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Surgeon Commander Alexander Ruan Caw, RAN MB BS. Adelaide. 1879-1924

These biographical notes on CMDR Alexander Caw who served in HMAS Australia during World War 1 were provided by Surgeon LCDR Tony Swain RAN Rtd.



Inscription
'To the Glory of God
and in memory of
Kathleen Euston Caw
wife of
Alexander Ruan Caw
who departed this life
May 21 1911.'

Alexander Ruan Caw was born on the 24th April 1879, the eldest son of W B Caw at Huyton Lancashire, England. He came to South Australia with his parents, a brother (Alfred Beech) and sister (Mary Olive). His father was a Librarian at the Adelaide Circulating Library from 1884-1908. He was educated at St Peters College and excelled academically, and in 1897 at the Annual School Sports, in bicycle riding. He studied medicine at the University of Adelaide, and graduated MB BS in 1902. Alexander Caw was, with W Magarey, in the 1901 SA Junior Lacrosse Team to play NSW. From 1906-1910 he was in a medical practice with Dr McMillan in Naracoorte. He returned to England in 1908 for further studies which included ship hygiene.

On return to Australia he continued his position in Naracoorte; and in March 1910 moved to Burra with his new wife, Kathleen, to relieve Dr J L Sangster jnr. who was moving to Glenelg. After the untimely death of his 25 year old wife and son in childbirth, in 1911, at Kooringa, Burra; he passed his GP position to Dr David Steele from Adelaide.

At his farewell, he had said that he "*always had a leaning towards the Navy, having for many years being in the Naval Reserves*".

On the 1st August 1912, he applied to the RAN for a 3 years Staff Surgeon appointment. He served in *HMAS Australia*, and was on her delivery voyage from UK and sailed in the Flagship *Australia* from the 21st June 1913 until the 30th September 1919, with a promotion to Fleet Surgeon Commander on 1st August 1917.

The Australian Naval & Military Expedition Force (AN&MEF) was formed following a request by the British government on the 6th August 1914. The

Australia became the flagship of the AN&MEF that captured the German colonies in the southern Pacific. The force was assembled under the guidance of Colonel J G Legge, and was separate from the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) forming under Major General W T Bridges.

HMAS Australia led a force which captured Rabaul on 13th September 1914 before proceeding to Samoa. With no German forces left in the South Pacific; *Australia* was deployed to the United Kingdom. En route she sank the German auxiliary *Eleanore Woermann*. On the 8th February 1915 she became flagship of the 2nd Battle-cruiser Squadron of the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet. *Australia's* service with the Grand Fleet consisted of a series of frequent patrols and exercises.



Caw married Lily Hewart, in 1918, daughter of South African surgeon, Sir John Hewart. Having resigned from his position and his resignation being accepted, he was posted to *HMAS Penguin* for 3 months with transfer to the Retired List on the 21st December 1919.

Caw went to Johannesburg in 1920 and entered medical practice as a Specialist ENT surgeon. His decision to move to South Africa may have been influenced by his wife and father-in-law or by his year with Surgeon Lt R W Hornabrook who served in *HMAS Australia* from August 1914-August 1915, also of Adelaide, and who had served with the RAMC during the Boer War.

Alexander Ruan Caw died on the 11th March 1924, 6 weeks after the death of his mother on 25th January 1924. He was survived by his wife Lily and two children.

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Sources:

NLA Trove, Photo AWM EN0003, HMAS Australia. NAA: A6769, CAW A R

The Burra History Group;

Window: St Marys Anglican Church, Burra Australia

“Jesus the Light of the World”: made by H L Vosz, Adelaide

<http://catalogue.slv.vic.gov.au>

The Register, Adelaide on the 26th March 1924