



Submarines Association Australia NSW Branch

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The Inaugural PLATYPUS ADDRESS

To be given by

Vice Admiral I. D. G. MacDOUGALL AC AFSM RAN (retired)

On the occasion of

**The 40TH Anniversary Of HMAS PLATYPUS Commissioning and The Arrival Of
HMAS OXLEY To Form The Australian Submarine Squadron**





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INAUGURAL 'PLATYPUS' ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT HMAS PLATYPUS 18TH AUGUST 2007

BY VICE ADMIRAL IAN MACDOUGALL AC AFSM RAN RTD

THIS IS A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE, OF HISTORY AND RECOGNITION OF THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF SUBMARINES AS A PART OF THE MARITIME SECURITY OF OUR NATION. I AM HONOURED TO DELIVER THE INAUGURAL PLATYPUS ADDRESS.

THE MEMORIES WILL BE MOST KEENLY FELT BY THOSE WHO WERE HERE FORTY YEARS AGO TODAY. BUT ALSO BY THOSE WHO SERVED IN OBERONS AND IN THE BASE, WHICH MAINTAINED THEM DURING THE THIRTY ODD YEARS, WHICH FOLLOWED.

MY STRONGEST RECOLLECTION OF THAT DAY WAS THE CONSIDERABLE ELAN WITH WHICH THE CAPTAIN OF OXLEY, DAVID LORRIMER, DROVE INTO NEUTRAL BAY AFTER A PASSAGE OF 68 DAYS FROM PORTSMOUTH.



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WITH THE ADROIT USE OF LOTS OF POWER ASTERN HE BOTH
CAPTURED THE ATTENTION OF THOSE ON THE WHARF CELEBRATING
THE COMMISSIONING OF PLATYPUS AND AVOIDED THE BOAT
BECOMING A PERMANENT FIXTURE IN ANDERSON PARK.

ONE SLIP IN THE CHAIN OF ORDERS FROM THE BRIDGE AND REACTIONS
BELOW WOULD HAVE SPELT DOOM BUT LIEUTENANT COMMANDER
LORRIMER HAD TRAINED US WELL AND HAD EVERY CONFIDENCE IN
US. THERE WAS NO CHANCE WE WOULD LET HIM DOWN. I GLANCED
ACROSS AT THE FACE OF COMMANDER BILL OWEN AS THIS BLACK
EXPRESS TRAIN SPED TOWARDS ITS BERTH AND SAW A SMILE OF PRIDE
- OR WAS IT RELIEF? - AS WE ARRIVED PERFECTLY AT OUR BERTH.

THE HISTORY OF OUR SUBMAINE ARM AND THE OBERONS' PLACE IN IT
IS IMPORTANT. THE ERA OF SERIOUS SUBMARINING BY GLOBAL
POWERS BEGAN IN ABOUT 1905. AT THE SPITHEAD NAVAL REVIEW OF
1909, THE TIMES OF LONDON COUNTED 42 SUBMARINES.

IN 1910, JUST NINE YEARS AFTER FEDERATION, OUR GOVERNMENT
BEGAN NEGOTIATING WITH BRITAIN FOR TWO E-CLASS SUBMARINES.
SADLY BOTH WERE LOST IN WORLD WAR I. IN A REMARKABLE FEAT,



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AE – 2 HAD FOUND THE WAY FOR OTHER ALLIED SUBMARINES TO FOLLOW THROUGH THE DARDENELLES INTO THE SEA OF MAMORA.

WE ACQUIRED SIX J CLASS IN THE 1920s, TWO O CLASS IN THE 1930S AND THE DUTCH GIFTED US A K CLASS DURING WWI.

AFTER WORLD WAR II THE ROYAL NAVY BASED ITS FOURTH SUBMARINE SQUADRON IN SYDNEY. FOR THE PRINCELY SUM OF FIFTEEN THOUSAND POUNDS, PAID BY AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND, THE SQUADRON DELIVERED INVALUABLE ASW TRAINING FOR THE NAVY AND AIRFORCE OF BOTH COUNTRIES.

IN THE 60S WE BOUGHT FOUR, AND THEN TWO MORE, OBERONS FROM BRITAIN. THESE WONDERFUL LONG RANGE BOATS, WITH THEIR CHALLENGING ASRI DIESEL ENGINES, PROVED TO BE ONE OF THE BEST-EVER DEFENCE OUTLAYS FOR AUSTRALIA. HENRY COOK AND BILL OWEN WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN THIS SUCCESS.

IT IS DEEPLY FRUSTRATING, TO SKATE, IN JUST A MINUTE OF SO, ACROSS 75-ODD YEARS OF DEDICATED SERVICE BY THOSE WHO TOOK THE BOATS TO SEA AND THOSE WHO SUPPORTED THEM ALONGSIDE IN WAR AND PEACE.



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IT WAS HARD, UNREMITTING WORK IN FAIRLY SQUALID LIVING
CONDITIONS BUT FEW WHO VOLUNTEERED TO JOIN THE SUBMARINE
ARM ELECTED TO LEAVE. WE WERE A SMALL, VOCIFEROUS MINORITY
- THE NAVY POPULATION IN SUBMARINES WAS LESS THAN 3 PERCENT.

NOT CONTENT TO BE MERELY ASW CLOCKWORK MICE, THE
SUBMARINE ARM SET OUT TO BECOME A HIGHLY POTENT STRATEGIC
CAPABILITY. IT ACHIEVED THIS VIA AN EXTRAORDINARILY
AMBITIOUS UPDATE PROGRAMME, WHICH SUCCESSFULLY DELIVERED
A COMBAT SYSTEM, MODERN WIRE-GUIDED TORPEDOES, AND
ENCAPSULATED HARPOON MISSILES. THIS ALSO LAID THE GROUND
WORK FOR THE EVEN MORE AMBITIOUS COLLINS CLASS, THE NATION'S
FIRST IN-COUNTRY BUILD OF SUBMARINES.

THOSE OUTSIDE THE NAVY CANNOT BE EXPECTED TO UNDERSTAND IN
DETAIL HOW BOLD A STEP IT WAS. SUPERPOWERS SUCH AS THE US
AND RUSSIA HAVE BUILT DOZENS OF NEW CLASSES OF SUBMARINES
OVER THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS. EVERY NEW CLASS HAS HAD
TEETHING TROUBLES.

THE REMARKABLE OUTCOME WITH THE COLLINS, ACKNOWLEDGED BY
INDEPENDENT EXPERTS AS THE BEST CONVENTIONAL SUBMARINE AT



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SEA, IS THAT THOSE TEETHING TROUBLES WERE SO FEW AND FIXED SO QUICKLY.

THE FACT THAT TAXPAYERS' DOLLARS REMAINED IN-COUNTRY, THAT JOBS WERE CREATED FOR AUSTRALIANS, AND THAT INFRASTRUCTURE ENHANCEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER BENEFITS ACCRUED SHOULD NOT GO UNACKNOWLEDGED.

WE NOW HAVE SOLID BEDROCK TO BUILD ON AS WE GO FORWARD WITH THE NEXT CLASS TO REPLACE THE COLLINS, NOW INTO THE SECOND HALF OF THEIR USEFUL LIVES.

IN MAY OF THIS YEAR, ROSS BABBAGE IN A WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE SPECIAL REPORT ARGUED COGENTLY THE CASE FOR SUBMARINES. NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED IN THE JUSTIFICATION FOR SUBMARINES IN A BALANCED MARITIME CAPABILITY SINCE ONE SMALL U-BOAT SANK THREE BRITISH CRUISERS BEFORE BREAKFAST, IN WORLD WAR I.

THE COST OF COUNTERING SUBMARINES IN A HOT WAR FAR OUTWEIGHS THE COST OF MAINTAINING A SUB-SURFACE CAPABILITY. IT BOILS DOWN TO THE PHYSICS OF SOUND TRANSMISSION THROUGH



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WATER, WHICH FAVOURS THE SUBMARINE. BILLIONS OF DOLLARS HAVE BEEN SPENT AND CONTINUE TO BE SPENT IN TRYING TO LIFT ASW CAPABILITY TO PARITY BUT TO LITTLE AVAIL. IT HASN'T HAPPENED YET.

IN A COLD WAR ENVIRONMENT, THE DETERRENT VALUE OF SUBMARINES HAS BEEN AMPLY DEMONSTRATED. FOR THOSE WHO FAVOUR NON-VIOLENT SOLUTIONS TO THE PREVENTION AND SETTLEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL DISPUTES, DETERRENCE SHOULD BE A FAVOURED OPTION UNTIL SUCH TIME AS HUMANITY CAN UNIVERSALLY AGREE TO ABANDON VIOLENCE.

I AM NO ARMCHAIR WARRIOR BEATING THE DRUMS OF WAR. I BELIEVE IN DETERRENCE AS A MEANS OF AVOIDING VIOLENCE, NOT LEAST FOR A LARGE SEA-LOCKED COUNTRY DEPENDENT ON SEA-BORNE TRADE FOR ITS PROSPERITY, INDEED FOR ITS ECONOMIC SURVIVAL.

AS TRADE GROWS IN A WORLD WITH ECONOMIES INEXTRICABLY LINKED, THE SECURITY OF TRADE ROUTES ON THE HIGH SEAS AND THROUGH LITORAL CHOKE POINTS GROWS IN IMPORTANCE. IT IS NO ACCIDENT OF GROUP-THINK THAT MOST DEVELOPED AND



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DEVELOPING NATIONS IN OUR REGION HAVE ACQUIRED A SUBMARINE CAPABILITY. THEY TOO KNOW THAT THEIR TRADE ROUTES ARE VITAL TO THEIR PRESENT AND THEIR FUTURE.

IT IS, I HOPE, UNLIKELY THAT WE WILL HAVE TO FIGHT A MAJOR WAR ON LAND OR SEA ON A STANDALONE BASIS. SINCE WORLD WAR II WE HAVE ENJOYED THE BENEFITS AND INSURANCE OF ALLIANCES, MOST NOTABLY THE ANZUS TREATY.

WE PAY OUR INSURANCE PREMIUMS WHEN CALLED UPON BY THE UN AND/OR OUR ALLIANCE PARTNERS TO CONTRIBUTE TO MILITARY ACTIONS DESIGNED TO BRING OR MAINTAIN PEACE IN TROUBLED PARTS OF THE WORLD. THERE IS NOTHING CYNICAL ABOUT PREFERRING TO DO THIS FAR FROM HOME RATHER THAN ON OUR OWN DOORSTEP. IN MOST CASES WE ARE CONTRIBUTING HIGHLY VALUED EXPERTISE, QUALITY IF NOT QUANTITY.

SOMETIMES THE CONTRIBUTION AS MEASURED IN NUMBERS - SHIPS, AIRCRAFT OR SOLDIERS - IS SMALL AND COMPLEMENTS THE LARGER FORCES OF COALITION PARTNERS.



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OCCASIONALLY OUR CONTRIBUTION IS IN A FORM NOT PRESENT IN THE ORDER OF BATTLE OF EVEN OUR MOST POWERFUL ALLY. THE COLLINS CLASS SUBMARINE FALLS INTO THAT CATEGORY.

THE US OF COURSE HAS A POWERFUL UNDERSEA FLEET, BUT ALL ITS PLATFORMS ARE NUCLEAR POWERED AND LESS THAN COMFORTABLE OPERATING IN SHALLOW LITTORAL WATERS. AUSTRALIAN SUBMARINES HAVE NO DIFFICULTY OPERATING IN SHALLOW WATERS AND THIS FILLS A GAP, IF OUR GOVERNMENT AGREES TO MAKE THEM AVAILABLE. IF OPERATING UNILATERALLY IN AUSTRALIA'S BEST INTERESTS EVEN SIX SUBMARINES PROVIDE A HIGHLY POTENT FORCE EITHER TO DETER OR, IF PUSH COMES TO SHOVE, MAKE CONTINUED AGGRESSION A PRICE TOO DEAR FOR AN ENEMY TO PAY.

THE LEAD TIMES FOR THE HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED SYSTEMS - PLATFORM AND COMBAT SYSTEM - ARE LONG. AS HAS BEEN SAID MANY TIMES BEFORE, OUR NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY IS BASED ON MAINTAINING A TECHNOLOGICAL EDGE IN EVERY COMBAT CAPABILITY.

THE REALITY IS, THE DECISION TO REPLACE THE COLLINS CLASS NEEDS TO BE MADE NOT LATER THAN THE END OF THIS DECADE.



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IF A TIMELY AND FAVOURABLE DECISION IS NOT MADE, THE
MARITIME SECURITY, HENCE WELL BEING, OF OUR NATION, WILL BE
PLACED IN JEOPARDY.

THERE IS A SMALL BAND OF OBERON BROTHERS HERE TODAY, AND TO
YOU I SAY THIS:. OUR CHARACTERS WERE FOREVER FORMED - SOME
WOULD SAY DE-FORMED - BY OUR EXPERIENCES.

70 DAYS WITHOUT A SHOWER. LEARNING TO PLAY A TIN OPENER LIKE
A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT IN ORDER TO EAT. ACCEPTING THE CHRONIC
LACK OF VITAMIN D AND ITS MEDICAL CONSEQUENCES. BEING
THROWN A BAR OF SOAP AND THEN HOSED DOWN ON THE FRONT
LAWN BEFORE BEING ALLOWED INTO THE HOUSE, ON OUR RETURN
FROM A LONG PATROL.

BUT OPERATIONALLY, WE KNOW WHAT WE DID, HOW DANGEROUS IT
WAS AND WHY WE DID IT ANYWAY. WE DON'T TALK ABOUT THE
DETAIL, NOT NOW, NOT EVER. BUT WE REMEMBER, WITH PRIDE, AND
ALWAYS WILL.



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PLATYPUS SERVED THE NATION WELL FOR 30 YEARS. IT WAS A
WELCOME BEACON FOR BOATS RETURNING HOME FROM FAR AWAY.
IT JUSTLY DESERVES THE RECOGNITION IT HAS HAD THIS DAY.

I AM SURE I SPEAK FOR ALL THOSE WHO SERVED HERE IN THANKING
THE SYDNEY HARBOUR FEDERATION TRUST AND THE SUBMARINES
ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIA FOR MAKING IT HAPPEN.

NOT LEAST I THANK CAPTAIN CHRIS SKINNER OF THE TRUST AND
DAVID SANDQUEST, NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION.

PLATYPUS HAD A GOOD FORMAL MOTTO - *NOTHING TOO DIFFICULT.*

I SUSPECT COMMODORE RICK SHALDERS, CURRENTLY COMMANDER
OF THE AUSTRALIAN SUBMARINE GROUP, MIGHT AGREE THAT THE
SPIRIT OF THAT MOTTO LIVES ON IN THE SUBMARINES OF TODAY AND
WILL DO SO IN THE SUBMARINES OF TOMORROW.

Nothing too difficult



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IAN MacDOUGALL, AC, AFSM VICE ADMIRAL RAN RTD

Ian MacDougall was the first Australian-born officer to command the Australian Submarine Squadron in 1985 and the first RAN Submarine Officer to attain flag rank.

He was Independent Chairman of the Co-operative Research Centre – Bushfires Board (2003-2007). The CRC has a budget of \$110M over seven years from July 2003 to conduct research into bushfire issues. He was also Chairman of the Australian Veterans Children Assistance Trust (2005-2007).

He was Commissioner (CEO) of the NSW Fire Brigades from 1994 to 2003. In 2001/2002 the NSWFB responded to 127,703 emergency incidents with 6,600 staff (operational and administrative) and a budget of \$365.875 million.

During his 40 years service with the Royal Australian Navy (1954 – 1994) he commanded submarines, a guide missile destroyer, a fleet tanker, the submarine squadron and the Australian Fleet.

He was Director of Submarine Policy between 1982 and 1984 and Director General of Joint Operations and Plans for the Australian Defence Force 1986 – 87, contributing to the successful integration of the three arms for operations.

From January 1989 to July 1990 he served as Maritime Commander Australia. One of the highlights of his time in command of the Fleet was attendance at Gallipoli for the 75th Anniversary of the ANZAC landings in 1915. Another key event was Kangaroo '89, then Australia's largest ever peacetime exercise. He took up the position of Deputy Chief of Naval Staff in 1990.

Following his appointment as Chief of the Naval Staff (Chief Executive Officer) in March 1991, Vice Admiral Mac Dougall oversaw some 15,000 uniformed personnel and 5,100 departmental civilians. The budget for the Navy was \$1.25 billion recurrent and \$1.25 billion capital.

During his time in the Royal Australian Navy, Vice Admiral Mac Dougall was granted accolades from other countries. He was awarded the Order of the Crown of Thailand, First Class, Knight Grand Cross for "his exceptionally meritorious conduct in performing outstanding service in the position of grave responsibility in the defence of the free world", and a prestigious military award from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for "his distinctive professional achievements and his personal endeavours for the improvement of relations between Australia and Pakistan and the Navies of the two countries."

He is a graduate of the US Naval War College (1980) and is an occasional external student at the University of New England, reading history. He was appointed a Companion in the Military Division of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honours list of 1993. In the 2000 Australia Day Honours list, he was awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal.

Vice Admiral Mac Dougall was Chairman of Royal Humane Society (NSW) 2000 - 2003 and was President of the Australasian Fire Authorities Council 1996 - 1999. He is Patron of the Submarines Association Australia.

Vice Admiral Mac Dougall's interests include skiing, golf and reading (particularly history). He is a First Fleeter, Sydney (1788) First Settler Norfolk Island, (1789), First Settler Sorrento, (1803), and First Settler Hobart Town, (1804).