Sir William Rooke Creswell and the Foundation of the Australian Navy

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By

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DEDICATION

The publication of this book is the end of a long road for me. It started 14 years ago when my youngest child began high school. With encouragement from my family I decided to pursue the education I had always wanted but, for various reasons, I had been unable to complete.

I was accepted into the University of Wollongong's Gateway Programme which taught learning skills to mature age students seeking entrance to university. I wish to thank most sincerely the University of Wollongong for offering this opportunity as a means of furthering higher education. It commenced a journey of historical enquiry, to search for the answer to that most basic of questions, 'Why'? The publication of this book is a significant milestone in this journey.

My sincere thanks go to the lecturers and tutors at the University's School of History and Politics in the Faculty of Arts, for making study both enjoyable and nerve-wracking at the same time. In particular, I thank my Thesis Supervisors, Dr. Peter Sales and Dr. Stephen Brown. They have supported me with encouragement, patience and sound advice even though I may not have appreciated it at the time. I will now admit that they were probably right, most of the time.

My biggest thanks must go to my family for their unfailing support over these years, my children thought me a little crazy for my choice of study topic, (The Foundation of the Australian Navy), but then 'Mum was always a bit odd'. My husband Neil has my never-ending gratitude for his support and understanding my need to complete my education and for being my research assistant during this work.

Thanks also must go to the staff of the Reading Rooms of the National Library of Australia, State Library of Victoria, State Library of South Australia and Archives New Zealand for making research material available as requested.

A final dedication must be made to Elizabeth Sevior, the granddaughter of Admiral Creswell for her friendship and interest in this work.

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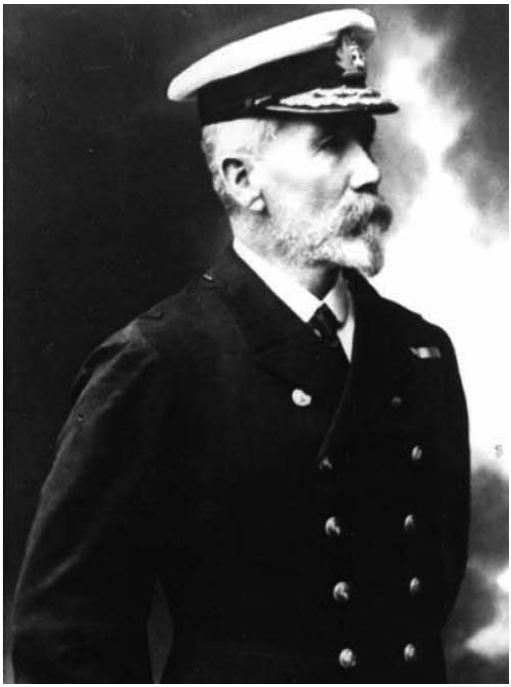
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Australian Archives
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ANZ	Archives of New Zealand
CBE	Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire
CDC	Colonial Defence Committee
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CMG	Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George
CNF	Commonwealth Naval Forces
CMF	Commonwealth Military Forces
CPD	Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates
CPP	Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
HMAS	His Majesty's Australian Ship
HMCS	Her Majesty's Colonial Ship
HMCVS	Her Majesty's Colonial Victorian Ship
HMS	Her/His Majesty's Ship
IJN	Imperial Japanese Navy
KBE	Knight of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire
KCMG	Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George.
NLA	National Library of Australia
OBE	Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire
QNF	Queensland Naval Forces
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RN	Royal Navy
SANF	South Australian Naval Forces
US/USA	United States/United States of America
VC	Victoria Cross

Sir William Rooke Creswell, *KCMG, KBE*



It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcomings; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy course; who, at best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.[1]

[1] Theodore Roosevelt, Speech to the Sorbonne (1910) in Fullilove, Michael. '*Men and Women of Australia' Our Greatest Modern Speeches*, Vintage, Sydney, 2005 (Forward: G. Freudenberg). p.61.

INTRODUCTION

To study the foundation of the Australian navy, one simply follows the trail that documents, historians, biographers and other writers have left us since the navy's inception. The prevailing accounts have remained so unchallenged that there is little reference made to how it all started or who campaigned for it. The writings of John La Nauze (*Alfred Deakin: A Biography*, 1979), George Macandie (*The Genesis of the Royal Australian Navy*, 1949), Neville Meaney (*A History of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy 1901-1923*: Volume 1: *The Search for Security in the Pacific 1901-1914*, 1976), Rev. Tom Frame (for example, *No Pleasure Cruise: The Story of the Royal Australian Navy*, 2004; *First In, Last Out: The Navy at Gallipoli*, 1990), and an unpublished doctoral thesis written thirty six years ago have become the basic references.[1] Professional historians have attempted to redress this: particularly David Stevens and John Reeve through their facilitation of the King-Hall Naval History Conferences, their edited publications of Conference papers, and with their own writings and recently David Day with his biography of Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher.[2]

Current descriptions of the navy's foundation appear to accept the available material without adequately questioning it. A thorough review of the limited literature and documentation actually suggests a different interpretation from the prevailing account. This work will consider several questions: What was the context (political, imperial, social, and economic) for the navy's foundation? What part did naval theory, regional influences and public attitudes play in the formation of a navy? Why was it that a Gibraltar-born, ex-Royal Navy officer campaigned strenuously for its creation?

This analysis of the navy's foundation seeks to challenge the conventional approach and consider more diverse available material

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[1] Webster, Stephen D., *Creswell, The Australian Navalist: A Career Biography of Vice Admiral Sir William Rooke Creswell, KCMG, KBE*, Unpublished Thesis, Monash University, 1976.

[2] Dr David Stevens is Director of Strategic Historical Studies, Sea Power Centre, Canberra; Dr John Reeve is Senior Lecturer, History Programme and Osborne Fellow in Naval History, UNSW at ADFA, Canberra; Dr David Day Historian and Author.

(newspapers, parliamentary reports and debates, correspondence) in seeking answers to the above questions, specifically the significant role of Vice-Admiral William Rooke Creswell who unrelentingly campaigned for a naval defence of Australia for over three decades. His public career has not been subject to close enquiry by professional historians, nor his actions or rationale evaluated. There is no biography and little written about Creswell the naval officer and less about the man. This account is not intended to be a biography of Creswell. Such an undertaking would be virtually impossible given the paucity of his private papers which have survived. What this work provides is an analysis of the extent to which Creswell shaped early naval defence and his challenge of early defence policy. In so doing it reveals a shrewd political strategist and tactician: In 1886 his articles on seapower in the *South Australian Register*[3] were the prologue to his campaign in the press, in correspondence and in reports to parliament to convince the public that Australia should have a naval defence. He was a politically astute advocate for a self-reliant naval force within the British Empire, a naval force the British Admiralty would not contemplate and did its best to crush what would be a successful campaign.

When Theodore Roosevelt, the great champion of the United States Navy, addressed the Sorbonne in 1910 he could have been characterising Creswell, when he said, "The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena."[4] This book seeks to balance the conventional approach of naval historians with insights into his character and his vision of a naval defence for Australia from the small amount of material available. The argument put forward here is that the role and the contribution in the establishment of a naval defence of Vice-Admiral Creswell have been under-estimated and misunderstood. Vice-Admiral Matt Tripovich said in 2008 in acclaiming Creswell's achievement:

> "Captain Creswell recognised that to be able to truly develop as a nation, a strong Australia needed a strong Australian Navy. Australia's future was dependant on maritime trade and its security lay in the protection of its sea lines of communication. In many ways Australia's strategic circumstances have not changed in 100 years."[5]

South Australian Register, 1839 to 1900 later changed to *The Register*. Trove**:** http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-title41.

[4] Theodore Roosevelt, Speech to the Sorbonne, 1910. p.61.

[5] Vice-Admiral Tripovich, AM, CSC, RAN Chief of Capability Development, Australian Defence Force, *107th Australian Navy Foundation Day Creswell Oration: Navy Capability From Creswell to Tomorrow*, 1 March 2008.

Competency and self-reliance were at the core of the Creswell vision, for Tripovich noted:

> "In an attempt to introduce what we now refer to as network centric warfare, he lobbied for all of the vessels to be fitted with wireless, to enable communications with shore and each other, and to allow dispersed vessels to act together for greater effect. … To enhance his vision for an independent Australian Navy supported by a local industrial base, he proposed that the first of the class of larger vessels be built in the UK, but that the remainder should be built in Australia."[6]

Creswell was relentless in his advocacy, according to Tripovich,

> "taking every opportunity to remind the Government of the consequences of continuing to fund the expansion of the Army at the expense of naval forces."[7]

Creswell was the campaigner in the struggle to establish a naval defence and, as importantly, a realist and pragmatist who advanced this grand vision by taking important small and practical steps, often in the face of widespread scepticism, suspicion and criticism. He believed that the Royal Navy was mighty, but "situated as we are at the extremity of the Empire"[8], Australia could not be adequately protected and a strong local naval force could add to the Royal Navy being mightier yet.

Creswell's advocacy occurred at a time when British imperialism was reaching its zenith. Britain's attitude to the members of its empire and the response of Australia to this imperialism are emphasised here. Amongst the Britons who promoted the ideals of imperialism was Professor John Ruskin. On 8 February 1870, he delivered his inaugural lecture, entitled *Imperial Duty*, at Oxford University. Ruskin's oratory inspired generations with his charismatic message, which would be shared by many beyond Britain's shores. It was a powerful *imprimateur* of British society: its people, its economy and its institutions (including the Royal Navy). To Ruskin, "there is a destiny now possible to us – the highest ever set before a nation to be accepted or refused. … an inheritance of honour, bequeathed to us"[9] extending to other lands the British race, society and religion,

[6] Vice-Admiral Tripovich.
[7] Vice-Admiral Tripovich.
[8] Commonwealth ParliamentaryPapers. Report: *The Best Method of Employing Australian Seamen in the Defence of Commerce and Ports* by WR Creswell p.156.
[9] Ruskin, J., from Lectures on Art, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Norton Topics Online: http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/20century/topic_1/jnruskin.html.

which Britain would govern and defend. These people were melded to Britain, for

> "though they live on a distant plot of ground, they are no more to consider themselves therefore disenfranchised from their native land, than the sailors of her fleets do, because they float on distant waves. So that literally, these colonies must be fastened fleets; and every man of them must be under authority of captains and officers, whose better command is to be over fields and streets instead of ships of the line …"[10]

In Gibraltar, where only a few nautical miles to the north-east was the site of the battle of Trafalgar, the sons of Edmund and Margaret Creswell seemed to echo the sentiments of John Ruskin's call to British youth in his final remarks of his lecture: "all that I ask of you is to have a fixed purpose of some kind for your country and yourselves."[11] One son, Edmund William, would join the Royal Engineers and serve in India; another, Frederic, would view Africa as his 'fixed purpose', eventually becoming a cabinet minister in South Africa and promoting a pre-apartheid form of racism ('Creswellism'); and a third, Dr J. E. Creswell, C.B.E., would be known as 'Creswell of Suez' for his nearly 30 years as a pioneer medical specialist in tropical and epidemic diseases in Egypt. William Rooke Creswell, like his brothers, embraced a role of service to make Britain 'mightier yet'. From the basic naval preparation of Eastman's Academy, Southsea, near Portsmouth, the thirteen year old Creswell entered HMS *Britannia*, the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth as a naval cadet in December 1865. An extraordinary naval career awaited him.

Ruskin's words still resonated throughout the Empire thirty years later. William Creswell, the Commandant of the Queensland Naval Forces, advancing the cause of a national naval defence in September 1901, declared the need "to develop locally those qualities of race and that sea profession which first gave us, and has since held for us, the land we live in."[12] Creswell as a former Royal Navy officer understood and accepted the significance of Britain and of the Royal Navy in the defence of the new Commonwealth *but*, in Creswell's view, only in co-operation with a local sea defence force. This was an abiding principle for Creswell in his concept of an Australian navy. Shortly after reviving his naval career in South Australia, Creswell "began to give shape to some ideas on the

[10] Ruskin, J. from Lectures on Art, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature.*
[11] Ruskin, J. from Lectures on Art, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.
[12] *CPP*. Report: *The Best Method of Employing Australian Seamen in the Defence of Commerce and Ports* by WR Creswell, p.156.

subject of Australian defence."[13] He thought the series of articles he wrote in 1886 for the *South Australian Register* might raise local interest in naval matters. His task, he soon realised, was "Imperial in its dimensions."[14]

Within a decade across the Pacific the writings of a United States naval theorist emerged which would influence the way the great seapowers would perceive their navies. Rear-Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan determined that there were three critical elements of seapower: firstly, first-class warships with supply bases; secondly, significant, secure sea commerce delivering wealth, supplies and manpower; and thirdly, colonies provisioning the seapower with bases and resources. Investment capital, international trade, raw material supplying colonies, a shared heritage with people throughout the empire and the greatest seapower the world had seen were all features of the enduring British imperialism.
It is hard to disagree:

> "Mahan sought to change the way Americans thought about their security. He declared that Americans must see themselves as inhabitants of a maritime state in a world of opposing navies."[15]

Creswell shared this sentiment and sought to persuade Australians to envisage a navy as a symbol of the new nation's identity in the same way Mahan defined seapower being broadly social and national, not just military. Both nations were maritime and both Admirals asserted seapower as a national interest. In his first public lecture in 1894, Creswell defined ''*Sea-Power* not so much the naval strength as the commerce of the nation, the national industry and everything that tended to send her products beyond her borders."[16] While Mahan sought to change Americans' thinking about their own navy, Creswell started from a lower base: he endeavoured to convince Australians of the need to have a navy at all. What ensured Mahan's success in the United States was the support and political leadership of Theodore Roosevelt, who between 1897 and 1909 developed the United States navy into a major naval power. Success for Creswell was delayed by the lack of a "local navy" policy arising mostly from adherence by Commonwealth governments, specifically between 1901 and 1909, to Britain's Naval Agreement with Australia and imperial naval policy.

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[13] Thompson, P. (ed.), *Close to the Wind. The Early Memoirs (1866-1879) of Admiral Sir William Creswell, KCMG, KBE.* Heinemann, London, 1965. p.195.
[14] Thompson, P. (ed.), *Close to the Wind*. p.200.
[15] Baer, G., *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Introduction, 1993.
[16] *South Australian Register* 10 April 1894.

"Historians have often expressed great satisfaction in the peaceful and seemingly inevitable process that brought together the six self-governing colonies."[17] Hirst has claimed. Inevitable, but Neville Meaney has noted:

> "Geo-politics was the determining condition of Australian nationalism. Distance from the Mother Country and proximity to each other enabled the Australian colonies to acquire a sense of possessing a community of interests. Although this set them apart from the British Isles on the other side of the world, it also provided the basis of a common identity".[18]

Less convincing, was Meaney's assertion:

> "From the end of the nineteenth century successive Australian governments were aware of their peculiar geo-political circumstances and within the formal framework of the British Empire they evolved consistent, cohesive and comprehensive defence and external policies to provide for the security of their own country".[19]

For much of the first decade of the twentieth century the thinking of the "short-lived" Commonwealth governments about defence and external affairs extended no further than Britain would allow. Their only consistent, cohesive and comprehensive policy related to a White Australia, an all-party political dogma of restrictive immigration. Creswell developed his ideas within this broader geo-political context and it was this which gave such prescience to his work.

Creswell's campaign came at a time when imperial policies (defence, foreign relations, economic and trade) sought to prevail over an emerging autonomous nation. Did the prevailing imperialism hinder his campaign for an Australian naval defence, the timing of its establishment and what form and development it would take? Why were early Commonwealth governments opposed to Creswell's schemes? A number of parliamentarians asserted a common national defence as the prime reason for federation, but did this include a national navy?

As early as the 1870's Australian politicians and the press had promoted Australia's ambitions in the Pacific, according to a local interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine: this was more assertive and

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[17] Hirst, J., *The Sentimental Nation. The Making of the Australian Commonwealth.* Oxford University, Press, South Melbourne, 2000. pp.1-2.

[18] Meaney, N.K., *A History of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy 1901-1923*: Volume 1: *The Search for Security in the Pacific 1901-1914*, Sydney University Press, University of Sydney, 1976, Pp.8-9.

[19] Meaney, *A History of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy 1901-1923*: Volume 1: Pp.1-2.

aggressive in attitude associated with territorial claims, unlike the original Monroe proclamation. They also perceived successively and even simultaneously at times, threats by France, Russia, Japan and Germany. The proposition that Australia, as an island continent, needed its own naval defence was a matter of increasing debate following Federation. Politicians (e.g. Sir John Quick, Richard Crouch, and Senator Chataway) would reference Creswell in their parliamentary advocacy for an Australian navy, while British journalist Richard Jebb in his study of the Empire in 1902 noted Creswell's 1901 scheme as "the basis of an immediate programme".'[20] After 1906 Creswell's public comments, schemes and annual reports to parliament reveal an evolution in his strategic thinking to a "blue water" navy and Australian political journals, such as *Lone Hand* and *The Call* supported the Creswell stance for an Australian built, crewed and commanded local navy. *The Age* told its readers in 1908 that Australia's geographic position demanded that it must have a navy:

> "Australia is an island continent. Our destiny lies on the sea. No friend or enemy can reach us save by the sea. … We must arm, and inasmuch as the sea while we possess no war ships puts us at the mercy of any hostile Power possessing ships, it is our first duty to arm navally".[21]

In the first decade of the twentieth century Australia's Commonwealth Naval Force was not a well-established organisation with the full suite of infrastructure, requiring government oversight of materiel purchase, new naval designs or the deployment of appropriate naval forces in support of foreign policy – as was to be found within Britain's government-Admiralty relationship. It was not an autonomous national navy; it was hardly a navy at all: Britain would not tolerate independent colonial or dominion navies, accepting only 'One Flag, One Fleet'. The nature of this context shaped the nature of the civil and naval relationship. Creswell found himself in an uneasy, even, at times, antagonistic relationship with the civil authority (parliament, government) and this extended to the Admiralty and the Committee of Imperial Defence. In Australia conflict arose through the differences in experience and outlook of the various players: Creswell, parliamentarians, journalists and the general public. These differences were partly ideological, partly traditional. Small tenuous steps were taken to formalise the civil – naval relationship by the Reid-McLean conservative government in 1905, which followed through on the

[20] Jebb, R., *Studies in Colonial Nationalism*, Edward Arnold, London, 1905, p.288.
[21] *The Age*, Melbourne, 17 March 1908.

intentions of the short-lived 1904 Watson Labor government. The Hughes-Onslow incident demonstrated in 1913 the civil authority-navy relationship remained awkward and underdeveloped. Though from his years of colonial naval service in Australia to Creswell the principles were clear:

> "With parliament and the Government rests the responsibility of deciding what amount shall be set apart for naval defences. As the officer charged with the care of those defences, my responsibility extends only to making the most of the means placed at my disposal. As professional adviser, it is, however, my duty to represent what is needed. … it is my plain duty to make them".[22]

Creswell did not waver in his stance for the next twenty-five years. Shortly before he died, Creswell told Herbert Brookes that his battle for a naval defence was purely on the naval side, not the political field. In this battle, as he advised graduating cadet-midshipmen from the Naval College in December 1917, two elements for their careers were important: the greatest confidence is shown in officers who, firstly, were absolutely straightforward in everything and who, secondly, never left a job or duty until it was completed.

While Creswell's reputation has not had widespread recognition, some historians and other writers (as early as Murdoch in 1923 and La Nauze in 1965) with their biographies accepted the politician Alfred Deakin as the pre-eminent advocate and a founder of the Australian Navy. The significance of his role is problematic at best, despite the defence of his granddaughter, Judith Harley:

> "Deakin has been criticised in his handling of naval issues as being political and erratic and as lacking expertise. But he had to be political and flexible as a democratic leader and diplomatic negotiator. And while Deakin was not a naval person, he had a certain strategic insight ahead of his time – Japan became a threat to Australia and the American alliance was important in defeating it. Above all, Deakin had a vision for Australian naval power".[23]

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[22] Report of the Naval Commandant, 1 August 1895, *South Australian Parliamentary Papers*, 99/1895 in Hyslop, R., *Australian Naval Administration 1900-1939*, The Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1973, p.26.

[23] Harley, J., *Alfred Deakin and the Australian Naval Story* in Stevens, D. and Reeve, J. (Eds.), *The Navy and the Nation: The influence of the Navy on modern Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2005, p.303.

My argument is that Deakin was not the catalyst for acquiring an Australian naval defence and his role should be re-examined in a more critical light. There are good reasons for thinking that an Australian navy came into being despite Deakin, and certainly not because of him. Deakin, as Prime Minister, lacked executive assertiveness and rarely delivered substance to his words in parliament, public addresses or writings in advocating an Australian navy. Deakin desired a local navy within an Imperial Fleet, as he desired for himself a major role within the councils of the Empire. He failed to achieve either. Deakin accepted that the instruments of British naval defence would protect the interests of Australia, but he did not transcend the orthodoxies of his day: in Deakin's view only with the consent, expertise and unity of control of the British Navy, whose fleet would remain the prime protector in Australian waters, would a local naval force be possible. Creswell, by contrast, challenged the established viewpoint. Reflecting on the mission he had set himself, Creswell wrote:

> "When I entered the lists to fight for the cause of Australian naval defence, I thought of the magnitude of the struggle in which I had engaged. In point of fact, the battle was destined to be waged for three and twenty years, no less. At the time the righting of what I conceived to be a glaring wrong seemed Simple enough. A wholly unsound policy had only to be explained was my fond thought, and correction must straightaway follow".[24]

What followed was a two-decade struggle for Creswell. Eventually, Australia gained a naval defence replete with warships, support infrastructure such as training schools, engineering facilities and an intelligence service under the direction of an Australian naval board.

There are many threads to the story of the birth of this naval defence: the setting of time and place, while the actions and behaviour of people and powers played out in the arena are integral to the origins of Australian naval defence. I contend that Creswell played the fundamental role in the establishment of a naval defence. While his advocacy was as much about a call for identity, as about security for a nation, at a political level duality of loyalty blurred the identity of nationhood. The Commonwealth Parliament, under the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act of 1900, had the power to make laws and to govern for external affairs and defence. Yet for forty years, until the Statute of Westminster, which was not ratified in Australia until 1942, it did not exercise the external affairs power, relying on British representation. As for defence, Britain considered Australia

[24] Thompson, P. Pp.196-197.

"safe" on land to manage its own affairs and encouraged Commonwealth governments to commit most of the defence budget to the army. After all, Australia was "girt by sea": an army was confined within a natural border, unlikely to stumble into Imperial affairs, but available to augment the armies of the Empire. As for the navy, that was a different matter. Localised navies in the dominions split responsibility in Britain's view and in the first half of the twentieth century Britain would accept no deviation from having one Royal Navy and sole command of the Empire's fleets. Imperial ideology stumped national practicality and it would be some time before Australians became aware that British naval protection was half a world away. An Australian navy could challenge the threat of an enemy at sea, staving off invasion until the Royal Navy arrived. For a maritime continent, the *sine qua non* that a navy built, crewed and commanded by Australians was the nation's first line of defence was not accepted by Britain. "One Flag, One Fleet," "concentration of naval forces" and "unity of control" were aspects of Britain's command of all the oceans: This was imperial ideology pervading British naval policy. What a swirling sea Creswell set himself on when, at first, he only asked to share, what Joseph Chamberlain called for at the time, "some assistance and some support' for 'the weary titan".[25] For Britain this offer of help was not welcome.

[25] Jebb, p.138.

CHAPTER ONE

1885–1900: "HAVE A FIXED PURPOSE OF SOME KIND FOR YOUR COUNTRY AND YOURSELVES"

Britain had a clear view of Empire and what it wanted from it: there was a clear sense of *Imperial Mission*. From the mid-nineteenth century, Britons, particularly those in high office or authority, generally subscribed to John Ruskin's invocation:

> "This is what England must either do or perish: she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men … and there teaching those of her colonists that their chief virtue is to be fidelity to their country, and their first aim is to advance the power of England by land and by sea … If we get men, for little pay, to cast themselves against the cannon-mouths for England, we may find men who will plough and sow for her, and bring up their children to love her."[1]

The spirit of his words guided peoples' thinking and actions: Africa was explored; regiments and naval squadrons were deployed throughout the world to protect British interests: to suppress slavery and piracy, to forestall or contain foreign powers; and wherever they settled, these people were "Britons" and Britain was "Home".

Britain could do all this because, at the conclusion of twenty-five years of European conflict (1790-1815), it had "the ability to use the seas and oceans for military or commercial purposes and to preclude an enemy from the same."[2] There would follow one hundred years of relative peace known as *Pax Britannica* (1815-1914) or the *Trafalgar Century* (1805-1905). These were not necessarily interchangeable terms: the span of the *Pax* – at least in Europe – was from the 1815 peace treaty between Britain

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[1] *Imperial Duty,* The inaugural lecture by John Ruskin, Oxford University, 1890, in Roberts, B., *Cecil Rhodes: Flawed Colossus,* W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1988, p.27.

[2] Gray, C., *The Leverage of Sea Power: The Strategic Advantage of Navies in War*, Free Press, New York, 1992, p.4.

and France to the outbreak of the Great War, while the latter *Century* denoted Britain's world supremacy of the sea from Trafalgar to the rise of other naval powers, particularly Germany and Japan. This relative peace allowed the Royal Navy freedom of movement to explore, its hydrographic office to chart the world's oceans and Britain to trade. Captain Peter Hore has argued also that:

> "it was the Royal Navy, not the US Navy, which policed the Monroe Doctrine in its early years, for Britain was undisputedly the one world power, and her navy was supreme… Without the victory of seapower, little of this would have been possible".[3]

What made British seapower great and secured its Empire was not that it had warships on every ocean and all the seas of the world but that it had a small number of geo-strategic naval stations which based squadrons with the aspect of "fleets in being". Britain effectively controlled the Suez Canal, the Mediterranean, the English Channel and the North Sea and thus could virtually dictate the terms of Europe's access to the "outer world". Under conditions prevailing until near the end of the nineteenth century, control of these four narrow seas had political and military effects felt around the globe. "… in effect a global command of the seas."[4] It was a clear illustration of sea power: the ability, through strength, capacity and mobility, of a nation to possess an effective naval defence which permitted its commerce to travel freely across the seas to markets and suppliers in peace and, in time of war, to prevent, repel or attack and destroy an enemy when required**.** Unlike the permanency that can be associated with conquered territory, a maritime nation's command of the sea is limited by the geographical area of control for the protection of sea routes and is as permanent as its maritime operational infrastructure, naval capability and its government's policy will allow. Britain's command of the seas came in two phases: the first, as a seapower reinforcing Pax Britannica, vigilant on the world's oceans, an instrument for the preservation of peace and security. The second, with the onset of an Anglo-German naval rivalry from 1904, Britain's naval policy was predicated not only on keeping British sea communication secure, but as a seapower preparing for 'Armageddon', possessing a navy modern in training, armaments and construction, which would attack and destroy an enemy when required.

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[3] Hore, Captain P., *The Habit of Victory: The Story of the Royal Navy 1545 to 1945*, Sidgwick & Jackson, National Maritime Museum, London, 2005, p.242.
[4] Sprout, H. and M., *Toward a New Order of Sea Power: American naval policy and the world scene, 1918-1922*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1969, p.16.

There was an emerging vulnerability to this mastery of the seas: acquisition of an extensive empire, rich in commerce, raw materials and agriculture, demanded the protection of sea trade and commerce and the defence of imperial territories. By the middle of the nineteenth century Britain, unchallenged at sea, became arguably at least somewhat complacent in the power of its navy. A Royal Commission on the Defence of the United Kingdom in 1860 brought forcefully to the attention of the British Government, and the Admiralty in particular, the urgent need to address the defence of its far-flung Empire. It had become burdensome for Britain to maintain a large and expensive empire on its own. A key finding was that the colonies could not rely solely on Britain for protection. British domestic pressure was increasing for a reduction in the costs of maintaining its colonies, many of which were now self-governing and well able to compete on the open economic market. This was particularly the case for the Australian colonies with their emerging aspirations for national autonomy within the British Empire. The protection of these colonies was as much a matter of economic value and good governance for Britain as it was a strategic piece in its imperial defence policy and foreign policy "chess game". The Australian colonial governments' concerned about the war between Britain and Russia in the Crimea – there were reports of Russian men-of-war in the Pacific – were already stirred to respond: the New South Wales government locally built a gunboat, the *Spitfire*, while the Victorians ordered from England an armed screw steamer, the *Victoria*, which arrived in May 1856.

On 25 March 1859 the Admiralty, anticipating the Royal Commission's findings and recognising the need for dedicated naval protection for the Empire's resource rich colonies, separated the Australian colonies from the East Indian Station and established Australia Station. It was the initial, though important, step in recognising a naval defence was required for this sea-bound continent. Thirty-five years later the United States naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan would declare an enduring maxim:

> Some nations more than others, but all maritime nations more or less depend for their prosperity upon maritime commerce, and probably upon it more than any other single factor. Either under their own flag or under that of a neutral, either by foreign trade or coasting trade, the sea is the greatest

> of boons to such a state; and under every form its sea-borne trade is at the mercy of a foe decisively superior.[5]

Though written at a time when maritime nations, particularly Britain, were re-assessing their positions as sea powers, Mahan's July 1894 article in the *North American Review*, seemed to be a précis of the situation for the Australian colonies: foreign warships could proceed unchallenged in Australian waters and, therefore, the Royal Navy needed a presence equal to any other power in the region.

After 1861, according to Lambert, "British strategy shifted away from the stationed forces, both land and sea, of the previous 60 years towards the mobile, centrally controlled units … urged as an economy measure by Gladstone"[6] who, when he became Prime Minister in late 1868, promptly adopted his long-held 'Flying Squadron' strategy. To give effect to this government policy of showing the might of the navy to its British possessions, Rear-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Phipps Hornby was given command of a Royal Navy flying squadron and was sent on a training cruise for new midshipmen around the world, which included a visit to Australia in late 1869. One of the midshipmen was William Creswell, who had joined the 35-gun, screw frigate, HMS *Phoebe*, following graduation from HMS *Britannia* at Dartmouth in 1867. Recalling his time as a midshipman, Creswell wrote:

> "*Showing the flag* was … a very necessary duty. Primitive states like the Central American republics would be less likely to infringe international law to the detriment of our shipping or of British subjects if they were occasionally visited by a powerful protector."[7]

Away from well governed colonies in less stable areas of the world, Britain still needed to protect its citizens, provide access to its territory and preserve the security of its trade routes or commercial interests from the threat by pirates, slavers or rebels. To counter these threats, incursions or illicit trade, Britain deployed the Royal Navy not for war, but to influence and preserve peace, protect sea commerce and permit free movement of goods and people across the seas. It did so in the form of small, shallow

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[5] Mahan, A.T., *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future*, Port Washington, Kennikat Press, 1897 (Reissued 1970), p.129.

[6] Lambert, A., *Australia, the Trent crisis of 1861 and the strategy of imperial defence*, in Stevens, D. and Reeve, J. (Eds.), *Southern Trident: Strategy, history and the rise of Australian Naval Power*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2001, p.116.

[7] Thompson, P. Pp.55-56.

draft vessels, which could work close to shore and access coastal rivers systems, commanded by junior naval officers:

> "This was, perhaps, the last era in history when, unfettered by global communications, the junior officer could exercise his initiative to the full in the Hornblower tradition".[8]

Lieutenant William Rooke Creswell, taken from Thompson P. (Ed.), *Close to the Wind*

This was the type of naval operation, of which Midshipman Creswell wanted to be part, in which small steam driven vessels – gun boats, built in their hundreds – became the instrument of diplomacy (asserting British foreign policy) and policing (protecting trade or the rights and interests of Britons in foreign lands or British colonies). He was promoted to Sub-Lieutenant on 20 October 1871 and, after a time with the Channel

[8] Perrett, P., *Gunboat! Small Ships at War*, Cassell, London, 2000, p.13.

Squadron, transferred to the China Station at Hong Kong in 1873. From here Creswell was sent to Penang, with the chance of command, to subdue piracy**.** David Howarth has said:

> "the young men who commanded the gunboats were often thousands of miles away from their senior officers, and British policy put a big responsibility on them."[9]

On 21 August 1873 Sub-Lieutenant Creswell, commanding a cutter, used rocket fire to silence a gun in a Chinese pirate fort at the mouth of the Larut River; the following month, 6 September, while onboard the schooner, HMS *Badger*, he fought off two large Chinese pirate galleys on the Larut River, and, though severely wounded in the engagement, remained at his post. For his gallantry, Creswell was promoted to Lieutenant, invalided home and went on to study at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich.

By 1875 "there was no active service going on anywhere"[10] the ambitious William Creswell recalled. "The lists were crowded, and promotion at its slowest."[11] The Royal Navy's work in suppressing the slave trade in East Africa offered young Creswell hope of promotion, higher pay and action; he transferred to HMS *Undaunted*, the flagship of the East Indies Station, in late 1875. Creswell seemed to echo the sentiments of John Ruskin's call to British youth: "all that I ask of you is to have a fixed purpose of some kind for your country and yourselves."[12] He was taught Swahili (which brought him extra pay as an interpreter) to add to his fluency in Spanish and then joined the unarmoured wooden screw vessel HMS *London* in Zanzibar in 1876. Hunting slave traders and stopping local rulers from interfering with legitimate trade, provided opportunities for Creswell to use his initiative, be decisive and be able to articulate and defend his decisions. Writing of such junior naval officers David Howarth noted that "Single-handed, they were expected to weigh up a local situation, judge who was right and who was wrong, and decide whether tact or a salvo of shells was a better solution."[13] Perrett observed that "their actions demonstrated the qualities of high courage, leadership, self-sacrifice, independence, initiative, ingenuity and sometimes

[9] Howarth, D., *Brief History of British Sea Power: How Britain Became Sovereign of the Seas*, Robinson, London, 2003, p.385.
[10] Thompson, P. p.143.
[11] Thompson, P. p.143.
[12] Thomas, A., *Rhodes: The Race for Africa*, BBC Books, London, 1996, p.110.
[13] Howarth, *A Brief History of British Sea Power*. p.385.

astonishing impudence"[14]qualities which would be evident in Creswell during his thirty-three year advocacy for an Australian naval defence. In 1876 in Zanzibar, following a bout of malaria, Creswell was invalided home. Before he left Creswell was advised of his father's death and this contributed to his decision at age 26 to resign his commission in the Royal Navy.

A visit to Australia in 1869 as a midshipman on board the frigate HMS *Phoebe* as part of Admiral Phipps-Hornby Flying Squadron revealed to Creswell "a land of infinite promise, as it seemed, for a man still young, with his way to make in the world…"[15] and, without any urging, arrived in Sydney on 4 February 1879 with his younger brother, Charles "… as a prospective settler in search of a fortune."[16] He took up a selection in the Curlewis area of Queensland with two partners, Abbot and Chataway.[17] However, the man may leave the navy, but the navy does not leave the man. In the first half of 1885, Commander John Walcott, the Commandant of the South Australian Naval Forces wrote to Creswell, his ex-shipmate, asking him to join the colonial navy in South Australia as First Lieutenant. Creswell declined but following the deteriorating health of his brother, for which a milder climate was recommended, Creswell accepted a second invitation from Walcott. When Creswell took up the position with the South Australian Naval Forces on 12 October 1885, already on board *Protector* were two men with whom he would be associated in the early Royal Australian Navy: Chapman Clare and William Clarkson.

First Lieutenant Creswell already knew the vastness of this continent as a visiting midshipman in 1869 and as a Queensland stockman. "To while away the many solitary evenings which, as a bachelor aboard the *Protector* fell to my lot," Creswell wrote in his early memoirs, "I began to give shape to some ideas on the subject of Australian defence."[18] The enormity of the coastline and the distance from Britain were significant considerations for formulating a maritime doctrine: a coastline of 19540 kilometres and 19200 kilometres from Western Europe, far from help ('Home' or neighbouring naval stations) or threat (an attack, Britons and colonists presumed, would come from a European power) for the Australian colonies. Geoffrey Blainey described the inadequacy of Britain's reach to govern Australia in concert with the colonial

[14] Perrett, p.16.
[15] Thompson. P. p.193.
[16] Thompson, P. p.193.
[17] Thomas Drinkwater Chataway later became a senator for Queensland and a supporter of Creswell in the Commonwealth parliament.
[18] Thompson, P. p.195.

administrations, as 'a tyranny of distance.' It was a dual tyranny: imperial policy, directives and expectations communicated through the Colonial Office to colonies, which, in turn, incorporated their realities of Australia and its environs to produce localised policy interpretations, reactions and fears. From the time of early white settlement, a particular reality for the colonies was the isolation they felt as an outpost in the South, which in part, generated their fear of the threat of armed invasion from one European nation or another – firstly, France, then Russia and later Germany. The colonies also feared invasion by migration from Asia. The influx of Chinese miners during the gold rushes in Victoria and Queensland had aroused concerns among the white population of an influx of 'Asiatics' from the north willing to work for very little pay or in jobs unappealing to the locals or dominate the gold mining areas of Victoria and Queensland. This concern of being overwhelmed by people of a different colour extended to the Japanese and Pacific Islanders.

British supremacy of the oceans made it highly unlikely that any enemy would harass coastal shipping, bombard ports or invade Australia. Based on this assumption two British engineering officers, Lieutenant Colonel William Jervois and Major Peter Scratchley, commissioned in 1876 by the British government at the request of colonial governments, and examined the condition of colonial Australia's existing port and coastal defences. The sea, they characterized, was Australia's first line of defence and British warships at sea would intercept an invading enemy fleet or marauding enemy cruiser. They reasoned the only thing the colonists had to fear was coastal raids in which the objective would be plunder, the extortion of money after the capture of merchant ships or bombardment of coastal cities. Yet all this would only be possible after the defeat of the Royal Navy. In 1879 Sir William Jervois recommended that the individual colonies acquire torpedo boats for coastal and river defence for the protection of their principal ports:

> "whilst the Imperial Navy undertakes the protection of the British mercantile marine generally, and of the highways of communication between the several parts of the Empire".[19]

Generally, the colonies did not respond positively to the Jervois-Scratchley report. An Inter-colonial Conference in Sydney in January 1881 considered contributing financially to additional naval forces locally, but it did not gain general support. To the contrary, the colonial premiers

[19] Macandie, G., *The Genesis of the Australian Navy*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1949. p.18.

resolved that not only should the British retain responsibility for the naval defence of Australia, but the strength of the Royal Navy should be increased on the Australia Station. The Secretary of State for the Colonies was not impressed with the premiers' resolution that the colonial naval defence "should continue to be an exclusive charge upon the Imperial Treasury."[20]

When the colonists' invasion fears were heightened by German expansionary activities in the South Pacific, the Queensland Government decided to act, in March 1883 the eastern half of New Guinea on behalf of the Empire. The annexation of the island of New Guinea had long been a priority for colonial governments for its possession would create a barrier between mainland Australia and Asia to the north. When Britain's Gladstone government repudiated the colonial government's action it highlighted the sharply drawn demarcation between imperial policy and colonial aspirations. Britain's refusal to sanction an active colonial policy was received with "profound regret in Australia and New Zealand". Victorian politician, James Service, in London at the time, was quoted in the *Morning Post* newspaper:

> "… from Queensland in the north to New Zealand in the south, from Western Australia in the west to Fiji in the extreme east, the cry is echoed 'the islands of Australasia shall belong to the people of Australia".[21]

Queensland's action and Service's comments were a clear declaration of Monroe Doctrine dimensions. These sentiments were re-affirmed at the Sydney Inter-Colonial Conference of Australian Colonial Premiers in November 1883. The Conference, which included New Zealand representation, demanded that Britain annex the unclaimed parts of New Guinea and nearby islands (Victoria, for instance, favoured the annexation of Fiji) as a buffer for the security and defence of the six colonies. Taking the concepts of the Monroe Doctrine and applying them to the South Pacific, the Conference declared that no foreign power be allowed to annex territory south of the equator and that any further annexations be viewed as a threat to Australia and the Empire in reality asserting an Australasian Monroe Doctrine.[22] As far as Victorian Premier, James Service, was concerned:

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[20] Macandie, p.38.

[21] Tate. M., *Political Science Quarterly*, 'The Australasian Monroe Doctrine', June 1961, Pp.264 – 284.

[22] The idea of An Australasian Monroe Doctrine would occur a number of times in the early years of the Commonwealth. Also in: Wellington, R., Journal of the

> "the object they had in view was to keep the English people in these distant lands as far removed as possible from danger arising from European complications…. by keeping the colonies safe, through their remoteness"[23]

while "the loyal people of Australia would be free to lend their assistance to the dear old motherland in any struggle in which she might be engaged."[24] The intention, in the view of the colonies, was to advance the Imperial cause, which in turn would strengthen their security.

The London *Pall Mall Gazette* of 6th December, 1883 reacted to the colonial premiers' declaration with:

> "it is hands off all round, with the exceptions of course, of the hands of Englishmen. To Frenchmen, Germans, Americans and all other foreigners the whole of the Pacific, south of the equator, is forbidden ground."[25]

The British government were dismissive. Publicly, the resolutions of the Sydney conference were "warmly welcomed" by the Colonial Office and would be "carefully considered" by the government in London, which was ever mindful of public opinion both at home, and in the Pacific colonies. Privately the government was not so polite: in a letter to Prime Minister Gladstone, Lord Derby a former Secretary of State for the Colonies, expressed his contempt of the resolutions: '…this is mere raving: and one can scarcely suppose it to be seriously intended: though it is hard to fix the limits of colonial self-esteem…"[26] The notion that even lowly colonials may have independent thoughts and ideas concerning their wellbeing and security seemed curious to the British premier.

Queensland Premier Samuel Griffith suggested "that a Federal Australasian Council should be created to deal, inter-alia, with the maritime defences of Australasia, beyond the territorial limits." Griffith realised it was a responsibility the colonies should have, which he underlined later in a memorandum of June 1885:

> "it is manifest that the ships at present on station are insufficient both in number and quality to afford such offensive and defensive force as a community of over 3,000,000 persons, with wealth far beyond that

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Royal Australian Historical Society, *Australian Attitudes to the Spanish-American War*. Vol.56, Part 2, June 1970. Pp.111-120.

[23] Wellington R., '*Australian Attitudes to the Spanish-American War*'. Pp.111-120.

[24] Wellington, Pp.111-120.

[25] Wellington, Pp.111-120.

[26] Tate, Pp.264-284.