supply sufficient to take her through to Cape Town.

November the first division of the convoy left King George's Sound without incident. In the afternoon of the 31st the orders to proceed *viâ* Cape Town had been cancelled from England, and the fleet made for Colombo,<sup>16</sup> the *Ibuki* with the two Western Australian troopships joining at 4 p.m. on the 3rd of November.

As might have been expected in circumstances so novel, the transports took some time to attain the necessary discipline. At nights the lines drew out overmuch, and the lighting of the ships was dangerously conspicuous; station-keeping was poor, and signalling very irregular.<sup>17</sup> "Obtaining replies to signal EOP last night," remarked the *Orvieto* severely on the 4th of November, "occupied several hours. . . . Attention is drawn to the extreme importance of keeping ships closed up in station. By allowing their ships to straggle to double their distance, as happened yesterday, the masters greatly add to the responsibilities of the escorting cruisers." On the 5th "all A transports"—that is, the Australian-chartered ships; those of New Zealand had already benefited by several weeks' practice—were again ordered to take up

<sup>16</sup> Some of the sailing orders for the convoy are given in *Appendix No. 16*.

<sup>17</sup> Claude Farrère, the author of an interesting book on the naval war in the Pacific (*Combats et Batailles Sur Mer, 1914, pp 110-11*), has a notable passage on the progress of this convoy.—

"Thirty-eight merchantmen! What a mob! Think of it—all their lives these merchant-skippers have sailed one by one on their own, each man choosing his own route, each regulating his speed by the pressure in his boilers. All of a sudden they are ordered to sail in convoy at fixed intervals, regulating their speed to the quarter-turn of the screw, they are subjected to a discipline so strict, and so necessary, that naval men attain it only by long practice in exact observation and continuous watchfulness.

"That sort of navigation is not learnt in a day or even in a month. It upsets the British merchant-masters' routine so thoroughly that the line of vessels begins to string out indefinitely. It is all very well to put the slowest at the head of the line; in the end they find themselves at the tail-end, and even straggling behind. . . .

"At night it is worse. They are all much more afraid of running into each other than of being attacked by an enemy; each keeps well away from his neighbours; lights are shown without hesitation, in spite of the formal order to mask them. By the morning the convoy, which should cover about five miles, stretches away for fifteen or sixteen. The laggards have to be waited for, and come hurrying up anyhow.

"Imagine the sudden attack of a raider at midnight on this shapeless mass. She would have no doubts; every ship would be an enemy; she would use gun and torpedo indiscriminately on the mob, and then disappear in the darkness. The escorting cruisers, afraid of firing on their convoy, would be almost unable to reply. And that would mean disaster—perhaps 20,000 men drowned.

"Twenty thousand men lost . . . a naval Jena and worse . . . the disgrace of the British Navy and a crushing blow to the generous impulses of the Pacific Dominions."

their correct stations, and the *Minotaur* found it necessary to steam down between the lines and reprove masters who were careless:

During last night the second division straggled to seven miles, whereas their distance should have been three miles; the third division straggled to six miles, whereas their distance should have been three and a half miles. . . . The *Medic* and *Geelong* were signalling last night with lights visible at least ten miles.

On the 9th, when the *Emden* had been found and destroyed, the *Melbourne* took occasion to point a moral:

On Sunday night the *Emden* probably passed within twenty miles of the convoy. The wireless was silent, and the van of convoy so well darkened that she might have passed five miles ahead of us. Had she passed astern of us certain Australian ships were showing lights visible six miles or more, and *Emden's* torpedoes would probably have taken toll of the convoy before the escort could attack her.

Another defect in discipline was the reckless throwing overboard of ships' rubbish. "Ten wooden cases and one sack," said the *Orvieto* on the 5th, "were observed floating in water of first division yesterday," and a few days later the commander was stirred to sarcasm:—

In spite of my signal this morning bags and boxes have been thrown overboard from some ships to-day. This is not a paper-chase.

On the 5th a new risk was incurred. The mail-steamship *Osterley* caught up with and passed close to the fleet, and was severely rebuked for giving her passengers a chance to observe movements which might be prematurely disclosed at Colombo by any of them who were careless or disaffected. At the same time her rashness had its uses, for Captain Kiddle was able to send to Colombo by her the details of the convoy's requirements there, which must otherwise have been transmitted by radio and might thus have given the *Emden* a hint of the convoy's approach. Signalling during this part of the voyage was always a problem; Kiddle refused even to close the Cocos group within "buzzer" range, and—though at first the *Orvieto* used short wireless to transmit fleet orders, and the replies were made by visual signalling (preferably by flashing lamp)—after leaving Australian waters the flashing lamp was used only in urgent cases, and when nearing the Cocos group the "buzzer" was forbidden after dark.<sup>18</sup> At this time, too, absolute darkness (except

<sup>18</sup> The use of wireless is further discussed in *ch. xiv.*

for the shaded stern-lights) was ordered on all vessels throughout the night; this procedure was maintained until the 11th, when it became known that no enemy cruiser was at large in the Indian Ocean.

At Colombo it was possible to take stock of the losses during this first Australian experiment in convoy work. Between Albany and Colombo four men had died (of pneumonia), 142 horses had been lost, and about ten tons of fodder in one vessel had been badly damaged by water. One vessel (the *Suffolk*) had found her wireless apparatus quite useless; two (the *Hororata* and *Anglo-Egyptian*) suffered from temporary breakdowns in their steering gear. Between Colombo and Aden thirty more horses were lost, two minor accidents happened to machinery, and on the 21st a collision occurred in mid-ocean between the *Ascanius* (which had just been assigned a new position in the line) and the *Shropshire*, which made a 24-foot hole in the former ship's port bow, fortunately above the water-line.

At Aden the whole convoy was reassembled during the 25th; and here (according to an account subsequently written by Captain Gordon Smith) information came to hand that the Turks had extinguished all the lights in the Red Sea. It was also rumoured that they had brought on camels a large number of mines for distribution in some of the narrow channels.

The absence of lights in the southern part of the Red Sea caused us a little anxiety. There are a lot of rocks and small islands scattered about near the entrance, and the currents are strong and rather irregular. We took a very unusual route on account of the possibility of mines. Fortunately, the weather was clear, and the captain of the *Orvieto*, having passed through it regularly six times a year, knew the Red Sea from end to end.

It was a good thing he did. On the first night we sighted ahead the shadowy shapes of a group of islands that ought not to have been there according to our reckoning; the convoy was steering straight for them. The question was, on which side of them should we go? The captain, fortunately, recognised one of the lumps by its outline, and we had just time to signal an alteration of course, which took us clear of the whole group. It was a bit exciting. We barely cleared them. If we had tried to pass on the other side we should have put the whole convoy on a rocky shoal.

The convoy passed through the Suez Canal on the 2nd of December and following days, and began to disembark troops at Alexandria on the 3rd.

### III

Before any of the transports of the First Convoy could return to Australia, a second contingent of troops was ready to be sent to Egypt. It therefore became necessary to requisition another fleet, sixteen vessels in all, and among these were five enemy ships that had been seized in Australian harbours at the outbreak of war.<sup>19</sup> All had been condemned by the prize court and handed over by the Admiralty to the Naval Board for use as might seem fitting; and the five—the *Melbourne*, *Sumatra*, *Pfalz*, *Hobart*, and *Cannstatt*,<sup>20</sup> of tonnage ranging from 5,900 to 7,500—were refitted for transport work before the end of December, a sixth, the *Hessen*<sup>21</sup> (5,099 tons), being added to the transport list in the following February.<sup>22</sup> Of this second convoy a higher proportion (seven out of sixteen) were of over 10,000 tons, and included the 18,000-tonner *Ceramic*, which could accommodate 2,800 troops. On the 28th of December the fleet was assembled at Albany, Commander Brewis being appointed Principal Naval Transport Officer, himself sailing in the *Ulysses*. No escort of warships was required, but the *Berrima*, which during the occupation of New Britain had been armed and temporarily added to the Australian navy, headed the convoy with the submarine *AE 2* in tow. Three New Zealand transports formed part of this convoy. On the 31st the fleet proceeded out of King George's Sound, leaving there two ex-enemy ships, then serving as horse-transports, which had developed defects. The sailing order shown in the inset<sup>23</sup> (on the next page) was considerably modified during the voyage to Colombo, as the three White Star liners (*Ceramic*, *Suevic*, and *Persic*) were found to be short of coal and had to be diverted direct to Aden; the *Borda* was

<sup>19</sup> See pp. 45-6 and Appendices Nos. 6, 8, and 11

<sup>20</sup> Renamed the *Boonah*,\* *Barunga*,\* *Boorara*,\* *Barambah*,\* and *Bakara*\* respectively

<sup>21</sup> Renamed the *Bulla* \*

<sup>22</sup> The new names given to the captured enemy steamers, and the use to which they were put, are fully shown in Appendix No. 6, Section II.

<sup>23</sup> The inset shows the order of sailing as on Jan. 2, after the arrival of the *Ajana* from Fremantle.



therefore placed astern of the *Themistocles*, and the New Zealand vessels had the port line to themselves. The voyage was almost lacking in incident. Occasionally the submarine's tow-line parted and she was forced to carry on under her own power; one small

•Berrima .A35  
 •SubmarineAE2  
 •Ceramic...A40 •Ulysses..A38 •Themistocles A37  
 •Persic.....A34 •Vestalia.. A44 •Suevic. ....A29  
 •Borda..... A30 •Melbourne A36 •Ajana..... A31  
 •Willochra . NZ14 •Hobart.. A37 •Port MacquarieA39  
 •Verdala.. NZ13 •Pfatz.....A42  
 •Knight of the Garter NZ15 •Ayrshire A33

horse-transport, the *Ayrshire*, was found deficient in speed and was allowed to lag behind; and on the 21st of January, when the fleet was nearing Aden, a strange cruiser, which flew the white ensign but did not answer the signals made to her, alarmed the convoy-commander into detaching the *AE 2* to guard the convoy's starboard beam. The stranger, however, proved to be the Royal Indian Marine ship *Dufferin*. On the 28th the convoy reached Suez, the *Bakara\** (one of the vessels left behind at Albany) arriving on the 29th; as it passed through the Canal on the 31st the Turkish operations against the Canal Defence force (described in the first volume of this series) had already begun, and armed guards were stationed on the transports' decks.

For the next two years transports were despatched sometimes in groups, sometimes singly as they became ready, without naval escort of any kind. They were, however, for official purposes grouped as "convoys," and the records show that twenty-seven of these convoys left Australia in two years, carrying nearly 253,000 troops (including a few naval and civilian passengers) and nearly 25,000 horses. The detailed figures vividly show the quick response of Australians to the news from the seat of war. Thus in May-June, 1915, "Convoy 6" took away 14,000 troops as against about 3,000 each for the two previous convoys. The despatch of the 3rd Division and heavy reinforcements caused the embarkations for "Convoy 21" (June, 1916) to rise to over 25,000 against a previous average that year of about 9,000. The despatch

of horses was very irregular. The first six convoys took away over 25,000; another 7,000 went in four convoys, during January-April, 1916 (when the light horse were being reorganised for the desert campaign); in twelve out of the twenty-nine there were no horse-transports at all. This irregularity was mainly due to the experience of the *Palermo*, which sailed in May, 1915, with 360 horses aboard, and lost half of them on the voyage. The British authorities at once concluded that the conveyance of horses through the Red Sea in monsoon conditions would become too expensive, and in June orders came from the Admiralty to divert all horse-transports then at sea to India, and to send away no more until November. The resumption early in 1916 was prompted by the preference of Australian troops for Australian horses, and the British War Office yielded to this preference as far as to suggest in August, 1916, the purchase of 8,000 horses for use in Palestine; but in November, before many of this consignment had been shipped, transport was again suspended on the ground of a shortage of tonnage, the Shipping Control Committee, when its action was questioned, ordering that all existing horse-transports must be used for the carriage of wheat to England.

It was the difficulty of securing the removal of cargo—especially wheat—from Australia which had, during 1916, forced the Australian Prime Minister, then in England, to purchase a number of cargo-vessels with which he established a government shipping line. As the purchased ships did not carry troops, this transaction and the conditions which led to it are part of the subject-matter for another volume.<sup>24</sup> Reference to it here is only necessary in order to make clear that there were now three classes of merchant ships serving under more or less direct control of the Australian Government:

- (1) British (and a few Australian) ships chartered as transports;

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<sup>24</sup> *Vol XI—Australia During the War*. It may be mentioned here, however, that the statement in Fayle's *Scaborn Trade, Vol II, p 341*, that, though bought to carry wheat, these ships "were not put into the wheat trade, but employed outside the war zone, chiefly in the Pacific services" is entirely inaccurate (see the detailed account of the "Austral" ships, *Appendix No. 6, Section III*).

(2) cargo-steamers bought by the Commonwealth and manned chiefly by British officers and crews (though these were at an early stage placed on Australian articles);

(3) ex-enemy ships, manned by Australian officers and crews, six of which were serving as transports and twelve as cargo-carriers.

The entry of the Commonwealth Government in the business of cargo-carrying precipitated, towards the end of 1916, certain differences which had earlier arisen between the Australian Government and British shipowners. Owners complained that their vessels—compulsorily requisitioned under the Australian Defence Acts as transports—were being used not only for the carriage of troops and warlike stores, but to earn profitable freight for the Commonwealth. They urged that government management often resulted in the ships sailing only half-full in spite of the existence of available cargo urgently needing to be carried; that ships were imperilled, and even damaged, by being ordered to carry cargo into harbours in which their owners would not have risked them; finally, that the Commonwealth was withholding from them their ships, while with ex-German and other vessels (some of which, they said, might have carried troops) it was competing in the very trades which the shipowners themselves had taken years to build up. The British Government, on the other hand, as far as possible avoided engaging in trade, its practice, when using merchant ships as transports, being to allow the owners to book cargoes at least for the return voyages. The resentment of shipowners against the Australian Government was of course sharpened by the huge rise in freights, of which advantage they were partially deprived. In appeals to the Admiralty, Board of Trade, and eventually to the Prime Minister of Great Britain, they questioned the legal right of the Australian Government to take over British ships. One company went so far as to advertise that it would accept cargo on its own account for a ship then in Glasgow under Commonwealth requisition. The Admiralty, however, promptly stepped in and requisitioned the vessel.

The case for the Australian Government was at least as strong as that of the owners. The Commonwealth possessed very few ships of the class required for the sending of the A.I.F. to Europe; if, therefore, the troops were to be sent, British ships had to be taken over. They had to be fitted, at high cost to Australia, as troopships and horse-transport, and, if the military effort was not to be unduly hampered, it was necessary that they should return as regularly as possible, with their fittings still in them. If owners were allowed to load them for the return voyage and determine the ports of call, there was certainty of delay; even the use to which the transports were unavoidably put by the Admiralty—for shipping troops to East Africa, for example—prevented these ships, often for very long periods,<sup>25</sup> from returning to Australia. To prevent dislocation of this vital service, Australia had to increase her requisitions; thus by February, 1917, the number of requisitioned vessels had increased to seventy, and several mail-steamships were also employed in the carriage of troops. It was recognised that the needs of the British Government in this matter were paramount; but it is nevertheless only fair to point out that, according to calculations made, if the transports could have been used for Australian purposes only, the work could have been done with forty-five or fifty. The suspicion entertained by British owners that the Australian authorities allowed considerations of cargo-carrying to interfere with the despatch of their transports—or to limit the space available for troops—was baseless. The

<sup>25</sup> For example, the *Kyarra*,\* *Medic*, *Barunga*,\* and *Boonah*\* all left Australia in the last quarter of 1916 with troops and cargo for England. On their way back to the Commonwealth, the *Kyarra*,\* *Barunga*,\* and *Boonah*\* were together employed by the Admiralty for about three months for the purpose of carrying Nigerian troops from Sierra Leone to Kilwa Kisiwani, Dar-es-Salaam, and Zanzibar. The *Medic* conveyed Imperial troops from Plymouth to Dar-es-Salaam. Diversion by the Imperial authorities occurred sometimes in the case of ex-emy steamers, but frequently in that of the chartered transports. Unavoidable delays at congested ports (such as London, Liverpool, Marseilles, Le Havre, and Bordeaux) also contributed to the trouble. For example, at the end of 1916 the *Boorara*,\* *Pera*, *Botanist*, *Clan Macmillan*, and *Mashobra*, all carrying wheat cargoes for France, were each kept waiting for several weeks at either Le Havre or Bordeaux before berthing accommodation could be provided for them. The effect of these delays and of diversions of transports by the British Government is seen in the fact that, of the 28 ships of the first Australian convoy, only ten were back in time to embark the third contingent (February 1915), five in time for the fourth (April), and six more before the end of July; three were handed back to their owners, one (the *Orvieto*) was converted by the Admiralty into an auxiliary cruiser, and the other four were employed in European waters until the middle of 1916. Those ships of the First Convoy which suffered least delay accomplished five round trips between October 1914 and February 1917; the quickest of the Second Convoy made four only.

whole effort of the Australian transport staff was for despatch, and the fact that the ships sometimes returned with little or no cargo was due to this cause.

Eventually, the question of Australia's right to requisition and retain ships was, by agreement, shelved, and in January, 1917, an arrangement was made by which, under certain conditions, owners would load their ships for the return voyage. But, almost before the ink upon it was dry, there had occurred a development which rendered it obsolete.

#### IV

On the 9th of January, 1917, the German Government made, and on the 31st announced to the world, its decision to enter on a period of unrestricted submarine warfare. With the exception of a few specified channels, the whole area of the Mediterranean and the eastern Atlantic was declared unsafe, any vessels found within it being liable to destruction by Germany's submarines. This brought about two great changes in the Australian transport system. In the first place the Admiralty at once prohibited the embarkation of troops until it became possible to provide suitable escort for the troopships; in the second, the huge ensuing loss of British shipping compelled the British Controller of Shipping to requisition for Imperial purposes all steamships trading between Britain and Australia, and this action was in June, 1917, extended to Australian transports. The *Euripides*, which on her previous voyage had carried over 2,000 men, sailed in March, 1917, with sixteen only, of whom six were civilians; and out of 678 men officially credited to "Convoy 30" (February-April) a single mail-steamer, the *Morea*, which sailed before the end of February, took 526. Moreover, whereas the so-called convoys from 3 to 30 comprised ships sailing independently and without escort, "Convoy 31," which sailed from Fremantle on the 22nd of May, 1917, with nearly 10,000 troops, resumed the character of an escorted fleet, and subsequent convoys were despatched either in this form or by various routes, some even using the Panama Canal. From June onwards the Australian transports were steadily released into Imperial control, thirty being thus handed over within six months; the few remaining after January, 1918, were

transferred to the Commonwealth Government's shipping line. Under the new régime Australian reinforcements were carried to Europe in transports under Imperial control. The fleet of seventy-four transports, which the Commonwealth had gradually accumulated, were in the end thus disposed of:

Handed over to Admiralty .. .. .	52
Handed back to owners .. .. .	7
Handed over to Government of India .. .. .	1
Handed over to Commonwealth Government Line	6
Converted into hospital-ships .. .. .	2
Sunk while employed under Naval Board ..	6

#### V

Australian transports were almost continually at sea, but the greater part of their voyaging was done in waters comparatively free from German submarines; it is, therefore, not surprising that few of them were sunk, or even damaged, by enemy action. Only five were thus sunk, and of these only one—the *Ballarat*—while engaged in carrying troops. The first Australian transport to encounter submarines was the *Argyllshire*, which, on the 27th of May, 1915 (being at the time on Imperial service), was attacked near the mouth of the English Channel by two submarines, one of which discharged two torpedoes at her without effect. The first actual loss was that of the *Geelong*, which on the 1st of January, 1916, was sunk in collision with an Admiralty collier, the *Bonvilston*. Both vessels were on Imperial service and under orders to proceed at full speed without lights, and the collision was afterwards described by a judge as "so much inevitable that it could not be attributed to the negligent navigation of one vessel or the other." On the 18th of the same month the *Marere*, also on Imperial service, was attacked and sunk 236 miles from Malta by a submarine which shelled her effectively, her own 3-pounder gun proving quite useless in retaliation. The value of a heavier armament was soon emphasised by the experience of another Australian transport, the *Uganda*, which on the 17th of June was similarly attacked and adopted similar manœuvres, but was able with her

4.7-inch guns to drive off the enemy. On the 20th of December the *Itonus*, four days out from Marseilles with a cargo for Australia, was torpedoed by a new submarine whose captain claimed to have sunk four other British vessels already, and who destroyed a sixth while the boats of the *Itonus* were still drifting in the neighbourhood. A few days later (on the 26th of December) the *Suffolk* struck a mine in the English Channel, but reached Portsmouth under her own steam, and was soon again on active service.

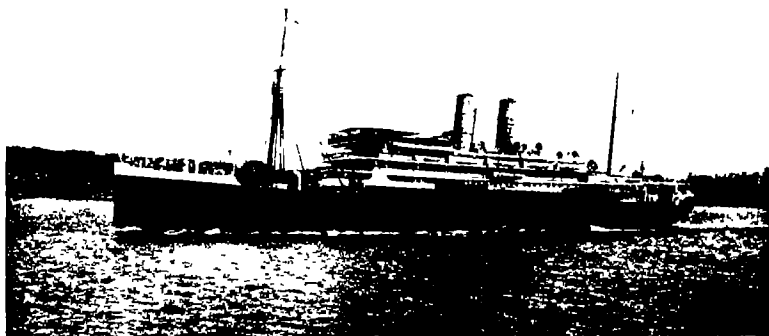
In 1917, as might be expected, the casualties were more severe, especially at the beginning of the year. In November, 1916, eight transports and two temporarily-requisitioned steamers left Australian waters almost together, and three of these met with serious misfortune. The *Port Nicholson*—which, though not a transport, carried 1,000 troops from Sydney to Plymouth—was on the 15th of January mined near Dunkirk; the *Argyllshire* was torpedoed on the 5th of February just outside Plymouth, but made port on a single screw; the *Afric* on the 12th of the same month was twice torpedoed off the Eddystone. Six days later the *Berrima*, after landing 1,600 troops at Plymouth, was torpedoed off Portland, but was safely beached. Not long afterwards the *Orsova*, which had brought about 900 Australian troops to England and was on her way down Channel to pick up Imperial troops for Egypt, was torpedoed in the same neighbourhood, but also brought into port.

In none of these cases were troops involved. But the next sinking might have been a great disaster. On the 19th of February, 1917, the *Ballarat*—an 11,000-ton liner with a nominal speed of fourteen knots—left Melbourne on her fourth voyage as a transport, with 1,600 troops aboard. At Cape Town she coaled, taking on 2,000 tons of Transvaal coal of inferior quality; while there was still enough Australian coal to mix with it, this did not greatly reduce her speed. On the 10th of April, however, she joined a convoy at Sierra Leone, but soon began to drop behind, being unable to make more than nine knots; her master asked leave to get Welsh coal at St. Vincent, but was refused, and the whole convoy had to conform to her slow pace. When nearing Britain the vessels separated, each being escorted by a destroyer, and



THE *Boonara*, ON 20 MARCH 1918, HALF-AN-HOUR AFTER SHE HAD  
BEEN TORPEDOED

*Lent by Capt J Buchanan*



THE *Indarra*

*Lent by Messrs MacDonald, Hamilton & Co*

*To face p 420*





THE AMBULANCE-TRANSPORT *Warilda*

*Lent by Capt T. Sim*



HMAS *Huon* IN IRON COVE, SYDNEY, DURING HER TRIALS IN  
DECEMBER, 1915

*Lent by Engineer-Commander O. A. Ireland, R. N.*  
*Aust. War Memorial Collection No. 1N425*

*To face p. 421.*

the *Ballarat* proceeded with H.M.S. *Phoenix*, zigzagging as she went—which further reduced her speed to about eight knots. About 2 p.m. on the 25th<sup>26</sup> a torpedo struck her, inflicting such grave damage that the main engines were soon under water. The troops were taken off by destroyers and drifters, and attempts were made to tow the vessel into shallow water, but she sank seven and a half miles off The Lizard. No lives were lost out of the 1,752 souls aboard—a result due mainly to the perfect discipline of the troops and crew.

Only one more loss marked the year. On the 10th of July the *Seang Choon*, which had carried no troops since the end of 1916, was on her way to England with a cargo of Australian produce when a submarine torpedoed her near Cape Clear on the Irish coast. Two of the ship's boats were unable to free themselves before she sank, and were therefore dragged down, four officers and fifteen lascars being drowned.

The story of the *Boorara*\* is worth telling. From the first days of the war she was in the public eye, for she was the first object fired on by an Australian gunner. She was the *Pfalz*, which on the morning of the 5th of August, 1914, tried to slip through Port Phillip Heads and was stopped by a shot from Fort Nepean.<sup>27</sup> Afterwards she was fitted up as a transport, renamed *Boorara*,\* and sent away in the second convoy. Like many other transports, she was then utilised by the Imperial authorities, and among other duties was sent to the Dardanelles to carry Turkish prisoners from Gallipoli. In the Ægean, on the 18th of July, 1915, she was rammed off Skyros by the French cruiser *Kléber*; but her bulkheads held, she was beached, patched up at Mudros, repaired at Naples, and early in 1916 was again on active service.

For some time she had nothing but good luck. But on the 20th of March, 1918, while homeward-bound to Australia with stud stock and general cargo, she was torpedoed in the Channel off Beachy Head. The torpedo ripped open and practically destroyed the engine-room, but, as there appeared to be a chance that the ship would float, and some trawlers

<sup>26</sup> See *Vol XII, plate 324*. It was Anzac Day, and a memorial service was about to be held on board.

<sup>27</sup> See pp. 45, 413, and Appendix No 11

came up, Captain Buchanan,<sup>28</sup> after sending to the trawlers the engineers and all hands that were not immediately required, had his ship taken in tow and managed to reach Southampton. No machinery, however, could be obtained there; she was therefore made seaworthy—it took four months—and then towed slowly to Newcastle. Before she could make that port, when two miles off Whitby on the 23rd of July, she was again torpedoed in exactly the same spot, the engine-room again gutted and the ship almost broken in two. Once more, however, her excellent bulkheads saved her. Captain Buchanan signalled to the tugs to continue towing, and she at length reached Newcastle to undergo repairs that took nearly twelve months.<sup>29</sup> Not until July, 1919, was she again in active service, and then on the happy task of repatriating Australian troops.

In July, 1918, there occurred an incident of which little was publicly known either at the time or afterwards, but which stands out, even in the fine record of the transports, as a striking example of coolness in face of danger. The steamer *Barunga*\*—formerly the German *Sumatra*, captured in Sydney at the outbreak of war, but thereafter manned with Australian officers and crew in the service of the Commonwealth Government—was on the 6th of July sent from London to Plymouth to embark 855 Australians, mainly invalids, for return to their country. On the way round to Plymouth at 11.45 a.m. on the 7th, a torpedo was fired at the ship. It was, however, sighted about 200 yards away on the port side, and by promptly turning to starboard the *Barunga*\* avoided a direct impact. The torpedo almost grazed the side, eventually coming to the surface a short distance away, and the ship proceeded safely to Plymouth.

Next day the returning troops, with twenty-seven naval ratings and four nurses, came aboard. The *Barunga*\* lay in the Sound until the 14th, when she pulled out, accompanied by H.M.S. *Kent*, three destroyers (*Midge*, *Lance*, and *Victor*), and several patrol-boats with captive balloons; between 10

<sup>28</sup> Capt J. Buchanan. Commanded s.s. *Bakara*, 1914/16; s.s. *Boovara*, 1917/19 Master mariner; of Yan Yean, Vic.; b. Knock, Isle of Skye, 19 May, 1867.

<sup>29</sup> A fuller account of this and other incidents in the remarkable record of this ship is given in *Appendices Nos 6 and 11*.

and 11 p.m. the patrol-boats disappeared. Everyone aboard was, of course, wearing lifebelts continuously, but all went well until 4.20 p.m. next day, when, at a point 150 miles W. by S.  $\frac{1}{2}$  S. from Bishop Rock in the Scilly Isles, a torpedo crashed through the starboard bow into No. 1 hold. The submarine, hearing the explosion, immediately came to the surface, and the *Barunga's*\* gun fired two shells at it, but failed to hit the enemy before he dived again. The destroyers, which had been some miles away, were quickly on the scene, two of them circling the *Barunga*\* and dropping depth charges round the spot where the submarine had disappeared, while the third stood by to render assistance. The *Kent* continued on her way.

Immediately after the explosion occurred, the Chief Engineer put the engines astern to take the way off the ship, but in a few minutes received the order to stop them. Soon afterwards it was found that Nos. 1 and 2 holds were full of water. In the meantime the troops had moved to their respective boat-stations, and the inmates of the hospital, which was situated in the 'tween decks near the gaping hole in the ship's side, had been brought up; in some cases nominal rolls were called over. The men allotted to the rafts stood by coolly waiting for orders, and others assisted the ship's crew to put out the boats. While the boilers were blowing off steam, verbal orders could not be heard above the roaring noise, but the conduct of the troops was exemplary and at no time was there any congestion or confusion. One man, observing that there was no flag on the ship's stern, obtained permission to hoist a Union Jack.

Each of the ten life-boats, after discharging its occupants on to the destroyers, which successively stood by to be filled, returned to the ship for another load; in this work the Australian naval ratings were conspicuous. Many of the soldiers also gave up their places in the boat-line to mates who could not swim, and themselves dived overboard and swam to rafts; Lieutenant-Colonel Burnage<sup>30</sup> (the commander of the troops) did the same when two-thirds of the men had been removed. By these means all hands were saved.

<sup>30</sup> Col G J Burnage, C.B., V.D. Commanded 13th Bn. A.I.F., 1914/15. Wine merchant, of Newcastle, N.S.W.; b. Dungog, N.S.W., 14 Dec., 1858.

At 7 o'clock, when the water was getting into No. 3 hold through the hatches and the ship's keel was visible aft, Captain Wilson,<sup>31</sup> together with the Chief Officer (L. S. Little<sup>32</sup>), the Chief Engineer (T. G. Lewis<sup>33</sup>), the adjutant of the troops (Lieutenant Connor<sup>34</sup>), and a medical officer (Major Montgomery<sup>35</sup>), left her, and two of the destroyers raced back to Plymouth with the rescued men, while the third stood by. At 10 p.m. the master and the chief officer again boarded her, and found that she was settling down; before midnight she disappeared.

The risks constantly run by such Australian vessels as were employed in dangerous waters may be illustrated from the experiences of the large coastal liner *Indarra*.\* In 1918 she was used by the British authorities to take infantry from the Palestine front to the hard-pressed defenders of Arras and Amiens; she was one of the "flying convoy" of 15-knot vessels—the others being the *Canberra*\* (another Australian coastal liner), the Orient liner *Omrah*, the P. & O. Company's *Malwa*, *Caledonia*, and *Kaiser-i-Hind*, and the Union Castle liner *Leasowe Castle*. The convoy's first trip brought 21,000 troops safely from Alexandria to Marseilles, under escort of six (sometimes eight or ten) Japanese destroyers. What followed its return to Alexandria is told by the *Indarra*'s\* master<sup>36</sup>:—

*May 1st.* Left Alexandria at 3 p.m. with the complete second division of British troops from Palestine, 21,000 in seven ships—*Indarra*\* 2,000. Attacked by two submarines and torpedoes just after clearing swept channel at 4.30 p.m. Submarines seen. Torpedoes fired missed all ships by small margins. Darkness and fog coming on, we got away clear and formed up next morning at daylight under escort of eight destroyers (Japanese). Attacked again<sup>37</sup> at 7 a.m. off Sardinia; depth-charges and guns fired, but got clear. The *Indarra*\* struck a submerged obstruction close to where the destroyer was dropping depth-charges—the force of the impact was so great that it burst all our saloon pantry deck up (steel plates and tiles). . . .

<sup>31</sup> Capt. R. A. T. Wilson. Commanded s.s. *Bulla*\* 1914/17; s.s. *Barunga*\* 1917/18. Master mariner; of Caulfield, Vic.; b. Madura, India, 7 Nov., 1861.

<sup>32</sup> Capt. L. S. Little. Master mariner; of Fitzroy, Vic.; b. Ceylon, 27 Jan., 1886.

<sup>33</sup> Chief Engr. T. G. Lewis. Of Port Adelaide; b. Brighton, S. Aust., 23 April, 1871.

<sup>34</sup> Capt. G. M. Connor, 25th Bn., A.I.F. Civil engineer; of Brisbane; b. Co. Cavan, Ireland, 21 Feb., 1885.

<sup>35</sup> Maj. H. H. Montgomery, A.A.M.C. Medical practitioner; of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Belfast, Ireland, 18 May, 1880.

<sup>36</sup> Capt. M. M. Osborne. Commanded s.s. *Indarra*\* 1917/18. Master mariner; of Cremorne, N.S.W.; b. Slane, Co. Meath, Ireland, 30 Oct., 1858. Died, 11 Feb., 1939.

<sup>37</sup> Several days later.

*May 7th.* Arrived at Marseilles 10 a.m. Troops all entrained for the front by 6 p.m.

*May 10th.* Left Marseilles 11.30 p.m., escort the same eight Japanese destroyers.

*May 12th.* 6 a.m., submarines reported by *Malwa*. 7 a.m., attacked; torpedo seen approaching direct for *Indarra\** on port side; missed *Indarra\** by about 30 feet and struck the *Omrah* (next ship in convoy) abaft the foremast; exploded, and blew all her hatches off. The *Omrah* sank in two hours. One man was lost, having been killed by the explosion. Over 5,000 bags of mail matter went down in the ship. The crew were rescued by the destroyers and landed at Malta.

*May 17th.* Arrived at Alexandria 2.30 p.m.

*May 26th.* Left Alexandria with the 3rd division of British troops from Palestine, escort same eight Japanese destroyers and two sloops. Attacked by submarines and torpedoes on starboard side at midnight. Full moon, calm sea, and very clear and still. The attack was severe and effective, the *Leasowe Castle* being hit between the funnels and sunk in one and a half hours: 114 lost, including the captain of the ship, colonel of troops, 17 officers, 2 wireless operators, and 3 naval ratings. One submarine was seen on the surface by the 5th officer Murday<sup>28</sup> aft of the port beam. I thought I saw it myself when quite close to it.

*June 1st.* Arrived at Marseilles without any further mishap or adventure.

*June 6th.* Left Marseilles with reliefs and leave-expired men. Arrived Malta at 7.30 p.m. June 9th in bad weather. After coaling and watering, &c., sailed on the 11th at 1.30 p.m. Convoy was attacked by submarines on the 12th; several depth-charges let off and guns fired by Japanese escort. Convoy not damaged in any way. On the 14th attacked again by submarines outside the swept channel off Alexandria. This was the most severe attack of the series; it was said afterwards by the naval escort that there were three submarines seen attacking. The attack lasted about fifteen minutes, Japanese destroyer-escort firing guns and dropping depth-charges; three aeroplanes from Alexandria dropped depth-charges also, and other vessels from Alexandria were engaged as well. The attack, we heard afterwards, was expected, hence the reason for the aeroplanes and other vessels being out. I personally saw one submarine hit and blown up by aeroplane depth-charges (and Japanese), for the air was full of dirt and debris. No vessel in the convoy was hit. We heard afterwards that at least one submarine was sunk if not two—anyway they were not seen again about the place.

Arrived at Alexandria at 10.30 a.m. safely. Trooping in convoy finished this trip, and the convoy was broken up and disbanded.

*June 18th.* Left Alexandria for Taranto escorted by Japanese. Shortly after leaving, attacked by submarine; torpedo seen crossing our bow, but at a safe distance. Arrived at Taranto 21st at 1.30 p.m.

*June 26th.* Left Taranto—no escort available—at 1 p.m. Arrived at Alexandria at 11 a.m., June 29th; no excitement of any sort during the passage. Docked at Alexandria on July 21st for examination,

<sup>28</sup> Chief Officer H. G. Murday. Of Mosman, N.S.W.; b. Leicester, Eng., 12 Dec., 1897.

cleaning, and painting. The marks of having run over and struck a submerged object were plainly visible on our bottom, from abreast of funnels to right aft to stern-post. Naval engineers and experts gave it as their opinion that the marks were probably caused by the conning-tower of a submarine, previously mentioned as having been run over and struck by us when attacked.<sup>39</sup>

The *Indarra*\* was afterwards employed in bringing an Indian regiment from Basra on the Persian Gulf to Salonica; between Port Said and Salonica she had the *Yarra* as one of her escorting destroyers. At Port Said, however, her Australian crew had left her, being replaced by Lascars. A submarine attacked the convoy in the Ægean, but was driven off by the destroyers.

## VI

Apart from the transport service, several large Australian coastal liners were during the war requisitioned by the Commonwealth Government for use as hospital ships. The Adelaide Steamship Company's *Grantala*\* was thus used during the expedition to Rabaul; at the beginning of December, 1914, the *Kyarra*\* (A.U.S.N.) was sent to Egypt with five hospital units, but in March was converted into a transport; of the Australian transports, during August, 1915, the *Karoola*\* (McIlwraith McEacharn) and *Kanowna*\*<sup>40</sup> (A.U.S.N.) were taken over by the military authorities as Hospital Ships Nos. 1 and 2, and in July and August, 1916, the *Warilda*\* and *Wandilla*\* (both Adelaide S.S. Company) were respectively lent to the Admiralty for the same purpose. Of these the *Kyarra*\* was sunk in the English Channel on the 26th of May, 1918, and the *Warilda*\* in the same area on the 3rd of August.

The work of the hospital ships will be fully discussed in the medical history of the Australian forces,<sup>41</sup> but a few examples of their adventurous career are worth record here. The *Wandilla*\* had in July, 1915, when serving as a troopship, assisted in the defence of Aden; Turks from Mecca were attacking, and a large body of Arab auxiliaries, whom the British commander had enlisted and armed, promptly deserted to the Turkish side, taking with them all their stores

<sup>39</sup> This is mentioned in the captain's diary under May 1.

<sup>40</sup> See Vol. XII, plate 39

<sup>41</sup> At present in preparation.

and about 1,000 camels. "The emergency being ended," to quote the *Wandilla's*\* phlegmatic master, and the Australian reinforcements landed at Suez, the vessel took aboard at Alexandria 800 British sick and wounded troops, landed them at Plymouth, and proceeded to London with her cargo of wool and wheat. As she passed The Downs, she saw four large vessels lying awash, having struck mines in the neighbouring fairway; next, while berthed in Victoria Dock, she was bombed (but not hit) by German aeroplanes that did much damage in the East End of London and at Woolwich. Moving to Tilbury Dock, she came in for another aerial bombing, close enough to sever her mooring lines. Her return voyage to Australia *viâ* the Cape, and her second and third voyages as a transport as far as Egypt were uneventful. At Port Said she embarked the Scottish Borderers and the Inniskillings (evacuated from Gallipoli), took them to Marseilles, picked up at Malta about a thousand ex-hospital cases who had recovered, took them back to Alexandria, and went on through the Canal to Australia. A fourth voyage—with troops and cargo for England—ended at Liverpool, where the *Wandilla*\* was converted into a hospital ship. During her career as a troopship there was only one death on board among 9,000 troops carried, and no sickness. "My crew," wrote her then master,<sup>42</sup> "were all Australian seamen, and I had no trouble with them throughout."<sup>43</sup>

As a hospital ship she travelled far and wide. She steamed in all 112,241 miles, and carried 26,425 invalids—British from all the three kingdoms and Australia. West Africans, East Africans, and Portuguese—with a death-record of forty-two in three years. In the United Kingdom she visited Liverpool, Southampton, Avonmouth, Cardiff, Plymouth, Newport, and Dublin. She saw Le Havre, and Brest, and Lisbon; in the Mediterranean Gibraltar, Marseilles, Malta, Port Said, Alexandria, Mudros, Salonica, Stavros, Limasol, Suda Bay, Beirut, Alexandretta, Haifa, and Tripoli in Syria; in Africa Mombasa, Zanzibar, Dar-es-Salaam, Kilwa

<sup>42</sup> Capt. C. C. Mackenzie. Commanded s.s. *Wandilla*,\* 1915/17. Master mariner, of Lindfield, N.S.W.; b Inverness, Scotland.

<sup>43</sup> The Australian crew of the *Wandilla*\* remained in her till June 1917, when, their articles having expired they were sent back to Australia and a British crew signed on; the Australian officers continued to serve in her.



Kisiwani, Cape Town, Lagos, Accra, and Sierra Leone. Of actual adventures during this period she had few; but in January, 1917, she picked up the crew of the Danish steamer *Viking*, which a submarine had destroyed by gun-fire in the *Wandilla's*\* presence; in February she rescued the seven survivors (out of 1,100) of an Italian troopship, the *Minas*, torpedoed two days before; and in May, 1918, she was held up in the Mediterranean by an enemy submarine, and thoroughly examined, but was so unmistakably a hospital ship that she was allowed to proceed.

The *Warilda*\* also had several narrow escapes before she was finally sunk. In November, 1916, when on duty in the Ægean Sea, she passed through the Zea Channel just before the *Britannic* was mined there (about 11 a.m. on the 21st), and a few days later through the Mykone Channel just before the *Braemar Castle* was torpedoed (on the morning of the 24th). On each occasion the *Warilda*\* made the passage at night. When allotted to the Havre-Southampton run at the beginning of 1917, being in an area in which all ships—according to the enemy's warning—would be liable to attack, she had to be camouflaged and armed with a 4.5-inch gun (being then known as an "ambulance transport"), and in February, 1918, was torpedoed, though luckily the torpedo failed to explode. Her sinking in August is narrated in Appendix No. 6.

## VII

All this voyaging was not done without an immense amount of dockyard labour in Australia. The naval establishments in the Commonwealth (whose work may here be considered as a whole) were centred mainly in Sydney and Melbourne, the former being the principal naval base, but headquarters being at the Navy Office in Melbourne.<sup>44</sup> The chief establishments were:—

At Sydney:

*Cockatoo Island Dockyard.* This yard, which in 1913 had been taken over from the State of New South Wales by the Commonwealth Government, was

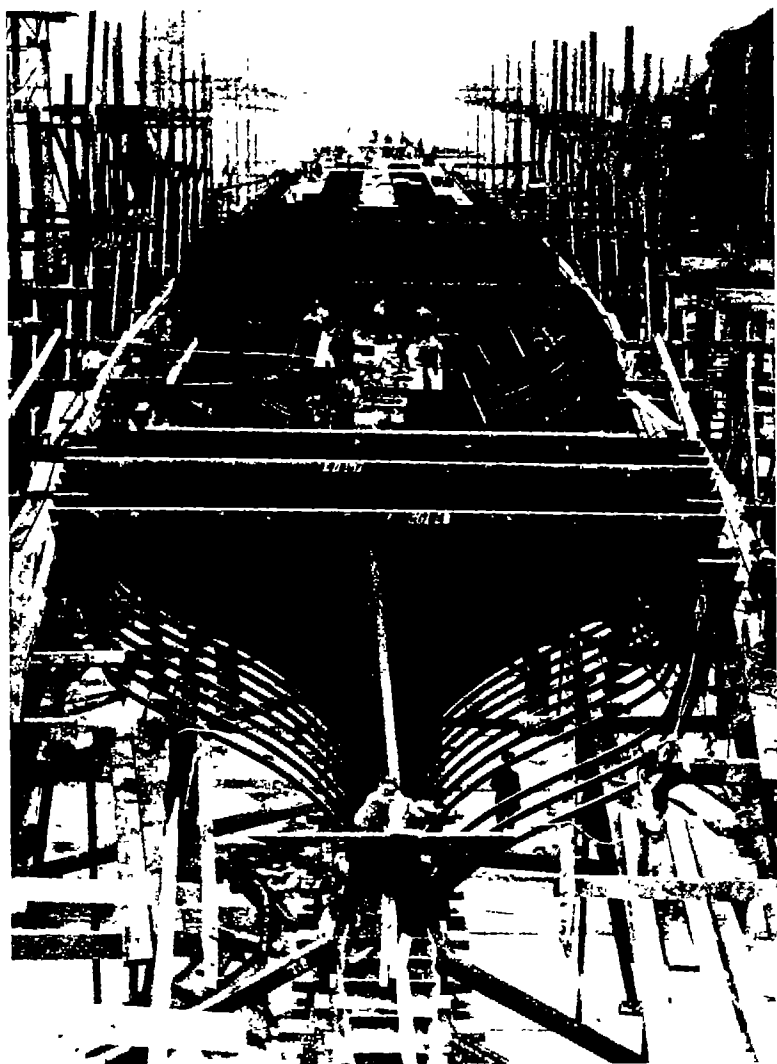
<sup>44</sup> The permanent head of the civil staff at the Navy Department was the naval secretary, Hon. Paymaster-Commander G. L. Macandie (of East Kew, Vic.).



THE AUSTRALIAN HOSPITAL SHIP *Karoola* AT BEIRUT IN OCTOBER 1918,  
EMBARKING BRITISH PRISONERS RELEASED BY THE TURKS

*Taken by Pte C S Mortimer, A I F*

*To face p 428*



H M A S. *Adelaide* UNDER CONSTRUCTION AT COCKATOO ISLAND

Photograph taken on the 2nd of January, 1918

*Lent by the Aust. Commonwealth Shipping Board*

*To face p 429*

the principal docking centre in Australasia and the only yard for the construction of warships. Here during the war three destroyers (the *Huon*, *Torrens*, and *Swan*) and a light cruiser (the *Brisbane*) were completed; that term includes the local manufacture of the boilers and main machinery (except the *Brisbane's* turbines) and of part of the electrical fittings. Another light cruiser, the *Adelaide*, was laid down in November, 1917, and launched in July, 1918.<sup>46</sup> The island dock was used by eleven Australian warships, two British auxiliary cruisers, and three Japanese cruisers. By November, 1918, fifty transports and two hospital ships had been fitted or refitted, many of them being dealt with four or five times; the *Wiltshire* had eight refits before being dismantled.

*Garden Island*, formerly the Admiralty's naval yard in Australia, but taken over by the Commonwealth Government before the war. It comprised repair shops for refitting ships, a naval store dépôt, a sub-dépôt for torpedo-gear and gun-mountings, and a dépôt-ship (H.M.A.S. *Penguin*) for naval officers and men. Here forty-two transports and the hospital ship *Grantala*\* were fitted out, and sixty-seven refits were carried through. *Garden Island*, having no dock, could undertake no new construction, but repairs were evenly apportioned between this yard and *Cockatoo*; the pressure of work being considerable, both were kept fully employed, and the friction which occurred after the war was entirely absent. At *Garden Island* all the smaller warships were refitted and repaired when necessary (the *Parramatta* was overhauled five times, and the *Encounter* six); the captured *Komet* was converted into H.M.A.S. *Una*, and several dépôt and patrol ships were fitted out, besides six mine-sweepers and three small vessels for the military administration at *Rabaul*. The main responsibility for the supply of naval stores and fittings in Australasian waters rested

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<sup>46</sup> Particulars of ships built or building for the Australian Navy during the war are given in *Appendix No. 4*.

upon this yard, and at the outbreak of war the most urgent needs were at once met from its reserve stocks. A store-ship, the *Aorangi*, was commissioned there to follow the fleet with stores and gear, and arrangements were made for the expansion of supply. In spite of the policy (followed both by the Admiralty and the Australian Naval Board) of buying stores locally whenever possible, it was found necessary to obtain most of the special naval stores from Great Britain. This, however, became at times impossible, and during these periods local manufacturers, especially of wireless equipment, rose to the occasion and maintained the supply of at least the most urgent needs.<sup>46</sup> Besides furnishing stores for all warships and auxiliaries constructed or converted in Sydney, the yard supplied certain cruisers of the Japanese Navy and the ex-German ships used as cargo-carriers and transports; it also sent shipments to outposts and stations in various parts of Australia and the Pacific.

*Royal Edward Victualling Yard.* The Victualling Store Officer not only undertook the purchase and provision of food, mess gear, clothing, and certain other material for all Australian naval services, hospital ships, and Commonwealth liners, and of bedding and other supplies for certain transports, but, from July, 1917, onwards, was responsible for the supply of provisions for the British squadrons in the Cape, East Indies, and China waters.

*The Naval Armament Dépôt*—charged with the supply of guns and ammunition.

At Melbourne:

*The Naval Dépôt at Williamstown*, comprising a training dépôt for naval officers and ratings, small repair shops, and a naval store dépôt. At this yard a number of merchant ships were fitted with 4.7-inch or 6-pounder guns, and certain repairs and alterations

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<sup>46</sup> The provision of wireless equipment in these emergencies is referred to in more detail on pp. 442-3.

were effected. The *Pioneer* and *Protector* were equipped with stores and fittings, and, until the opening of the special store at Port Melbourne, blankets and hammocks were supplied to transports. Mine-sweeping gear and wireless apparatus were also supplied to a number of ships and stations. Through the training dépôt there passed practically all officers and men recruited for the Australian Navy, except those entering through the Naval College and the training ship *Tingira*. Former officers of the British Navy reservists, young medical or engineer graduates from the Australian universities, were put through short tests or courses of varying lengths before distribution to their various posts; 202 officers and 1,295 men went through the gunnery school.

The Victorian Government dockyard adjoined this establishment, and during the war was closely associated with it.

*Port Melbourne Naval Store.* This was a subsidiary establishment specially instituted in 1915 for the provision of repair stores and fittings for part of the transport fleet.<sup>47</sup>

### VIII

Another of the Naval Board's activities, though not itself strictly naval in quality, must be mentioned here. Besides its seventy-four transports it operated a fleet of cargo-vessels—twelve ex-enemy steamers—with the object of regularising as far as possible the export of food-stuffs to Europe and the import of necessaries to Australia. As the transport fleet included most of the vessels (other than mail-steamers) that had hitherto carried refrigerated meat, &c., to England, the traffic in meat became mainly the business of the Board; soon the exports of wheat, wool, and metals were also lifted by Board-controlled vessels, and receipts from this source were

<sup>47</sup> The numbers employed at the chief establishments are stated to have been roughly as follows—Cockatoo Island, about 2,700; Garden Island, about 950; Royal Edward Victualling Yard, several hundreds; Williamstown Naval Yard, about 950.

used to meet in part the expense of transporting troops. The following table shows the quantities of meat, etc., thus carried and the freights earned year by year:—

Year.	Cargo in Freight-tons.						Freight. £
	Wheat.	Wool.	Meat.	Metals.	Other.*	Total.	
1914 ..	1,335	37,977	37,349	20,861	32,650	130,172	411,343
1915 ..	22,879	124,921	84,764	155,799	71,737	460,100	1,623,750
1916 ..	392,350	100,273	66,881	111,845	100,361	771,710	3,913,154
1917 ..	78,155	173,958	61,599	70,866	78,316	462,894	2,702,159
1918 (three months only)	5,262	21,609	681	4,138	6,382	38,072	300,977
	499,981	458,738	251,274	363,509	289,446	1,862,948	8,951,383

After March, 1918, this traffic was carried on by the Commonwealth Government Line, to which were transferred the twelve cargo-steamers and six of the transports.

One awkward result of using ex-enemy vessels must be noticed. To make this use internationally legal each vessel was permanently requisitioned and placed on the British register, thus satisfying the provisions of Article 2 of The Hague Convention of 1907, which had been agreed to by Germany. But instructions were repeatedly issued from Berlin to German consuls in neutral ports, ordering them to use every means of seizing or harassing the requisitioned vessels, and more than once the Board was warned by the British Government against allowing a cargo steamer to visit ports where German influence was strong. Further, the Governments of the United States (before it took part in the war) and of Holland were extremely punctilious in observing a strict neutrality, and ex-German vessels operated by the British or the Australian Government were not favoured in ports of the United States or the Dutch Indies. Thus the *Conargo*\* (ex-enemy *Altona*) was refused the use of a Government dock at New Orleans on the ground that she flew the flag of a belligerent nation; the *Boonah*\* (ex-enemy *Melbourne*) had great difficulty in clearing the port of New

\* This included butter, fruit, tallow, and skins, etc.

York because she had been used as a transport on the voyage to Europe, though at the time of her visit she was merely carrying cargo to Australia; and the Board's cargo steamers were unable to trade with ports in the Dutch Indies because the local authorities refused even bunker-coal to a prize vessel in the employ of the British Government.

#### IX

An important section of the Naval Board's transport machinery was the Transport Branch, established in London in January, 1915. Many of the requisitioned vessels belonged to British firms, and many of them were (as has already been mentioned) used by the Admiralty for purposes not peculiarly Australian; it became, therefore, advisable to have at the centre of the Empire representatives of the Board who could conduct negotiations and adjust a mass of claims (both for and against the Board) without the long delays that must have been caused by perpetual reference to Australia. A single paragraph from the first annual report of the Branch will sufficiently illustrate its usefulness:

“The military operations in the Dardanelles, and subsequently in Serbia, have necessitated the frequent use of Australian transports for Imperial service, as in an emergency the Admiralty's need for ships becomes absolutely imperative. When reinforcements are urgently required or a new expedition is launched at short notice, all considerations beyond the military necessities of the moment must be disregarded, and any and all ships within reach have to be requisitioned. At such times the Commonwealth transport service suffers, unexpected delays result, and prearranged plans are seriously disorganised. It has been the practice of this Branch to maintain the closest touch with the Admiralty throughout, and, without raising obstacles to the Imperial employment of Australian transports where urgent requirements arise, or where material deviation and detention are not involved, to keep prominently before the Admiralty officials the full importance of Australian requirements in respect of the carriage of troops and maintenance of trade. The Admiralty system of decentralisation, under



which responsibility is so largely delegated to the man on the spot, renders it at times very difficult to keep in close touch with the movements of transports in Egyptian waters and in the Ægean Sea. The recent appointment of an Australian naval officer to the staff of the Principal Transport Officer in Egypt should be of the greatest assistance."

The Branch was placed under the superintendence of H. B. G. Larkin, with the Director of Navy Accounts (Fleet Paymaster Martin<sup>49</sup>) as his right-hand man. When Australian troops were sent to France and a branch of A.I.F. Headquarters was established in London, the Transport Branch at once co-operated with the military authorities, and permanent Port Embarkation Staffs were created to deal both with the landing of troops and with the handling of military cargoes in London. When in 1917 the Australian transports were transferred to direct Imperial control, the work of the Branch changed character; its main duties thenceforth were to secure from the Ministry of Shipping accommodation both for reinforcements proceeding from the Commonwealth and for invalids and wounded men who must be returned to the Commonwealth—and these, after the heavy casualty lists which began with the Battle of the Somme in 1916, overflowed the British hospitals and demanded for their relief every berth the Branch could secure. The introduction of the convoy system, moreover, automatically eliminated from the transport service a number of slow vessels, and those which were left, while usually sufficient for the accommodation of reinforcements, were subject to

conflicting demands for space for Imperial reinforcements, for returning labour battalions, and for Australian invalids.

Consequently by the end of 1917 there were still in England nearly 5,000 Australian sick and wounded who should have been on their way home.

From its inception to the end of 1918 the Branch handled, on transport account, an expenditure of nearly nineteen millions sterling, and receipts totalling nine millions—the freight earned upon cargo carried in transports. These figures

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<sup>49</sup> Paymaster-Capt. A. Martin, O.B.E.; R.A.N. Of Melbourne; b England, 16 March, 1871. Died 22 Sept., 1930.

do not include the accounts relating to cargo steamers employed as such by the Commonwealth—an expenditure of two millions and receipts of over four—which also came under the control of the Branch. These large trading operations, as well as those involved in the transport of troops, were brought to account in the Navy Office, the supervision of this task—a most unusual one for such a department—falling almost entirely on the Acting Director of Navy Accounts.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> R. Abercrombie, Esq., O.B.E. Director of Navy Accounts and Finance, 1919/38; Commonwealth Auditor-General, 1938. Of Hawthorn, Vic., b. Mount Duneed, Vic, 19 July, 1881.