**The Victorian Colonial and Royal Australian Navies,**
**and the visit of The Great White Fleet to**
**Australia, August 20, to September 5, 1908.**

**By Mackenzie Gregory**

*Introduction.*
Australia is an island continent, if you study a world map you may besurprised to learn that about 70% of the world's surface is covered by water. Our country was discovered by Captain James Cook in 1770.

In 1950 I was appointed Aide-de-Camp to His Excellency the Governor General of Australia, Sir William McKell.
At the National Library in Canberra I was able to get my hands on Captain James Cook's original Endeavour Journal to learn from the
Entry for Sunday 6th of May 1770.

*In the evening the yawl returned from fishing having caught two stingrays weighing nearly 600 pounds.*
*The great quantity of huge stingrays found in this place occasioned me in giving the name of Stingrays Harbour....*
*(This is crossed out by Cook in his Journal, his next try was Botanist Harbour, but this also is crossed out, then Botanist Bay was given a run, but it too was erased, finally Botany Bay was used, and this name survived, to be still used today.)*

We were settled, albeit, initially by convicts transported by sea from the British Isles, our imports and exports have essentially used the sea. The oceans that surround us have formed a protective barrier; prior to the development of aircraft we were totally dependent upon the sea for travel to and from the rest of the world.
I suggest that we in Australia will always need *"To look to the Sea"*
In the early stages of Australia's development, the Royal Navy provided our shield of defense, but in the main it was based upon Sydney.

*Discovery of Gold in Victoria.*
It was at Ballarat in August of 1851 that James Reagan and John Dunlop discovered gold, to be followed by a number of other sites throughout Victoria.
A good deal of this precious metal was shipped off to England, carried in sailing ships. The Victorian government and the local populace of Melbourne were fearful of attacks from both the French and Russians, upon the stored stocks of gold held for future shipment, and on the vessels carrying it off to Europe.

*Defence of Melbourne and Port Philip Bay.*
Port Phillip Bay is roughly 20 miles wide by 30 miles from the Heads to Port Melbourne.
Naval Reserve training commenced in 1855 with the formation of the Sandridge and Williamstown Companies of the Victorian Naval Brigade.
By 1864 there were 68 pounder batteries mounted around the Bay, eg the Sandridge Lagoon battery, Emerald Hill Central battery, Emerald Hill Advanced battery, St Kilda battery, Breakwater Pier battery, Right battery, Lighthouse battery at

Williamstown near the Railway Pier (the largest of them all, with 8 by 68 pounders )
At the entrance to Port Phillip Bay, at both Point Nepean and Queenscliff. There had
been an embarrassing incident when in 1862, a Russian warship had entered the Bay,
firing a salute that could not be returned by the Queenscliff battery, WHY? the battery
did not have any ammunition. There were opinions aired that the Russians were
merely testing out our defences at the entrance to Port Phillip Bay!

### Confederate Raider Shenandoah.
On the afternoon of January 25th 1865, Captain J. L. Waddell sailed his Confederate
Armed Raider Shenandoah into Hobson's Bay; he requested that his ship be slipped at
Williamstown for repairs, and to take on food and water. Melburnians flocked to view
the raider who also was quietly attempting to recruit crewmen, but the Victorian
Government sought to ignore such reports. Amongst the locals, some were for the
Raider, others against her. In fact about 42 men were actually recruited and were
transported in four boats from Sandridge beach (eluding a police presence).

### Neutrality breach.
This breach of Neutrality was to cost the British Government dearly, after the war, an
International Tribunal awarded damages to the United States against Britain of some
$15.5 Million, an immense sum in those days. Shenandoah continued to attack
shipping in the Pacific, and was not aware that peace had been declared, as she sank a
number of US vessels after the war was over. A newspaper captured from a ship that
was sunk provided Captain Waddell with the first news that The American Civil War
was actually over. This warship had been the former Sea King, bought by Confederate
Agents in London, and sailed to Madeira to be fitted out at sea with her 8 guns, and
renamed CSS Shenandoah.

### Early Victorian Governor.
The Royal Navy continued its influence with the appointment of Victoria's first
Governor, a Naval Officer, Captain Sir Charles Hotham, after Victoria gained its
independence from the Colony of New South Wales. Sir Charles served for but a
short period, from May 22 to December 31, 1855.

### Victorian Colonial Navy.
The State of Victoria was to develop the largest of all the Australian Colonial Naval
forces, and negotiated for their first warship, an 880 ton sloop, HMCSS (the SS
denotes steam sloop) Victoria 1, launched at London in 1855. She served over 1860-
61 in New Zealand during the First Taranaki War, thus becoming the very first
Australian unit to serve in an overseas war. From the early days of settlement in
Victoria the importance of Sandridge (the former name for Port Melbourne ) in its
defence was clearly recognised. A site on Sandridge beach would be an ideal location
for a gun powder reserve, and in 1861 an area of the beach near the lagoon (the future
site for building HMAS Lonsdale) was reserved for Military purposes.

### HMS Nelson.
A 55 year old ship, HMS Nelson was acquired for training purposes, and the
Victorian Treasurer arranged for the construction in UK of a Monitor, HMVS
Cerberus, so named after the Three Headed Dog that guarded the gates to Hades.
Britain agreed to pay 80% of her costs. The new ship arrived on station in Victoria in
1871, carrying 10 inch guns. It is a tragedy that this Monitor, the only survivor of its

type world wide was sunk as a breakwater off the beach of the Melbourne suburb of Black Rock.

She was allowed to rot, and an attempt to preserve her at this late stage now underway, may prove to be too late. In 1883, two First Class Gun Boats, two Second Class, and one First Class Torpedo Boat were ordered at a cost of 84,200 Pounds. The Victorian Colonial Navy ships bore names such as: Victoria II, Albert, Childers, Lonsdale, and Nepean. The threat from French and Russian warships was very much in the minds of the Victorian Government, and a number of Merchant Ships were fitted out as auxiliary warships.

A minelayer Miner, the Melbourne Harbour Trust hopper barges *Batman* and *Fawkner*, the tugs, *Gannet* and *Eagle*, the Yacht *Commissioner*, the tugs, *Gannet* and *Eagle*, the Yacht *Commissione*r, and the Launch *Spray*.

1886 saw the arrival of the Turnabout Torpedo Boat, launched as Gordon, designed to turn rapidly in the water after discharging her torpedoes.

Lady Loch, the Victorian fleet's largest auxiliary also came into service in 1886, fitted with one 6 inch gun plus two one inch Nordenfelt guns.

On May 25 1889, the auxiliary Yacht Vulcan was launched off Williamstown, a 75 ton mine layer, she transferred from Navy control to the Permament Engineers, as the Army was responsible for controlled mine laying, from this distance that appears an odd decision, Naval mining at sea run by the Army! But I parade my bias.

It is an interesting fact that from a Defence Budget for Victoria in 1890, of the 145,000 Pounds total, the Navy scored 32,000 Pounds 6 shillings and 4 pence, I found myself pondering on the 6 shillings and 4 pence, what would that bring to our Naval defense?

*Countess of Hopetoun* was laid down in 1890 at the Yarrow and Company yard in UK, the last ship to be ordered for the Victorian Navy.

She was to have a top speed of 24 knots, and was the largest and most powerful Torpedo Boat in all of the Colonial Navies. This vessel was also the first to feature a twin and rotating torpedo mounting. In 1895 both Albert and Victoria were withdrawn from service, plus the auxiliary gun boats and Nelson was already in reserve.

The colony of Victoria now only operated Cerberus and five torpedo boats.

### Federation.

With Federation on January 1, 1901, all the previous State Colonial Navies were, on March 1st. transferred to the new Commonwealth of Australia. Melbourne became the location for the administrative head quarters of the Commonwealth Government, the Department of Defence which was headed by Captain Muirhead Collins as the new Permanent Secretary (formerly Secretary of the Victorian Colonial Defence Department)

The Commonwealth Naval Forces (CNF) under its Director, Captain W. R. Creswell CMG, CNF were also located in Melbourne.

### Ballarat Boy's Naval Brigade.

A private Boy's Naval Brigade had been founded at Ballarat in 1903 by Lieutenant John Adeney, ex the Victorian Colonial Navy, British Merchant Navy mariner, and Harbour Master, his Father, the first vicar of St Peters Church of England at Ballarat.

*Beyond Federation.*
The old Colonial Post Office on the corner of Bay and Rouse Streets was acquired by the Federal Governments in 1911, as the new Department of Ports and Telegraph had no further use for it.
The first brick building erected in 1912 for the RAN in the Commonwealth was the Drill Hall adjacent the old Post Office (I took my Medical as a candidate for the Royal Australian Naval College there in 1935).
The Drill Hall now became the new Port Melbourne Naval Reserve Depot (PMNRD) and all training was carried out there until the outbreak of WW2 when it Commissioned as HMAS Cerberus III, but with three separate naval establishments all carrying the same name, and only distinguished by the next Roman numeral, absolute chaos reigned, and in July 1940, Cerberus III became HMAS Lonsdale, named after Captain William Lonsdale the first Agent General of the Government, and the Police Magistrate of Victoria.

*Japan and the United States, early 1900's.*
Japanese and United States relationships were at a new low in 1907. Japan had been victorious against the Chinese and the Russians both on land and at sea respectively, many in the US believed that the US west coast and Hawaii were vulnerable to attack from Japan. President Teddy Roosevelt considered that a show of strength by his Navy might deter the Japanese, he ordered his Atlantic Fleet to undertake a world wide cruise, and now named the Great White Fleet, all the ships were painted white, and consisting of 16 Battleships manned by 14,000 sailors sailed from Hampton Roads, farewelled by their President in his Yacht *Mayflower*, on December 16, 1907, to commence a voyage that lasted till February 22 in 1909.
As the Panama Canal was still unfinished, the fleet needed to sail round Cape Horn to enter the Pacific Ocean. Over the 15 years before the Great White Fleet sailed on its historic world wide cruise, in the Pacific Ocean the balance of power was shifting, from the Sino-Japanese war 1894-95, and the Russian- Japanese conflict 1904-05 the pendulum had swung to a strengthening Japanese Navy in the Pacific.
The Russian Navy was destroyed at Tsushima, the French Navy was in decline, and the British had withdrawn their Battleships, leaving Japan with the biggest single fleet in the Pacific Ocean. This was of great concern to President Teddy Roosevelt, hence his orders to the Great White Fleet.

*Australia, Britain and the Great White Fleet.*
After Federation, Australia, as we have noted, combined all its State Colonial Navies to form the Commonwealth Naval Forces, but essentially we relied upon the Royal Navy to shield and protect us. But both the British and Australia were really working from different agenda, the British Admiralty wanted Australian ships to act as they were required to suit the needs of the British Empire. The Australian Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin wanted more independence for the infant Australian Navy, he sought to put Australia's needs and its defence as his primary priority. He pre empted the Australian WW2 Prime Minister, John Curtin, who after the Fall of Singapore in 1942 turned his eyes to the East to the United States for both alliance and support.
Alfred Deakin ignored the Colonial Office in London and contacted President Roosevelt to invite his Great White Fleet to visit Australia, he agreed that his ships would visit Sydney, Melbourne and lastly Albany to coal for the next leg of their voyage. This was the commencement of an alliance between Australia and the United States that still flourishes in 2008, in 2001 we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the

ANZUS treaty. To mark that event, at the Washington Navy Yard on September 10, 2001, President George W. Bush presented the ship's bell from USS Canberra (named after HMAS Canberra, sunk at the Battle of Savo Island on August 9, 1942) to the Australian Prime Minister John Howard. I had been sunk in HMAS Canberra, and my son Raymond had been christened aboard USS Canberra, alongside at Station Pier on Mother's Day in 1967, using this bell as the christening font. Both my wife and myself were present in Washington for the impressive bell handing over ceremony.

### The British Press.

The British press went to work with a will, trying to downgrade the importance of any visit to Australia of the Great White Fleet; they even questioned our loyalty to the Mother Country. Australia was not expected to be the petulant child stamping its foot as we were not getting our own way. Colonials should be aware of their proper place within the hierarchy of the Empire. Let me go forward to 1940, I was serving in HMAS *Australia* attached to the British Home Fleet, we had been seconded to the Royal Naval force supporting General Charles de Gaulle's debacle at Vichy held Dakar on the west coast of Africa. *Australia* had twice been hit by French shells, had our Walrus aircraft shot down, lost her three crew, and sunk a Vichy destroyer. We were in a dry dock at Liverpool in December, and subjected to a number of heavy raids by German bombers. I was taken home for a weekend by an English Wren whose Father was the MP for Birkenhead, her rather formidable Mother who certainly believed the family belonged to the Upper Class, found me cleaning my shoes; she snatched them from me with
*"Naval Officers do not clean shoes; we have servants to do that."*
I was due 10 days leave, Mother said, *"We must send you away from Liverpool and all the bombing, we have friends on a farm in Wales that will be much safer for you".*
I protested that I should not be thrust upon the family, oh replied Mother *"Don't you worry at all, they are Canadians, only Colonials, just like you."*

### Back to the Great White Fleet.

Rear Admiral Evans was in command of the 4 divisions, each of four Battleships, as he led his fleet up the west coast of South America to enter San Francisco to a great welcome. But he was suffering from gout and was forced to hand over command to Rear Admiral Charles Sperry who led his Fleet to sea on July 7, 1908 to start the Pacific leg of the world tour.

### Composition of the Great White Fleet

1st. Division. USS *Connecticut*, fleet flagship. US ships, *Kansas, Vermont, Louisiana*.
2nd. Division. USS *Georgia*, divisional flagship, US ships, *New Jersey, Rhode Island, Virginia.*
3rd. Division. USS *Minnesota*, divisional flag ship, US ships, *Maine, Missouri, Ohio*.
 4th. Division. USS *Alabama*, divisional flagship, US ships, *Illinois, Kearsange, Kentucky*.
*Fleet Auxiliaries.*
USS *Culgoa* and USS *Glacier*, store ships.
USS *Panther*, repair ship.
USS *Yankton*, tender.
*Torpedo Flotilla Destroyers.*
US ships, *Hopkins, Hull, Lawrence, Stewart, Tuxton,* and *Whipple*, *Arethusa*, torpedo flotilla tender.

*New Zealand.*
Over August 9-15 the Fleet visited Auckland to a great reception from the New Zealand people. Now it sailed for Sydney Australia to arrive in that city on August 20 for a 7 day visit. Sydney viewed the visit of the Great White Fleet as a sign that any aggressive move from the Japanese Navy would be thwarted by an American Fleet. As the Russians had been defeated, and the British had also vacated the Pacific, the remaining vacuum could only be filled by America. A local comment was, we have never seen a single British battleship here, now we suddenly have 16 battleships in Sydney Harbour. Their reception was overwhelming.

Allow me to quote from James R. Reckner's book: Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet, *"So intense was Australia's and Sydney's interest in the visit of the Great White Fleet one half of the population of that city remained awake the entire night, and thousands and thousands of them long before night was over were on their way to the hill tops outside the city limits, where they massed in unbroken lines to view the spectacle. An estimate of the viewers vary from 500,000 to 650,000."*

Finally on August 27 the Fleet disengaged itself from Sydney's embrace and sailed out through the Heads to turn south and head for Melbourne. When the Fleet sailed, 91 men had failed to report, but USS *Yankton* had stayed behind, and when she proceeded, 60 of them had come aboard, the remainder stayed in Sydney.

*Melbourne Greets the US Fleet.*
Even today there is a great sense of rivalry between Australia's two major cities. For this visit of the Great White Fleet to Melbourne, the locals knew they would have to excel to top the reception that Sydney had provided for their visitors. On Saturday August 29, 1908, the Fleet entered Port Philip Bay just after 11 AM. Crowds lined the foreshore; small boats greeted the majestic battleships to accompany them on the 30 miles trip up the Bay, where the Fleet dropped anchor in two lines of 8 ships, off Williamstown at about 3 PM.

*Melbourne was about to turn on American Week*
HMAS *Cerberus* was anchored at the entrance o the Yarra River, she returned the Fleet's salutes and then saluted Rear Admiral Sperry's birthday. The monitor was now 40 years old, tending to look her age against the might of the United States, she was spawned in a different Naval era.

*Ballarat Boy's Naval Brigade.*
The Boy's Naval Brigade from Ballarat wished to see the Great White Fleet, they requested RailwayPasses from the Government, the then Premier, Tommy Bent, growled *"Let them walk."* and that is exactly what the boys did, a report says, over 5 days the Boys marched from Ballarat to Melbourne, to arrive to a great reception. The local community raised such a fuss that the Government was forced to provide for them return train travel, so many gifts were showered upon this Naval Brigade, and that an extra rail carriage was needed to accommodate it all.

*Rear Admiral Sperry goes ashore.*
On Sunday the 30th of August, Rear Admiral Sperry officially landed at St Kilda Pier to attend a reception tended by the Australian Prime Minister and his Cabinet.

The next day, a US Naval Brigade landed at Port Melbourne, marched along dusty roads to the City, thence to parade down Swanston Street, to the cheers of a huge cheering crowd lining the street, people up poles for a better view, others crowding windows overlooking the parade.

### Freemasons and Roman Catholics.
The Freemasons looked after some 1,000 of their members aboard the 16 ships, now the Roman Catholics, not to be outdone, arranged a special Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral for a 1,000 visiting Sailors.

### Military Review.
The Military Review held on Thursday at Flemington Racecourse was probably the highlight of the US visit.
8,000 Victorian Cadets including the Ballarat Boys, and many military units took part.

### Dinner.
That evening a lavish dinner for 3,000 Sailors was set up at the Exhibition Building, come the start time of 7 PM, a lone Sailor was present, by 9 PM only 7 had turned up. With female company in full supply, why would a Sailor want to leave his new found girlfriend to attend a dreary dinner with his shipmates he sailed with every day? From the girl's viewpoint, they were reluctant to give up their exciting escorts to be left alone.

### The Sailors were feted.
Free rail passes were available, some went off to Bendigo, clubs made the visitors welcome, balls were turned on, homes opened, all were treated like heroes, no wonder in due course.

### Time to leave.
Liberty was supposed to end at 11PM on Friday the 4th of September, the Fleet due to sail next day. The last 1/4 of a mile to the Railway Station lay through packed crowds, gathered to say goodbye.
The girls hugged and kissed the Sailors struggling to reach the station, their tunic buttons grabbed as a souvenir. It was little wonder that some of the US Sailors chose to take permanent leave of the US Navy in Melbourne.
On the first count, 85 had failed to return to their ships, this figure was soon revised upwards to 221.

### The problems of coaling ships.
Only two of the six British Colliers to coal the US Fleet turned up in Melbourne. Perhaps Britain was merely demonstrating that Australia was still dependent upon her. Rear Admiral Sperry was forced to go to the local market to buy more inferior coal to make sure his ships reached Albany where coal was waiting to take the Fleet on its next leg.

### Time for tears.
*"Fleet bitten girls rose on Saturday morning, went to the edge of the Bay to wave heart broken to the departing Armada. Others got up with the object of their affections still there."*

On Saturday morning, September 5th. 15 Battleships departed, leaving USS *Kansas* behind to collect any mail and other males still not returned. When she sailed on the 10th she carried 458 bags of Fleet mail and 100 stragglers. Still ashore and unaccounted for between 100 and 115 deserters. How fascinating it would be to actually track down some of the descendents from those who stayed, and to hear their stories.

### Visit of the Great White Fleet a huge success.
The visit to Sydney and Melbourne of the Great White Fleet was a huge success. The Sailors later voted that Melbourne turned out to be the best Liberty Port over the entire World tour.
Politically, the visit had vindicated Alfred Deakin's decision to contact directly President Teddy Roosevelt to invite his ships to call into Sydney and Melbourne. The visit of this powerful force raised the awareness of Australians to our vulnerability, and the need for a Navy under our own control.
We received Royal assent from King George Vth to prefix Australian Navy with Royal, thus on July 10th. 1911 the Royal Australian Navy came into being.

### New Drill Hall for Port Melbourne.
The Navy had outgrown the Bay Street Drill Hall, and in 1942 a new Drill Hall was built on the Lagoon site to open as the HQ of Lonsdale. Any one in Victoria joining the Navy for the duration of Hostilities and a further six months had the prefix PM to their Official Number. PM stood for Port Melbourne, they thus carried with them over their career the fact they joined the RAN at Port Melbourne, and thousands would fall into that category.
In 1992, Lonsdale was decommissioned; the site was cleared to give way to a high rise apartment block named HMAS. The Bay Street Drill Hall passed from Commonwealth ownership to the then Liberal Victorian Government, who allowed CIRCUS OZ to take possession; they are still in occupancy in 2008.

### The Long Naval Association with the City of Port Melbourne ends.
Thus the long association of the Navy with Port Melbourne sadly came to an end, today no one would ever know that the Navy ever existed in the precinct.

### The Naval Heritage Foundation of Australia Inc.
In January 2008, an interested group of the Navy Family in Melbourne incorporated The Naval Heritage Foundation of Australia Inc. One of its objectives is to erect a 1.25 times normal size bronze Statue of a WW2 Sailor at Port Melbourne, adjacent to the site of the old Town Pier, demolished in 1950.
Since the mid 1850's and the Colonial Navy, thousands of naval men and women have served their country in war and peace. There is not a single Heritage Marker to remember all those who passed this way.
The *Answering The Call Statue* will be designed to honour and remember them. I am proud to be President of the Foundation.
My thanks for your attention and patience, I will be happy to try and answer any questions.