David’s Navy

Part 4 Aug 45 to Jan 46 HMAS *Strahan*

Date 8/8/45

Appointed to Strahan

Well, my first appointment is to H.M.A.S. “Strahan” – ever heard of it? – no, nor have I.

Yes, we found out this morning, but won’t know where we have to go till tomorrow or Friday, i.e. where to pick them up.

The “Strahan” is a corvette & one of the latest, that’s about all I know about her. I am quite satisfied with the draft, considering I thought I was in for a big ship (‘she’ is about 900 tons). I wouldn’t have minded a frigate or destroyer ( a little more action in them); but what’s that about never being satisfied!

Most of the others got corvettes, one chap a 3-masted schooner & the other middy, the ‘Barcoo’-frigate.

Probably go straight to Sydney Sat. (if that’s where we pick up ships) – but not definite. Will let you know any further developments by wire, or somehow. Just a note but had to let you know,

Date 16-8-45

END of WAR!!

Am writing this from Brisbane. Expect you are wondering what is happening. Well, things have happened so quickly that I have just about lost trace of everything, including time.

I suddenly realised it was Wed (it’s not, it’s Thursday) & I have been travelling since Sat. It looks as if I will be staying here for an indefinite period; may be a week or two. But in case I do go on, had better forward any mail to H.M.A.S. Strahan. I am waiting transport from here by plane, so it could be any time. Well, yesterday the war ended – before I even got out of Australia – that must be my luck! Still it must mean a lot; I just can’t realise it. Have just returned from a peace service at the C. of E. cathedral here: there were great crowds, people standing everywhere. It was a very nice service – it seemed ages since I was at church last.

Yesterday the place went mad. I heard the news about 9 am down at H.M.A.S. Moreton (same as Torrens in Adelaide) where we are sleeping. Have to report 3 times a day by phone – otherwise a free depot. As a result my money is fast disappearing. There are four of us still together – all waiting transit up North – to fight the war!! Yesterday I met my skipper (a Lieut) – he caught a plane this morning at 3.45 am

Sat., from Melb.,

Caught the 1st division of the express at 4.15 – the Spirit of Progress was the second div. Changed at Albany (missed out on sleepers) & so got into Sydney about 11 am. The others had somewhere to go so I caught a taxi to an Officers Club at King’s Cross. Had a shower & cleaned for dinner, after which met a R.N. sub-lieut. We then went to the “Spit”, about ¾ hr from the city, & hired a dinghy & rowed round the old harbour.

That night the two of us went for a walk through K’s Cross & witnessed some of their celebrations. The people seem to enjoy destroying everything they see. We then went back to the Club & I was in bed by 10 pm.

Met the other two at 8 next morning & went out to Balmoral – what a beautiful depot that is. We had to catch the Brisbane express at 7.40 at night; so meant a day to look around Sydney. First went to Shorty Walton’s Aunty for morning tea. Then I went into Sydney & bought 2 pr. of shorts & pr. of sandals. Then time for dinner. In the afternoon met Mac. (the other middy) & his brother in the merchant Navy. Went to Bank of N.S.W. with Mac. – used to work there – then met his father & had afternoon tea with him. Later met the R.N. subby to say ‘Cheerio’ to, & then rushed out to Shorty’s Aunty’s & had tea there & so back to Central Station & caught train. In same compartment were two R.N. subbies (supply chaps) & in Melb. – Sydney train we met four English V.A.D.’s so we have been seeing quite a few ‘Pommies’. Arrived in Brisbane about 4.30 Tuesday afternoon & went straight down to Moreton. Came ashore that night but went to bed early. Wed. of course was V-day & the trains weren’t running i.e. in city. We watched the celebrating from the roof of this club (Army Officers Club) in the morning, & in the afternoon explored the city, on foot. Went to a dance at night. This afternoon we watched a march - & a big show it was – almost every nationality I think. Tonight going to a dance at the depot – have got invites.

Gosh, the weather here is perfect – just like summer, wish we could get into trops, as nearly all my whites are dirty now.

Wonder how Clare is taking V-J day? I won’t expect any letters yet, Mum so you might as well hold them until I go. Will send a telegram when I do.

This is a very scrappy letter but am trying to put bits of everything in. Am having a lovely time even if expenses are mounting, but there is no other way out, in this place. So Cheerio All for now, hope all are well; will write again soon,

Date 27-8-45

Brisbane

(Run out of ink already)

Thanks very much for telegram which received Sat. (this is Monday by the way) & I assume from that, you have not received my previous letter which I wrote just after I arrived. – hope you’ve got it by now as sent it by airmail too. Tomorrow makes it a fortnight I’ve had in Brisbane – annual holiday, except that I haven’t been able to see much.

Weather has been perfect, every day; have done a little sunbathing in the mornings i.e. at the Depot – haven’t been able to try their surf yet, 60 miles to the nearest beach & still reporting 3 times a day. Were told today may hear something very shortly about transport – certainly hope so – would rather be on the way than having this ‘holiday’ here.

Had to draw out another £5 from Bank on Sat. – the old account looks a bit grim now – quite a bit of trouble as no sig. here – but got it. Went to a ‘society’ dance, recommended by the Chaplain (!), last Thursday, & to a University dance on Sat. night. Met quite a nice girl there & was invited out to her place on Sunday. Her father is a doctor – nice chap – you would have laughed to see me hanging out the laundry in the morning! Went for a drive in the afternoon & to Symphony concert – had a good time. Will write you when I leave. Cheerio for now, feeling fine,

Date 2-9-45

Brisbane to Moratai

Well, I’m still not one of officers of H.M.A.S. “Strahan”, but even so I’m two days flying time from Brisbane, which puts me at Moratai – the northern most island of the Mollucas. Now out map & have a look for it! That’s saying a fair bit in one sentence – isn’t it? But it covers a lot in a short space.

Now that the war is over, or at least peace signed, I can tell you where I am & where I’ve come from; nothing of future movements though; so here goes.

I received your letter Mum (from Rhyl Ave.) the day before I left Moreton. I was 16 days there & damn glad to get out & on my way. As it is I missed my ship here by a fortnight – she has gone much further north, & boy would I like to be on her. I’ve been told there is not much chance of me catching up with her now, but I hope they are wrong.

Last Thursday our priorities were raised & when we (Mac. & I) returned from an afternoon’s horse riding learned we were going next morning. Yes, Marg me on a horse – better look out when I come home next – but I was sore next day; from my shoulders to my knees. We got up at 4 am and were driven out to Archerfield (Brisbane’s airfield). Even so, didn’t leave till 6.30, on a DC3. I was looking forward to my first trip on a plane – am afraid it wasn’t quite as exciting as I expected. It seemed just like a trip in a car – but very nice – it certainly is the only way to travel , except by sea of course!! Couldn’t see much that morning – were above the clouds. After 5 hours arrived in Townsville. Had some lunch there – sandwiches & milk, & by 2.30 were in the air again. Had a good sleep in the afternoon & so by 5.30, had landed at Higginsfield – a RAAF strip right at the top left-hand corner of Cape York. And what a place – tall trees & red sand; & here we stayed the night. I was as hungry as a horse & we had roast meat & tinned veg., only enough to make me realise I was hungry. Was in bed by 8 o’clock & had to rise at 5 next morning. By about 6 had left the strip & this turned out to be good 5 hour trip.

It is amazing the difference a bit of altitude makes. I was perspiring on the ground & before long was almost shivering, & with my Burberry on. Of course we had to go over the New Guinea ranges – got up to just over 15,000 feet. The we landed at Biak – north of the north of the neck of New Guinea. Only had a cup of tea here – had had a few ‘sangoes’ in the plane, made by the nursing sister she carried. Quite a pleasant crowd in the plane, especially the sister’s little pup! By golly it was hot at Baik – a real scorcher; of course we couldn’t leave the strip. Then another 4 hours & we arrived at Moratai, which is a typical tropical island, nothing but coconut palms, paw-paw trees & jungle. The only part I’ve seen so far was the trip from the air strip to the naval base – by the inevitable ‘jeep’. I hope to get ashore and have a look around soon. The only thing I’ve seen of the natives are their peculiar outriggers with a rectangular sail, drifting around the harbour.

We were appointed to H.M.A.S. Platypus, which is the depot ship here, (Rex will know her) as transit officers, i.e. awaiting transport to ships. On board is N.O.I.C. for Moluccas – work it out – if you can! Stepped aboard about 5.30 & were shown our cabin – the smoke room, in which were 8 other officers! Last night I slept on the deck – all the settees were already taken; could be worse I suppose. The food aboard here is beautiful & I mean that – something I didn’t expect.

In the morning had nothing to do but to sit around in smoke room & read. Anyway was raining – it has rained just about non-stop ever since we arrived & it is rain! They have pictures aboard every night & always a different programme – fair enough isn’t it; just take a chair out to the quarter-deck & see the pictures – sitting in the rain! What does it matter though – it keeps you cool and you soon dry off.

This afternoon, as I was the only executive transit officer left, I had to take over O.O.W.! (Officer of the Watch). It was my first time and I was only aboard a day; still it was good experience for when I do get to a ship. I had a 6-hour stretch. Sound rather proud of it don’t I? – I wonder for how long! Every afternoon about 4.30, the chaps go over the side for a swim – course I couldn’t this afternoon, but it looked good.

Well folks, I guess I could just keep on writing, but had better get to bed – should say ‘crash on the deck’. Only hope I can soon write down a fixed address. Maybe you could send your letters here, they can follow me & I mayn’t finish up on the “Strahan” now – most unfortunately. Do hope everyone is feeling fine at home & in as high spirits as I am. Thanks for your letter Mum – already seem to have missed out on a couple; didn’t have time to look up anyone in (Moreton) Brisbane, after I got letter. We were next to ‘varsity’, but there was no Prof. Lewcock there. Well must off, will write again soon,

P.S. Guess who is anchored about 200 yds from us – “Burdekin”!

Date 5-9-45

At Moratai

I have not long been in from the pictures – once again wet through. It was a beautiful night & it hadn’t rained all afternoon, & yet suddenly down it came; every time it seems to be getting heavier.

Yesterday morning turned out very lucky me. I had to go ashore to the C.O. of the A A M W S. with a message. So I left on the 8 o’clock boat & I’d soon finished my little job. Decided to hitch-hike my way around the island as far as possible. As luck would have it the first truck that stopped was going right to the other side of the island for some water. It was very interesting – the road led along the coast & through some of the hills. The driver only had the one job for the morning & he showed me all he could & explained a lot about the natives; they are very dark & although rather small are very well built. On the way we stopped at one of the villages – there are only two big ones here – the other is at the far end, near the Japanese. Unfortunately you have to get a permit to go through from the Dutch, who have a small force nearby, so we just watched them from the road. The men & boys wear bits and pieces from almost every army in the world, so it seems. From a camouflage cape to just a pair of good solid army boots on a boy of 10. Some of the women wore colourful skirts down to the ground with a contrasting jacket. (Sorry, run out of ink). Their living quarters & huts are all built up on short piles & are made of bamboo & coconut palm weaving. The whole place appears to be very clean. While there, they were chopping down a coco palm; one had tied a rope around the top of the tree & another couple cut it halfway through at the bottom. Then out came half the village – down to little kids - & all sweated off on the rope. As soon as it broke – away niggers, in all directions, yelling & laughing. Then on again, past the Dutch camp. Gave a couple natives a lift – were carrying huge poles which they cut down with their own big jungle knives. We went about 25 miles both ways; couldn’t go any further – still Japanese up that end of the island. Saw an Aussie patrol going out.

So back to the starting place & then past the Jap compound. I spent a little money to get back some of the Dutch money as change – both notes & coins. As a result missed the 12 boat back to the ship, but was lucky enough to get a lift soon afterwards – my lucky morning! In the afternoons have been swimming off the ship’s side & it is beautiful in. We play water polo, or at least a type of such.

It is now Thursday morning. Didn’t finish this last night as we were lucky enough to have the smoke room cleared by 11.30 & so we could all get to sleep. Unfortunately I have to get up six because stewards come in to scrub out then &, as I’m on the deck - well!

This morning went ashore again with a message, but wasn’t lucky enough to get such a good trip today, still we went a different way. After that I went for a walk along the beach & so caught 11 am boat back here. Only to find I’ve got another watch this afternoon – 4 to 8 – which means no swim & boy today is the worst we’ve had – can’t keep dry for perspiration. I don’t think the temp is very great, it’s the humidity.

Well, will let you know when anything is decided about me – still hoping!

Date 10-9-45

Catching up to my ship

Luck came my way again last Sat. I had been on the “Platypus” just over a week & was sick of spending the whole day in the smoke room, really doing nothing. I went ashore again during that week, this time I strolled along the beach. This was the only break, except for the afternoon swim & evening pictures.

There were some other officers who had been waiting over 2 weeks to go up north, so I imagined myself staying there for quite some period. Noel Evans, the ‘subby’ I came up with, caught a plane early Sat. morning & suddenly about 20 to 12 the cap’s sec rushed down & told me to be ready to leave at 12 to take passage with H.M.S. “Hind” which was going where “Strahan” was supposed to be.

The “Hind” is an R.N. sloop of about 1900 tons & I happened to be able to get a cabin to myself. I am doing one watch in four, on the bridge, which is pretty good.

It has been pretty hot & I’ve come out with prickly heat all over me – it started in Moratai. But yesterday I got out in the sun a bit & it is not so bad this morning.

Received a signal last night saying any mail would be picked up by another ship at 11 am & landed so I’m just scribbling this out, with hope that you’ll get it soon. It may even go to England first with all the ship’s mail. Still trust you will get it some time. When you write next Mum, write to the “Strahan”. Probably I’ll be on some other ship still chasing her round, but I don’t mind – I’m getting around a bit & that’s the main thing.

Cheerio for now, hope everyone is well, etc. I’m certainly enjoying myself at present,

Date 15-9-45

At Hong Kong

When I last wrote I was at sea on H.M.S. “Hind” – hope you received it.

Well, we were at sea for six days & yesterday arrived here at HONG KONG! – lucky boy, eh! I didn’t think I would make it. I left Moratai on Sat. & had a very pleasant trip up. – no typhoons Mum, & it only rained about half the time. Of course it was quite hot and muggy but had an electric fan as well as cooling system, in my cabin. Also had a reading lamp, desk, wash bowl, wardrobe & dresser. Not bad for comfort!

I felt quite O.K. this trip – didn’t even feel like missing a meal. I was doing one watch in four on the bridge, so had time to sleep.

Wed. morning the Hind left the other two sloops & called into Subic Bay, Luzon; which is in Bataan Peninsular - ever heard of that before? I should say so. We went in to pick up mail, but found it had been sent on here, so we were only in harbour about 2 hours. The previous night I saw the lights on Manilla on the horizon & also passed Corregiador Island. Unfortunately we received a signal en route cancelling previous plans of having 36 hours in Subic Bay, when we could have got to Manilla.

So on to Hong Kong: we arrived at the mouth of the harbour at 9 am. As you know, H.K. is an island and the harbour itself is around opposite the mainland – if you can follow that

(small diagram)

The place is certainly smashed about – from the first gun emplacements, the wharfes, factories, houses & I counted eight ship’s sides or superstructures above the water. As we came down, we passed dozens of junks, with their high poops & patched sails. (a no. of Chinese have just stuck their heads through the ports in the wardroom & having a good laugh at me, writing in here). There are all sizes of native craft – down to the sampans & there are families of about 5 living in them. It seems incredible that they can spend their whole lives on one of these – I believe they are only allowed ashore for about 2 hours a day. As soon as we went alongside the oiler we had a few sampans hanging onto the side, each wanting to do some work. They came aboard with recommends for good clean work etc, from H.M. ships dated back to all ages. We hired one to clean the ship’s side, bring food from shore & any odd jobs.

Everyone wears the traditional dress, e.g. black satin trousers with coloured loose fitting jacket down to the thighs plus, the coolies straw hat.

The big disappointment is that no one is allowed ashore at present. Apparently things are still in a state of chaos – the only money accepted is American dollars – no sterling or Aust.; & the Japanese have inflated the country with yen. We paid equivalent of 2000 yen for a fish yesterday. It seems a pity to be so close and yet you can’t get ashore. There is some talk of lifting the ban – I certainly hope so – there is quite a few things I’d like to get.

Peace has not been signed here yet – negotiations are under way today. The harbour is full of Naval ships: the Duke of York & Anson, cruisers, destroyers, sloops & six big carriers. There is one Nip destroyer here.

As we came down the harbour yesterday, four Aust. corvettes passed us going out & one was – yes, the Strahan! Anyway she is due back today, so I hope soon to be aboard her. It has been a good chase anyway.

Also hope to get some mail from her – seems ages since I’ve had a letter. She “Strahan” is sweeping for the B.P.F. Hope I can get further north – still time will tell.

This is the lot for now, hope to hear some news very shortly, cheerio,

Date 27-9-45

Hit by a mine!

Dear All at Home,

Quite a bit has happened since I last wrote & I hardly know where to begin. As you see I am at last aboard the “Strahan”. On arrival received fifteen letters - of course you know where most of them came from Mum!

It was certainly very nice to hear a bit of news – even if most of it was quite out of date. I haven’t had any since then, so expect another little bundle soon. Will try & give you the news in order:

I stayed on the “Hind” for the peace signing celebrations & next morning transferred to the “Castlemaine” (corvette), in case the “Hind” went out on short notice. Did a patrol in her – was on her for two days ‘till we returned to harbour. Met a few lads I know aboard – Ron Strange from A.M.P. Next afternoon “Strahan” returned so went over. It was a five-week trip to catch up with her, but I certainly had a good time during the chase! If I had arrived a week earlier, would have been in the initial landing parties. The chaps have all manner of Jap. souvenirs !?! – swords, (double-handled), pistols, binoculars, rifles, etc, etc. When introduced to the 1st Lieut. on board, found he used to live at Clare: Jew – (his father was a Meth. minister)

By now am settled down pretty well. One of my jobs is – guess what – capt’s sec: can’t get away from reps, files & a typewriter. I have to keep all my gear in the ship’s office & believe me there is not much room; still I’ve got a few drawers. There is no bunk for me, so I have to sleep on the wardroom settee. We have five officers aboard & the captain; at present there are six – one waiting to go down south. There were eight before the chap I relieved left – a heck of a crowd for a ship this size.

Most of the time I have been aboard, has been spent around the neighbouring islands & only had about one day in harbour, on this ship. That afternoon I went ashore for the first time, with the captain. As soon as we stepped out of the boat who should I run into but Nobby Clarke. He had just arrived from south. As I was with the skipper I couldn’t leave him, so hope to see more of Nobby in the near future. There are about 20 Aust. corvettes here, so I should see quite a few lads I know.

Life ashore is still pretty jumbled & everything is a colossal price. Currency has just been re-established from the ‘yen’. There is little or no transport (only by rick-shaw), lights are just being put back & there is a curfew after 2000. So you can see things are far from normal. We decided to go for a walk rather than shopping. What I have seen of China it appears to be very mountainous right down to the water’s edge. Hong Kong is like that – built on the side of a 2000’ hill. We walked up the winding roads until well above the city – wonderful views of the harbour etc. Beautiful growths & with flowers on the sides of the hills; still just inside tropics you know. Then we left the road & climbed up the side of the hill & boy were we hot – my cigs in my pocket were saturated so guess what it was like. Never-the-less, it was worth it when we got up there. Next came the long walk down – that was worse than going up. All the better class houses up on the hill – but nearly everyone had been stripped bare. The looting that has been going on has been terrible.

As you come down you pass though the various quarters. Everything you see is of some interest – just have to hope I can remember it all, it’s impossible to try & write it (for me anyway). The contrasts in living conditions are amazing. Some children beri-beri (nothing but bones) were begging on a corner & along passed a Chinese man in black silks with a huge bunch of flowers in his lap, leaning back reading a book, while a couple of coolies ran him along in his sedan chair. Have seen quite a few of the latter. Also saw a Chinese funeral, with all accessories. So I could go on.

We stopped & went into one shop – type of curio shop. The skipper bought set of coffee cups; very nice, but colossal prices, compared with pre-war. My word, it is funny bargaining with these Chinese – more so with the sampan natives, who usually can’t speak any English. Cigarettes are the best means of barter with the latter. They usually start off at 20 packets of cigs & finally finish at about 3. Most of the gear in the sampans is second hand – nearly all looted goods: that is why I haven’t got and of the silks yet. What is new has been dug up after four years & looks almost rotten. It will probably take a couple of months for any new goods to come onto the market & the prices should then be coming down.

By the way, “Strahan” was one of those corvettes inspected by Adml Bruce Fraser, the day after I joined. Inspected us & gave a little speech. He asked me how long I had been aboard; when I told him 24 hours, he had quite a natter to me, much to the amusement of the other officers, some of whom have been aboard since she was commissioned, & they were just passed by.

Back to the naval side again – since here have done some very interesting things: from sweeping & patrolling, to chasing pirates, landing parties on surrounding islands & transporting internees from the big Stanley Prison to H.K. harbour to be shipped to Aust. & U.K. Not bad for a fortnight’s work in Hong Kong! Have been through a number of native villages in the surrounding islands, all very interesting – the old oxen in terraced rice fields, etc. Naturally there is a lot of piracy going on what with no law for 3 ¾ years, so we took an interpreter aboard & have been collecting information about them, & Japanese, from these islands. I remember reading out these pirate junks – never thought I would (be) on the trail of any! As I said, we also went around to Stanley Prison where all internees have been kept – heard quite a few first-hand stories – apparently not a very bad camp. Some of the folk have put on 40 lbs. just since H.K. was relieved. As you can see, everything has been just full of interest – to me, if no one else.

It is time I answered some of your letters. Thanks for long letter Gordon with all the sporting & social news; very glad to hear about your decision regarding nest year’s work. That’s the right idea, if you get in early & something doesn’t work out, you’ve got time to try elsewhere. Still there is no need for that if you set your mind to a thing; I’ve found that. And as you say, you’ll probably have your Leaving cert. behind you. You will, with that bit of extra work. Well you’ll be sitting tomorrow (28th) so good luck, son! Hope you had a good holiday.

Am glad to hear about the celebration in Clare on V-J day – yes, certainly a great day for all, Mum. It would take a pad to answer all the questions in all your letters Mum, so will just omit them for now – some other time, eh? Yes, good idea about Marg’s birthday Mum, please carry out those ideas; once again will fix up later. (getting a bit of a habit). I think it would answer a few

questions, telling you I am (feeling) extra & have been all along – can’t do anything else in this life Mum. Plenty of sun & plenty to eat (even if it is out of tins) & I haven’t had a bit of trouble with the sea & my stomach – I’m just ‘tops’ in fact.

I could write a book – if I had the time – but I haven’t as I am still trying to break the red tape around the routine of this . . . . . ship’s office. Still it doesn’t worry me because we are at sea most of the time, & can’t run up to the corner to post a letter, there.

It’s time I thought of finishing, so cheerio for now folks, hope everyone is feeling as well as I am,

P.S. Suppose you’ve received that cable, well there’s nothing to worry about at all, the ship was towed back to H.K. & we are now safely tied up in harbour – only a few minor casualties – I didn’t get a scratch. Luck was certainly with the whole ship’s company yesterday. We were on the trail of some pirates when it happened – so the pirates were lucky too. I was having breakfast when it happened – it was a magnetic-acoustic mine, probably one, combining the two. Still we are all well & safe, which is the main thing. (sent the cable in case they put it in the papers, which they probably will). Love, David.

P.P.S

I think it would be a good idea to number our letters Mum, then I could put them in sequence. This will be no. 1.

Date 2-10-45

19th Birthday, Dry Dock

I just had to write a note home today: my 19th birthday in Hong Kong – not bad! Was looking forward for a letter, but no luck. I haven’t had any since coming on board, so should get another little bundle soon.

What are you having for dinner today? – I’d like it whatever it is; we had cold heart, spuds & peas – still there was plenty of it even if it doesn’t sound very tasty. Being my birthday, the beer was ‘on me’, until the captain received a letter from his wife telling him he was going to be a father – for the fourth time – so we went 50 – 50!

I have certainly been busy of late & I didn’t remember it was the 2nd until breakfast. You can guess the reports etc having to go to this Board and that with this mine business & I happen to be cap’s sec. Still it’s better than nothing to do. Both our typewriters were smashed so if I can’t get to some other ship I have to write long hand - & you can guess what that would be like after three copies had been done with carbon paper. Have tried all ships (depot) in the harbour, but can’t get another & they can’t mend ours – so there it is.

Even so with all this growling, I have been ashore a couple of times. Explored the native quarters – some horrible sights there – as well as being very interesting. Also been over to the Chinese mainland side – Kowloon - the dock areas there are terribly bashed about.

Life generally is settling down somewhat – noticed a couple of antique buses yesterday – but I prefer the rickshaw. I must try one of the sedan chairs; they look even more sedate. Prices are still terrific; I suppose you can’t blame the Chinese because they haven’t made hardly anything in the last 3 years – still they will forced down soon – I hope, because there is plenty I would like to buy. Some items are 12 times pre-war, & even more. Dressing gowns are about £10 – 12, which according to some of the Europeans could be bought for 15p & less.

Since being towed in, we have been tied up along one ship or another undergoing repairs. Have had divers down to report on the underwater damage – probably be going into dry dock as soon as one is repaired.

I wonder if it has been in the papers; we all sent those cables in case it got down quickly. We were certainly the item of interest around here for a while: the “Duke of York” passed us as we were being towed in & sent us a signal “Glad to see you – best of luck”. Capt’s have been 2 to a dozen & had an Admiral come to pay a short visit – when I happened to be Officer of the Day too – just in shorts & sandals!

Sorry I can’t keep going, but knew it would only be a note – write again shortly – cheerio, hope all are well, Lots of Love, David

P.S. Almost forgot your birthday Marg. – All the best & many happy returns. David

Date 6-10-45

Still in dry dock

Thanks very much for the parcels I received today, & the birthday wishes. I got a tin of biscuits – beautiful too – from Myers, & I got the little slip inside thanks Mum. Also the birthday cake, presumably made by you, Mum, & iced by you Marg. We haven’t cut that yet, started on the biscuits today, but I think I’ll cut it tomorrow – can’t just look at it for too long – can I Gordon? With these came 2 bundles of mags, 2 Mails & Argus’ - including the great 12-page edition!

Thanks again; everybody in the wardroom has been through the mags once already. I read all about your V-P day – as seen by Eric, anyway – looked like a couple of full days.

Yesterday I received first two letters while on here – one from you Marg; thanks for that & birthday wishes, & one from Marg D. Yes, I’ve seen quite a bit of the “Geraldton”, as she carries the Senior Officer of the 22nd M/S Flotilla, & therefore does quite a bit of harbour time. I haven’t been aboard, or seen Pon, though. Before I go any further; let me wish you all the best for your 21st birthday Marg. – have a happy day, enjoy yourself at the party (which is bound to be a success), & may it (the key, of course) open the way to health, happiness & whatever your desire most – end of quote. But really Marg, your 21st is a very big step - you are so old, you know! (haven’t I heard that before!) I’m sorry I haven’t sent you anything Marg, but I’ll be included in what you get from Gordon. Anyway here’s to wishing you many happy returns, of the day, 16th not your 21st – you could never be as young as that again! : don’t you believe it.

Since last writing we have moved into dry dock – at Kowloon, on the Chinese mainland side, we came in early yesterday morning. So have another record (of sorts) – first ship to go into dry dock in H.K., since the war, that is.

Also had another funny experience. On the 2nd all the ships got warning of a typhoon expected to hit H.K. Most of the big ships, “Anson” & others, put out to sea (safer there for them). At the time we were alongside a destroyer which in turn was alongside the repair ship “Diligence”. We got a tug to take charge of us while the dest. slipped out between us, & when we were clear, what should happen but the tug broke down, so we drifted across the harbour – we had no power, of course. We dropped anchor & eventually were towed back. Later (the latter was at night) we were towed around into a sheltered spot & left there. Anyway, the typhoon didn’t hit us, only got the outside of it, so after wasting a day & a half there got back to the Diligence, & work.

My word, the dockyard area here is certainly a shambles – seems to be nothing left intact. The nearby village was completely wiped out – only the remaining rubble and bits of walls left; it is said 4,000 wiped out there. Went for a walk in the evening yesterday – found a Chinese temple – I went in & had a good look around. A priest in scarlet & black robes beating a tom-tom with his right hand playing a single brass cymbal with his left & chanting as only a Chink could. Certainly weird: figures all around the walls in dozens, & great long sand pits in the altar ‘affair’ in which the people place a burning stick of incense. It was dilapidated & dirty, but never-the-less interesting.

All the officers, except the duty chap, went ashore a few nights ago to look around at the night life (one advantage there, ratings have to be back at 2000). We were directed to a café down in the native quarter. It was up a side street & took ages to find – no lights – up four flights of stairs in the dark - & lo and behold a good dance floor with a 5-piece modern band (playing 1941 hits of course). It certainly amazed me – you just don’t expect it in that part of town. We were tricked up in the system of dances though, try it sometime – ‘O yeah’! You buy 3 tickets for a dollar (H.K.) & on completing a dance hand over one ticket to the girl you were with. They collect so much on each ticket – it is a job to them. They were all Chinese girls, but most could dance beautifully; one or two Europeans there. Apparently the place had only been re-opened a few nights before - & so it smelt too – very musty and peculiar.

If you have more money, you call a waiter & tell him to bring a nice girl who can speak a little English to your table – this costs you 10 dollars for every hour she is there! Some system, what. That is what they call tax-dancers ‘back in the U.S.A.’ Never-the-less, we spent a very amusing evening, as you could guess.

We will be in dock for another couple of days before going back to the repair ship, & after that – well, circumstances point pretty strongly to Sydney, for complete repairing (??). Still maybe they can do it here now & put us on some other job – time will tell. I haven’t been here half long enough, as far as I’m concerned; so I don’t necessarily want to go south. That’s not the general opinion though, as you would say. Now don’t bank on what I said there Mum, I really shouldn’t have mentioned it, I suppose, because it is merely a supposition, & far from fact.

I am getting pretty tired now, am duty today – I have one in four at present, which is pretty good. Still no typewriter so have to rush off to the dock-yard office to do anything. And they have only got two left in the whole of their remaining, huge works (which used to include building 10,000 tonners, docking up to cruisers & all types of marine engineering); & one of those barely does the job. I just walk up there, & Chinese rush to do your bidding – what a life!

As I said I must get to bed (on my settee in the boardroom i.e.), so cheerio all for now, once again wishing you a very happy birthday Marg.,

Date 10-10-45

Back to Sydney

This is to congratulate you both on your ‘silver’ wedding anniversary, of the 24th (I hope!) Twenty-five years is certainly some time, isn’t it? But if it doesn’t seem that long – I guess that says a lot. October is some month this years – your ‘silver’, Marg’s 21st & I happen to be 19. But you can remember that time when - - etc – etc eh, Mum? Well, it is quite a day & I certainly would like to be home for it; but the next best thing is to send my congrats by letter, & hope I will be home for the next one! Never-the-less I hope you have a very happy day & like whatever the others have got you. I’m sorry I can’t send anything but it would be useless to post anything like that. I’ll be in with Marg & Gordon – I couldn’t do anything better than that.

Yesterday I received your welcome letter, dated 26/9 – I guess there is still quite a few on the way. Thanks very much for the birthday wishes – yes, still have a little cake left. So you think the photos are O.K. – that’s the main thing; maybe they touched them up a little from the proofs! Yes, please send one to the Cowdens - whichever you think best. Let Marg D. & Rex pick whatever one they like - I can’t think of any more for the moment; will let you know later. Glad to hear Cliff B. has at last arrived home & is well – remember me to him i.e. if he remembers me!

Well, we came out of dry dock last Monday – plates & ribs are a bit buckled down aft. We are again alongside the repair ship, also an R.M. destroyer & will be until tomorrow or Friday, then the following day we do our trials & the, on Sunday – yes, we are going South! at least – the ship is; I will probably be going with it. We will take about four weeks so maybe I’ll be in Aussie by then. Of course, there is a chance I’ll be changed to some other ship – still time will tell. We will either do a refit or pay-off the ship on arrival.

Yesterday & today have been Chinese holidays – had Victory celebrations – on a bigger scale this time. It is Chinese National Day today – population has gone wild. Talk about 5th of Nov. – you couldn’t hear yourself think for crackers! Saw some of their dragon-dances in the streets – some interesting sights! Sorry this is so pushed; but am on duty now, so must finish. If I go down to Sydney, you probably won’t get many letters for a while, but guess you won’t mind, Mum!

Once again, all the best for the 24th, & good luck for the next 25 years.

Date 21-10-45

Morotai, Darby, Hawksbury

I expect there is quite a gap in my letters, but as you will see I have been as sea for the last week. Received your letters today – one of yours dated 10/9 & another 7/10th, also two from Cowden family.

Had better tell you a little about my last days in H.K. I met Nobby Clarke, who is now in “Bendigo”, & went over to his ship for a yarn. We then stepped ashore for a while to watch some celebrations: there were two Chinese National holidays – with nearly all shops shut. You can imagine the crowds, but not the crackers! Boy, what a row! There were a no. of “dragon” dances in the streets – all very colourful. I met Nobby another afternoon & we did some shopping together – I knew it to be my last chance so bought a few souvenirs (?) – but nothing has got cheaper yet. It certainly won’t now as a Yank force arrived yesterday. Never-the-less, we had some fun in all the various shops we tried.

We waited an extra day before sailing, & who should come over & see me but the R.N. subby I met in Sydney. So ashore once again for the last afternoon. He had the use a car (not stolen – just taken over!) so we went for a drive, almost completely around the island – it was lovely & very interesting. His ‘quarters’ was a lounge suite in one of the hotels, which he shared with two other R.N. types.

Anyway next day (14th) we sailed – to Morotai & then – well the signal said Melbourne, but nothing was definite. By this time we were in a fit condition to go down under our own power, we had our trial on the previous day, & were O.K. We left H.K. in company with “Castlemaine” & we let everyone know we were going ‘home’.

Everyone lined up on the upper decks & our loudspeaker blared forth the right sort of numbers: “Show me the way to go home”!

We struck it a bit rough the first couple of days our & these corvettes shook me up a bit – but I only missed one day’s meals! From then on it was a very pleasant trip. I had the morning

& dog watches (4 - 8 in the morning & 4 - 8 in the afternoon) & also the office to look after so there was not much spare time. We arrived in Morotai on Sat. morning – just over six days out – oiled straight away & anchored next to “Hawksbury”, which Darby J’s is in. I was duty first day but he came over to say ‘hullo’ – they have just returned from Singapore; one of the first Aust. ships in. That night I got a substitute & went over to the pictures with him (they have them every night on “H”).

Sunday the captain invited 4 nurses from 2/9th out to dinner – one was his bridesmaid - & were they funny when we showed them the gear we had bought in H.K. We all thought we had been taken down horribly, but apparently it is always best to get a woman’s opinion before condemning yourself!

That afternoon we rigged our whaler & went for a sail out to a nearby island – one of those you read about: stretches of sand, coconut palms down to the beach & of course, a little village in the centre of it. Well such was this, but maybe not quite up to the standard on which Dorothy Lamour would be allowed to play. Never-the-less it was very pretty, & beautiful in swimming. All the native canoes & dugouts were lined right along one beach – seemed to be dozens of them. Naturally I went for a walk through the village, which could have been a little cleaner to come up to expectations. The girls swapped their scarves for native hats & armbands – the only thing I had on was my swimming trunks, which made things a little awkward – for bartering. Still I had a great afternoon & enjoyed every minute of it. On returning had a shower, changed & went over to “H” for supper & so to the pictures again. Tonight is the last night here so will go over once more to the pictures; having Darb. over here for supper.

Well, it looks as if “Strahan” has ‘had it’ – we are going down to Sydney to pay off. I don’t know how long it will take, & when where & what my next ship will be. Of course will endeavour for a bit of leave – let’s hope for Xmas . . . ! Next stop I believe is Thursday Is. so will be able to post another letter there. Thanks for your two Mum – one was almost a book, the 10/9, & very ‘newsy’, even if it was a bit old. No Mum, I don’t wear dark sox, at present; only khaki – but more often none at all. It helps so with the dhobeying, because have to do it myself on board here.

Must be off now & get cleaned, hope everyone is tip-top – you had a good birthday Marg – not forgetting the anniversary Mum & Dad – will be at sea for that

Date 2-11-45

En route to Sydney

Since last writing I received quite a nice bundle of letters – when we called into Thursday Island; which included four from you Mum, during the period 10 to 21st of Oct. So I am well up in the news, at present. What a party! & what presents etc!

Will get rid of my news first. After leaving Morotai we had about a five-day trip to T.I.; we arrived early Sunday morning. Here we left “Castlemaine” – she had come right from H.K. with us, after waiting there about 10 days for us. Then at T.I. she got the job of towing two luggers down to Brisbane. What a blow to them. Yes Mum, I saw Dick Colley when in “Castlemaine” – don’t know him personally though: he is Ron Strange’s ‘oppo’.

Had only been at T.I. about ten minutes when who should bowl into the ‘office’ but Dave Oakeshott. He had only got in about 5 days before – he is now base staff there – what luck; he says it will mean 12 months. So I was with him all the morning, duty in the afternoon, & went ashore with him at night – only to meet another acquaintance – on of the N.A.P. skippers I used to go out with; has got an A.S.R. (Air Sea Rescue) boat up there. We went down to his boat - he seemed very pleased to see me.

Left again early Mon. morning. From here on, has been a beautiful trip – right through the Barrier Reef. Called into Townsville Wed. afternoon for fuel & stores. I went ashore to the depot, on duty. From here on we have been making good speed, so should arrive at Sydney early Sunday morning. We were going to take our time through the reef – landing swimming & fishing parties at one or two of the coral islands, but at T.I., the skipper got a letter saying his wife was dangerously ill – so it has been flat-out since then.

We are definitely going to pay off in Sydney now – but have no idea how long it will take. Never-the-less should get to know a bit about Sydney in the time & try out their famous Bondi & Manly

As regard our uniform Mum – it is khaki & khaki alone. Of course you can wear whites – shorts & long suits buttoned up to the neck, do you know them? – but you have to buy them yourself, they are not issued. As we are doing our own dhobeying at present, I’m jolly glad it is only khaki.

No, I don’t get more pay at 19, not till 19½ when I get my ‘stripe’ (sub-lieut.). At present it is 7/6 a day or £10/10 – a month – not much when you spend a month in H.K.! Nobby Clarke is now in the “Bendigo” - by the time he got to H.K. the “Whyalla” had left to go south!

No Mum, the ‘young Jew’ is Colin, the ‘jimmy’ (first lieut.) & the skipper, he & the gunnery officer are all lieutenants (two stripes), the engineer a lieut. & the A/S (Asdic – will tell you later about that) officer, a sub-lt. At present we have got two extra officers living with us – both taking passage down to Aust. One was Capt. of “Cessnock” – a corvette & the other an R.N. W.O. (warrant officer) The weather was perfect when we left H.K. the rains had finished until Feb., but still very ‘close’. You don’t stay ‘brown’ very long up there – as fast as you get any colour you ‘sweat’ is out. If any does stay it usually rubs off in a few days. I can notice the difference in the sun already – it is now a clean heat – although have been wearing a shirt the last couple of days & a jumper at night – this Aust. is a cold place!

That typhoon that struck Okinawa came close enough to us; we got the outside of it & it was blowing then. All the big ships left the harbour for the open sea – just in case.

So you went to your first dance Gordon - & no dancing classes – a bit good, eh! That cake carried perfectly Mum, the biscuits were hard, but none the less enjoyed. No Mum, we are certainly not being ‘towed’ to Aust. at 14 knots! – just a reporter’s chance for a good story. No, all my kit is quite O.K.

My word Marg, can just imagine you didn’t know whether you were coming or going on the 16th: what with parcels for breakfast, telegrams for dinner & letters & more parcels for tea! Hope to hear a little more about it. - & from you too! As for the party, well expect Clare has never seen one like that before – I can see I have got quite a big letter coming! Anyway it certainly has a lot to say for you & Mum & whoever helped in the organising – it must have been a big job – but something well worth it.

I can quite understand how busy everything must be at Clare, at present Dad, especially with your being in almost everything & the Governor apparently causing quite a lot – trust you don’t tire yourself too much. So the show is back to its old standard.

Congrats again, Marg on your prize winnings – you found time for the flowers, then. So the Governor has been well introduced to the Whiteman family – it certainly seems like it! Amazing him living near where you went to school Dad; & stopping to have a ‘personal’ chat with you Mum – did you have your new red frock on?!!

My word, you must have had a nasty fall Gordon, - it sounds as if you did a high dive from the top of the steps – hope you haven’t hurt yourself too much old, old man.

Similarly I hope everyone is feeling on top form - & somewhat getting over the heavy strain of social activities (or are there more?)

Date 20-11-45

Leaving the Town of Strahan

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 9am 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 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’ we were later referred to 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 stem to stern. Of course we could see all this ‘crowd’ from a quite a distance through our glasses & it certainly tickled us. All their main street was decked 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.

Never-the-less 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 – whacko! 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 cap/n & 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 ‘barbeque’ 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.

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 1,200 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 H.M.A.S. “STRAHAN”!! Naturally there followed some big speeches & then we were dismissed for lunch.

Now here comes the biggest laugh of the day: 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 when at last we made the final dash (ahem!!) to the doors of the hotel - & dinner. Thanks goodness school was in went we went to catch the buses to Mt. Lyell. We spent the whole afternoon being escorted 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 keyed up with a certain number of ‘plums’ each when Lady J. wrecked the whole setup by saying “ ‘ow are ya”!! So onto the dance which was the usual 2 am 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 around the famous Gordon river (scenery & fishing) but it fell through as 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 sought 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 comfort 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 Tassie 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 day Mum. I had only 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 Sydney.

By the way just before leaving for Strahan received another parcel from you Mum (with the writing tablet) thanks so much, certainly packed well – also a couple of bundles of papers & mags. At the same time got one parcel from RNFU & also Xmas hamper. So I was well stocked. when I got to Strahan found three letters from home too (got the other in Sydney). Will briefly answer them. “oppo” is the naval word for “cobber”, Mum. No we were very fortunate regarding the 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 Gordon, well all the best old 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 ½ 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 Mum, winning the bridge again – it was right saying again isn’t it?

Well I must off 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.

Date 1-12-45

Start paying off

We have now been in Sydney for over a week & after the first panic, we are now settled to routine life. Trust you and Dad had a good time at Victor & are now feeling the benefits. I still don’t know anything definite – do trust I’’ make it for Xmas

Last Sunday I was out at Bruce’s home & had a very pleasant time. I’ve also been out to Mac’s but only once. Went with Bruce last week to a play in the city; & the rest of my time has been spent on board. There is only Graham & I to do the duty & I’m bound by my conscience to let him go when he wants to.

I saw Tom the first couple of days in Sydney. Had just had his appendix out – on the Navy! Then he went straight home again.

Well folks this is just a note. Have had cold weather ever since we arrived & have been off colour. It has now developed into a nice cold & I feel much better.

Hope everyone is O.K. – am looking forward to that Xmas dinner.

P.S. By contrast the next letter will contain a touch of sadness!!

P.P.S. Sorry if you worried about my arrival in Sydney Mum. Be telling you I’d arrived in Aust. (from Townsville) I thought would be sufficient. This interstate travel is merely a hop-step & jump these days!

My once written-to sister,

Except for your superiority in rendering a sketch, so small, yet so full of character portrayal & feeling, I see no reason why I should be grouped under SUNDRY correspondents (plural, what’s more). If you could give me an estimate (to the nearest hundred will do!) of how long Bill wrote, & how many letters were penned to you, before HE was raised from the sundries to that exalted position, I could work out an approx. date for my promotion.

Signed: Student of Calculus.

Date 5-12-45

Paying off in Sydney

Well, it is still the same answer – I don’t know when, or whether, I’ll be home on leave. All the ‘dockies’ here at Garden Island are having 10 days at Xmas so just hoping they’ll give us some. Of course may not be able to get transport now, what with this ‘civil war’ just about taking place. Also I still don’t know where I will be going next – when we do finish paying off. It looks as it will be over a month yet. There is quite a bit to go when you remove all stores, armament, fuel etc from a ship.

We are still at one of the buoys in the harbour which is awkward when you want to return aboard. We are wishing we could be alongside one of the wharves. Never-the-less, it is quite interesting as far as the shipping goes, out here. I saw the Aquitania & Shropshire come in last week & Duke of York go out (on Monday I think it was)

I have been going ashore 4 or 5 nights a week, but you get a bit sick of it, when you don’t know anyone i.e. to stay with, & having to come back to the ship to sleep. Actually I have met quite a few chaps I know. Have been to Mac’s (Macdonald the other middy who passed out) place a couple of nights; for tea, & stayed there a night. Have been out to the Skipper’s & one of the other officer’s place the other nights, & am going out to Colin Jew’s fiancé’s place on Friday night for a party. Everyone is wearing no. 10’s i.e. long white suits – so I’ll have to get some – will need them now anyway, as all the peace-time rigs are coming back. If I go to a big ship it will mean the lot – so here’s hoping.

Last Sunday turned into a beaut. day & I met Ken Haughton (one of the other subs on board) & we went first to Manly, on the North Side, where we bought some lunch & then on to Harbord, further up the coast, & had lunch on the beach. This place is supposed to be one of the best for surfing, but it was fairly calm on Sunday. Never-the-less, had a good swim & went home to supper at his place.

On Friday night, all officers aboard, with a couple of extras, went to a night-club. It was a very nice place & had quite a bit of fun, as you can imagine, with 16 in the party i.e. with partners. There is a dance with occasional floor shows, & of course supper served at the tables.

As yet I haven’t had time to go anywhere much, because I only get the evenings off & up to now have been duty one day of the weekend – on the Sunday – so that cuts out any traveling, unfortunately.

Have received a few papers & mags last week & two letters Mum – thanks very much. I think I told you about the R.A.N.F.U. Xmas parcel I received.

Very glad to hear you have had such a good time with the Air Force types at home. Must have been pretty busy Mum. So Lady James ‘tickled’ you – she would have in person then. I didn’t notice those beautiful complexions Mum, but quite a few of the others must have, when we saw the mail that was waiting for us in Sydney!

Glad to hear your exams went so well Gordon (!!) – or apparently you don’t think so. Still everyone doesn’t think the same – lucky for most of us. Guess you are feeling quite free, now they are over.

Sorry to hear about Uncle Frank, Mum – I never thought he would have a bad heart – always seems so lively.

So you are glad the “Village Fair” is over – some day I should say & quite successful for the Whitemans too. I expect the ice-chest will be a saving to you Mum – that’s something new to look for, when I come home!

This is not very long but got it off on my duty night – am meeting one of the O.T.S. boys tomorrow night (one of those who dipped) – when I can sure a bit of time.

Well folks, hope all are well & not too tired, so cheerio for now. Will let you know if anything definite about leave

Date 13-12-45

Not to be home for Xmas

I received your letter dated the 9th, today Mum, the transport is certainly becoming difficult. Also the Argus & Mail.

Well, last night I tried to ring you up, but couldn’t get through unfortunately. I got to the G.P.O. about 7:15 & booked the call & was told to wait – “wouldn’t be long”. Had no luck by ¼ to 11, so cancelled it & caught the 11 p.m. boat back to the ship.

Am afraid there is no chance for Xmas, or the New Year holidays, as we don’t anticipate finishing the paying off until late in January. Everyone bar S. Aus. & W. Aust. will get 5 days i.e. if rail transport available. There are only 2 officers, non-natives – a Victorian & myself – so we will do the holiday periods between us. I think I will have Xmas Day off & be duty on New Year’s Day. If this is the case will probably go out to Macdonald’s – they asked me to go out if I wasn’t duty

Anyway when we do complete paying off, I will get 14 days leave so will look forward to that. By the way, also got my next appointment – guess where? – to H.M.A.S. Torrens, additional!! That means I will wait there until I get posting to another ship. Still don’t bank on it being for long, because may even get a ship in the meantime. Sydney is certainly a green place at present, mainly lanterns and candles in all the big shops. There has been talk about a curfew at 9 pm., which would mean landing patrols & of course no leave after that time. Let’s hope these commo’s see daylight for a while & give way; they surely must have caused as much trouble as they anticipated already. This coming weekend is the first full one I have had off & now I can’t go anywhere because the trams & trains are cancelled Sat. & Sunday – am not sure what I’ll do yet.

I think you’ve got the wrong idea about those white suits Mum – I’m getting them second-hand from the captain, who has grown out of the. He just brought them into the ship with him.

My word, the laundry situation is a bit grim – can’t get it done ashore now & the water aboard here is rusty; will just have to use it, as my shirts are all used now. I only brought three with me & I’ve only got my old suit here – rest is still at Cowden’s. Didn’t expect to be swinging around a busy Sydney Harbour for long.

It was a pretty quiet week last week except of course the party at Colin Jew’s fiancé’s place – what with the newspaper photographers! & I being done up in my ‘ice-cream’ suit. Another night I went out to Mac’s place & another unsuccessfully searched for a picture show.

I won’t be able to send any presents on, ( ) but certainly wish I could personally bring some. Still, only about 5 weeks to go – it won’t take long to pass.

Well goodnight all, hope everyone is well, how about cutting down on some of your work Marg?

Date 21-12-45

Times at Mac’s

By the time this reaches you, Xmas will be over, & unfortunately I am duty on Xmas Eve as well as the 25th, so can’t even ring you. Last letter I had arranged to be off for the day & was going to Macdonalds. But the Vict. in our team has gone on holidays which meant entire reorganisation. I also had a spell of 6 days off during which I was hoping for a trip to the hills or beach. Still can’t help that. It is only right those at home should get those days at Xmas free.

Another disappointing thing while I’m on the subject was that I dipped out on a few days on a big station this week. I met a cobber who went through O.T.S. at the same time & he was driving home to this station on Thurs.. morning & back Sat. Well, as you see I am duty today, Friday, & couldn’t get the others to do me a substitute as too much was arranged, so had to let that offer slip. I am sure I would have had a very interesting time. That is an example of my luck in Sydney!

Last weekend went out to Mac’s i.e. Sat. night, & on Sunday we drove to Newport – a beach on the North Coast - & stayed down at a shack till about 11 pm. There wasn’t much sun, but even so quite warm & the surf was good – I slept well that night. I am going out there again tomorrow, but don’t know what is on for Sunday yet. They are very good to me – all their sons are in the forces & they don’t seem satisfied if at least 3 Navy types aren’t sleeping there of a night. I slept there last night as well; you just have to walk in & if their beds are full just crash on the floor – well, more or less.

Our paying off will be held up for a week or so now, as half the remaining ship’s company are on leave, but if everything goes according to plan – which I very much doubt – we should finish about 20 of January. On the 3rd we will be moved over to the “Adelaide” to transfer everyone aboard her while the mess decks etc. are cleaned & painted.

Well, I haven’t posted any parcels on for Xmas, so am afraid you will just have to wait for the one or two things I did bring back. It would be useless trying to post them anyway.

What a surprise getting a letter from you Marg – thanks very much anyway – I think it is time you left the place, if you are working as hard as that. Well, I’m very glad to hear you & Gordon have had your photos taken – you can keep me company on the mantel-piece or wherever I am finally resting. Right-o Marg. I will hand that book onto Bill, when next in Melbourne. Trust your aid’s concert went off to expectations – guess it did with such experienced casts as you now seem to be.

So you have finished with C.H.S for now Gordon, guess it feels pretty good at present. Hope you soon hear more about your position; don’t forget to have some other alternative in mind though, son; just in case. Glad to hear you beat Riverton at cricket again – Clare High can’t seem to do a thing wrong at present.

There must be tons to tell you all, but I can’t think at present – except not getting home for Xmas! Will be thinking of Xmas day procedure at home & here. It is going to be pretty monotonous out here at the busy for the next two weeks with nothing happening at all. So must sign off or will be getting ‘sad’ again.

Once again a very happy Xmas & a bright and prosperous New Year to you all.

Date 30-12-45

Xmas at Mac’s

I have just returned to the ship after spending the last four days ashore at “Macs” - & very nice too. I was to be duty until the 2nd Jan. but luckily the Vict. chap returned ahead of schedule this morning so will be able to go off again tomorrow & so be able to go to the New Year’s Party at the “MacD’s”. They are dressing for it – so I will wear “mess undress” black trousers, cummerbund & white mess jacket (borrowed) – a bit of flash, eh! Thanks for all the letters and telegram; got the latter on Xmas Eve & your letter Dad – thanks a lot. Glad to hear today you received the card O.K., quite novel isn’t it? I got it on the China side of H.K.; Kowloon.

I am afraid I am getting a bit irregular with my writing, but the weeks are so broken up at present. I just don’t notice the time go. That way it will seem all the quicker before I get home. – I hope! Sydney certainly gets sickening without transport etc. – I am very glad I have had a home to go to.

The weekend before Xmas I went down to Newport again. A very nice spot – good beach & good surf. On the Monday morning came back to the ship & in the afternoon got down to a big dhobey session & it kept me going till 6 pm. – were my hands sore! Then on Xmas morning I got to work with the iron & did some fine specimen pressing. This sudden burst of energy was caused by the closing down of all laundries!

We had a fine Xmas dinner with all the trimmings & I went up to the mess deck to eat dinner with the boys – also did the duties & messman & brought the seran in – for a change! Then settled down to a good sleep in the afternoon & an early night. So passed Xmas – 1945.

Boxing Day got off about 11 am & had lunch on the “Gerrard” with a subby with whom I went through (is that O.K. Marg?). Then, dressed & went onto “Bunty” (yes, dinkum!) Thompson’s for dinner – he dipped midway in out course & since has been right around the world. To England on “Aussie” & back the opposite way on “Suffolk” (R.N. cruiser). Rest of the 3 days spent mainly at Wollstonecraft (Nth Sydney), where I did quite a bit of gardening! Friday afternoon went into town, had a yarn with Military Section, C/wealth Bank. It looks already as if that job to return to, will certainly be worth it’s while. That is, going on various reports about ex-servicemen finding new jobs. And on Sat afternoon went for a swim with Neil Mae & on to his married brother’s place at night. So back to the ship this morning – most of the way be taxi, as I couldn’t find any busses coming this way. To make matters a little more awkward our motor boat broke down on Xmas Day & still isn’t fixed, so can’t even depend on transport back to the ship. By the way folks, you’d never guess what I got from Rhyl Ave. - a diary! It’s pity Auntie M. hasn’t seen the stack in my drawer – from 1940 on

So Bill Redding is now in India – he has had a good stretch away from home. I agree Dad, not much good sending a parcel now – hang onto it – it should keep for a month, when I will do justice to it. Yes Mum, I’ll look up those people at Manley before I leave. I think you did the right thing in suggesting the sale of the house in Ada St.

Probably see John Q. when he returns, “Diamantina” is at the next buoy to us. Did I tell you I went over “Shroppy” a couple of weeks ago – she seems huge after these small ships.

Will convey your thanks onto the “Macs” Mum – they are very good to me.

Must say ‘cheerio’ for the time, trust you are all O.K. & in top spirits, wishing all, All the Best for the coming New Year.

P.S. Paying off should finish 20th Jan. so maybe about the end of Jan. should see me on the train!

Date 13-1-46

Still at Sydney

I have just come back from having dinner on board the “Stewart”. She is tied up behind us. We left Garden Island on the 2nd & came round here to Pyrmont prior to going over to the “Adelaide” to finish paying off. But as usual – someone blundered - & we are still at Pyrmont & likely to stay. Last Wed. we all went out on “Lodge & Comp.” i.e. everyone lives away from the ship & only an officer & fire party duty at night.

Of course we still have to report every morning, & finish about 4 pm. We are gradually losing all our stores, furniture etc., until now we have to buy sandwiches for midday & if duty, buy something for supper & breakfast. There are no lights at night, so life is pretty miserable on board. Still it is easily made up by living ashore on your free nights. We had a couple of Commanders down on Friday to look over us & apparently they want the ship looking like new when we hand it over. This is ridiculous because they don’t know what they are going to do with them, other than tie them up somewhere. According to them we won’t be finished by the 21st, so don’t expect me too soon. I’ll certainly be glad when it is finished.

Mrs. Macdonald has very kindly put me up, but on no account will she accept any money; so I will buy her something when I leave. By the way Mum, what can I buy our 1st Lieut. for a wedding present – what do you usually buy? I have been invited to their wedding on the 26th; & it looks as if I will be here for it now.

The other night I went over and visited Misses Sherriff – but I didn’t get a word in edgeways. They brought out a photo of the family (us) I have never seen before. Also showed me the teapot cover they are still using, which you gave them, Mum. Of course sent their kind regards on to the family.

On Sunday (last week) a friend of the skipper’s, who has a yacht, invited us all out for a day’s sailing. It was a perfect day & had a wonderful time. We had lunch at the most perfect little beach I have ever been to, & then went on out the heads for a few miles. It was a very fast job & this chap had built it himself, after buying an old hulk.

Last Monday afternoon I went to a Macquarie St. specialist & had X-ray therapy treatment on this foot of mine. I don’t think I told you that it had been giving me more trouble. Apparently the doc. in Flinders didn’t remove it properly & it started growing again. I first noticed it again before we left Hong Kong, so, after our Strahan visit I went to Randwick Hospital & saw a skin specialist who sent me onto this Macquarie St. type. The latter wants me to go back in 30 days i.e. 6th Feb. but I hope I won’t be here; well anyway I would rather be home. I expect Navy will get me to see someone in S. Aust.

I wonder if your Leaving results are out yet Gordon – I will be looking forward to some news; also about your S.A.R. position. Congratulations on gaining your extra credit in your exams Marg.

Tell Eric I think Nels. is on the “Aussie” but am not definite, Mum. Quite right about Wollstonecraft – it is on the Chatswood line – still remember a bit about Sydney then Mum.

When going through Melb. will try & pick up my gear from Box Hill but what in, I don’t know – have already got 2 cases, I small case & one small tin trunk. Yes, keep me some of those cooking apples Mum – in fact as many as you like. Yes, I saw that dry dock in the K.G. V dock (work it out?)

This next week should be quite full – I still have a lot of office work to clean up, etc., but it is the type of thing you have to leave till the last minute – It will work out.

Must off & organise some supper from up the street, so bye-bye, but not for long,

Date 21-1-46

Still at Pyrmont

Dear Gordon,

Thanks for your letter son, which I received a few days ago – started to answer, but was interrupted by a visitor on board. Naturally I was sorry for you, & disappointed, but after all examination results aren’t everything & it is no good ‘crying over spilt milk’. The experience gained by doing a year’s Leaving work is worth more than the actual results, providing you put a certain amount of work into it, which I know you did. I am sure it will give you a much better start in whatever you do next - & it looks as if it will be engineering. You now probably realise just how much work is necessary to pass an exam., & there will certainly be a lot in this job which you expect to get. So don’t worry about not getting the Leaving cert., decide on the amount of work which will have to go into your next examination, whatever it may be. Enough on that …….

Well, I hoped to be on the way home tonight, but once more the final inspection has been postponed till Friday morning at 9:30. Normally I should proceed on leave Friday or Sat. night, but that is still uncertain – depending on my foot. A blister has formed around the actual growth – due apparently to the X-ray treatment & as a result is very sore. I will go in tomorrow & ask the specialist whether I should be detained on medical reasons or if a Sth. Aussie. doctor could carry on the good work – I certainly hope so. Anyway, I will send a telegram when I leave to let you know.

We had bad luck with our programme last week: first our Leading Supply Assistant went into the hospital & he just about ran the paying off; & next the ‘jimmy’ (1st. Lieut.) went to hospital – just over a week before his marriage (Yes Mum, it is Colin Jew). So we were left in a spot – never-the-less everything is working out & should easily be finished by Friday.

Had an unlucky turn last Friday night – I lost all my pay, & just when I wanted it: to buy presents. We presumed we were burgled, because after going through everything I am positive I had the money when I got out to Mac’s, & didn’t notice the loss till Sat. midday when I went to pay for my laundry. The confirming factor was that Mrs. Mac lost a purse the same night, luckily with under 10/- in it. I lost £7. We told the police & are putting a claim in to the insurance company – but doubt any results myself. Gee, I have been unlucky losing things over the last few months.

Yesterday spent another wonderful day exploring the Harbour. Went out with Ian Mac. (the married son); we hired a boat & went for a run right up Middle Harbour. Got wet through in the morning, with rain, it then fined up but got wet with spray on the way back. Had a hot bath when I got back and went to bed early. Tonight am on duty again and will have to fight mosquitos all night. Gosh, they are bad down here, & no fans or anything to keep them off.

Duty bloke sleeps in the skipper’s cabin as it is the only bunk left on the ship. There are only four hands on board & they doss down on the deck somewhere. Had supper on the “Stewart” again tonight & very nice too. They had visitors aboard so had a beautiful spread.

Mrs. Macdonald’s address is 17, Gillies St., Wollstonecraft., Mum - am sure she would love to hear from you. I am very sorry to hear Paddy has been so ill – do hope Mr. Scales has been able to fix him up properly.

I think that is the only way I could pick up gear from the Cowden’s, by you at home sending a case; but on second thought it wouldn’t reach there in time, so will try & borrow one from them.

You sound to be having a good time Gordon – out at Floyd’s. Do hope you have a successful trip on the 25th – expect so though.

Time I discontinued this light (tapping a line from on the wharf) so cheerio until – hope next week, trust everyone is feeling 100%.

P.S. This is a snap of us at the buoy in the Harbour – a bit blurred, but you get an idea of it. David