

**The Creswell Oration**  
**Commodore Timothy Brown RAN**  
**Director General Submarines**

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**Salutations**

**Introduction**

*The Constitution of Australia Act* received Royal Assent on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1900 and came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1901. At this moment the separate colonies became states of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Thirteen years later, our Nation was at war.

On the 4th August 1914, Great Britain declared war on Germany.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> August 1914, the German Steamer SS *Pfalz* tried to leave Port Melbourne.

She was fired on by Fort Nepean, just south of Melbourne. These shots, incidentally, were the first fired in the war.

The *Pfalz* was requisitioned by the Royal Australian Navy, and refitted as a troopship -- HMT Boorara. She carried Australian soldiers to the Mediterranean, and Turkish prisoners from the Dardanelles campaign. In 1919, she brought Australian soldiers home.

In thirteen years we had come together as a Nation and the Royal Australian Navy was at sea in defence of the Empire.

But we tend not to hear too much about the Navy.

Tradition holds Navy as the “silent service”.

So we tend to overlook the Navy. And we subsequently tend to misunderstand naval power.

Very few people grasp the way naval planning is enmeshed with politics at the level of grand strategy.

Let me fill out those remarks.

In thirteen years, the Royal Australian Navy grew from the mish-mash of colonial navies transferred to Commonwealth control on Federation.

These -- and I will say so-called -- navies were token forces confined to harbour protection.

The significance of that remark is in the confinement of the colonial navies to harbour defence. People did not look beyond the beach to the ocean. The sense was not that we were a maritime nation, dependent upon the sea. Look at the early Australian impressionist painters and you will see the Australian self-concept in the bush.

But when the Australian Fleet steamed into Sydney in 1913, it was a Fleet suited to very much more than harbour defence.

What happened?

How did a nation that was young, and very far from populous, and very far from economically rich manage to acquire such a fleet in such a short time?

We know that officially, the Royal Australian Navy was constituted on 10 July 1911 when King George V granted the Commonwealth Naval Forces the designation "Royal Australian Navy."

Thus, Commonwealth Naval Order number 77 of October 5<sup>th</sup> 1911 reads:

His Majesty, the King, has been graciously pleased to approve of the Permanent Naval Force of the Commonwealth being designated the Royal Australian Navy, and of the ships of that Navy being designated as His Majesty's Australian Ships.

But this is surface gloss.

The provenance of the Navy reflects a farsighted strategic vision: Creswell's vision.

The *Commonwealth Defence Act* (1904) enabled the appointment by Prime Minister Reid of Captain W. R. Creswell as Commonwealth Director of Naval Forces.

It was as Director of Naval Forces that Creswell came to sit on the Board of Naval Administration.

From this position Creswell dragged the Colonial navies together into a single institution with a centralised administration.

This institution -- called the Commonwealth Naval Forces -- was organised in 1907, a mere seven years before the Great War.

But though the institution was drawn together, the ships were weak and the naval defence of Australia continued to be reliant on the Royal Navy.

And the Royal Navy ships were not much to write home about.

In 1908 when the Great White Fleet visited Australia; an officer in the US Flagship, *Connecticut*, noted that with the exception of HMS *Powerful*, the Australian station looked like an unimportant society posting, suited to cocktails, but nothing serious.

Creswell was a realist and a visionary. In September 1905 he said: the Naval Service is practically on the verge of collapse appearing to represent to the public a defence which could not be rendered if called upon.

Rather than complacency, Creswell urged action.

Very far from content with the status quo, Creswell saw the need for a great leap forward; he grasped the truth that peace is assured only by military strength.

Creswell looked ahead.

Similarly, we must now also, look ahead. We must not be content with the status quo. We must not deceive ourselves that ships, which are new now, will be the solution to our needs for ever.

### **Creswell's Strategic View**

Australia is blessed by her strategic geography, but there has never been a time when we might have claimed to be unassailable.

Creswell looked from our shores to a world defined -- as the world continues to be defined by Thucydides: The strong will do what they can, and the weak will bear what they must.

Creswell died at the age of 80, on April 20, 1933.

In the intervening eight decades, politics has not changed.

Politics continues to be Clausewitzian, all about power and dominated by war's spectre.

I reference the British diplomat Sir Ernest Satow.

Satow claims international politics depends upon "intelligence and tact."

But in fact, that is a superficial reading of the way things are.

Recall the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes who said: "Covenants without Swords are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all."

Politics is dominated by power, by the threat of war, and the need to avert war or to win it.

Thodore Roosevelt put this memorably: “speak softly and carry a big stick.”

The Latin is well known: *si vis pacem, para bellum*. If you want peace, prepare for war.

### **Whosoever Commands the Sea**

It was Sir Walter Raleigh who said:

Whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself.

Recalling Raleigh, my point concerns the imperative of sea control.

We must maintain the security and good order at sea.

We must make incursion perilous for our adversaries.

The sense that an incursion must be perilous for our adversary gestures to Mahan who said famously:

It is the possession of overbearing power on the sea which drives the enemy’s flag from it, or allows it to appear only as a fugitive; and which, by controlling the great common [being the ocean], closes the highways by which commerce moves to and from the enemy’s shores.

In the modern era, how do we do this?

In the modern era, sea control in the sense that this phrase might once have been used is not feasible for any one Nation.

Strategy, as Admiral Stansfield Turner observed, must be paid for, and the costs of overbearing, dominating power at sea are beyond the reasonable scope of any one Nation. Second, the sorts of ships which might exercise this sort of sea power are exposed to the menace of the submarine.

So, my answer is in two parts.

First, in the modern era we project power at sea in alliances.

Second, we grasp and we exploit the ominous potentiality of the submarine.

I now speak to these two points.

## **Power in the Alliance**

When Creswell conceived of the Royal Australian Navy, the fleet he envisaged was in fact a very powerful unit, designed to operate in concert with the Royal Navy.

His ideas continue to be relevant.

Today, the Royal Australian Navy is a warfighting system in its own right, but it also takes station as the constituent part of alliance and coalition structures, which aim to serve the cause of justice and good order at sea.

We are not a subsidiary power. We are a power in our own right. But we do not fight alone. We contribute to the distributed lethality of coalitions.

## **Submarines**

I return now to the submarine: the most daunting and perhaps the most misunderstood part of the equation.

Submarines change the strategic calculus in formidable and far-reaching ways.

In the maritime environment, the presence -- the POSSIBLE presence -- of submarines changes the way a surface fleet operates.

An example is from the Falklands War.

In his essay, *The Navy and the Nation*, Vice Admiral Barrett referenced Admiral Sandy Woodward.

Admiral Woodward argued, surprisingly, that Royal Navy submarines did NOT deter the Argentinian invasion. Rather, the submarine menace drove the Argentinian commanders to precipitate action.

This was because -- for political reasons -- the Argentinians had committed to the invasion around the September of 1982. They had calculated that the British had neither the force, nor the will, to prevent an invasion, nor to fight and to eject an invading force.

But; when the Argentinians noticed a Royal Navy submarine load torpedoes and leave Gibraltar in the March, they worried that their plans had been tumbled.

And they knew that the Royal Navy could sustain an SSN in the South Atlantic, and that such an SSN would make an invasion of the Falklands unworkable.

As a consequence, the Argentinians invaded within days.

Deterrence failed. The British could not deter -- they DID NOT deter -- the Argentinians.

But the strategic influence of the submarine is established.

Leaving Gibraltar, the mere possibility that a submarine might be on station upset the strategic calculus in dramatic fashion. The Argentinian command decided that the only chance of success was to launch operations BEFORE the submarine could play a part.

And of course, the strategic influence of the submarine is demonstrated in the sinking of *Belgrano*. By this action, Royal Navy submarines DID deter Argentine surface actions. In consequence, the Argentinians relied on a failed strategy of passive defence of the islands, and projection of air power into a contested maritime domain, against a powerful and resolute British task force.

### **Australian Submarines**

In the Australian context, since we do not possess nuclear weapons, we rely upon our alliance with the United States. It is this alliance which puts the ultimate damper on incursion by any great power adversary.

In our own right, Australian deterrence obtains from the submarine: which -- by conventional means -- imposes unacceptable risk on incursion.

Our submarines are very powerful.

If any aggressor were to attempt to cross the sea to so as to do harm to our Nation, rest assured that aggressor should expect to fail. Our submarines are suited to the archipelagic Indo-Pacific region, and prepared to sink ships and submarines.

We do not keep our submarines tied up alongside. We keep our submarines at sea. Ready. There are four boats at sea now. They represent a threat to any adversary, and thus they offer to Australian diplomacy real-world power which is cardinal to real world influence.

This is the deterrence concept which was detailed in the 2016 *Defence White Paper*, where Government specified Australia's submarine capability as the Nation's big stick.

Each Collins submarine carries a large number of the Joint US/AUST Mk46 Mod 7 CBASS torpedoes. We can carry around about twenty weapons. Perhaps it doesn't sound like many: however, these sophisticated weapons are highly reliable...highly accurate...and highly effective.

In all realities, if fired, you can expect that that one weapon will find its target, and it will sink it—even the most capable of capital ships.

Since our submarines are stealthy, and since they operate over significant ranges and endure on station for considerable periods of time; we might reasonably say Australian submarines offer substantial menace and significant deterrent to any adversary.

Australia must have submarines.

Justice, the rule of law and good order at sea depend upon submarines. But they are often misunderstood and underestimated.

The same was true in Creswell's time.

Creswell was a modernist. He was ahead of his time in warning of the maritime threat to the Australian economy, and ahead of his time in urging a sea-blind Nation to build a navy.

But Creswell was focused on surface forces.

Probably he was right.

Submarines -- properly called submersibles -- were largely experimental: they were weak in stability, seakeeping, range, and capability.

With a range of only 3000 nautical miles the first Australian submarines, AE1 and AE2, had done nothing to alter preconceptions. Acquired with the Fleet Unit as assets suitable for local defence, the submarines had been alternately towed by a surface warship for much of the 12,000 nm delivery voyage to Australia. After their arrival in May 1914 both submarines had gone straight into refit. Repairs and maintenance were not completed until after the outbreak of war, and by April 1915 both had been lost, the first to accident and the second to enemy action.

Consequently, in 1915 the wider RAN understood neither the rapid advances made in submarine tactics and technology, nor the difficulties involved in dealing with submarines.

But after the War, things were different.

In fact, after the War, in a newspaper clipping held by the Sea Power Centre, Creswell says:

I do not suppose there lives any human being who could doubt the power and influence of a submarine, seeing how very nearly it decided the war against us....

It is true to say that our style is cramped, absolutely by the financial position. But at least some expenditure, even out of proportion to our means, should go toward placing us in a position to have effective submarine defence.

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Though it is a great challenge, our Nation must build submarines.

### **Conclusion**

Our leadership in science and industry, our hopes for peace, for security, for justice, for human rights, for good order and the rule of law, our obligation to ourselves and to others require that make this effort, that we build ships and submarines, that we take chances and that we triumph over the adversity we will inevitably face.

To take risks, to serve justice: such an endeavour is in the finest traditions of the Royal Australian Navy.

(and by the way, that British submarine that loaded weapons in Gibraltar; it sailed and turned north.....)