

Centenary of the arrival in Sydney

of HMA Submarines AE1 and AE2

24 May 2014

Address by Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, AO, CSC, RAN

Chief of Navy

Senator The Honourable Michael Ronaldson, Minister for Veterans Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC, and also representing the Minister for Defence; and Mrs Cate Ronaldson; The Honourable Charlie Lynn; MLC; NSW Parliamentary Secretary for Veterans' Affairs and representing the Premier of NSW; Ms Gai Brodtmann, Member for Canberra, representing the Shadow Minister for Defence; Families of the crews of AE1 and AE2 – it is wonderful to see some many of you here today; Members of the submarine community; Veterans and other distinguished guests; Ladies and Gentlemen.

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and in whose waters our ships lie, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and pay my respects to their elders past and present; I also wish to acknowledge the contribution that our indigenous submariners have made over many decades.

Today we meet in this simple ceremony to celebrate the centenary of the arrival into Sydney of Australia's first submarines, His Majesty's Australian Submarines *AE1* and *AE2*.

Their arrival into Sydney Harbour completed Australia's new Navy – a Navy whose architects were convinced of the need to have this important capability as part of a balanced fleet. This Fleet – these warships – were a major achievement by our new nation.

Perhaps appropriately for submariners they slipped quietly into Sydney Harbour early on a Sunday morning, without the celebrations and fanfare of the Fleet entry the year before.

But no matter how much they were almost unseen, their arrival was very significant.

This fleet they completed was now one that could defend the nation's shores; which could defend the nation's vital trading arteries – thus protecting our ability to trade which was as fundamental to our security and prosperity then as it is now; and had the capability to secure our region.

At the time of their construction in 1912 and 1913, *AE1* and *AE2* were amongst the largest submarines in the world – their size reflecting the nature of our maritime geography – something which has been repeated with every class of submarine we have subsequently operated. The submarine crews demonstrated extraordinary endurance and highly developed mariner skills on this long journey to Australia – a great feat of seamanship in itself. And they did so in boats for which the living conditions were cramped and difficult at the best of times.

Even though our submarines today have little in common with their early forebears; even though their capabilities make those of *AE1* and *AE2* pale in comparison; even though the strategic weight, the warfighting capacity of the *Collins* class resembles more the battlecruiser *Australia*, the flagship of our first fleet, than our early submarines; the mariner skills and the endurance of the crews of the *AE1* and *2* remain an inspiration to our submariners and to all our sailors. No matter how advanced the technology, it still needs fighting sailors to make it work.

So as we celebrate the centenary of submarines in the Royal Australian Navy, we can be proud of what we have achieved: proud of the professionalism of our submariners; proud of their unheralded operational outcomes; and proud of their ability to excel in the most demanding of environments. Even though the nature of their work will always and rightly limit the specific and detailed understanding of many submarine force achievements, it is fair to say the reputation of our submariners, amongst the most respected in the world, is well deserved.

The professionalism of our submarine force is a golden thread which runs through the last century of submarines, best epitomised by the mastery required by every individual who earns the prized Australian submarine dolphins. And I have no doubt it is a thread that will run through the next century of Australian submarines.