

**Australian Navy Foundation Day Organising Committee  
CRESWELL ORATION 2014**

**Presented by**

**RADM Tim Barrett AM CSC RAN, Australian Fleet Commander  
at the William Angliss TAFE Restaurant 550 Little Lonsdale St.,  
Melbourne.**

Over 90 people attended including 20 HMAS *Yarra* crew members invited from HMAS *Yarra II* which was in Melbourne prior to receiving on Tuesday 4 March at Melbourne's Docklands, the Navy's first Group Citation for Bravery for actions in February and March 1942. This was presented by HE the Governor General The Hon Quentin Bryce AC.

**CRESWELL ORATION 2014**

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen, I am honoured to be able to present the Creswell Oration 2014 to you today.



i have been asked to talk to you about a century of Naval service, neatly bracketed by the arrival of the first Australian Fleet in 1913 and the recent commemoration of this event with the International Fleet Review held in Sydney in October last year.

It's highly relevant that this topic form the basis of the Creswell Oration this year given the fundamental involvement of the then

Captain Creswell in the formation of the first Australian Fleet at the start of the last century.

I will not presume to lecture this audience on the life of Vice Admiral Sir William Creswell's long service to this nation and its navy. He remains the longest serving professional head of our Navy - a record I suspect that will never be eclipsed - and along with his engineering counterpart, Vice Admiral Sir William Clarkson, achieved a great deal of success for Australia and her Navy against great adversity.

As an aside, this year we have instituted a Clarkson Division at HMAS Creswell, a synchronicity which would I hope please both individuals.

I am, however, the right person to talk to you about the commemoration of the arrival of the Royal Australian Navy's First Fleet. You have heard that I am the Fleet Commander with responsibilities to manage the current Fleet, its

ships, submarines and aircraft. That said, for the past 12 months you may have confused my role with that of an event planner. The International Fleet Review was an enormous event for Navy and required a great deal of detailed planning. But dare I say it was executed without fault and we achieved all we set out to achieve.

Let me say up front this was neither a party nor a fireworks spectacular. The fundamental reason for making such effort to commemorate the event was to educate government, our regional neighbours and even our navy on the importance of the sea and our place on it. Perhaps more than anything else, we sought to remind the Australian population that Australia is an island continent (girt by sea) which depends on maritime trade for a vast majority of its needs.

It was also to remind people of the utility of naval forces in defending these maritime trade routes and promoting our own defence. Also, it was to demonstrate the capability of Australia's Navy - all the same reasons that then Captain Creswell argued, 100 years previously.

So today I am going to compare and contrast the two Fleet entries of 1913 and 2013 and make a few observations about their significance. I would like to explore what I regard as the enduring strategic themes which link us with our past and will no doubt guide our future.

To do this I will start by putting some historical context around the creation of the first Royal Australian Navy fleet - the political and strategic circumstances that existed at the time and the significance of this to the nation. Here we will see Creswell's intimate involvement.

Australia's post-Federation navy first formed as the Commonwealth Naval Forces on 01 March 1901. It was a small coastal defence force, comprising an underpowered collection of aging vessels formerly owned by the colonial governments of Australia and designed primarily for coastal defence and naval training. It was not a unitary fleet and had never been designed to be one.

Captain Creswell was appointed to be the Commandant of this small force in 1904 and he argued from the outset that the naval defence of Australia should become a national responsibility and a Federal government priority. He envisioned a modern Australian fleet replacing the Royal Navy's Australasian squadron based in Sydney which, after Federation, remained under Admiralty control and therefore answerable to the Imperial Government. His argument was based on some of the fundamental principles of sea power: the projection of force to secure maritime trade so vital for an island nation.

Prime Minister Alfred Deakin supported Creswell and shared his vision, but they both encountered significant opposition from their Lordships at the Admiralty, who were pleased to provide RN cruisers in exchange for significant annual payments by the Australian government. Not surprisingly, this contribution was electorally unpopular among Australian taxpayers, who did not see it as value for money. Neither was this arrangement a copper-bottomed guarantee that Australia could rely on Britain for naval defence in the event of a global war being conducted in the Pacific.

One might argue that in his 1897 poem *Recessional*, Rudyard Kipling wrote prophetically, “Far called our armies melt away.” And in 1907 Australians were concerned that it would be the Royal Navy which would be “far called” by the Admiralty and melt away to Europe, just when it was needed in our waters defending our sea lanes and cities.

In 1908, with this concern in mind, Prime Minister Deakin welcomed President Teddy Roosevelt’s Great White Fleet of USN battleships. He had invited them to Australia, without consulting, and against the wishes of the Admiralty. Deakin aimed his words of greeting at their Lordships in London as much as at his fellow Australians when he said: ‘But for the British Navy there would be no Australia. That does not mean that Australia should sit still under the shelter of the British Navy – those who say we should are not worthy of the name of Briton. We can add to the squadron in these seas from our own blood and intelligence something that will launch us on the beginning of a naval career, and may create a force which shall rank among the defences of the Empire.’

Coincidentally this view aligned with the vision of Admiral Sir John Fisher, the Royal Navy’s innovative First Sea Lord. It was Jacky Fisher’s energy and the rise of the German naval threat in the North Sea that galvanized the Admiralty into new thinking. With Britain engaged in the Dreadnought building race with the German Kaiser, and with the British public demanding ever greater naval expenditure to protect the United Kingdom, it became obvious that the Royal Navy’s capital ships and its manpower were urgently needed in home waters.

Local defence of the Dominions and the Imperial sea lanes should be given to what Fisher called his ‘Dominion Fleet Units’. These were each to be comprised of a fast, heavily armed, battle cruiser, light cruisers, destroyers and submarines. These were designed to be capable of defeating any naval power in the region.

In Australia’s case this meant the German fleet of armoured and light cruisers based in China and capable of action in the South Pacific. Fisher’s Dominion Fleet Unit concept was very much what Creswell and Deakin had been advocating for Australia. Now they were pushing at an open door.

In 1909, in response to increasing European tensions, the Australian government placed orders with UK shipyards. The First Fleet Unit began to be riveted into the Australian national consciousness and the news of its progress and launching was followed with great enthusiasm from afar. To reflect this new responsibility and naval maturity, on 10 July 1911, King George V approved Australia’s request to have the ‘Royal’ prefix and thus the Commonwealth Naval Forces became the Royal Australian Navy.

On 4 October 1913, the First Fleet Unit, commanded by Rear Admiral Sir George Patey, Royal Navy, flying his flag in the battle cruiser HMAS Australia, led six cruisers and destroyers into Sydney Harbour. The Fleet comprised Australia armed with eight 12 inch guns, the light cruisers: Melbourne Sydney, and Encounter; and the destroyers; Warrego, Parramatta, and Yarra.

These ships were greeted by the Governor of New South Wales and the Premier, and tens of thousands of enthusiastic, cheering citizens lining the

harbour foreshore. As the Flagship, HMAS Australia came out of the early morning mist near Sydney Heads she greeted the country whose name she carried with a deafening salute from her main armament. The long awaited Navy was here and Sydney heard its roar and it was reported at the time that all Australians felt the warmth of its protection.

October 4, 1913 was, and remains to be, a moment of great national pride and significance. The new Navy was recognized at the time as a key symbol of Australia's progress to full nationhood. A nation with its own fleet was a power in the world.

It would give Australia strategic weight; an independent, uniquely Australian voice in international affairs and the ability to act to secure or defend its own interests. Something which was of particular interest in the first decades of the 20th century as Australia struggled to influence the direction of British foreign policy particularly with respect to Japan.

In national terms, these were one of the first major acquisitions by the new Australian Commonwealth Government: a coherent acquisition, consistent with Australian aims and circumstances, consistent with the newfound national status.

Contemporaries too viewed the arrival of the warships as being nothing less than a national coming of age, completing a process which began with Cook's discovery of Australia's eastern sea board in 1770.

While the final form of the 1913 Fleet Unit was different to the specific schemes Creswell had proposed, it met most of the basic requirements for which he had advocated. The acquisition was not just a success for Creswell's persistent and politically sophisticated advocacy, it immediately made Australia a significant regional naval power. Of nations in the Indo-Pacific, only Japan had a larger fleet and it was allied with the British Empire after the 1910 Declaration of London.

On 24 May 1914, the day after Empire Day, the fleet was completed with the arrival of Australia's two 'state of the art' E class submarines AE1 and AE2. About half of the sailors embarked in the Fleet Unit were Australian born and many of the Royal Navy sailors would transfer to the RAN and settle in Australia.

As we know the nascent RAN had an immediate effect on Australia's military capability and went on to play an active part in defeating or deterring forces which threatened Australia's national maritime interests in 1914.

The battle cruiser Australia, was an effective deterrent to the German Asiatic Fleet, which chose to operate away from Australia and also from Japan. The Navy conducted some of our first major operations of the war, not only escorting and transporting the Australian Naval and Military and Expeditionary Force to Rabaul, the capital of German Guinea, but providing sailors for operations ashore.

In what I think is a poignant example of joint operations, the first personnel killed were two Able Seamen and the Army doctor who went to their aid during the advance on Bitu Paka.

Later in 1914, the Navy was a major part of the escort for the Anzac

Convoys which, once the Government could be assured of its safe passage, took the Australian Imperial Force to the European theatre.

Enroute it was HMAS Sydney which intercepted and sank the German cruiser Emden off Cocos Island. Incidentally, during the IFR the German CN and ours held a memorial service at Bradleys Head in Sydney, under the Sydney mast and commemorated the bravery of both ships companies.

Sadly, in September 1914, AE1 went missing while on patrol in the vicinity of Rabaul – the first significant unit to be lost. Exactly what went wrong remains unknown, as does the location of her wreck, but it is a reminder of the risks inherent in operating warships; something for which early submariners and aviators had a very direct and immediate appreciation.

You may be interested to know that Navy will send a ship to Rabaul in September to commemorate its loss and if conditions are favourable to conduct a search in an area that is now thought to be the likely place of rest of the vessel.

Although the focus shifted to Gallipoli and the Western Front, we should never forget and should never cease to remind people that our participation throughout the war was based on a maritime strategy, on the safe and reliable passage of our troops and supplies, not to mention our ongoing trade. It is often difficult to make this point.

By 1915, the new RAN was operating with the Royal Navy in the long blockade which sapped the strength of Germany and made the defeat of the Kaiser's army in 1918 inevitable. At war's end, no Australian city was shelled by the German Fleet; no ANZAC soldiers lost their lives to enemy action as they were convoyed to war by the Navy.

So, At its first major test, Australia had a defence strategy and a maritime strategy suited to her circumstances and she had appropriate, capable naval and military forces to execute that strategy. Of course there were many who contributed to that outcome. Amongst them, the then Rear Admiral Sir William Creswell stands tall.

Fast forward 100 years and consider the commemoration of the arrival of that first Royal Australian Navy fleet. I ask you now to think of the political and strategic circumstances that pervade Australian thinking about defence and the maritime environment.

It is easy to see that our strategically geographic circumstances and dependency on the sea remains. And we face many of the same challenges faced by Creswell to articulate the case for Australian maritime forces. But there is a difference. Creswell had to argue for the "Australian" nature of our maritime force; conversely, we now have to argue for the "maritime" nature of Australian defence needs. Both require a consistent effort to link maritime power with our national security, prosperity and way of life.

In some quarters, the contemporary inability to see this link, to understand the importance of the sea to so many aspects of our life, has been characterised by the term "sea blindness". This term was first coined, ironically, by the UK as they have struggled to articulate their need for naval forces. What do I mean by this?

Well, Modern sea transport has become so good, so reliable, so predictable and so cheap, that not only do we use sea transport more and more, but we notice it less and less. It just works and so we have come to take it for granted.

About 98% of the volume of our trade goes by sea. About 70% of all the bulk commodities we produce – iron ore, coal and wheat – are exported by sea.

We need secure and reliable access to the global maritime trading system to supply the many things we rely on every day. Think about your lounge room and try to imagine it without things which have been imported, probably in a shipping container that has come by sea.

If your lounge room is anything like mine, then the TV, the computer, possibly the seats, maybe the light fittings and the carpet have been imported – not through any wish to spurn local manufacturers, but simply by virtue of our near complete integration with global markets we have the choice of the best value products from around the world.

Although maritime trade and resources remain as fundamental to Australia today as they were in Creswell's time, there have been some significant changes in the character of our dependence. Containerised shipping really dates from the 1960s; offshore oil and gas dates from about the same time, as does the truly remarkable industrial fishing methods we see today.

More recently, we have seen the advent of alternative forms of energy generation: most spectacularly the huge arrays of wind turbines in littoral European waters.

And the growth of fish farming, particularly in Asia, means that as of 2012, we now produce a greater quantity of farmed fish worldwide than we do beef.

For Australia, our sovereign maritime zones cover around 1.5 times the area of our continental landmass; our Search and Rescue area covers around 11% of the world's surface.

Containerised shipping has enabled us to transport more goods, finished and unfinished, to and from more places. As a result, with globally distributed supply chains and manufacturing processes, more parts of our economy are more directly and immediately reliant on maritime trade than ever before.

Our dependence on the global maritime trading system means that we have a direct national interest in issues which are geographically distant from our shores: piracy off the Somali coast, terrorist attacks on shipping in the Suez Canal, actions to close or disrupt key shipping lanes or choke points. All of these actions could cause fuel prices to rise, or worse, interrupt the supply of fuel imports or equally valuable exports.

In what I think is a significant change, we now have hugely valuable permanent infrastructure situated in our maritime zones: oil and gas platforms, energy generation and fish farms; permanent fixed infrastructure, which could be targeted by state or non-state actors if they so chose.

In short, we are now more dependent on good order at sea than at any time in our history. And many of the major innovations have qualitatively

changed that dependence quite recently.

And yet, in Australia, we maintain a perversely land-centric strategic dialogue where, perhaps because of our current and historical alliances with the dominant global maritime power, we have come to take good order at sea for granted. Or maybe it is a consequence of the ANZAC legend.....

Over his tenure, Chief of Navy is promoting a strong platform for an Australian Maritime School of Strategic Thought: a means of engaging other parts of Government, the private sector and the broader Australian public on the importance of a maritime outlook for Australia. This is important in arguing the case for Navy and its structure.

This is also the context for the decision to put a major effort into marking the centenary of the arrival of the RAN's First Fleet into Sydney. The Chief of Navy authorised a series of centenary commemorative events for Sydney Harbour and the wider Sydney area between 3 and 11 October.

CN's intention was that the IFR: 'promote awareness and celebrate Navy's contribution to the nation in the past, present and future; and to promote Navy values and the ongoing good work of Navy people.'

The Review was a chance to bring an eye-catching number of warships into Sydney Harbour; to bring these grey agents of government will into the spotlight, where the people who depend on them can see them and hopefully take away some understanding of the role they play in our security, prosperity and way of life.

The Seapower Conference, which brought scholars and naval leaders to Sydney, was there to show the intellectual underpinnings of our maritime outlook.

The Pacific International Trade Show was there to show the industrial, manufacturing and technology aspects of the maritime environment.

And the Fleet Review itself had very traditional elements of pageantry: the conduct of the Review, with fireworks and so many warships and aircraft in close proximity in Sydney Harbour, was choreographed to demonstrate poise, precision and performance. The professionalism was an indication of might and power. It looked impressive and it was intended that way.

I think this education about the importance of maritime security is something which we need to continue, not just for the public, but for ourselves as well. Recent media commentary about Navy has been challenging, but our ability to manage it has been supported in no small part by the lasting image of a trusted working Navy that flowed from the public's exposure to the Navy during the IFR.

Somewhat serendipitously, the Review not only had great weather – for which I am now happy to take credit – but it also occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Federal Election. As a result, Chief of Navy and I had the new Prime Minister and Defence Minister as an engaged audience for several hours during the Review, while we went past a parade of visiting and Australian warships. This provided an excellent opportunity to educate the country's new political leadership on what Navy did - and you may be assured we did not waste the opportunity.

Importantly, just prior to the Review events in Sydney, the RAN orchestrated a significant multi-lateral exercise off Jervis Bay – called the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus Experts Working Group on Maritime Security Field Training Exercise.

This particular grouping was co-chaired by Australia and Malaysia. Inaugurated a little over two years ago, it has brought a diverse group of nations together for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief exercises.

In the complex and cautious diplomatic scene in our region, this progress amongst regional navies is remarkable. You can imagine the diplomatic benefits which accrue; the relationship and confidence which is built; and the habits of cooperation which are engendered. I will just offer one observation: this is the only exercise I have seen where the Chinese and Japanese have operated together. It is perhaps only a small step, but it is a step in the right direction.

Conducting these diplomatic engagements remains a key role of Navies and again, for our new government, it was important for them to see how well we could manage it on their behalf.

While today's Navy is not perfect by any means, we are certainly not idle and we are certainly not as was recently characterised by one commentator - the world best photogenic Navy. In fact, we are a working Navy; probably busier now than at any time in recent memory and our operational tempo is not expected to diminish.

Indeed this was not the only activity for Navy through this period. We maintained a frigate on operations in the Middle East, major and minor fleet units on border protection operations; as well as having several ships in major upgrades and maintenance, the introduction into service of two different types of helicopter (the MRH-90 in partnership with the Army, as well as the Seahawk Romeo) and the fitting out of the first of our two Canberra class amphibious ships.

The 2013 Review had one other major outcome, which I suspect will not surprise most people here. The last Fleet Review we had prior to 2013 was the Bicentennial Review in 1988, before many of our people joined or were even born! For me, last year's Review was something of a turning point for the attitudes of many, both in and out of uniform.

Many at first saw the Fleet Review as simply another task. Afterward, first-hand accounts indicated that our people were thrilled to have participated in various ways and, most surprisingly for them, to experience the enthusiasm and respect that was so willingly demonstrated by the Australian people, reacquainted with their Navy. Much as I imagine the crews of those first ships in 1913 when welcomed by the crowds.

For a Navy which has been working very hard, the 2013 Fleet Review provided a great boost to morale. For me, that was one of the best outcomes of all.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention. I hope I have been able to provide an account not only of how the Royal Australian Navy continues to actively serve her country, but also of how Navy views



Australia's enduring strategic geography and our significant need for a maritime outlook. In this, I think we can see clear similarities between the tangible impact of the 1913 arrival on Australia's national consciousness, with the tangible, practical impact we hope the 2013 Fleet Review will continue to have.

The similarity with the circumstances then Captain Creswell faced in arguing for the First RAN fleet is not lost on those of us who now seek to educate the current generations about the need for maritime forces to serve our national interest.

RADM T Barrett AM CSC RAN

RADM Barrett was presented with a framed picture of VADM Sir W.R. Creswell KCMG KBE RAN by The Naval Association of Australia Box Hill Subsection representative Ray Gill JP.

*Special gifts presented to CO LCDR Brendan O'Hara RAN and XO LCR Richard Brickacek RAN from HMAS Yarra by CMDR John M Wilkins OAM RFD\*Chairman of ANFD Creswell Oration 2014 Committee.*

