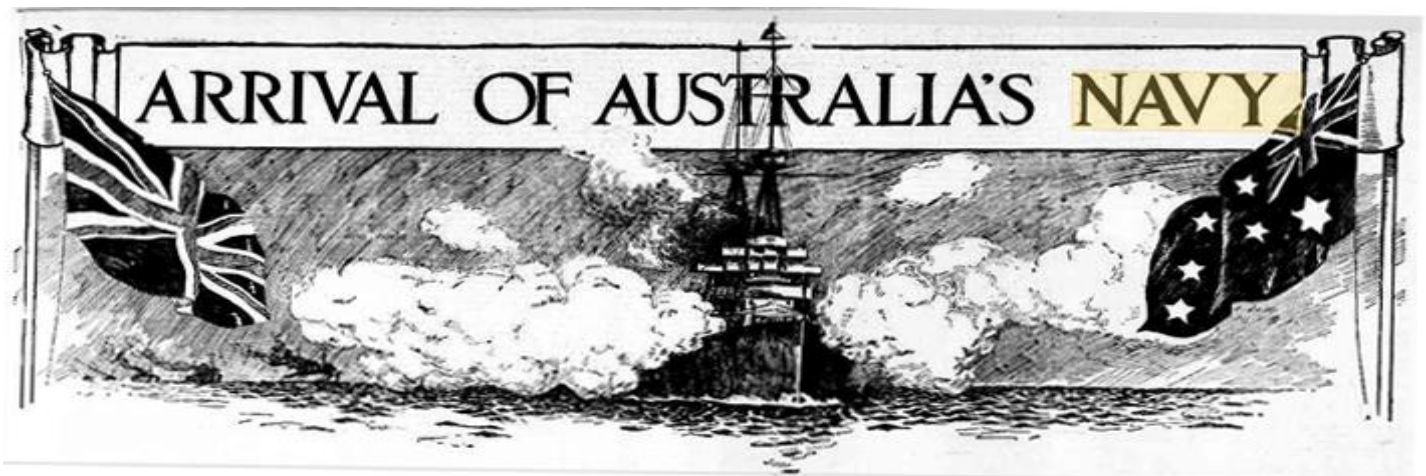# OCCASIONAL PAPER 17

October 2017

The Naval Historical Society of Australia

Fleet arrival in Sydney – 4 October 1913

At an Imperial Conference held in 1909, it was decided to deploy to Australian waters a naval unit consisting of at least a battle cruiser, three second class cruisers, six destroyers, three submarines and a number of auxiliaries. Detailed discussions were held on 19 August 1909 between representatives of the British Admiralty and the Australian Government that resulted in a decision to proceed with the establishment of an Australian Fleet Unit. The first units of this Navy, the destroyers, HMA Ships *Yarra* and *Parramatta*, reached Australian waters in November 1910 and in the following year on 10 July 1911, His Majesty King George V granted the title of 'Royal Australian Navy' to the Commonwealth Naval Forces.

In June 1912, a third destroyer, HMAS *Warrego* was commissioned at Sydney and in 1913 the battle cruiser, HMAS *Australia* and the light cruisers, HMA Ships *Melbourne* and *Sydney* arrived in Australian waters. On the 4 October 1913, the Australian Fleet entered Sydney harbour for the first time and in October of the same year formal control of these units passed to the Commonwealth Naval Board. Thus, direct Imperial control came to a conclusion.

The newspaper article below is from the Sydney Morning Herald, Monday 6 October 1913, page 5

THE ENTRANCE.

HOW THE SHIPS CAME IN.

A NOBLE SIGHT.

THOUSANDS OF CHEERING CITIZENS.

Far away on the horizon there was a faint grey streak. It was scarcely visible, but someone on the steamer Kubu, which took the Ministry and members of the Federal Parliament, together with a large number of specially invited guests to the Heads to welcome the Fleet, espied the streak of grey and exclaimed "There she comes."

The morning was somewhat dull, and the sky overcast—it had seemed earlier that there would be rain—but gradually, as the wisp of smoke afar off became more definite against the sky-line, the clouds began to lift. Then another faint grey line was seen, another and yet another, until at last there were· seven of them.

Out of the mist of the morning the ships came into sight. The blur became something definite and tangible; and seven ships of war rode in from the east.

Seven ships of war in line rode slowly towards the Heads. One thought of Phillip and the First Fleet, a century and a quarter ago, heading for the self-came harbour. Here, on the shores of Port Jackson, Phillip founded "a meagre settlement, and gave immortality to an obscure states-

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man by naming it Sydney"; and on Saturday the great city which he founded gave welcome to this other and far greater Fleet.

A GRIM, PORTENTOUS THING.

Majestic and beautiful, yet a grim, portentous thing, the fleet took shape before our eyes. From seven grey ships rose seven great grey clouds of smoke—rose and curled away to the south. Slowly they came on, nearer and nearer, till they stood out, bold and clearcut, against the sky.

A balloon ascent at Watson's Bay—a beautiful ascent and descent—for a minute or two held the attention of the people, who in their thousands were crowding the foreshores and the boats that lay within the harbour, and perhaps it also interested the crews of the warships, for the balloonist was throwing bombs down from high up in the air to demonstrate its possibilities in war time; but this was soon over. Impressive as it was, the sight beyond the Heads was a more impressive and more fascinating thing.

Thought of that other fleet—the American fleet—which entered Sydney Harbour a few years ago, a magnificent and awe-inspiring spectacle, came to one; but one made no comparisons. This was a different thing, and in its way more wonderful to us. It was our own.

AUSTRALIA'S GREYHOUNDS.

They will do twenty knots and more these ships, when occasion comes. On Saturday they crept up to the Heads like snails. A hydroplane came racing across the harbour at terrific speed, churning the waters into angry foam. But the battle-cruiser Australia and her consorts, like greyhounds straining in the leash, were waiting the call of time.

The Navy is never late. And the time fixed for the entrance was half-past 10. That was why the advance of the ships was slow. They were waiting till the clock should strike.

Out of the south-east they came in beautiful single line, like a long, lithe snake, turned, and came in direct from the east, so that, looking from inside the Heads, the flagship was for a time all that was visible.

And exactly at half-past 10 H.M.A.S. Australia, flagship of the Australian Fleet, Rear-Admiral Sir George Patey, K.C.V.O., in command, was passing through the Heads. And as she did so her band played "Rule Britannia," and the crew stood at their stations.

And simultaneously on the Kubu, where the welcoming Ministers and members of the Federal Parliament were, another band played "Home, Sweet Home;" and from ten thousand throats on harbour and on shore came cheer upon cheer. It was a proud moment for all.

There, high up on the foremast flew, the Rear-Admiral's flag, alongside the Australian flag—the starred blue ensign; on the mainmast was the White Ensign of the Royal Navy. The Commonwealth Flag was the symbol of our ownership. It is the Blue Ensign, with a Southern Cross on the field, made of five-pointed stars and a six-pointed star underneath the Union Jack in the centre.

MAGNIFICENT GRACE AND BEAUTY.

And the ship herself. . . . She rode in with magnificent grace and beauty, nineteen thousand and two hundred tons of massive grandeur, the biggest warship that has ever entered Sydney Harbour.

We had seen pictures of her, but the sight of her revealed the nation's Dreadnought in all her beauty and majesty—no longer a thing to be looked at on a printed page, but a living, sentient thing, whose mission is to guard our shores and protect our commerce and our trade routes. We do not look upon her as standing for war, but for peace—that peace which comes by being prepared for war. Yet we know when we look upon her that she is a grim and powerful thing, fearfully and

wonderfully made, and that she is something to be reckoned with by an enemy. That

broad belt of steel armour, 7in thick, those great 12in guns, 50ft long, which hurl 850lb shells through the air at a rate of something between 2000ft and 3000ft a second, carrying death in their train, remind us of what terrible engines of destruction they are.

And so with the light cruisers Melbourne and Sydney, which followed the flagship in; and so with the Encounter and the destroyers Warrego, Parramatta, and Yarra. Each one is an engine of war, a deadly thing. As they came through the Heads in the order named, a distance of two cables and a half from foremast to foremast, they spoke to us of the potential force they stand for. And it was heightened when, nearing Farm Cove, the big guns of the flagship boomed out their salute. It was magnificent, but, fortunately, it was not war.

A STATELY PROCESSION.

We had seen the destroyers before—those swift, destruction-dealing things which Kipling calls the "Choosers of the Slain"—and we had seen the cruiser Melbourne; but the Sydney, sister ship to the Melbourne, and the Australia, greatest of them all, we had not seen. Now, for the first time, we saw a real and compact Fleet—a real Australian Fleet, if not as yet a big one.

But our eyes were chiefly on the great ship in the van—the Bulldog of the Fleet, with its great turrets and its torpedo-net booms, that looked like great steel stays to strengthen the hull. It was the first time a battleship with torpedo-net booms had been seen in Australian waters; and it was an Australian battleship.

Because a feature of modern warships is a clearance of all unnecessary superstructure, there were some who seemed disappointed. "The Connecticut was a finer ship," one with a remembrance of the American Fleet mistakenly remarked. He forgot the thirty feet below the waterline, and he forgot that this ship of his is made for fighting, and not for spectacular, purposes. The Australia is the greatest fighting ship the Commonwealth has

seen. And most of those who cheered her proudly knew it.

Seven ships in single line rode in and down the harbour. A stately procession, and an impressive sight. And on each foremast flew Australia's flag, and on each mainmast the White Ensign. The sun was now shining brightly, and the harbour waters were as peaceful as a lake.

All the way along, at every vantage-point on the foreshores, dense crowds of people cheered.

THE SALUTES.

And suddenly a shaft of light shot out from the side of the flagship, immediately followed by a thick smoke-cloud—then a loud report. It was the First Gun. And from Bradley's Head onwards the big guns of the Australia, on starboard and port, continued to boom—seventeen of them.

It was the salute of Rear-Admiral Sir George Patey to Admiral Sir George King-Hall.

And from H.M.S. Cambrian, moored in Farm Cove, thirteen guns were fired in return—the "Admiral"'s" salute to the Rear-Admiral.

"DRESS SHIP."

Quietly and methodically the ships of the fleet went to their moorings in Farm Cove. And then the strains of a bugle rang out on the flagship—"Dress Ship"— and in a moment, a magical thing, every warship there was dressed from stem to stern with flags.

Rear-Admiral Patey descended into his barge, and proceeded to the Cambrian to visit Admiral Sir George King-Hall. The Admiral a few minutes later returned the call.

Our ships had come to their home.

HMAS Australia entering Sydney Harbour

Arrival of the AUSTRALIAN FLEET
Sydney. Oct 4th 1913.
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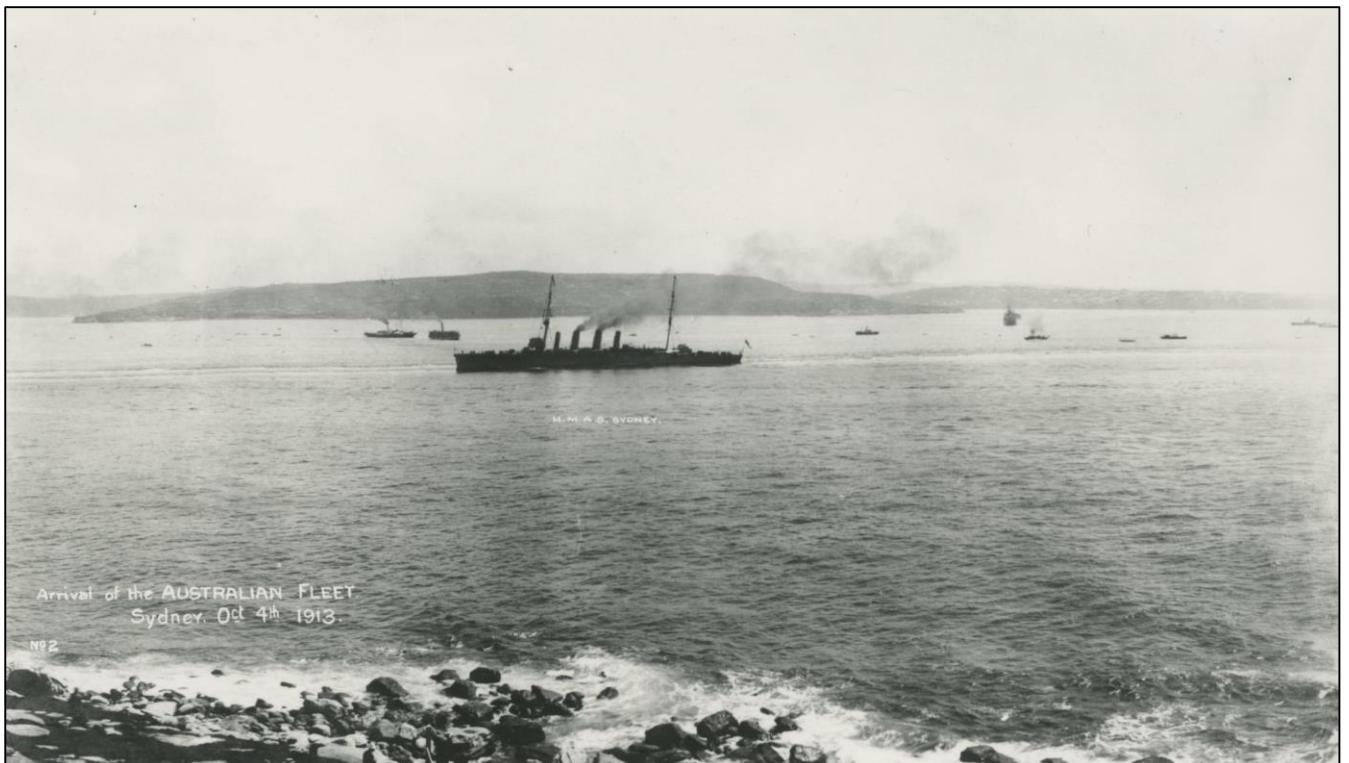
H.M.A.S. SYDNEY.

HMAS Sydney entering Sydney Harbour