

CALL THE HANDS

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HMAS Sydney (3) Delivery to Australia: 1949

Our thanks go to Debbie Irwin for the letter by her uncle, Stoker Mechanician James (Jim) Ashwood of HMAS Sydney (3) to his sister Nancy dated 8 May 1949 about his trip home from UK in HMAS Sydney which includes a visit to Aden.

STO/MECH.J.ASHWOOD O/N35168
MESS 12 HMAS SYDNEY
C/- G.P.O
8TH.MAY 1949

Dear Nancy,

Well, we are in the Indian ocean now and only four days out from Fremantle, our first sight of Aussie for almost 12 months. We are all anxiously looking forward to seeing it again especially as we will have been 14 days at sea without sighting land. My luck is out I think, because as things work out at present I'll be 24 hours on duty the day we arrive there and as we are only staying for the one day it looks as if I won't be stepping on Aussie soil until we reach Melbourne on the 18th. I'm hoping something happens so that I can get ashore and get my teeth into a decent steak and eggs.

We stayed at Aden for ten hours and we were allowed ashore for three hours. It's a lousy place ashore, very dry and dusty and dirty, the natives there, Arabs mainly, are dirty devils and talk about rogues, I've never met their equal. I'm afraid they gained very little out of me though as I was almost broke when I went ashore. The currency there is Indian rupees and annas, ten rupees to the Aussie pound and 16 annas to a rupee. There are no horses there and the hauling done, apart from trucks, is by camels. We had some photos taken but I don't know how they'll turn out, I hope they turn out alright because they should be quite amusing.

The weather for the week before Aden and the week after leaving there was terrific, I was working in the engine room most of the way and believe me Nance, I'd just about had it, I lost about ½ stone in weight and was as weak as a kitten, so were all the rest of the boys working down there, you see the temperature never dropped below 106 degrees for a fortnight and most of the time it was 115 to 120 degrees in the engine room. Still the last four days the weather has cooled down a lot and is now ideal and we have all fully recovered.

There has been quite a bit of entertainment organised on this stage of the trip, pictures twice a night, a concert, a quiz contest, deck hockey and deck tennis tournaments and a crossing the line ceremony.

The crossing the line was very entertaining, there is one chap dressed up as King Neptune and he has his court; a judge and policemen. Chaps are picked out who have never crossed the equator before and charged with some humorous offence and asked how they plead; of course, it makes no difference whether they plead guilty or not they are still judged guilty and have grease and oil rubbed on them and rotten eggs and fruit (if any) smashed on them and then they are thrown into a big canvas tank of water.

When the ceremony is all over the mob take to King Neptune and his hangers on and they get the same treatment, believe me, it's a great afternoon's fun.

Were the Aden stamps still intact on the letters I sent you and kitty from there, I sincerely hope so as I thought they were very interesting.

I believe we will only be in Sydney for fifty days when we get there and then we are to go on another months flying trials off the east coast of Australia. Anyhow there's one thing for sure we'll be getting 21 days leave first.

I've been sleeping on the open deck for the last fortnight and it's been really good, you wake up lovely and fresh in the mornings. The seas have been very calm all the way, we are wondering if we will get a real rough trip, it's quite on the cards.

Please give all the family my love. I'm looking forward to being with you all again.

Well I guess that's about all for the time being, you'll probably only get one, maybe two more letters from me before you see me.

Cheerio for now,
Fondest love
Your ever loving brother
Jim

