

This is a typed copy of a hand written letter written by Aircraftsman Keith Howard (sic) Homard RAAF, one of 6 RAAF personnel, who were part of the 645 men lost on the HMAS Sydney on 19th November, 1941. The leader of the RAAF contingent was Flying Officer R.B. Barrey (pilot).

Same address

7.10.41.

Dear Mum and Father,

As we are due in port tomorrow I will write this letter now and post it by Air Mail as soon as we get in. I hope there is one waiting for me when we arrive or I'll be very disappointed.

We have had a very exciting trip this time. One day last week I was on the fo'castle (top deck in front) having some Rifle practise when "Action Stations" was sounded. You should have seen the sailors move. In 3 minutes every man was at his post with all guns loaded and ready and in 10 minutes we had the plane ready to take off. We clapped on speed and raced to where the look out had sighted a ship but to our disappointment it was one of our own. That night as it was very hot we all slept on the deck and were soundly asleep when at $\frac{1}{4}$ past 1 "Action stations" was sounded again. It was pitch^a black night but everybody hopped to it and in about 10 minutes we were ready to go again. Suddenly our searchlights were switched on and outlined in the beam some hundreds of yards away was another ship. While we wer signalling to each other our ship was slowly cruising around the other one in ever narrowing circles and all guns trained and it was just like a cat playing with a mouse. I have often wondered how I would feel if we went into action and whether I would be scared or not, but I was very excited and feeling disappointed because if we did fight, as it was night time and I wouldn't be able to get any photographs. However it turned out to be another false alarm as it was also a friendly ship, so back we went to bed to get what sleep we could before our usual "hour before dawn action stations" which we always have in case a ship has trailed us during the night and is waiting for daylight before attacking. That same day about 4 we had another alarm and as this was the third within 24 hours we all thought that at last we were going to have a fight. What we had sighted though turned out to be a gunnery target, and we sent a sea boat off to pick it up. From the markings on it the officers assumed that it was from an enemy raider. They had apparently put it out for shooting practice, then spotted us coming and went for their lives without waiting to pick it up. As the target had only been in the water for about 3 hours and we knew an enemy raider was somewhere in that vicinity it looks as if that was the case. Like all the rest of the boys I was very disappointed, especially as we had apparently missed by such a short time. However we might have better luck on our next trip and run into it.

Sometime ago I took some photographs of a convoy and the Captain sent

word that he would like to see proofs of the ones I had taken. He liked them so much that I had to get special paper and print him 2 15 x 12 enlargements which he had framed and hung in his cabin. He complimented me on them and said they were particularly fine, then asked me to come up to the Bridge the following day and take his photograph. I was certainly nervous but I took 4 of him and luckily for me they all turned out good ones. I did proofs of them today and sent them up to him and when he sends them back I will have some more enlargements to do I suppose. As long as he is satisfied that is the main thing anyway.

We have had some very hot weather on this trip and I have mostly lived in shorts and sandshoes. I am enclosing a photograph that Dick took of me in the plane the other day. I look kinda lean don't I, but am feeling pretty good considering, and not feeling the loss of weight a scrap. I am getting quite a good color up also. We have had some beautiful moon light tropical nights up here and I have been putting a blanket down and sleeping on the deck. I'm getting that way now that I can sleep anywhere.

I forgot to mention before that when "Action stations" went on the second day I was having a bath. I must have looked darn funny racing through the ship all wet and only a pair of shorts on. One day was all lathered up with soap and he raced out just as he was in his birthday suit. Believe me when that alarm goes you drop everything and go for your life no matter what you are doing.

We are arriving back at Freemantle tomorrow. Freemantle itself isn't much of a place as it is a very old city and a typical sea port, but Perth, about 12 miles away, is a very modern place and is quite a busy city. They have some very nice shops in it and Cox Bros also have a branch but I haven't been in to it yet.

You'll be surprised to know that the other night in Perth, a chap tapped me on the shoulder, and when I turned around it was Mr ^{Person} Smith. He was on one of the ships that we had with us. I certainly got a shock to run into him and he looks very well which is hardly to be wondered at since he is away from that "beaut" wife of his. He probably thinks this war will be a picnic by comparison.

7.10.41

We arrived safely this morning and as the mail closes in a few minutes I will finish this now and write again later.

Your loving son,
Keith

P.S. Give my love to Nance and all the others.