

Chapter V.

THE SECOND CONVOY.

As it was impossible for any of the ships from the first convoy to return to Australia in time to embark the second contingent, it became necessary to requisition and fit the following vessels:—

Name.	Gross Tonnage.	Owners.	Fitted at—	Fitted for—		
				Officers.	Others.	Stalls.
A.29. <i>Suevic</i> ..	12,531	Liverpool White Star	Melbourne	40	510	527
A.30. <i>Borda</i> ..	11,136	P. and O. Branch Line	Brisbane and Sydney	26	550	260
A.31. <i>Ajana</i> ..	7,759	Australind S.s. Co.	Sydney ..	17	410	304
A.32. <i>Themistocles</i>	11,231	Aberdeen White Star	Melbourne	100	1,220	..
A.33. <i>Ayrshire</i> ..	7,763	Scottish Shire Line	Sydney and Brisbane	20	330	297
A.34. <i>Persic</i> ..	12,042	Liverpool White Star	Sydney ..	40	520	491
A.35. <i>Berrima</i> ..	11,137	P. and O. Branch Line	Sydney ..	60	1,500	..
A.36. <i>Boonah</i> ..	5,926	ex-enemy, <i>Melbourne</i>	Sydney ..	5	120	498
A.37. <i>Barambah</i> ..	5,923	ex-enemy, <i>Hobart</i> ..	Sydney and Brisbane	5	120	498
A.38. <i>Ulysses</i> ..	14,499	Ocean S.s. Company..	Melbourne	100	2,000	22
A.39. <i>Port Mac-</i> <i>quarie</i>	7,236	Commonwealth and Dominion Line	Sydney ..	25	371	456
A.40. <i>Ceramic</i> ..	18,481	Liverpool White Star	Melbourne	100	2,700	24
A.41. <i>Bakara</i> ..	5,930	ex-enemy, <i>Cannstatt</i> ..	Melbourne	6	120	348
A.42. <i>Boorara</i> ..	6,570	ex-enemy, <i>Pfalz</i> ..	Melbourne	6	150	414
A.43. <i>Barunga</i> ..	7,484	ex-enemy, <i>Sumatra</i> ..	Melbourne	6	140	367
A.44. <i>Vestalia</i> ..	5,528	Gow, Harrison and Co.	Melbourne	5	118	440

In the next chapter some account is given of the ex-enemy ships which were interned or captured in Australian waters, and it will be seen that owing to the prompt action of the Transport Branch of the Navy Department it was possible to include five of these vessels in the second convoy. The actual embarkations in the ships at each port will be found in Appendix I., but as this is the last occasion for a considerable time when it was expedient to send the transports in company, although the necessity for the escort of warships was no longer deemed essential, a short account of the voyage is of interest.

As in the case of the first convoy the second assembled at Albany, the *Ulysses*, with Acting Captain C. R. Brewis, R.N., aboard as Senior Naval Transport Officer, being Flagship. By the evening of the 28th December the whole Fleet, with the exception of the *Suevic* and *Port Macquarie*, had arrived, and these vessels put in an appearance at daylight the following day. The weather was very stormy, with a high sea and strong wind, which rendered the operations of the launches which acted as tenders both difficult and dangerous, but the little boats were skilfully handled and their work was accomplished without mishap.

The *Bakara*, one of the ex-enemy ships, had arrived at Albany somewhat earlier than most of the fleet with her bunkers on fire, and had gone inside to the pier. The fire was subdued by 6 o'clock on the evening of the 29th December and the discharge of the coal was commenced, and though work could have been more satisfactorily carried out in the Sound had the weather conditions been at all favorable, as things were it had to be performed where she lay.

Steam was raised in all ships for a start at a quarter to five on the morning of the 31st December, but as final permission to sail had not been received fires were banked and the convoy did not actually get under weigh until 8 o'clock.

While weighing anchor the *Barunga*, another of the ex-enemy ships, developed engine trouble which completely disabled her, so that a departure was made without the two vessels named.

The fleet proceeded out of harbour in single line, but when clear of the land formed into two columns and later into three, the disposition of the vessels being as under:—

<i>Berrima</i> with Submarine <i>AE 2</i> (Commander Stoker) in tow.		
<i>Ceramic.</i>	<i>Ulysses.</i>	<i>Themistocles.</i>
<i>Suevic.</i>	<i>Westralia.</i>	<i>Port Macquarie.</i>
<i>Persic.</i>	<i>Ayrshire.</i>	<i>Boorara.</i>
<i>Borda.</i>	<i>Boonah.</i>	
<i>Willochra.</i>	<i>Barambah.</i>	
<i>Verdala.</i>		
<i>Knight of the Garter.</i>		

At 2 p.m. the next day the *Ajana* joined the convoy and took up station astern of the *Themistocles*.

One of the New Zealand ships, the *Knight of the Garter*, was supposed to be only a 10-knot vessel, and it was feared that her presence would retard progress, but to the general surprise difficulties of this sort occurred in quite different directions. At a speed of 10½ knots all except the *Ayrshire* were able to keep their positions, so she was ordered to drop back astern of her column and speed was increased half a knot.

All went well until the morning of the 2nd January, when the submarine's tow line parted, and as there was a strong southerly wind and considerable sea connexion could not be resumed till next morning, and in the meantime she proceeded under her own power.

Some alterations were made in the disposition of the ships on the same day, the main object being a better distribution of the armed vessels, and incidentally by the necessary easing of speed to enable the laggards to regain stations.

The *Ayrshire*, however, still continued to drop behind, and gave the explanation that although the number of her staff of firemen was sufficient the efficiency was by no means what could be desired.

Nothing of unusual interest happened until the 5th January, when further delay occurred owing to the submarine's tow-line again parting. Attempts that day to pass another line were unsuccessful, so once more the little vessel proceeded under her own power throughout the night. Next day efforts were rewarded, and in the early morning the *Berrima* resumed the tow.

About this time it was discovered that the three White Star ships *Ceramic*, *Suevic*, and *Persic* had left Australia with very much less coal aboard than they should have carried. It was, therefore, considered advisable, if the route was clear, to detach these vessels and send them direct to Aden to replenish bunkers. Before taking action an attempt to communicate with the Navy Department via Cocos Islands was made, when it was found that the station had not been restored since the visit of the *Emden*, but that the *Empress of Japan* was in Refuge Bay and could pass through any messages. The requisite reply having been received from Melbourne, the three White Star vessels were ordered on the 12th January to part company with the convoy and proceed direct to Aden. The withdrawal of these ships made a slight re-arrangement of the columns desirable, and the *Borda* took up position astern of the *Themistocles*, leaving the three New Zealand transports in a column of their own.

The convoy arrived at Colombo early on the 13th January and berthed in the harbour, the poor *Ayrshire* turning up some nine hours after the rest had anchored.

The general arrangements for coaling, provisioning, &c., were on this occasion much more satisfactory, and on the following day the first transport left the harbour and anchored outside, the rest following as pilots became available. A start might have been made at once were it not that the new towing gear for the submarine was not complete and she could not continue her voyage without it.

Some trouble was experienced with the troops while in port. About 500 broke ship, but before sailing all but 22 came aboard, and these were later picked up by the *Bakara* and brought to their destination.

Though not quite as imposing a picture as the first convoy, the ships as they left Colombo on the morning of the 15th January in three columns, line ahead three cables apart, presented an inspiring sight. Station was well kept, and the Masters had by this time acquired greater proficiency and confidence in carrying out fleet tactics.

The *Ayrshire* alone had difficulty in keeping up a speed of $11\frac{1}{2}$ knots, and when on the 17th January she reported that her condensers were leaking permission was given her to come along as best she could and to rendezvous at Aden.

All went on quietly with the exception of the interception of numerous wireless messages between other unseen ships till on the morning of the 21st January a vessel having the appearance of a cruiser was sighted a

few miles to the northward, and until the character of the steamer could be ascertained it was deemed advisable to take the precaution of placing the *Berrima* and the submarine on the starboard beam of the convoy as a protection in the event of enemy attack.

As the unknown ship approached she was seen to be flying the white ensign, but she hoisted no signals and offered no reply to repeated wireless calls. At 2 o'clock the submarine cast off her tow and prepared for emergencies. Fortunately her aid was not required, for about half an hour later the stranger gave her name, the *Dufferin*, of the Royal Indian Marine, proceeding to Aden.

No further incidents of moment occurred, and the convoy arrived safely at Aden at 9 a.m. on the 22nd January.

It was necessary for the crew of the submarine to have a few hours' rest, so the voyage was not continued till 5 p.m., when the convoy weighed and steamed for Suez. An accident, however, occurred which for the time being crippled the *Berrima*. As she was weighing anchor she fouled the submarine cable, and the tow line of *AE 2*, which had been cast off while the larger vessel was trying to get clear, fouled the *Berrima's* starboard propeller. This necessitated her waiting behind and entering harbour next morning to get it cleared.

The *Ceramic*, *Persic*, and *Suevic* had joined up as arranged and once more took their allotted stations, and the convoy proceeded at 11½ knots, the submarine using her own power until the 25th January, when the *Borda* took her in tow. At 4 a.m. on the 28th the fleet anchored in Suez Bay; the *Borda* and her charge arrived four hours later, the *Ayrshire* at 11 a.m., and the *Berrima* at 6 o'clock in the evening.

Next morning the *Bakara* arrived, bringing with her the 22 men who had been left behind at Colombo.

The *Berrima* entered the canal, and followed by the rest of the transports anchored that night at Ismaliah. All along both sides of the canal were entrenchments and wire entanglements and Camps of British Territorials and Indian Troops, while aeroplanes and hydroplanes hovered overhead.

Next day the transports proceeded to Port Said, where orders were received to continue to Alexandria for the disembarkation of all troops. It was arranged that vessels should travel independently as they completed coaling and watering. The whole of the ships reached Alexandria by the 3rd February, and the disembarkation of the contingent was completed by the 7th of the month.

The story of the second convoy as a convoy ends at Alexandria, although the ships with their cargo and passengers (on account of the Imperial Government) continued their voyage to England.

For some time, although the vessels despatched from Australia were sent in groups and were designated convoys, no armed escort was deemed necessary until the war zone was reached. Early in 1917,

however, the Naval Board was informed that the Admiralty considered that, under existing circumstances, no troops should come forward from Australia, and that steamers ready to sail should be despatched without delay, leaving troops to come on by later vessels. The *Euripides* and *Armada*, via the Cape, and the *Itria* and *Kabinga*, via Suez had, in accordance with this ruling, been despatched without troops on board.

The Admiralty further intimated that troops should not be embarked in the mail steamer *Mongolia*, which was to sail from Sydney on the 19th March.

Meanwhile, the *Hymettus* had been recalled to Colombo on the 6th March. It was suggested to the Admiralty that the few troops on board should be landed and retained on shore to come on by a later steamer as soon as the embargo was removed, thus permitting the *Hymettus* to proceed on her voyage.

Several transports sailed from Australia without troops, owing to the Admiralty's decision that troopships with troops on board should not leave without escort.

Arrangements were later made to supply the escort for the first part of the voyage.

During the embargo on conveyance of troops unescorted through the Indian Ocean, the *Morea*, homeward bound from Australia with troops for Egypt, was diverted to Bombay to disembark her troops shortly after leaving Colombo. The *Hymettus* was allowed to come on from Colombo after disembarking her troops, the oncarriage of these troops being arranged by the Imperial Authorities who utilized the *Mashobra*.

The Admiralty, in response to an inquiry put forward at the request of the Naval Board, stated their definite opinion that the restrictions on transport of troops should apply equally to munition workers.

The *Ceramic*, *Commonwealth*, *Aeneas*, and *Nestor* sailed from Australia without troops, owing to the Admiralty embargo on despatch of troops in unescorted vessels.

When the raider *Wolff* was at large, in May, 1917, generally warships of the British Navy accompanied Australian transports from the Cape or Colombo, as the case might be, and then handed them over to the care of other ships to take them west. In one instance a Japanese man-of-war accompanied a convoy to Colombo.

The Admiralty procedure was to accept liability at blue-book rates in respect of demurrage in delays attributable solely to the fact that troops were on board, and in the case of the delay to the *Omrah*, owing to her recall after departure from Fremantle, the Naval Board considered that the demurrage should be chargeable to the Admiralty.

This vessel left Fremantle on the 23rd January, 1917, for Durban, where she was due on the 6th February. While at sea she received wireless orders at 11.30 p.m. on the 28th January to return to port,

and she promptly turned back. Twenty-four hours later these orders were cancelled, and she was told to proceed, but as to regain the position at which she first turned round would involve two days' shortage of coal, there would have been no margin of fuel aboard for emergencies. The captain, therefore, returned to Fremantle. The *Omrah*, after coaling, resumed the voyage on the 2nd February, and joining the *Miltiades* and *Anchises* at Sierra Leone, arrived safely at her destination on the 27th March. Eventually it was agreed that the Commonwealth should pay demurrage for 24 days, as the orders for the recall were issued for Naval reasons and for the purpose of safeguarding the ship and the troops on board.

The cost of extra victualling during the period, calculated on current Australian victualling rates, was also borne by the Commonwealth.