

## **CN SPEECH**

### **Australian Navy Foundation Day, Creswell Oration**

**01 Mar 2012**

Members of the Creswell family, members of the Australian Navy Foundation Day Organising Committee and of the Navy League, ladies and gentlemen. It is my pleasure to be invited to present the Creswell Oration for 2012, to commemorate Navy's 111 years service to the Australian nation. I am particularly honoured to be the first person to have the opportunity to deliver this address twice. Five years ago as the Deputy Fleet Commander, when paradoxically, I probably had more freedom in what I said than I do today - I focused heavily on the period leading up to the key decision to acquire our own fleet - I think after five years I hope I can get away with reusing some of that speech! But before I start, though, I would like to acknowledge the achievements of John Wilkins and congratulate him on the public recognition he received with the award of a Medal of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day Honours List this year. It is fitting that this recognition was for his work in the preservation of Australia's naval history - Well done John!

This time five years ago was the first real attempt to publicly acknowledge Navy's birthday; there was a quite a media blitz, CERBERUS, under the tutelage of Dave Garnock, had a huge Navy birthday BBQ and our ships were dressed for the first time to mark the occasion.

I remarked during this speech 5 years ago that I thought Navy's celebration of its birthday was here to stay. Well, so far so good! There is maybe less media fanfare today, but I think we are seeing the importance of the day being embedded in our naval calendar. Indeed tonight I will be hosting the first Navy birthday official reception in Canberra. I have discontinued the Chief of Navy's traditional Christmas reception and replaced it with tonight's event which I think is more fitting and helps re-inforce the importance of the day.

As always it is great to be here in Melbourne where so much of the story of our early Navy was played out. I don't think I need to recount the entire role of Victoria in those early years but I do think it is worthwhile to note the richness of Victoria's naval heritage from our first purpose built warship of 1855 which proudly bore this state's name. *Victoria* served in the Maori wars of 1860 and has the distinction of earning Australia's naval forces their first battle honour - New Zealand 1860-1861. Victoria was also the first colony to regulate its naval activities, and, of course, remains the 'cradle of the Navy'.

Today I would like to talk to you about the way Navy is developing as a result of the challenges of today but I will also draw on some historic parallels. The reason I chose this mix for discussion is because, like so many other speakers before me at this event, I firmly believe that Australia's naval future cannot be understood, developed or articulated in isolation from our history and foundations.

If I could turn to this day in history - it marks more than the birth of our nation's Navy (and Army - we should not forget that, either). On this day in 1901, control of the States' Defence Forces was transferred to the Commonwealth of Australia.

In 1913 on this day the first entrants of the Royal Australian Naval College commenced their training at Osborne House in Geelong. This included distinguished graduates such as a young John Collins and Harold Farncomb, both of whom served with distinction during World War II and reached flag rank and whom we honour today through the two submarines that proudly bear their names.

In the early hours of the morning on this day 70 years ago, Victorian born Captain Hector Waller led the crew of the cruiser HMAS Perth in company with USS Houston in the face of impossible odds against superior Japanese naval forces during the Battle of Sunda Strait.

357 of *Perth's* complement, including Waller, were killed in action, while those who survived suffered the privations of three years of captivity as prisoners of war. Nearly 700 US sailors died that morning, including their Captain and Medal of Honour winner, Harold Rooks. Today the concept of over a thousand people losing their lives in action over the space of a couple of hours would be very hard to comprehend.

On Tuesday, at the War Memorial in Canberra, I was privileged to meet seven of the twelve remaining PERTH I survivors from that action. Meeting our naval veterans is always an honour; as a group they were truly inspirational. Services like that on Tuesday remind all of us in this uniform of what we may be asked to do as part of a combat force. It also reminds us of the strength of the bonds that the term 'shipmate' evokes and in this particular instance it also underscores the depth of the relationship that we have with the United States Navy.

So, whether we join together today in celebration or commemoration, March the 1<sup>st</sup> is an important day for us to strengthen and honour our Australian naval heritage. A day to acknowledge the lives lost, the sacrifices made and the selfless service given by tens of thousands of fellow Australians and to draw upon the valuable lessons their experiences and challenges provide us.

Australia as an island state with a long coastline is critically dependant on seaborne trade and has vital interests in the stability and security of the region, whether in times of peace or conflict. As stipulated in the White Paper of 2009, today - as at every stage of our nation's development, our main aim is to defend against and deter armed attacks against Australia.

There are many significant parallels that may be drawn between the challenges we face today in the RAN and those that were presented to the Navy in our early years of development.

This tyranny of distance and associated naval challenge was acknowledged by Alfred Deakin and Admiral Tyron amongst others at the 1887 Colonial Conference held in London and indeed was the catalyst for the Australasian Naval Defence Act passed that December which allowed for the provision of an auxiliary naval squadron which was to be partially paid for by the Australian colonies and New Zealand.

Of course, in addition to Victoria, several already had their own defensive naval forces and these in time were to become the basis of the future national navy.

Captain, later, Vice Admiral Sir William Creswell, who commanded first South Australia's, then Queensland's naval service – and, briefly that of Victoria, was steadfast in his insistence that Australia needed the ability to defend its vast coastline. Creswell however, was of the opinion that this defence needed to be indigenous to Australia. In an article printed by the Brisbane Newspaper Company in 1901, Creswell wrote about a “guerre a commerce” and how a war on merchant shipping would adversely affect Australia in both the trans-oceanic and coastal trading domains. Then, as now, Australia's future and its prosperity are bound to the maritime environment and the ability to use the sea for the conduct of commerce.

I recently had the privilege of speaking at the Sea Power Conference in Sydney, the theme of which was ‘The naval contribution to prosperity and National Security’, which reflects the continued importance of Australia's ability to use the sea. Whilst at this conference I discussed the unfortunate phenomenon of 'sea blindness'. This phrase was coined in the UK a number of years ago to describe what was considered a lamentable lack of understanding by the British public of the sea and the importance of their Navy. We suffer from it too. Curiously enough it was not something that was evident in the early years of federation. With literally no other means of communication or transportation, the country was very much focused on the sea and what it meant for Australia's prosperity.

The strategic reality is that in 2012 it has not changed but the public's grasp of the importance of the sea has waned significantly.

It is confounding that many Australians observe an array of merchant ships at anchor off Australian ports like Newcastle, but do not instinctively make the connection to our national wealth. Of course, compounding this is that much of our high value merchant traffic operates off our sparsely populated north west coast or other regional areas, largely unseen by the public.

The truth is that most seaborne activity is invisible to the average citizen and the relationship between the assured use of the oceans and our national prosperity – indeed our national survival - is not something that penetrates the consciousness of most. Perhaps running the 'supermarket shelves' test is the best way to make this point. Take everything off the shelf that has in some way been reliant on sea transport and see what is left.

Partly this problem exists because of the nature of maritime work. Much of what maritime industries – shipping, fishing and offshore resource exploitation – as well as what the navies that protect them occur out of sight of land and therefore out of mind. We as a Navy, along with the broader naval community need to talk more about what we do and the contribution that we and the rest of the maritime sector make to the continued prosperity of this country.

If you have been following my recent speeches you will see this is a recurring theme, and if I am starting to sound like a broken record it is because I believe that this is such a fundamental message that we must get across.

I would like to touch briefly on the recent findings of Mr Alastair Hope the WA Coroner into the tragic events of 15 December 2010, when Suspected Irregular Entry Vessel 221 foundered on the rocks at Christmas Island and up to 50 asylum seekers perished. I have personally spent a number of months operating there during the monsoon; they are perilous waters in those conditions. I remain very proud of what the ASSAIL THREE crew and their small Army Transit Security Element did on that day. They were the most difficult and tragic of circumstances and our people were simply magnificent. I think what they did on that day, like their mates who dealt with the explosion on SIEV 36 in April 2009, are the truest indicator of the quality of our people and of the intrinsic nature of Australia's Navy. It reinforces for me that there remains an unbroken thread throughout the last 111 years that this sort of behaviour has been consistently demonstrated in both peace and in war. There are some who still want to criticise the response of our people on that day, criticism leveled by people who have never worked at sea, let alone commanded men and women in tough circumstances or had to pick their way through the reality of the Clausewitzian fog which sometimes descends on operations.

I am grateful that Mr Hope, who was quite rightly very tough, forensic and probing during his inquest, reached the conclusions about our people that he did. From all my reading of the material and my personal experience of the operational environment up there, our people can stand tall for how they responded and acted, putting themselves in harms way to save others on that awful day.

Our commitment to border protection is our most significant operational task, it continues under close public scrutiny and is conducted every single day by a dedicated and yet largely unrecognised group of sailors. We should all be very proud of what they achieve. I certainly am.

If I could turn to the Navy of tomorrow. As most of you would know we are building Force 2030, the future force that was articulated by the Government in the 2009 White Paper, a very capable Australian Defence Force. It is a force that is starting to be delivered. In many ways there are similarities in the challenges we face today just as Creswell faced as he set about building the early RAN. The parallels are significant as we upskill our people for new capabilities and equipment that we have had no prior experience in operating. We of course are not coming off a zero base but it is nonetheless a challenging time.

This year marks the arrival of LHD CANBERRA here in Melbourne for the fitting of her superstructure and integration of her communications and command and control equipment. When you see her come in you will see the step up that we face after 30 years of having a 'frigate-navy' outlook. We are up to the challenge and frankly I think it will bring a level of excitement and pride to the organisation that will be beneficial, but as I have been saying to the wider Navy, the worst thing we can do is to think that 'we know boats'. In capability terms the LHD is a game changer and will shift the way we conduct our amphibious training and operations just as the arrival of the first RAN fleet of ships in October 1913 shifted the thinking of those in the navy at the time.

For us however the LHD will not be just about shifting Navy and what it wants to achieve, it will be about shifting the ADF and accommodating what it needs to achieve for the capability as a whole.

And there will be equivalent challenges for the ADF with the introduction of the Air Warfare Destroyers. We are starting to get back into the air warfare mission in a way that is also paralleled only by the capability jump that the 1913 Fleet Unit represented. The AWD are key to that jump, but so are the new Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft now entering Air Force service.

Together, ship and aircraft – and the other systems and units with which they will operate – represent a sum very much greater than the component parts. In the meantime, we have the long range SM-2 missile at sea in the modernised guided missile frigates and the new phased array radar fit and combat system in the frigate PERTH has been immensely successful. When the program is complete, all the ANZAC class will have an order of magnitude increase in their missile detection and engagement capabilities.

In 2014 we will see new combat helicopters for Navy with a new variant to the Seahawk helicopter. It re-introduces an important capability - the dipping sonar; which will allow us to conduct anti-submarine warfare in a way that we have not for some time.

Then, of course, there is the future submarine, the offshore combatant vessel, and in the mid-2020s a new frigate to replace the ANZACs. in all, it is a very exciting time on the hardware front.

I know the reality of a serious maritime power projection capability is coming into sharp focus within the Defence senior leadership group.

The announcement regarding the 2nd battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment as a dedicated amphibious battalion is an important lead indicator, as are the changes Navy will be making to tactical command and control structures to better support the deployable joint force headquarters construct and provide a more robust Command and Control arrangement.

If we consider one of the very first combat experiences of the RAN, there was an emphasis from very beginning on a joint expeditionary capability. Australia and New Zealand had combined to create a Naval and Military Expeditionary Force which set out on August 19, 1914 just weeks after the proclamation of war to land in Rabul and then take the wireless station at Bitapaka.

This operation was a maritime power projection mission enabled by the ability to exercise local sea control. In that case it utilised the versatility and utility of the battle cruiser HMAS *Australia* the light cruiser *Sydney* and the Australian destroyer and submarine forces. The initial landings were conducted by naval infantry who were then subsequently supported by militia forces landed from the transport ship.

Today of course we still serve in the joint environment ashore.

In August last year I accompanied the then Minister for Defence Materiel, Minister Clare, into Afghanistan for my second visit to that country. Navy have about a dozen officers and sailors in a number of roles, from patrolling on the front line with the MTF as Explosive Ordnance Disposal or Improvised Explosive Device specialists, to some key HQ and support positions; they are doing a great job and are universally well respected. We also have Navy people on operations in the Sinai, Timor, the Solomons and in Southern Sudan.

We are now in our 22<sup>nd</sup> year of major fleet unit operations in the Middle East. HMAS *Parramatta* is the current frigate in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) doing a sterling job across counter piracy, counter terrorism and general maritime security missions. Someone who was no stranger to the dangers of counter piracy operations was Creswell himself who was shot in the hip during a skirmish with pirates off the Malay coast in 1873 whilst he was serving as a Sub-Lieutenant in the gunboat *Midge*.

Of course both new and old capabilities bring with them significant maintenance challenges, a fact that the naval engineer, a man very much the 'second father' of the Australian Navy, Captain and later Vice Admiral Sir William Clarkson was well aware of as the senior technical officer of the naval forces from 1901.

With the outbreak of war there were 28 vessels requisitioned for the purpose of transporting the first AIF contingent of 21,500 men and 8000 horses to the Middle East. As you can imagine, alterations of a drastic nature were required. In addition to configuration changes Clarkson was ultimately responsible for the manufacture of all the equipment required to fit out and repair ships at Cockatoo Island dockyard. All of this was achieved often in very tight timeframes. Perhaps the most impressive of all technical achievements of that time under Clarkson's direction was the building of warships up to light cruiser size at Cockatoo Island, a process which was enabled utilising an increasing proportion of locally produced items as suggested by Clarkson.

Speaking of technical integrity....last year the report resulting from the Rizzo Review into amphibious and support ship maintenance was released. This review was undertaken with the express purpose of ensuring that what led to the systemic failure in availability of our amphibious force never occurred again. An important recommendation made by Paul Rizzo was to rebuild and reorganise Navy engineering. A process that he recommended be led by a two star Navy Admiral to give the necessary weight to this critical function. I promoted RADM Mick Uzzell and appointed him as Head of Navy Engineering in September last year and he has been hard at work since that time. There is significant work underway to implement the recommendations of the review and get us back to basics.

Of course the review was about more than engineering, it was about the broader capability management challenge and ensuring that all of our officers and senior sailors understand their role in it. But a healthy engineering function which is viewed as an enabler rather than an overhead remains absolutely critical to a high technology organisation. I believe we lost sight of that critical difference over the last decade or so. It is interesting to compare the technical content of what our young officers today are being taught compared to Collins and Farncomb and the 1913 entry. In general terms they had a much higher level of technical content than today - perhaps there is a message there and it is something that we are going to have a close look at.

In the current economic climate the RAN has had lower separation rates than has historically been the case which is a significant turnaround from a few short years ago. They are on the rise, however, and we still face a fierce battle for talent particularly for technical personnel as our own Navy-trained personnel remain highly sought after and not just in the resource sector. In Navy we are trying a broad range of initiatives to demonstrate that we have shifted from an 'overhead' view to an 'enabling' view of this critical workforce.

The drive to retain our trained talent has included some very tightly targeted bonuses, industry outplacements, a redesign of our Fleet Support Units and broader professional development programs which I think show that we are serious.

This will take time and there is no easy fix. In the meantime we are looking to augment our talent base through the use of lateral transfers from other navies. While Creswell would probably not have described it as such, this is exactly what happened in the early life of the RAN. We are working very closely with the Royal Navy to ensure that we can help be part of the solution as they downsize.

What began 111 years ago as the development of an Australian Navy has grown and matured into a force which I am immensely proud of. We are on watch around the world, ashore and at sea, on peacetime and active service getting on with the job we have been given. In doing that I think we owe a great deal to the early leadership of the Navy and how they shaped the organisation here in Melbourne over a century ago. I said last time I gave this address that Creswell's real legacy was that he ensured that the Navy was set up in such a way that it could be sustained and grown as the strategic situation demanded. My time in this job has only reinforced that belief.

This is the enduring task for the organisation's leadership; we are stewards after all, stewards of this great national institution. We must not allow ourselves to be consumed by the parochialism of the present. Stewardship demands due regard to the past, it demands that we understand the challenges of today, that we nurture what we have and also that we have a very clear view of where the organisation needs to be positioned in the future.

We stand on the cusp of one of the most significant periods of naval modernisation for many decades in this, the Asian Pacific century, this inherently maritime century. Guided by the example of Creswell and Clarkson, we are getting on with this challenge.