

By AIR MAIL.

NAVAL SERVICE



20/11/45
leaving Town of Stirling

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Clare,
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Widm. Whittemarr.
H.M.A.S. Strahan
20th Nov.

Dear All at home,
Yesterday we left
Strahan - a wonderful time being
marred with a tragic end. After
leaving the wharf we anchored in
the harbour waiting for the tide.
While here one of our leading-seamen
dived overboard to swim ashore & was
drowned before reaching the shore.
Why he did it? - well there is no
explanation, unfortunately.

We left Sydney on
a Sunday afternoon & had a very
quiet trip down - had beautiful
^{weather} almost all the way (except
passing Victoria, of course) &
arrived in Strahan 9 am. on
Wed. morning, via Bass St. & the
West Coast of Tassie. The harbour
into Strahan is reputed to be one of
the trickiest in Aust. & yet we
were lucky enough to run into a

2.

a small merchant ship. going there,
so just followed her in.

Now for the arrival -
talk about returning heroes!?! All
the school children lined the cliffs
above the wharf & everyone,
including the two dogs, were
down at the wharf. It was the
first time a warship (not 'battle-
ship' as we were later referred as!)
of any kind had even visited
Strahan & also the first time
one had come to the west coast,
not on duty. And according to
the radio & papers - we were news!

Anyway we must have looked
pretty good: it was a beautiful
morning, we had just finished
repainting, & had flags flying
from stern to stern. Of course
we could see all this 'crowd' from
quite a distance, through our
glasses & it certainly tickled us.
All their main street was decked

3.

out in red, white & blue streamers,
flags etc. We could see there
was some fun awaiting us.

Strahan has a pop. of
450 with about 120 school children
— Tasmania should certainly go
ahead, as this is the case in
nearly all the towns. One
thing we found, by experience,
that almost everyone in the town
was related. — there lay some
amusing incidents! In fact, the
whole week was packed with
them & now we have all left,
we have time to really enjoy them.

Nevertheless everyone was
most sincere & had a programme
worked out for all the stay & did
their utmost to give us the best
time possible. Right from the
word 'go' we were showing people
around the ship & if I didn't
know much about the ship, I
certainly do now.

I was duty the first day⁺ in, so I had to cope with the initial rush - including all the kids - they had a half holiday. If anyone had a good time, it was the latter; imagine letting me loose at the age of 10, with some 'real' guns to play with - whacks! That night was a big welcome ball, & crowds came from near & far - still, I dipped out on that.

Thursday was fine during the day, so the capt. & four others went out in the whaler, sailing. We found a nice beach & cooked chops over a fire & when we got back it was time to leave for a 'barbecue' at a place called 'Ocean Beach'. Buses were arranged & after eating more chops, had a 'sing-song' in the sand hills (not bad) arriving back well into the morning.

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Next morning left at 9.30 for Queenstown, 26 miles away, which is the nearest town to Mt. Lyell Mines, with a pop. of 4,500 + once again 11 to 12,00 school children. The train trip there is about the prettiest I have ever seen, especially in a Tasmanian train - for all the world like an overgrown toy. Each carriage holds about 16, at a pinch!

On arriving we assembled on the station + marched through the streets. Everyone must have stopped work, + also another half holiday for the schools. Once again flags were waved + crowds cheered - what for? - I must have omitted to tell you of the magnificent fighting record of HMFS "STRAHAN"!! Naturally there followed some big speeches + then we were dismissed for lunch. Now here comes the biggest laugh

of the day: ^{b.} that was the cue
for the kids - they trapped
us on the spot, in the middle
of the road, & guess what with
autograph books!! as long
as they had a pencil & any
bit of paper they were set. But
just imagine it; as soon as
you'd take a couple of steps down
the road, you would be surrounded
by another mob, wanting your
sig. - it was almost impossible
to escape. Needless to say, it
was pretty late when at last
we made the final dash (ahem!!)
to the doors of the hotel - &
dinner. Thank goodness school
was in went we went to catch
the buses to Mt. Lyell. We spent
the whole afternoon being
excited around the mines - which
is certainly a big concern - & very
interesting. So back to
Queenstown, & a shower. Then the

whole ship's company was entertained at dinner by the R.S.A. at one of the local pubs. Free beer, of course, for everyone. Also the R.S.A. had arranged a ball for the night, but prior to going to this, all the officers were expected at a sherry party at the Doctor's, to meet a Lady James, who happened to be staying there. We were all beamed up with a certain number of 'plums' each, when Lady J. whisked the whole setup by saying "ow are ya"!!

So onto the dance ~~and~~ which was the usual 2am finish & back to the ship by bus.

So onto Saturday which was almost free from set arrangements & during which we were going to borrow a launch & go the famous Gordon River (scenery & fishing) but it fell through so, finally went for another sail in

the afternoon, & pictures at night.

Sunday I was duty again, & what a day. There were three special trains from different districts without mentioning buses & cars & guess what sort of carriages this time — canvas-covered cattle trucks! For the others there was a church service in the morning, & a rodeo in the afternoon & a party at night. I reckon mine was the fully day, it was a wonder they didn't pick the ship bodily up & carry it away. I had a bit of bad luck that day — I lost 1500 cigarettes, quite a bit of comforts fund gear, a belt, my good cap & cap badge. Still I guess it is only to be expected with crowds like that — still you wouldn't expect them to take personal.

gear.

Monday morning we got ready for another march - this time with armed guard. The march took place at 3 pm. after which we made the official presentation of the jap. 55 mm. field gun & jap flag, latter signed by the entire ship's company. Then at night was the farewell ball - yes, another one, which finished about 2 am. & so our visit to the west coast of Tazzy was almost over; & I doubt if many could have lasted much longer! But I am sure everyone of us appreciated just all that had been done for us & the wonderful time we had had.

Now back to Sydney.

We certainly got our time when I rang up the other night home.

I had only ^{10.} had a couple of
nights ashore & who did I
meet again but that RN subby
on his way back to U.K. (the one
I went for a drive with around H.K.).

As yet haven't been for a swim
there - hope to soon though. Guess
there will be plenty of work
from now on as well, due to
paying off - a heck of a lot
of office work to be done. Navy
doesn't take the shortest way out
with all the depots in & around
Lydney.

By the way just before
leaving for Strahan received
another parcel from you, ^(with the writing tablet) Brum.
Thanks so much, certainly
packed well - also a couple of
buddles of papers & mags. at the
same time got one parcel from
RNFL & also Xmas hamper. So I
was well stocked. When I
got to Strahan found ~~that~~ ^{there}

letters from home too (got the other in Sydney). Will briefly answer them. "Oppo" is the Naval word for "clobber", Mum. So we were very fortunate regarding weather in Tassie - from the day we arrived till Monday night we had beaut. days & nights - something unheard of in those parts - most unusual to have two days without rain, Rainfall is 12 feet there.

Guess you are in the middle of exams London, well all the best to son, you know that - am sure you will do O.K. - keep at it till the last. Wonder if you've heard any more about your Railway's position?

No Mum, I wasn't at P.O. all night, went out to see Tom Edwards' sister for about $\frac{1}{2}$ an hr. & got back about 11.30.

Yes I saw the sailing ship - the "Lawhill" - she was

anchored at the next buoy
away from us. Congratulations

Bum, winning the bridge
again - it is right saying
again, isn't it?

Well I must go
at once, must get a little
sleep before going on watch
at 4 am. Hope you can read
this & that everyone is
feeling fine, although expect
you are still pretty tired
Dad after the show etc. - trust
not for long.

So cheerio for now,

- Lots of Love

from David