

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

This record has been compiled from primary sources where available, including records from the National Archives of Australia, Australian War Memorial and other institutions. I have used records of interviews where these have been relevant, together with the memoir written by my father, John Miller Blunt. Where primary source information has not been available, I have used available secondary sources. All sources have been documented in the extensive Footnotes and Bibliography.

Whilst compiling this historical record, I have endeavoured to trace and gain permission from holders of copyright. If I have been unable to find you, please contact me so I can make amends in future editions.

Where sources refer to imperial measurements, I have used those to provide authenticity and where appropriate, I have provided metric values to assist the reader. Where currency is referred to in pounds, I have retained that currency as there is little point in endeavoring to reflect the current dollar values. I have however, included advertisements from the period in the Appendices for comparative values. For readers unfamiliar with shipping, naval terms and abbreviations, I have included details of their meanings where I have thought it appropriate to do so.

In 2002, the 285 year old publication, Lloyd's List, abandoned the use of the pronoun 'she' for vessels and decided to refer to vessels in future as 'it'. However, the Royal Navy (**RN**) and the Royal Australian Navy (**RAN**) have always referred to their vessels as 'she'. For sailors, the ship was said to be the only woman allowed at sea and she was treated with deference and respect. Others said it was because crews believed their ships represented their mothers, or because early ships were dedicated as goddesses. Others have referred to the personal relationship between the ship and their owners, commanders and crews, where 'she' reflected that relationship. Whilst respecting the changing views, I have decided to refer to the ships in this historical record as 'she', as they would have been referred to at the time they were launched, and the time they served during wartime.

With regards to the term 'rating' to indicate a naval seaman or petty officer, as distinct from an officer, where appropriate I have adopted the term currently used in the Royal Australian Navy of 'sailor'.

Records held by the Australian War Memorial (**AWM**) are included in the National Australia Archives (**NAA**) searchable database. I have therefore listed those as NAA records, eg: NAA: AWM78, 418/1: Sydney Log. (Note the AWM78 is the Series and 418/1 is the Control Symbol). Where Records have been scanned and include page numbers, I have included the relevant page numbers. However, virtually all non-scanned Records do not have page numbers and unfortunately a search will require locating the relevant page. To assist your search for NAA Records (including AWM Records), I have included the name or a shortened version of the name for each Record - as recorded by Archives.

If you find any errors, I would welcome your corrections, just as I will welcome any further information you may wish to share regarding the vessels of the Hollywood Fleet and the officers and men who served on them. My search will continue.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In compiling this history, I have received the warm support and assistance from many people. In particular, I would like to thank the staff at the many institutions including; State Library of New South Wales, National Archives of Australia, Australian War Memorial, National Library of Australia for their wonderful Trove facility, Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney Heritage Fleet and the Royal Australian Navy Sea Power Centre. I also acknowledge the contribution of authors Steven Carruthers

and Peter Grose for their research and accounts of the Battle of Sydney Harbour and the inspiration those accounts provide.

Two people, however deserve a special thank you, Ken Brown and Marty Grogan for the opportunity to chat about our *Lolita* and other common interests.

And in particular, I must thank my brothers and my lovely partner and many others for their interest in reading and editing my early drafts.

## 1 - INTRODUCTION

It was an extraordinary phone call that had brought me here, to an early morning in the Riverina – a call I would not have made if I was not joining my brother and his wife for a trek along the Great Ocean Walk along the south coast of Victoria – a call I would not have made if I hadn't decided to spend a few days in Melbourne.

That Tuesday morning, I was driving west across the country plains – heading to a town I never knew existed before that phone call – to meet, a *'living legend'*.

As I drove further and further west, I admit I was feeling increasingly annoyed. I had been told the town of Berrigan was only a short drive from Albury, but I had already travelled past the 100km mark and there was still no sign of the town. I had left the hilly country around Albury over an hour ago. I was out onto the flat plains. The green pastures had given way to brown dry lands in the midst of a significant drought. The detour was taking me a long way off my route to the start of the trek at Apollo Bay, and there was at least another seven hours of driving.

The road was straight and flat – not a car in sight. With time to think I pondered how coincidences and chance events and encounters often connect events in life.

After an hour and half, I caught sight of a speck to the west. Could that be the top of the Berrigan communications tower? As kilometres passed, the speck grew taller until I knew it was going to be my destination. It seemed such a tiny town.

I flicked on the satellite navigation system in the Iphone and listened to Siri – *'straight ahead for another 300 metres then take the second turn on the left'*. I did as I was told – not usual for me. *'Take the next turn to the left and you will be at your destination'*. I took the left turn and drove past the medical centre and local hospital, and into the car park of the retirement home.

I gathered my notes with some trepidation. What would he be like at 98? Would he have any interest in what I wanted to talk about? I recalled Marty's email – *'you will be amazed at his recall'* and *'he's looking forward to meeting you'*.

I entered the office and explained my visit. The nurse welcomed me with an enthusiastic, *'he's been expecting you'*. She led me down a corridor, and another, and another into a small lounge room. *'Mr Blunt, this is Ken Brown and his wife Mavis'*. I was instantly greeted with smiles and hands to shake.

For the next two hours I was privileged to chat with an extraordinary person, a veteran – the last surviving sailor from several HMAS ships.

He was everything Marty had described - *'bright as a button'* with an amazing recall that was to reveal extraordinary connections.

But what had any of this to do with *Lolita*, you may well ask!

Let me take you to the beginning.

\* \* \*

In 1986 my father, John Miller Blunt, died. Far too young at the age of sixty-six. Taken from my mother, my brothers and from me, by the consequences of the war he never discussed. We knew something had happened in the past. He was always *'jumpy'* at a car back-firing, or a door slamming with a loud bang. We were never told why, and I understood mum had never been told everything.

I often recall a special time I had with him – after one of his early heart attacks – we were both together at the hospital – he was in bed and I was sitting beside him, watching TV together. It happened to be a documentary film of my sailing and climbing adventure to Heard Island. I glanced at him. He had a smile from ear to ear – I could see he was thrilled and I could tell he was very proud of the achievement – gather a team of twenty adventurers and sailors, charter the yacht *Anaconda II*, sail to the remotest island in the world and climb Australia's highest mountain – the glaciated active volcano of Big Ben. I am sure it reminded him of his own sailing adventures and his participation in the very early Sydney Hobart yacht races.

I remember from the day I told him of my plans to visit Heard Island over ten years before, to the day we sailed back into Port Adelaide, he and my mother were staunch supporters. At the time, they were living on Spectacle Island which became a de facto expedition headquarters – for the printing of T shirts to raise money, and a logistics store for the expedition's equipment and everything else needed for the adventure.

Not long after his first heart attack he retired, and having served in the public service his whole life from the time he was a young man aged 16, he was entitled to a pension from the superannuation he had accumulated. While not much, it was sufficient for him and my mother. However, when he died, the pension was substantially reduced – despite his superannuation contributions over many, many years.

For years I saw Mum struggle. She was too proud, like my father, to ask for any assistance she felt she did not deserve. She fought on with what she had. But with the growing number of grandchildren, it was tough, especially at Christmas and birthdays when she wanted to support her grandchildren and others.

A year or so after Dad died, Mum gave my brothers and me, a copy of a memoir Dad had written – about his work and family. I had skimmed through it and put it away. But at the time when I saw Mum struggling, I recalled a short passage where Dad had described the loss of his ship in the war. There had been an explosion of some kind whilst the ship was in New Guinea. Two sailors had been killed and dad was burnt before being repatriated back to Australia.

I suggested to Mum that she should make an application for a war widow's pension. She would have none of it. For her, there were others more deserving. I persisted over a number of years but received the same response – No! – she would not ask for anything she did not deserve.

Without telling Mum, I spoke with officers at our local Legacy office to see if they could provide some assistance. The officer listened to the brief account dad had left of his service in the Navy and the loss of his ship. The officer indicated there may be a possibility my mother may be eligible for a war widow's pension, but more details of dad's service, the explosion, and his injuries were required.

At the time, I had been undertaking research in the National Australian Archives with regard to the discovery of Heard Island and other Antarctic matters and I was becoming adept at searching for records. For some reason, still unknown to me to this day, I typed into the search box, the name of the vessel on which my father had served during the war.

A list of records appeared including a report of an inquiry into an explosion.

I was compelled to obtain that report. Maybe it would shed light on the explosion and the injuries he sustained. But the record was in Melbourne and it had not been released. It was still confidential. I lodged an application for it to be made accessible to the public. After what seemed an eternity, I received notification the record was available and drove to Melbourne with thoughts swirling of what it would reveal.

The record provided all the details. A Board of Inquiry had been conducted and all personnel associated with the ship and the explosion had been interviewed. The circumstances were set out in the transcripts of interviews with the Board's concluding report providing the details.

Again, I contacted Legacy with the new information, together with his service record and medical discharge papers. The officer advised me to convince Mum to come and have a 'chat' adding that based on the material, she would have a chance of being awarded a pension.

It was a number of years before Mum decided to have the 'chat'. I recall as we walked in the door, she insisted she was there just to meet, and would not be asking for anything. The officer was a gem – one of those wonderful people who knew what to say and understood her view. Talking quietly to mum, he told us that he knew dad's story, and that she deserved the opportunity to lodge an application and see how the Department of Veterans Affairs may respond. He asked if she had any grandchildren (he already knew because I had told him) and when she told him of the eight grandchildren, he suggested that anything she received from the pension, she could use for them – she could honour her commitment that she would not accept anything for herself – she could use it for the grandchildren and others.

She accepted his advice and whilst restating her commitment that she would never accept anything for herself, she signed the papers. Nothing was heard for many months, but it was a pleasing moment when the officer telephoned me with the news. Mum received the war widow's pension. Of the pension, true to her commitment, she never took any for herself. She used the income to support her grandchildren and various charities.

Some years later, she asked how the officer could have known so much about dad's war record and the explosion. I revealed the documents I had found, and told her the story she had never heard from dad.

Dad's ship was HMAS *Lolita* – a small patrol vessel that had served Australia well and will remain in my memory for years to come.

Over the years, I visited Mum every weekend or two – for a cup of tea and cake and a catch up – or an 'argument' about politics.

On one of the visits, I noticed a small suitcase inside the front door. Nothing was said during our tea and conversation that afternoon, but as I was leaving, she pointed to the suitcase and said '*I would like you to take it and look after it – it has Dad's papers and things in it*'. I was busy at the time and put it in the cupboard for another day.

In August 2015, Mum died – after a short unexpected illness, a sad loss to us and many others.

I recalled the suitcase and took it out. Among the papers was a photograph that caught my attention – a group of people, dressed to the 'nines' in 'Sunday best', gathered on a cannon, a very large cannon in a park. There were ten people, and among them I recognised my grandfather – Percival Blunt and my grandmother – Catherine Miller.

Who were these other people, what was the occasion, and where was the photograph taken? It was such an interesting photograph, I needed to find answers.

Our lovely family historian believed it to be a wedding photograph, taken some time after the end of WWI. The Secretary of the Toowoomba and Darling Downs Family History Society sent the photograph to the Fort Lytton Historical Association. Their researcher identified the cannon was from the Victorian

Warship HMVS *Cerberus*<sup>1</sup> and had later been sent to HMAS *Cerberus* where it remains. He added the photograph appeared to have been taken in the Botanic Park at Ballarat.



My grandmother Catherine Ferguson Miller of Toowoomba – centre row sitting on the cannon third from the left. My grandfather Percival Marmaduke Blunt of Ipswich - standing at the rear – right.

A web search revealed there was a gun like the one in the photograph at HMAS *Cerberus* – a naval shore station to the south-east of Melbourne on Westernport Bay. I recalled Dad had visited the station many times during his work. I remember him speaking of the training and formal mess dinners he enjoyed at the base.

I decided I should inspect the cannon at HMAS *Cerberus* to confirm I was dealing with the same cannon. After finding there was a historical museum at the station, I sent an email. There was no response. I called but the phone rang out.

I became busy with other pressing matters and tucked the issue away for another day.

\* \* \*

It was the Wednesday before I was due to leave for the Great Ocean Walk. I recalled the cannon and thought it may be possible to squeeze in a visit to HMAS *Cerberus* to have a look at the cannon. I decided to give it a go, and dialled the number for the museum – same as before - no answer! I left a brief message and asked for a call-back. There was no call-back.

On the Thursday with time running out before my departure, I decided to give it another go and dialled the museum – again no answer. Again, I left a brief message and asked for a call-back. There was no call-back.

An hour later I decided to call the base commander. But when I looked on the website, I found the name and a mobile number for a person at the museum – a Warrant Officer. Annoyed that no-one had answered my earlier calls and there had been no call back, I decided to call the officer.

The conversation I had with Marty that morning was extraordinary.

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<sup>1</sup> Her Majesty's Victorian Ship *Cerberus*. At the time she was commissioned in 1870, Victoria was separate to New South Wales. After Federation, naval ships became His or Her Majesty's Australian Ships (HMAS).

He listened in silence while I explained about the photograph of the cannon, and the people sitting and standing on it, my search that had led me to HMAS *Cerberus* and my request to visit to inspect the cannon. It was short notice, but I told him I would be willing to come down as soon as I finished the trek.

In responding, he apologised saying he had only recently retired from the Navy and his ten years at the museum, and that no person had yet been appointed to replace him. He explained there was no such cannon at the museum, but there was one *'in front of the Command Building'* and it may be possible to inspect it. However, I would have to contact the station commander.

He seemed to warm to the story of the cannon and explained he understood the cannon at the base had come from Ballarat some years prior as part of a centenary of the base and that it had been removed from HMVS *Cerberus*. He explained HMVS *Cerberus* was now lying on the bottom of Port Phillip Bay as a breakwater off Half Moon Bay at Black Rock. He suggested I contact a person at the HMVS *Cerberus* Association as they would probably have more information regarding the cannon.

I thanked him, but, before we ended the call, he explained his role with the museum over the years and the work he had done.

There was something in what he said, that made me ask if he knew of the naval museum on Spectacle Island. I was not prepared for the response.

*'Yes – I have been there over thirty times, I love it, it is so important and a wonderful collection of naval material, but I don't know what's happening to it now – there is only one person looking after it now.'*

Marty spoke for a good five minutes describing the collection, the buildings and Spectacle Island and offered to arrange for me to visit the island.

When he paused, I informed him I had already visited the collection many times. There was silence. I then added that I had lived on the island. There was even more silence (if that was possible), and I could sense he was wondering who I was – a stranger calling him *'out of the blue'* with the puzzling and surprising information – that I, had actually lived on Spectacle Island in Sydney Harbour, and I knew his favourite naval museum.

After a long pause, I explained my father's role in the Naval Supply Branch, culminating as the Chief Superintendent of Supply, and our family's time living in the house – the large white house at the northern end of the island.

I could sense he was stunned. We continued to reminisce about the island and the collection. I asked if the Mawson sledge was still there. Of course, he asked how I knew of that particular item. I explained my interest from my expedition to Heard Island and the later expeditions to Cape Denison in Antarctica to work on the conservation of Mawson's Huts. He said it had *'disappeared'* when he last visited and the heritage officers in attendance were unsure where it was – he explained the necessity for continued interest by defence officials for the Navy's heritage collections to ensure local knowledge would never be lost.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The current Director Navy Heritage Collections has confirmed the two sledges are considered valuable items and are always stored at Spectacle Island except when they have been on loan to other institutions such as the Australian Museum. The Director also confirmed as of August 2019, the Navy was mid-way through a major review of *'Naval Heritage'*, sponsored by the Deputy Chief of Navy.



The Residence, Spectacle Island in December 2016 – during a family reunion.



Family reunion outside the Residence.



Boat reconstruction in the Spectacle Island Museum.

The conversation was amazing. For some reason, perhaps it was just his profound interest in the Navy and its history, which he clearly relished, I mentioned he may be interested in another story – that of HMAS *Lolita* and my research.

Well - the response from Marty was astounding.

With gusto and enthusiasm, he told me he knew the last surviving member of HMAS *Lolita*. He told me this 98 year old veteran residing in a small country town, '*is a living legend*' – and added in one breath without pause, that he was also the last surviving member of HMAS *Nestor*, and the second last surviving member of HMAS *Sydney II*. That veteran is Ken Brown.

What I thought would be a curt telephone call with a response along official lines – ‘you will have to get permission to visit HMAS *Cerberus* to inspect the cannon’, and ‘no it will not be possible in the short timeframe’ etc - extended for 30 minutes - a most amazing discussion of coincidental matters of mutual interest.

Sensing Marty’s enthusiasm for this ‘*living legend*’, I asked the location of the country town. He explained ‘*just west of Albury – just a short drive*’. In an instant I decided it may be possible I could take a short detour on my drive south to Apollo Bay. I asked if it may be possible to visit him on Tuesday morning.

*‘Absolutely – I was going to call him this afternoon – I am sure he would be interested to have a chat’.*

As soon as we finished the call, Marty emailed a photograph to me.



Ken Brown (on the right) with the Chief of Navy in early 2018.<sup>3</sup>

Over the next 24 hours, we exchanged emails. Marty confirmed that Ken, despite his 98 years of age, was as ‘*bright as a button*’, and would like to meet me.

*‘His sharp recall will just blow you away. A truly amazing man.’*

And so that was my destination that Tuesday morning – all because of a photograph of a cannon which included my grandparents, because I had lived on and knew Spectacle Island, and because of HMAS *Lolita* – the ship on which my father served during WWII.

What an extraordinary confluence of matters, and a chance encounter with ‘the’ Marty Grogan and our common interests!

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The two hours spent with Ken was a wonderful experience. It was a privilege to be able to chat with him about his time on HMAS *Lolita*.

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<sup>3</sup> Photo courtesy M Grogan

Ken recounted his experience on HMAS *Nestor* – the only Royal Australian Navy ship never to have sailed in Australian waters. It had been acquired by the Royal Australian Navy from the Royal Navy in February 1941 under the command of Commander George S. Stewart, RAN. She joined the Home Fleet based at Scarpa Flow and spent the first months of service escorting North Atlantic convoys, on patrol and screening capital ships at sea.

In late May 1941 *Nestor* was a unit of the force which hunted and sank the German battleship *Bismarck*, although *Nestor*, having been diverted to Iceland to refuel, was not with the force when the *Bismarck* was eventually sunk on 27 May 1941.

Ken told me of the cold and terrible conditions in the North Sea, and the crew's disappointment in not being with the fleet for the sinking of the *Bismarck*.

*Nestor* then entered the Mediterranean for the first time in July 1941 and subsequently spent time in the Indian Ocean before returning to the Mediterranean. On 14 June 1942 she was part of the 7th Destroyer Flotilla, returning to Alexandria with an aborted Malta convoy, when off Crete, she was straddled by a stick of heavy bombs which killed four seamen and put her out of action. HMAS *Javelin* took *Nestor* in tow, but by early next day she was sinking by the bow. The crew was transferred to *Javelin* and HMAS *Nestor* was scuttled and sunk by depth charges. Ken had joined *Nestor* in February 1941 and was with her when she was sunk.



HMAS *Nestor* under aerial attack whilst on convoy duty in the Mediterranean on 15 June 1942.<sup>4</sup>

We talked about HMAS *Lolita* and he told me of his time in HMAS *Sydney II*. But what I found stunning, was his response when I asked him of his involvement with HMAS *Australia II*.

He recalled his adventure in 1950 when HMAS *Australia* was engaged in a mercy mission to the Australian Antarctic base at Heard Island, to extract the doctor who had fallen ill. I sat in awe as he told me the story of how the crew thought they were sailing for Korea, but instead found themselves sailing in the opposite direction – to the Subantarctic.

I could not believe how the photograph of a cannon, Spectacle Island and HMAS *Lolita* had connected us – and both of us had visited this isolated and remote island – two people of a very select few.

We enjoyed our meeting, but it was time to leave – I really was behind schedule to arrive at the start of the hike. We said our goodbyes and agreed we would keep in touch.

I sent him a card for Christmas with a short note thanking him and Mavis for the opportunity to meet and share our common interests.

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<sup>4</sup> AWM Photograph 044998



Ken meeting Mavis with newly grown beard on disembarkation from HMAS *Australia* after visit to Heard Island.<sup>5</sup>

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Saturday 29 December 2018 was a stinking hot day - another heat wave. While having a 'little' snooze I heard the mobile ring. As I reluctantly rose, the phone stopped ringing.

I didn't recognise the number, but pressed it to return the call.

*'Hello, this is Ken from Lolita'.*

Ken had rung to thank me for the card and for a chat. For twenty minutes we talked about his progress since I had seen him – *'improving'* he said. We spoke again about the coincidence of us both visiting Heard Island. We spoke about 'our' ship – *Lolita* – and his being the last surviving member of the crew and me chasing its history.

I told him I was on a search for a photograph of *Lolita* before she became a HMAS ship – when she was a pleasure cruiser on Sydney Harbour and Pittwater in the late 1930's and early 1940's. I also told him I was looking for a photograph of HMAS *Australia* at Heard Island and that I would send both to him when I was successful. I said I had a feeling I would be successful. The only question in my mind would be when, and if I could do so whilst he could remember his adventures.

I also told him of my lobbying to have HMAS *Lolita* included on the memorial at Bradleys Head. I informed him of the recent letter from the Minister for Veterans Affairs that explained the inadvertent exclusion would be corrected. He said that would be important and he welcomed the news.

We agreed to catch up again.

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<sup>5</sup> Argus (Melbourne), 29 August 1950, p.5

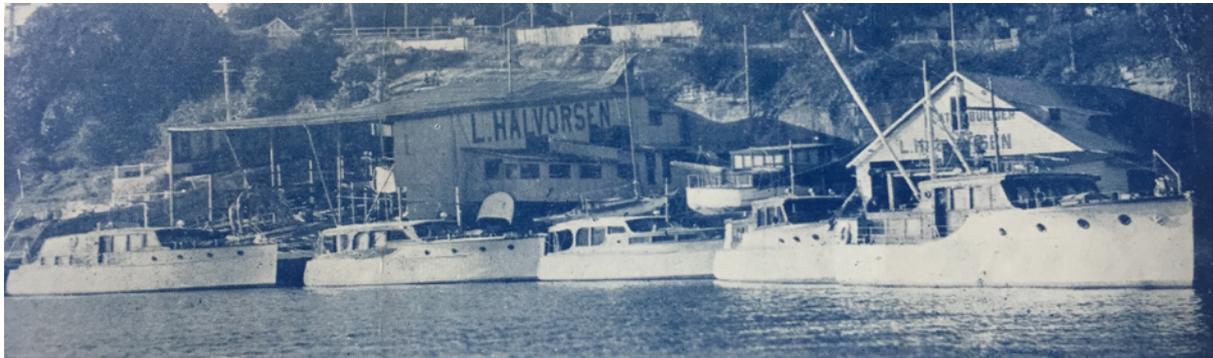
## 2 - LOLITA

As Australia crept out of the depression of the 1920s and early 1930s, the Australian public found an interest with boating – sailing, speed boats, new outboard motors, and for a few, an appetite for large motor pleasure cruisers. The first motor cruiser exhibited at the Sydney Royal Easter Show was in 1933. The exhibition included the 36 foot cruiser *Iolanthe* built by the well-known boat builder Lars Halvorsen. With more boat shows, the popularity of boating increased considerably with many shipbuilding yards unable to cope with the orders.

By 1934, the Royal Motor Yacht Club (**RMYC**), with branches at Broken Bay, Newcastle and Port Hacking had 476 members with 97 motor cruisers, 61 speed boats and 12 outboards and a large number of unregistered vessels in the Club's fleet.<sup>6</sup>

According to the editorial of the May 1935 edition of *The International Power Boat and Aquatic Magazine*,<sup>7</sup> the 1934/35 season enjoyed greater success than any other sport since the passing of the depression. The Editorial held the boom was because boating in Australia was considered the safest of all sports, kept families together, owning a boat was a '*mark of distinction*', and that '*by investing in a boat, a business man in Australia is going in for a new life*'.

By 1936, the boating industry was enjoying prosperity. Boat builders, engine firms, sail-makers, and paint manufacturers were said to have participated in the prosperity with the majority of firms working at high pressure. Boatyards had enough work on hand to keep their staff fully occupied. In 1937, Australian boat builders were the equal to any in the world, including the Sydney boat yards of; W L Holmes, Halvorsen's, A G Williams of Drummoyne, Jack Robinson of Balmain, Walker and Kelshw of Rushcutters Bay, C Larsen at Gladesville Point, and the three yards of Cedric Williams, Jack Miles and G and H Solomons of Newport.<sup>8</sup>



A typical day at Halvorsen's Neutral Bay boat yard with *Argo*, *Sunbeam III*, *Dilio*, *Norena* and *Pollyanna* moored alongside – c. 1935, 1936.<sup>9</sup>

It is not known when *Lolita* was launched or the name of her builder.<sup>10</sup> However, it is known that in February 1932, Arthur Douglas Walker, the owner of *Lolita*, came 1st in the first general handicap race of 2 laps over 5 miles (8km) at the Royal Motor yacht Club of Broken Bay. In the '*Re-run General Handicap*, Walker scraped home with *Lolita*, half a second in front of *Wyvern*'.<sup>11</sup> It also appears that 1932 was the year Walker became Commodore of the Broken Bay Branch of the Royal Motor Yacht Club.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The International Powerboat and Aquatic Monthly, 10 September 1934, p.6

<sup>7</sup> The International Powerboat and Aquatic Monthly, 10 September 1935, p.1

<sup>8</sup> The International Powerboat and Aquatic Monthly, 10 March 1937, p.1

<sup>9</sup> The International Powerboat and Aquatic Monthly, 10 January 1936, p.1

<sup>10</sup> *Lolita* was first registered in the Port of Sydney section of the Register of British Ships on 24 October 1929, Microfilm held by ANMM, Registration No. 155349, 13 of 1929. The Register records she was constructed in 1929 but no launch date is given.

<sup>11</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, 29 February 1932, p.6

<sup>12</sup> Referee (Sydney), 10 October 1935, p.15

A Report in The Sydney Morning Herald<sup>13</sup> records the opening of the 1933 Broken Bay Season and associated regatta off Saltpan as being one of the most successful. One of the best features of the day was the race by ten cruisers from the parent club of Rose Bay in Sydney. The course took the cruisers out of Sydney Harbour, past North Head and up the coast to Broken Bay, and to the club house at Newport at the southern end of Pittwater. *Miramar II*, the flagship of Commodore Stuart F. Doyle,<sup>14</sup> recorded the fastest time of 2 hours 6 minutes for the voyage.

According to the reporter, the most imposing impression was of the ‘ceremonial procession’ by the visiting cruisers led by *Miramar II* sweeping past the flagship of Branch-Commodore Walker’s *Lolita* – complete with an 11 gun salute.



The first *Lolita* at the December 1937 Pittwater Regatta. She had been renamed *Uralia* in April 1937.<sup>15</sup>

It is not known when, or why, Walker decided he needed a new *Lolita*. At the latest, it must have been in late 1935 or very early 1936. Why is a mystery. There is no information. Perhaps he had outgrown his first *Lolita*, or as Commodore of the expanding Broken Bay branch of the RMYC, he needed a larger, more up to date vessel. Perhaps he simply felt he had to keep up with Stuart F Doyle, still Commodore of Sydney’s Rose Bay branch of the RMYC and owner of the larger 75 foot *Miramar II*.

At the time, he had a choice of expert boat builders for his new *Lolita* – Halvorsens, who were constructing cruisers at Neutral Bay, W L Holmes of McMahons Point or other smaller builders around the shores of Sydney Harbour, or even J Williams and Sons at Bayview on Pittwater. For whatever reason, Walker chose W L Holmes to construct his new *Lolita*. It was an interesting choice given the notoriety of the Holmes family and business which had been managed by Reginald ‘Reg’ Holmes for several years.

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<sup>13</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney), 9 October 1933, p.12

<sup>14</sup> Throughout this Historical Record, there are four men with the surname of Doyle, namely; **Commodore Stuart F Doyle** of the Royal Motor Yacht Club and owner of *Miramar II*, **Sub-Lieutenant John Ashton Doyle** being a commander of HMAS *Seamist* (NAA: A6769, Doyle JA), **Horace Frederick Doyle** being an Able Seaman on HMAS *Yarroma* (NAA: A6770, Doyle H F), and **Captain Alec Broughton Doyle** being an Engineer at Garden Island during the Battle of Sydney Harbour (NAA: A6769, Doyle A B). In addition but not included in this Record, Able Seaman **David John Doyle** served aboard HMAS *Lolita* during the Battle of Sydney Harbour (NAA: A6770, Doyle D J).

<sup>15</sup> Image no 16624h by Sam Hood, 1937, Courtesy State Library of NSW

## The 'Shark Arm Affair'

On Anzac Day 1935, a Tiger shark in the indoor swimming pool at the Coogee Aquarium Baths vomited. Along with fish, it disgorged a rat, and a human arm. The left arm was decorated with a tattoo of two tiny figures about 20cm tall facing each other in boxing gloves. The arm also had a piece of manila rope around its wrist tied with a half-hitch knot. It was evident, the arm had not been severed from the person's body by the shark.

To all appearances, Holmes was a pillar of respectability managing the family's boat building business at Lavender Bay. But for some years, Reg lived another life as a drug runner. With his fast speedboats, he would often speed out through the Sydney Heads to collect packages of cocaine dropped from passing ships. He was also a fraudster having defrauded building suppliers with an acquaintance – one James 'Jimmy' Smith, who he had engaged to build a block of flats at McMahons Point. Reg was also in cahoots with his friend and business competitor, Albert Stannard, to whom he had mortgaged a life insurance policy in 1932 for £4,000.<sup>16</sup> Together, Reg and Albert ran a scheme to defraud marine insurance companies on a 'grand scale'. In one episode, they purchased and over-insured an ocean going motor yacht – *Pathfinder*, which was looked after by Smith. On a trip to the Central Coast, it sank, and the police became suspicious. They interviewed the owners. Unbeknown to the owners, Smith was also a police informer, and his days were numbered.

The police investigated the '*shark arm*' as it had become known, and placed a photograph in the newspapers hoping someone would identify the tattoo. It was not long before the arm was identified as belonging to Smith. The police did not take long to track down an acquaintance of Smith named Brady, who had been seen with Smith in a local Cronulla pub. A taxi driver had dropped Brady at Reg's home, and the police had a connection.

Of course, Reg denied he knew Brady, took one of his speed boats onto the Harbour and in full view of people on the shore, shot himself in the head. He fell into the water. But he botched the shot and survived. The bullet failed to penetrate Reg's skull. He climbed back into the speed boat and sped around the Harbour eluding police for another four hours before finally surrendering two kilometres out to sea. He admitted Brady had visited him with the '*shark arm*' and that Brady had tried to blackmail him.

Despite fearing for his life, Reg agreed to be a witness into the death of Smith. Police offered a twenty-four hour guard at his home, but Reg rejected the offer.

But in the early hours of the morning on the day before he was to testify at the inquest, Reg was found dead in his car near the Harbour Bridge at Dawes Point. He had been shot through the heart.

His wife later testified, Reg had told her that night, he was going to meet Albert Stannard. Another witness identified Stannard as the man who was seen walking away from Reg's car on the evening Reg was killed. Without Reg's evidence, Brady was never convicted.

Reg's killer was never identified and in 1937, Albert Stannard purchased the Holmes boat building business.<sup>17</sup>

\* \* \*

## Lolita II

Despite the circumstances of the 'Shark Arm Affair', by September 1936, members of the RMYC visited the boatyard to inspect Walker's new cruiser. It was due to be launched within the '*next few weeks*'.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix A - Comparative Purchasing Value

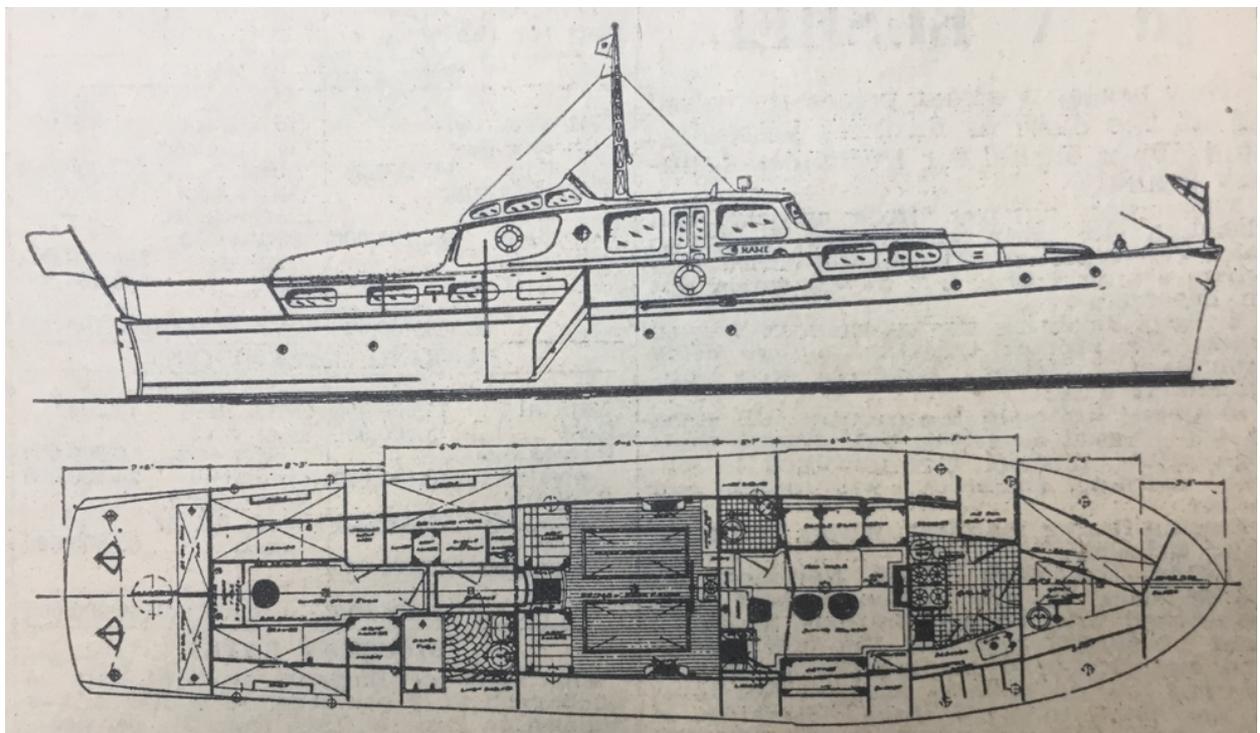
<sup>17</sup> One of the best accounts of the Shark Arm Affair can be found in *The Shark Arm Murders* by Castles A. A new account *Shark Arm* by Phillip Roope and Kevin Meagher provides further insight into the affair.

Her *'graceful lines'* won the admiration of visitors who complemented the Walker's on her *'new and original design'*. It was confirmed she would be powered by *'twin "Grays" of 91hp each'*, and be fitted with a further *'Gray' engine to power her 'auxiliary lighting and hot water service plant'*.<sup>18</sup>

By the end of 1936, the second *Lolita* was ready to launch. The Saturday edition of The Telegraph informed the public of the pending launch, due for the following Monday. The newspaper even included a diagram and details of the new vessel – 54 feet long (16.46m) with a beam of 13 feet (3.96m) and a draught of 3½ feet (1.06m) to be driven by the twin *'six-cylinder "Grays" with reduction gears'*.<sup>19</sup>

The following Monday evening, 31 November 1936, two hundred guests gathered for the launch of the new vessel. The honour fell to Mrs. A D (Emily) Walker to break the champagne over the bow, name her *Lolita* and launch her, which she did *'admirably'* to the applause and cheers of the guests.

The following day, the Daily Telegraph recorded the launch of the *'twin-screw bridge-deck cruiser'* represented a *'step forward in marine design and craftsmanship'*. Readers were informed there was only one other cruiser of the type in the world, which had only recently been launched in Chicago.<sup>20</sup>



Perhaps *Lolita* had been designed in the United States which may explain the role of W L Holmes, as Halvorsens may have been reluctant to build a vessel designed by another naval architect.

*Lolita II*, as she was named at the time of the launching, was added to the register of the Broken Bay branch of the Royal Motor Yacht Club.<sup>21</sup>

A few weeks after the launch, The Sydney Morning Herald<sup>22</sup> described the cruiser, giving readers a glimpse of the lavish and opulent interior:

*The Lolita was built by Australian craftsmen. The lounges, bedrooms, kitchen, and other rooms are large and airy, and there is plenty of floor space.*

<sup>18</sup> Referee (Sydney), 17 September 1936, p.16

<sup>19</sup> The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 28 November 1936, p.22

<sup>20</sup> The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 1 December 1936, p.19

<sup>21</sup> Referee (Sydney), 3 December 1936, p.17

<sup>22</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, 22 December 1936, p.6

*In the forward part of the cruiser is the galley, with a gas stove with full-size oven, refrigeration, and all the refinements of a shore kitchen.*

*The dining saloon is aft of the galley, and is bright and commodious, the furniture consisting of sideboard, desk, wireless cabinet, lockers, etc., all being built-in.*

*A fireplace with a bas-relief carved mantel of the Endeavour sailing for Australia contains an electric radiator. The flooring and upholstery are blue, with brown shades of tapestry.*

*From the saloon one enters the bridge deck, where the colour scheme is brown to match the polished maple woodwork which is relieved by the chrome fittings of the instrument panel and wheel. Two tubby upholstered seats may be extended to provide full-size berths. The planked caulked deck with the ports and vision windows completes a restful nautical layout.*

*From the bridge a passageway leads to the owner's state-room, on one side of which is a single guest cabin. On the other side is the bathroom in primrose colourings. A bath and basin are contained here, and one may have hot or cold fresh and salt water.*

*The owner's cabin is large and airy, and occupies the full width of the ship. It is fitted with two full-width double berths, with ample locker space. Two fitted wardrobes and dressing table, all built-in, complete the equipment. The colour scheme is carried out in shades of green.'*

In describing the vessel, the reporter explained *'In the good old days, or possibly bad old days, yachts and launches were built for men' and 'little, if any, thought was given to comfort'*. But with this new vessel, that deficiency was being remedied as many of the new *'small pleasure ships'* on Sydney Harbour were *'virtually floating homes'*.



The new Lolita.<sup>23</sup>

The Herald included photographs of the palatial interior saying, *'The pictures of the interior reproduced on this page will give some idea of the artistic comfort of this cruiser. Confined within a length of 54 feet (16.46m) and a beam of 13 feet 4 inches (4.06m), there is a modern kitchen, a bathroom, bedrooms,*

<sup>23</sup> Image No. 13590h by Sam Hood, 1937, Courtesy State Library of NSW. A caption for this photograph included in the Pittwater Online News, Issue 155 of March 2014, identified this vessel as *Hourglass* owned by Sam Paul. That is incorrect as *Hourglass* was only 38 ft in length.

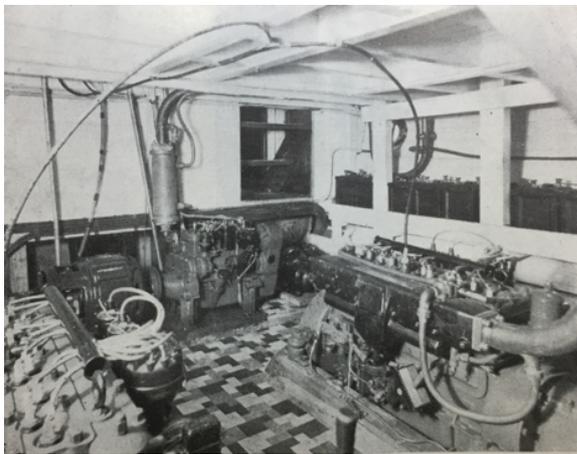
*lounges, and a large bridge deck. All the furnishings have been planned in the modern manner, with comfort as the basis.'*



Bridge showing the companionway on the right to the forward cabin.



Owners cabin in the stern.



Engine compartment under the floor of the bridge.



Saloon complete with fireplace.<sup>24</sup>

Clearly, *Lolita II* was not a run-of-the-mill vessel. Walker had set out to achieve the best, and set a standard for future '*pleasure ships*'.

A month later, Walker sailed her out of Sydney Harbour and up the coast to the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Pittwater Regatta held on 26 December 1936. While rain poured throughout the day casting a gloominess over the event, owners of luxurious cruisers, '*were able to sit back, entertain large parties afloat and treat the weather with scorn*'.<sup>25</sup> Despite the conditions, almost three hundred craft from canoes and dinghies to ocean going motor yachts and expensive pleasure craft, assembled in the vicinity of Horseshoe Cove, Newport for the occasion.

Walker changed the name of his first *Lolita* to *Uralia* in April 1937,<sup>26</sup> and by mid-May, had sold her to Charles Henry Christmas.<sup>27</sup> Walker renamed his new *Lolita II*, *Lolita*.

Easter 1937, saw the new *Lolita* with Walker at the helm, lead a fleet of thirty-two '*cruisers*' up the Hawkesbury River to the Sackville Motor Boat Club. As the '*flagship*' rounded the corner approaching the club, a salute was fired. The shore guns fired a salute in return.

<sup>24</sup> Internal photographs from The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly, March 1937

<sup>25</sup> The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly, January 1937, p.2

<sup>26</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, 10 April 1937, p.7. *Advertising*

<sup>27</sup> Register of British Ships, Microfilm C2/13 held by ANMM, registration 155349, 13 in 1929. Charles Henry Christmas died on 8 April 1938. He was the father of Henry Percival (Percy) Christmas owner of *Toomeree* and *Winbah*.

The local newspaper<sup>28</sup> reported that for those who witnessed the fleet's arrival, the occasion would live long in the memory of all. The paper described the following Easter morning breaking clear and cloudless with the scene of cruisers coming around the sharp bend below the Sackville ferry as '*indeed a memorable one*'. The fleet included vessels from several branches of the RMYC and included *Esmeralda* that would later join *Lolita* as a Channel Patrol Boat during the looming war.



*Lolita* at anchor. Compare this photograph to the later photographs of her as HMAS *Lolita*.<sup>29</sup>

A month later, the newspapers recorded, Walker had a '*change of luck*' when *Lolita* '*with engines running perfectly*', he won two general handicap races defeating a number of other cruisers. It was also noted that in the championship for cruisers from Broken Bay, *Carinya* had turned the tables on *Lolita* just before the finish.<sup>30</sup> December 1937 found the Walkers and other guests in '*residence*' on *Lolita* in Pittwater for the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Regatta.<sup>31</sup> The Women's News of The Daily Telegraph recorded Mrs Walker '*introduced a new note in nautical fashions with her chamois yellow suede shoes which matched the belt on her navy silk frock*' and that Mrs Phillips on the *Diana* made '*an attractive ship board hostess in her navy tailored slacks, worn with a navy suede belt, adorned with sea dragons in red and white and a white nautical jacket*'.



For the regatta celebrations, the Walkers were accompanied on board *Lolita* by Mr and Mrs E M Rowell, Mr and Mrs Stan Ravenscroft, Mrs R C Leslie, and Mr and Mrs W J Carrod.<sup>32</sup>

Also, in attendance at the December 1937 Pittwater Regatta, was the new *Uralia* (former first *Lolita*) with new owners Mr and Mrs C H Christmas. They had been spending their holidays on their newly

<sup>28</sup> Windsor and Richmond gazette (NSW), 7 May 1937, p.3

<sup>29</sup> Image No. 13595h by Sam Hood, 1937, Courtesy State Library of NSW

<sup>30</sup> The Referee (Sydney), 13 May 1937, p.12

<sup>31</sup> The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 28 December 1937, p.6

<sup>32</sup> The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 28 December 1937, p.6

acquired *Uralia* at Refuge Bay with friends and their son, Ronald.<sup>33</sup> Mrs Dawn Christmas was seen as a smart figure at the Regatta in her *'blue floral playsuit, with halter neckline'*.



Miss Roma Browne and Miss Dawn Christmas *'who all wore cool yachting costumes when they took part in the Regatta at Pittwater yesterday'*.<sup>34</sup>

The October 1938 Opening Regatta was spectacular and colourful. Cruisers were bedecked with flags and pennants blending *'perfectly with the white cruisers, sunshine and blue sky'*. It was one of the brightest aquatic functions with a record attendance from the visiting motor yacht clubs.<sup>35</sup>

Two months later, Walker again motored *Lolita* from Sydney Harbour to Broken Bay to join the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Pittwater Regatta. Walker hosted a luncheon party on board *Lolita* and in the afternoon, took his guests for rides in his speedboat, *Sinabada*. His daughter, Mrs Eric Rowell, acted as the hostess and was accompanied by her young son Alan.<sup>36</sup>



Spectators aboard the flagship *Lolita* include Mrs R C Leslie, Mrs W J Carrad, Mrs E M Rowell, Mr Eric Rowell, Mr G Hannon and Mr A D Walker.<sup>37</sup> Also appears to include young Allan Rowell, grandson of A D Walker.

The newspaper once again took delight in describing the fashions – Mrs Rowell wore a *'Hawaiian print frock in cyclamen toning's'*, Mrs Carrad a *'tailored sharkskin coat over a striped navy and white frock'*, and Mrs Leslie a *'tailored ivory linen frock and shady white hat'*. Alan was a sailor-like figure complete with a yachting cap.

<sup>33</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, 28 December 1937, p.3

<sup>34</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, 28 December 1937, p.3

<sup>35</sup> The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly, January 1939, p.2

<sup>36</sup> The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 28 Dec. 1938, p.8

<sup>37</sup> The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 28 Dec. 1938, p.8. Note The Daily Telegraph has used both Carrad and Carrad, whilst The International Power Boat and Aquatic Magazine, refers to Secretary Bill Carrard (November 1939 – see below) and Secretary Bill Carrad (November 1938).



38

**ARTHUR DOUGLAS WALKER** was educated at the Church of England Grammar School and Sydney High School, and later studied under solicitor Dr J D Sly.

Walker was elected Mayor of Mosman from February 1914 to February 1915 and again from February 1918 to February 1920.<sup>39</sup>

In 1919, when elected Mayor, he was noted as being one of Sydney's busiest men.<sup>40</sup> Public calls on his time included; President of the Chamber of Manufacturers, a member of the Vocational Committee under the Repatriation Department for the training of disabled soldiers to enable them to resume their vocations, and Chairman of the Administrative Committee on pneumonic influenza. He was also serving on the board of directors of several companies.

He was also well known for his interests in the chemical by-products industries and in manufacturing and commercial circles.

In 1920, he joined the Progressive Party and ran for the state seat of North Sydney. He was unsuccessful.

During 1925 he purchased the stately residence, Tregoyd, in Raglan Street Mosman. The residence had been owned for 33 years by Sir William and Lady Cullen and was described, at the time of auction, to have a large number of rooms, situated on three acres of land surrounded by excellent scenery.<sup>41</sup>

In 1946, his wife Emily died leaving two children – Frances Alison and a son with his father's name, Arthur Douglas. Frances married Eric Rowell.

Arthur Douglas Walker died in 1952.

A reason for the popularity of motor cruising, which by 1938 was reaching its pre-war zenith was eloquently described, '*Some prefer to cruise quietly in the placid waters of the rivers, to idle along during the day with engine just ticking over, and the water burbling past the side of the boat, and at night to glide to a peaceful rest in some sheltered creek, where brush-covered hills drop steeply to the water's edge, where the mariner can sit on deck and watch the shadows lengthen in the water as the shades of night blot out all but his own tiny world*'.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> The International Powerboat and Aquatic Monthly, January 1936

<sup>39</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_mayors\\_of\\_Mosman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mayors_of_Mosman)

<sup>40</sup> Evening News (Sydney), 13 March 1919, p.10

<sup>41</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, 10 April 1925, p.8

<sup>42</sup> The International Power Boat and Aquatic Magazine, December 1938, p.12

June 1939 saw the annual presentation of Regatta prizes hosted by Walker at his home, Tregoyd in Mosman.<sup>43</sup> Frank West, publisher of the *International Power Boat and Aquatic Magazine* attended describing Tregoyd as reflecting the beauty of an English mansion with splendid lawns, tree covered grounds and harbour views. The guests were '*lavishly entertained and speeches reflected the pleasant air of merriment and wit which prevailed throughout the evening*'. Secretary Allan Beveridge spoke of President A D Walker; '*Although our president has modestly suppressed mention of his part in regatta preparation, it is well known that A D worked unceasingly in an endeavor to enroll as many regatta competitors as possible*', and '*I have worked for three years with him, and he is undoubtedly the driving force behind the regatta, so necessary to functions of that nature*'.

By September 1939, Walker had resigned as Commodore of the club, and at the Annual General meeting he was elected a life member in recognition of his eight years of valuable leadership.

The following month, West described the forthcoming summer season, '*No healthier sign appears on the entire motor-boating horizon than the greatly increased interest being taken this year in cruiser building. The publisher has attended many launchings of modern craft during the past two months*'.

Despite the outbreak of war in Europe, the October Opening Regatta proceeded to launch the 1939 - 1940 boating season. It was attended by more than thirty cruisers and speedboats.<sup>44</sup> Luxury motor cruisers and streamlined speedboats provided an impressive spectacle, as the club's flotilla paraded the designated course in full view of the spacious club house and received the salute from the new Commodore Sam Paul. Both cruisers and speedboats, '*filled to capacity with men and women in bright, nautical attire, blended to the gay atmosphere*' with guests and visitors from the Rose Bay, Toronto and Port Hacking clubs.

Walker, only recently retired from the position of Commodore, was presented with a grandfather clock.<sup>45</sup> On rising to respond, Walker was given a rousing reception and it was evident from his expression that he was impressed by the thoughtfulness of his friends. In responding, Walker paid special tribute to the General Secretary Bill Carrard with whom he had worked for nine years. The club was free of debt and in a very sound financial position.

Frank West, said when Walker had taken over the reins of leadership in 1932, the club was in a very poor position owing to the depression, but by his determination, Walker with the co-operation of his officers, ensured the club recovered and progressed.

After his lengthy period of service, it was contended that Walker deserved a rest, and '*relaxation on his new pig farming property would be most beneficial*'. It seems the farm was on the Hawkesbury River with a deep-water frontage.<sup>46</sup>

Rather than give up his association with the club entirely, Walker took up the position of President.

As with the Opening Regatta in October, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Pittwater Regatta proceeded in December 1939. Similar to previous regattas, the function was described as a '*tremendous*' success.<sup>47</sup> With the regatta in aid of the Lord Mayor's Patriotic Fund, thousands of people arrived in cars and boats. Many had already been at Palm Beach, Newport and neighbouring districts over the Christmas weekend. Walker motored *Lolita* over 100 miles (160km) to the start. The Lord Mayor attended in his own vessel – *Silver Arrow*.

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<sup>43</sup> The International Power Boat and Aquatic Magazine, June 1939, p.49

<sup>44</sup> The International Power Boat and Aquatic Magazine, November 1939, p.49

<sup>45</sup> The International Power Boat and Aquatic Magazine, November 1939, p.10

<sup>46</sup> Truth (Sydney), 22 June 1941, p.24

<sup>47</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, 27 December 1939, p.5., Daily News (Sydney), 23 December 1939, p.10

Walker was presented with a *'beautiful silver cup'* which had been engraved by the donors – Mr Stuart Doyle of the vessel *Miramar II* and Commodore of the Rose Bay branch of the Royal Motor Yacht Club, Mr Williams of the vessel *Brough Belle*, Mr Christmas and members of their families.



The cheery party onboard *Lolita*. From left to right, Mrs A D Walker, Mrs E Rowell, Mrs D Baden-Powell, Mr E M Rowell, Mrs A D Walker Jr., Master Alan Rowell, and Mr A D Walker Jr. This would be the last gathering of the Walker's aboard their motor cruiser, *Lolita*.<sup>48</sup>

At some point in time, Walker sold *Lolita*. It is unknown why he sold her, or why he stepped down as Commodore. There is no mention in the media of his acquisition of another vessel or of any continued direct involvement with motor cruising.

Perhaps he was aware of the implications of the looming conflicts in Europe and rising anxieties over Japanese intentions in Asia and the Pacific, or perhaps he merely wished to retire to his pig farming property.

By March 1940, *Lolita* was in the hands of H C Small, the proprietor of Small's Chocolates. Small skippered her on the annual Easter Hawkesbury River cruise. That year, there were only sixteen *'motor cruisers'* sailing the 60 miles (96km) from Pittwater to Sackville. Six of the cruisers were from the Rose Bay branch of the RMYC. The vessels anchored at Wisemans Ferry before proceeding to Sackville for the annual speedboat and motor cruiser races with the Windsor Motor Boat Club.<sup>49</sup> The International Power Boat and Aquatic Magazine recorded the *'esteemed former Ex-Commodore'* A D Walker and his wife had forsaken their *'orchards'* to cruise the river with Harold (Percy to his friends) Christmas and party in his vessel *Toomeree*. When visiting the gathering, they were entertained by the Commodore on his vessel *Hourglass*. Walker called on his *'old sweetheart'* *Lolita*, and it was said it appeared difficult for him to tear himself away. The magazine editor said he was led to believe Mr and Mrs Small endeavoured to the best of their abilities to *'drown'* Walker's *'sorrow'* and although an offer was made by one of his former club members to *'assist the poor farmer into his dinghy'*, the offer was refused.<sup>50</sup>

The Walkers again hosted the Club's annual prize presentation in June 1940 at their Mosman home.<sup>51</sup> The President announced that he was pleased the club had done its share towards the Lord Mayor's Fund by handing over a cheque for £80. Mr Doyle moved a vote of thanks to the Walkers and hoped Mr Walker would continue in the future with the enthusiasm he had displayed in the past and assured him that he could rely on the support of the members of the RMYC.

<sup>48</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald, 27 December 1939, p.5

<sup>49</sup> The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 23 March 1940, p.16

<sup>50</sup> The International Power Boat and Aquatic Magazine, April 1940

<sup>51</sup> The International Power Boat and Aquatic Magazine, June 1940

### 3 - NAVY NEEDS SHIPS

From the moment the United Kingdom's Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain declared war on Germany, Australia was also at war. The date was 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1939.

Within days of the outbreak of war in Europe, the Australian Government committed to construct vessels for the British Admiralty. Britain was in desperate need of anti-submarine and minesweeping vessels to keep its sea channels open. Ten anti-submarine vessels were to be constructed with the first to be ready by October 1940, with all to be completed by mid 1941.<sup>52</sup>

Given, Australia was at war with Germany and with German naval activity and hostilities in the Pacific, the need for minesweepers for Australia was considered by the War Cabinet in June 1940. Such need was reinforced by the subsequent sinking of *MV Nimbin* by mines off Port Stephens in December 1940, the trawler *Millimumum* off the NSW coast in March 1941, and by the later activities of the German raiders *Orion* and *Penguin* and the captured *Storstad*. *Penguin* laid mines between Sydney and Newcastle, off the Victorian coast and off Adelaide in October and November 1941. Two ships were subsequently lost off Victoria at Wilsons Promontory and Cape Otway, with another off Sydney and a further ship off Adelaide.

By September 1940,<sup>53</sup> the possibility of Japanese intervention was also being factored into the need for Australian anti-submarine and mine-sweeping tasks. By that time, thirty-one naval vessels were under construction – seven for Australia, 20 for the British Admiralty and another four for Indian requirements. In addition, twenty-seven vessels from the Australian merchant fleet had been requisitioned. Further additional Australian requirements demanded the construction of another seventeen vessels with another eight to be requisitioned from the merchant fleet. It was put to the War Cabinet that if Japanese intervention did not eventuate, the requisitioned vessels could be released. As a result, it was accepted that forty-eight new vessels were to be constructed in Australian shipyards by the end of 1941, which would entail the '*fullest use of all Australian ship-building resources*'.

By January 1941, with the growing threat of mines around the Australian coast, the War Cabinet directed the requisition of a further nine coastal vessels for minesweeping.

In early 1941, Prime Minister Menzies travelled to Britain. On 10 March while in Britain, he delivered a statement to the British War Cabinet in which he listed the strength of the Royal Australian Navy – two heavy cruisers, four light cruisers, two armed merchant cruisers, five destroyers, five sloops, one fast auxiliary minesweeper, nineteen minesweepers, seven anti-submarine vessels, one depot ship, three boom defence vessels, five patrol and examination vessels and one fleet oiler.<sup>54</sup> That was it – there was nothing more! And the five destroyers were nearly 25 years old, from World War I.

At the time, the European war was demanding more from Australia, whilst to the north, there were menacing signs of war closer to home. Japan had invaded China in 1937 and was continuing its pursuit of victory. In 1940, the United States ended its commercial treaty with Japan, imposed sanctions and stopped exporting scrap iron, aviation fuel, machine tools and war materials. In late 1940 Japan signed a Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy placing them firmly with the enemy on the side of Hitler and Mussolini - against Britain and Australia. The month after Menzies' statement, Japan entered into a neutrality agreement with Russia.

By early January 1941, consideration was being given to the procurement of vessels for anti-submarine patrol work at each of the main Australian ports.<sup>55</sup> The Australian Commonwealth Naval Board (**ACNB**

<sup>52</sup> NAA: A5954, 514/1: Construction in Australia of Patrol Vessels., p.166

<sup>53</sup> NAA: A5954, 514/1: Construction in Australia of Patrol Vessels., p.118, 120

<sup>54</sup> Grose, P., *A Very Rude Awakening*, p.18. (Source not cited)

<sup>55</sup> NAA: MP1049/5, 2026/2/384: Asdic for motor boats for inner anti-submarine patrol

or **Naval Board**) issued instructions on 28 February that ‘*Motor Boat patrols*’ were to be established, and that boats were to be selected locally for the service. The main considerations for the selection included; seaworthiness, minimum speeds, suitability for fitting machine guns and depth charges, superstructures for freedom from damage, twin screws and diesel engines.<sup>56</sup>

Twenty-four boats in total were required for all ports. Five were suggested for Sydney with two to be equipped with anti-submarine equipment. A schedule identified thirty eight Sydney based vessels for possible consideration. Of those, *Miramar*, *Winbah*, *Seamist*, *Toomeree*, *Leilani*, *Lolita* and *Penelope* had earlier been identified for transfer to the United Kingdom Admiralty for rescue work in the English Channel. They were never transferred. By April, the Naval Board had issued instructions for vessels to be “*selected*” and reports to be provided. By the end of May 1941, initial selections for requisition included *Miramar*, *Silver Cloud*, *Seamist*, *Leilani* and *Steady Hour*.

Consideration was also being given to the installation of ASDIC<sup>57</sup> equipment in the soon to be requisitioned vessels. The Secretary of the Navy directed personnel to; ‘*Endeavour ascertain by how much ASDIC dome reduced speed of 50 foot 14 knot motor boat. How long after placing order could delivery of motor boat sets be expected*’. A further direction was issued to consult the Admiralty regarding the ‘*comparatively light construction*’ of the boats. The Admiralty confirmed speed would be marginally reduced and units could be supplied.

By May 1941,<sup>58</sup> the demand for additional naval shipping was becoming acute. Australia was short of dual minesweeping and anti-submarine vessels. India had asked for six additional minesweepers and identified a potential need for another six. In addition, Australia had a desperate need for a fleet of new Corvettes for ocean escort work for ‘*Australian trade protection*’.

At its 15 May 1941 meeting, the War Cabinet granted approval for advanced planning in preparation of a ‘*Far Eastern War*’ and for the ‘*taking up of vessels for special Naval purposes*’.<sup>59</sup>

By the following War Cabinet meeting, just two weeks later on 30 May 1941,<sup>60</sup> the situation presented to the members was dire:

*Even allowing for the greater efficiency and better performance of our new constructed Australian Minesweeping Vessels (AMS), it will be realised that the present planned programme falls far short of what was previously considered necessary to give security in circumstances in which the strategic position would obviously have been more favourable than can now be visualised.*

The shipbuilding and requisition program did not include any allowance for casualties which could occur owing to losses from enemy action, minesweeping, collision or ordinary marine risk.

In July 1941, Japan placed 120,000 troops in Thailand and northern Indo-China – on the doorstep to Malaya and Singapore. The signs of a Pacific war were loud and clear and Australia needed ships.

\* \* \*

By August 1941, the Navy Office had issued directions to requisition *Lolita*. *Lolita* was ‘*taken over*’ by the Navy on 26 September 1941.<sup>61</sup> The owner H C Small, had completed a brief questionnaire to assist

<sup>56</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/5464: *Yarroma* – Purchaser Std Vacuum Oil Co. Despite the requirement, *Esmeralda* and *Toomeree* would be the only vessels of the Hollywood Fleet with diesel engines. The remainder were powered by petrol engines.

<sup>57</sup> ASDIC, known to Americans as Sonar, consists of an underwater transmitter and a receiver mounted under the ship. A signal is transmitted through the water. When it hits a submarine, it is reflected back to the station. The operator of the station determines the bearing and distance to the submarine.

<sup>58</sup> NAA: A5954, 514/1: Construction in Australia of Patrol Vessels., p.93, 94

<sup>59</sup> NAA: A5954, 735/2: Summaries of Decisions of the War Cabinet 1941., p.60

<sup>60</sup> NAA: A5954, 514/1: Construction in Australia of Patrol Vessels., p 85

<sup>61</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400: *Lolita* – Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45., p.69

the process. He appears to have been a willing seller, but he wanted fair payment. He confirmed to the Navy he had purchased *Lolita* on 2 January 1940. Just the week before, *Lolita* participated in the 1939 Annual Pittwater Regatta with the Walkers and guests. Small said he paid £3,200 ‘cash’<sup>62</sup> and had subsequently spent a further £150 on maintenance works. Incorrectly, he recorded 1937 as the year she was built - an error that has persisted in subsequent records.<sup>63</sup>

The following month, with *Lolita* in the hands of the Navy, she was back at the W L Holmes’ shipyard for naval refit work.<sup>64</sup> All external glass except the windscreen was removed and the openings boarded up. She was painted from bow to stern in navy grey and fitted with .303 Vickers machine guns on the fore and aft decks. She was also fitted at the stern with two depth charge racks<sup>65</sup> to hold a total of four depth charges.

*Lolita* was surveyed whilst afloat at Garden Island and on the Stannard’s slipway. The comprehensive Lloyd’s Register of Shipping survey report of November 1941,<sup>66</sup> valued the vessel at £3,000, described the vessel in detail, and listed repairs that had already been completed by the Navy, with the cost of those repairs to be arranged ‘by mutual agreement between the Owner and the Department of the Navy’.

That month, Australia’s light cruiser, HMAS *Sydney* was sunk by the German merchant raider, HSK *Kormoran* off the Western Australian coast. The loss was profound and brought the war into home waters. Three days later on 22 November 1941, *Lolita* was formally commissioned into the Royal Australian Navy as His Majesty’s Australian Ship (HMAS), HMAS *Lolita* under the command of Commissioned Warrant Officer Herbert S Anderson RANR(S).<sup>67</sup> She was designated as a ‘Channel Patrol Boat’ (CPB) with the responsibility to patrol the shipping channels into and out of harbours.

Within two weeks, on 7 December, Pearl Harbor was attacked. The United States declared war on Japan and formally entered the wider world conflicts which it had tried to avoid. On 15 December, the commander of naval operations for Sydney Harbour, Commodore Muirhead-Gould<sup>68</sup> requested approval for the installation of a radio telephone set aboard HMAS *Lolita*.<sup>69</sup>

From December 1941 onwards, negotiations continued with Small over the purchase price for the *Lolita*. At the end of January 1942, the Department of the Navy was proposing a price ‘not exceeding £2,500’ noting that a 10% depreciation would give a sum of £2,200 but in view of the independent valuation of £3,000 by the survey, £2,500 was recommended – despite Small valuing the vessel at £3,350.<sup>70</sup>

Towards the end of March, the Naval Board directed negotiations be undertaken with Small. The negotiations were fruitful with Small amending his valuation to £3,000, which he was prepared to accept

<sup>62</sup> See Appendix A - Comparative Purchasing Value.

<sup>63</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400: *Lolita* - Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45., p.70

<sup>64</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400: *Lolita* - Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45., p.68

<sup>65</sup> Some authors have said that depth charge ‘throwers’ were installed. There is no evidence to support this and in any event, the light timber construction of the vessel (and other vessels of the Hollywood Fleet) would not provide sufficient structural support for the explosive operation of such devices.

<sup>66</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400: *Lolita* - Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45, p.52. See Appendix H – Survey Report of *Lolita*.

<sup>67</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400: *Lolita* - Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45, p.50. Throughout Anderson’s command of HMAS *Lolita*, he was referred to as holding the rank of Warrant Officer. The matter of his rank was clarified by the Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal in its Decision of 17 April 2013 (see Chapter – Anderson’s Appeal) where it was confirmed that on 1 September 1944, he held the rank of Commissioned Warrant Officer from the date of his enlistment being 15 September 1941.

<sup>68</sup> Muirhead-Gould was appointed Commodore-in-Charge, Sydney on 3 February 1940. On 20 March 1942, he was appointed to the acting rank of Rear-Admiral and as Flag Officer-in-Charge, Sydney. He was an officer of the Royal Navy on loan to the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board. His appointment was terminated on 21 September 1944 and he reverted to the Royal Navy the following day.

<sup>69</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400: *Lolita* - Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45, p.48

<sup>70</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400: *Lolita* - Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45, p.42, 43

in £10 Bonds. The Department's negotiator, a Mr Tennant of the Contract Board, concluded that as that sum was in excess of the £2,500, the negotiations were 'fruitless' and the only recourse was for an 'Impressment Order' to be issued. He recommended appropriate action should be taken by the 'Navy Authorities'.



HMAS Lolita.<sup>71</sup>

Small stood his ground, and on 4 May 1942, he wrote to Muirhead-Gould. Small rejected the offer of £2,500 as he considered it 'most unreasonable' and again confirmed he had purchased *Lolita* from Walker in January 1940 for '£3,200 cash'. He understood the original cost of the vessel to Walker was £3,800, and with a depreciation of £600 for the twenty months under his ownership, Small claimed his £3,350 was the reasonable value. Small also re-confirmed this value included £150 for work he had completed on the vessel, and confirmed he had installed 34 new batteries and had stripped and varnished her.

Small considered the difference between the Department's offer of £2,500 and his value was 'too great'. In addition, Small confirmed that prior to handing the vessel over to the Navy, he had received a valuation from a 'Certified Marine Surveyor' of £3,400. Small set out his position:

*Therefore, in view of the good reports received from your Department and the perfect condition of the Lolita it is unreasonable to expect me to accept £2,500. I have already loaned the Commonwealth Government £4,000, £1,000 of which is free of interest and have made sacrifices in other directions to assist the War Effort. I am prepared in the case of the Lolita to accept £3,000 to be paid in Commonwealth War Bonds and submit this proposal for your consideration.*

Ten months after *Lolita* had been taken by the Navy, and ten days after the Battle of the Coral Sea, a note dated 18 May 1942, confirmed the purchase negotiations had been completed for the accepted sum of £3,000.<sup>72</sup>

Following her requisition and commissioning, HMAS *Lolita*, with her commander Herbert Anderson and crew, carried out patrol duties at Port Kembla, Newcastle, Broken Bay and Sydney.

\* \* \*

By early 1942, the Navy had gathered, a flotilla of Channel Patrol Boats - thirteen of Sydney's finest high class pleasure cruisers, including *Lolita*.

<sup>71</sup> AWM Photograph 301905

<sup>72</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400: *Lolita* - Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45, p.35

Some owners willingly 'sold' their vessels, while the Navy was forced to compulsorily acquire others – seize them and 'sort-out' the value and payment later – just as the Navy had done with *Lolita*. They were all commissioned into the Navy as His Majesty's Australian Ships and were commanded by Navy officers and crewed by RAN sailors.

Vessels that had joined *Lolita* in earlier Pittwater Regattas, including *Miramar II*, *Sea Mist*,<sup>73</sup> *Esmeralda* and *Leilani* were acquired. Others included the Halvorsen designed and built, express cruiser *Penelope*, commissioned as HMAS *Kiara*. Other Halvorsen's luxury cruisers to be commissioned included *Nereus*, *Silver Cloud*, *Steady Hour*, *Toomeree* and *Winbah*. *Marlean* from the Williams yard at Bayview and *Yarroma* from W L Holmes were also taken.

As former palatial luxury motor cruisers, often moored on 'display' in Farm Cove, adjacent to today's Opera House, they became known to Sydneysiders as the 'Hollywood Fleet'.<sup>74</sup>

\* \* \*

As the Hollywood Fleet was being gathered, directions from the Naval Board in November 1941 confirmed *Lolita* along with *Esmeralda* were to be retained at Sydney, while others in the small fleet had been directed for service in other ports. *Nereus*, *Winbah* and *Marlene* had been recommended and approved for service at Darwin, with *Seamist* and *Silver Cloud* to be allocated to Port Moresby if required.<sup>75</sup>

Along with the installation of 'towing arrangements' for those vessels being proposed for use in Port Moresby and Darwin, approval had been requested for the installation of the new ASDIC equipment, if trials on *Miramar* were successful.<sup>76</sup> However, within a few days, the Naval Board directed ASDIC would not be fitted to *Nereus*, *Winbah*, *Marlean*, *Seamist* or *Silver Cloud*.<sup>77</sup> No record has been found regarding ASDIC for the remaining vessels other than *Miramar* and *Yarroma*, and it appears ASDIC was fitted to *Winbah*, despite the earlier direction from the Naval Board

As with *Lolita*, in December 1941, finance approval was requested to install radio telephone sets in *Miramar*, *Yarroma*, *Steady Hour*, *Leilani*, *Winbah*, *Nerus* and *Esmeralda*.<sup>78</sup> For whatever reason, the sets were not installed on *Lolita* and many of the other patrol vessels. This failure was to become a serious impediment to the proper functioning of the Hollywood Fleet.

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<sup>73</sup> There is significant confusion regarding the names of both vessels. Svensen in *The Halvorsen Story*, uses both names – *Seamist* and *Sea Mist* in the body of his book, however, in his schedule of the Halvorsen vessels, he uses *Seamist* and *Seamist II*. In a range of advertisements promoting their business, Halvorsen refer to the Gale's earlier 45ft cruiser as *Seamist* and to *Seamist II* for the later 60ft cruiser. The Australian National Maritime Museum refers to both vessels as *Seamist* and *Seamist II*. The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly magazine uses *Seamist* for the first vessel (November 1937). The Navy's Contract Demand for the second vessel is for the purchase of *Seamist* (NAA MP138/1, 603/246/4966) yet the Purchase Agreement is for *Sea Mist*. Naval correspondence, directions and orders refer to the second *Seamist* as both *Seamist* and *Sea Mist*. The two Reports of Proceedings held by the AWM (AWM 78/309/1) contain both forms. The commendation from the Naval Board in October 1942 refers to *Seamist*. The Sydney Log (AWM 78/418/1) records *Seamist* being commissioned on 21 July 1941. I have therefore, adopted that form for this historical record. However, it should be noted that for Jack Davey, a later owner of *the second vessel*, she was named *Sea Mist*, (See The Australian Women's Weekly, 8 November 1972) which has continued to be her name. I have therefore referred to her as *Sea Mist* from that time onwards. As for the first *Seamist*, constructed for R A Gale, she was always named *Sea Mist* in associated naval documents (NAA MP139/1, 603/246/2350).

<sup>74</sup> The Sun (Sydney), 9 June 1946, p.5, 15 June 1946, p.4

<sup>75</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400: *Lolita* - Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45, p.66

<sup>76</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400: *Lolita* - Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45, p.66

<sup>77</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400: *Lolita* - Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45, p.65

<sup>78</sup> NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400: *Lolita* - Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45, p.48

Notwithstanding earlier directions for some of the vessels to be assigned to other ports, on Sunday night, 31 May 1942, all vessels of the Hollywood Fleet were assembled in Sydney Harbour – all except HMAS *Kiara* which had earlier arrived for service at Darwin.

*Lolita* and *Yarroma* were patrolling the boom net at the entrance to the harbour. *Steady Hour*, *Seamist*, *Toomeree*, *Marlean*, *Esmeralda* and *Leilani* were at their designated anchorage in Farm Cove. *Silver Cloud* was moored in Rushcutters Bay, and *Miramar* was moored at Garden Island – not far from HMAS *Kuttabul*. The locations of *Winbah* and *Nereus* are unknown, but according to one report, both vessels were unmanned,<sup>79</sup> whilst another report identifies *Winbah* may have been the vessel used by Rear Admiral Muirhead-Gould, and may therefore have been moored to the wharf at the bottom of the steps leading from his residence, Tresco at Elizabeth Bay.<sup>80</sup>

All were armed with at least one .303 Vickers machine gun and all carried 2, 4 or 6 depth charges in racks at the stern. The night was dark and overcast. Outside the harbour, the seas were rough with a moderate swell. Winds were from the south-west at force 4, and it was winter.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> NAA: SP338/1, 201/37 – (Japanese) Midget Submarine Attack on Sydney Harbour, May 31<sup>st</sup> June 1<sup>st</sup> 1942, p.44

<sup>80</sup> NAA: SP338/1, 201/37 – (Japanese) Midget Submarine Attack on Sydney Harbour, May 31<sup>st</sup> June 1<sup>st</sup> 1942, p.216. See also Grose, P., *A Very Rude Awakening*, p.242. See AWM78, 418/1 – Sydney Log, p.172. This document is the Sydney Log which shows *Nereus* arrived from Broken Bay with *Steady Hour* on 4 May 1942. The Log also shows *Winbah* departing on 11 July for Broken Bay confirming she was also in Sydney harbour on 31 May 1942.

<sup>81</sup> NAA: MP1049/5, 2026/21/79 – Midget Submarine Attack on Sydney Harbour, p.24