

Lloyd Shackleton Kent

21 July 1919 - 19 Nov 1941

Text compiled by Lloyd's surviving nieces and nephews

As a 5 year old when HMAS Sydney II and all her crew went missing, my memories of Lloyd are of a fun loving Uncle who looked very handsome in his Navy uniform. Lloyd gave me my favourite toy, a small, cream, fine woollen, polar bear I named 'Poly Bosom Friend'. Poly would occasionally go to the Dry Cleaners and would be returned to the door with an announcement - "One polar bear, one ear, one eye". My last vivid memory of Lloyd was at a family celebration at my home. He was in uniform and he would have been in Melbourne on leave.

My eldest cousin Noelle has wonderful memories of her Uncle Lloyd. She remembers also being at Lloyd's home when the telegraph man, with black armband, delivered the news that HMAS Sydney II and all her crew were missing, the silence that followed and the distressing rumours that abounded over the years.

When the ship was lost Lloyd had two nieces, Nollian (Noelle) and Janice and three nephews, Halden, Peter and John. Later another two Robert and Geoffrey were born. Noelle and Janice are the only surviving nieces who knew and remember him.

All surviving members of Lloyd's family are very grateful to those who were responsible for persevering and ultimately finding the resting place of HMAS Sydney II and her crew. We feel a sense of great relief. The pain over so many years of knowing nothing and finding no trace of the ship or her crew, was something Lloyd's immediate family never got over. There was a family silence over the tragedy and it just was not talked about. Perhaps that might have been different had the Sydney been found earlier or if there had been some survivors.

Lloyd grew up in a comfortable and loving family home in Melbourne, at Ranfurlie Crescent in the suburb of Malvern. He was the youngest of five children to Albert and Mabel Kent (nee Shackleton). He had two brothers, -Lincoln, the eldest (father of Halden and Janice), Allan (father of Peter, John and Geoffrey) and two sisters, May (Noelle and Robert's mother) and Mildred. Mabel was from Christchurch in New Zealand. The family were Methodists. Church and Sunday school were attended regularly on Sundays. Lloyd's parents were, in earlier years, members of the Salvation Army.

Sunday afternoons were spent at Ranfurlie Crescent where grandchildren, nieces and nephews played indoor and outdoor games, after we had changed out of our 'Sunday Best'. There was a very popular billiard room for older members and the younger ones

watched with keen interest and loved to collect the balls from the pockets to place back on the table.

After games there would be 'High Tea' with all seated around a large dining table with delicious home made sausage rolls, sandwiches, scones, jam and cream and sponge cakes. This was served with tea and home made lemon and orange drink for the grandchildren. At Christmas time Lilydale Cider was served to all! After tea, everyone gathered in the living room for music. Some played piano, two played violin. Others sang solos and duets. All had good voices.

May and Norman (Grieve) moved into the house at Ranfurlie Cres on the passing of Albert and Mabel and their son Robert moved into what had been Lloyd's room. Although he was too young to have known Lloyd, Robert formed a connection through Lloyd's bookshelves and signal pennants that were a fixture of the room.

After finishing school, Lloyd joined the family firm of A.F. Kent & Sons, (Manchester and piece goods) of 175-177 Flinders Lane. There he worked alongside his father and two brothers – a proud and amicable arrangement. His father, Albert, who started the business at the age of 50, was more than happy to have his three sons working with him.

When the war intervened, Lloyd (aged 19yrs.) was mobilised for service by proclamation. He reported for duty on September 25th, 1939 as a Signalman. He was allocated on mobilisation to Cerberus III. Noelle and I talked about how alien the transition from this comfortable and familiar environment to life in the navy in wartime would have been. Very stark and almost unimaginable to many people today.

After my father Lincoln died in 1982, 15 letters Lloyd had written to his family during his service on HMAS Sydney II between July 21st and November 11th 1941 were passed on to me. Much of what the surviving family know of his time on HMAS Sydney has been gleaned from these letters.

Lloyd first went aboard HMAS Sydney II on Saturday July 19th 1941, (now aged 21) This was an important date for the ship as it was exactly 12 months since the ship engaged and sank the 'Calleoni' in the Mediterranean. He mentions in his 1st letter, after boarding at 10.30 am, that by 1.30 pm they had slipped and were proceeding down Sydney harbour for an unknown destination. However the Commander advised before long they would be proceeding to Noumea. He also posted a notice on the board which read, *"I wish to thank you all for your very fine work in preparing for and getting to sea in such a short time"*. He also expressed regret there was no leave, *but their job could not always be exciting like sinking enemy ships*. He felt sure *"they would all keep up the good name that "Sydney" had for efficiency and happiness."*

Lloyd's first watch went until 12.0'clock during which he did 1 hour's crows nest lookout. He wrote –

"We had developed a steady slow roll and pitch combined and I was not feeling my usual self by any means. However I threw caution to the winds and started off up the mast .It wasn't so bad going up but when I was safe in the nest I just shook from head to foot and I'm not a bit ashamed to admit it either. The crow's nest is 160 feet above the deck and the ladder (rope with wooden rungs) sways all over the place. It felt as though the wind was doing its best to tear me off the ladder, but I suppose most of it was just imagination, because I did another hour up there this morning and shinned up like a real monkey in much worse conditions than yesterday, more roll, more wind and I enjoyed it so much that when my relief came up I was sorry to leave the nest. When you get used to it, it's the best spot in the ship. The crow's nest lookout is the most important one in the ship and it gives one a good feeling up there on top of the world wrapped in a "Duffel Coat" with a pair of beautiful binoculars to work with."

The crew's day started at dawn at action stations until it was light.---

"It is a fine sight to see, in the dim light of the early morning, all men standing at their posts, guns manned, lookouts sweeping the horizon with their huge glasses, while the ship shoots along at 28 knots (and that's moving)."

Living and washing facilities are mentioned as being *"a bit inadequate."* Obviously they were a far cry from home! However through his letters he often states, when things are a bit tough, *"We can take it."*

On reaching Noumea there was no shore leave, but they could see from the ship it looked beautiful, just like you read about, with palms and beautiful beaches. The saying *"Join the Navy and see the world" seems to be true after all.* Lloyd writes a p.s. at the end of his 1st.letter, asking that the family please keep all his letters in a file as he thinks they will make a good diary *"after it is all over."*

By the time they return from Noumea to Sydney Harbour he is now keeping night watches at sea and in the harbour. He states, *"I don't feel as strange as I did at first and am getting to know the ropes a bit, which counts for quite a lot believe me."*

Sunday in harbour was visitors day- *"overrun with WANS, WRENS, and WAAFS."*

Lloyd and his brothers were keen photographers using 8mm movie film and he continued this while away from home. All film he took had to go to the Navy Office in Melbourne for censorship, to be processed and sent back with criticism regarding exposure. He thought he had enough film to last him a lifetime, *(if it's short)*. Unfortunately none of the film he took while on the Sydney has yet come to light and perhaps it was with him when the ship was lost. Censorship of all letters was very strict and he apologises for the lack of news sometimes as to where they were or where they were going. However *"I can say I am in the best of health and putting up with life quite ok (most of the time)"*.

Life in the harbour is not all work. Sometimes girls came on board. *"girls, supper and music were all to Jack Tar's liking."* Movies were shown also.

After many days of fast cruising taking them farther from home each hour it was obviously a good feeling to turn and make good time back, especially if the weather had been unbearable. But there was some excitement too when on middle watch in the morning, while darkness still prevailed, the ship and sea were suddenly lit up by a bright greenish white light. This turned out to be a falling star or meteor. On another occasion action stations were called, - *not just for practise*, - *"Quite exciting in a way especially when it was found to be friend not foe."*

Work sometimes was harder in port than at sea and he did not go ashore often. Letters from home were *"wonderful and changed everything around"*.

When ashore one time, a few jars of honey were bought. On the last trip *"I was longing for a piece of bread and honey."* He also *"met up with a friend, whose ship was in and another chap off the "Adelaide."* They spent an afternoon together before boarding their ships once more.

The next trip was *"a terrible experience, a repetition of which I don't want to see for many a long day. The roll has been so bad that we have had nearly everything smashed in the way of crockery, glassware etc. and at times I have seen the mess deck about six inches deep in the most amazing bric-a-brac such as tea, broken plates cups and bottles of sauce, the contents of a couple of large billy cans of custard. Add to this dozens of knives, forks, spoons and sundry articles of clothing to say nothing of one or two pounds of sugar and dry tea – stir and mix briskly with about 30 yelling, cursing, barracking and cheering SAILORS and there you have some mixture believe me. You've just got to laugh. As soon as it starts to roll like that, the boys start barracking the ship with cries of Go-on roll you grey so and so, then comes a crash of breaking plates followed by a mighty cheer and further cries of "Gorn!" screams from some poor unfortunate who has slipped on a piece of steak covered with gravy and is now shooting at breakneck speed from one side of the deck to the other. Of course his plight calls for many yells of delight from the more fortunate ones. The unfortunate sailor then needs must yell back at his tormentors; and so it goes on. Then it gets a bit quieter and we clean up the mess"* All in vain as the performance is repeated, but *"Some humourist starts singing "Rule Britannia" or "Life on the Ocean Wave" Are we downhearted NO!!*

Now he has a new job as leading hand of a watch. He must be doing well as seems to be getting on well with the Chief now.

During a visit to Fremantle and Perth, he made some very good friends *"will be quite sorry to leave the place."* Quite by chance he met up with a business acquaintance and was invited out to his home. Another business acquaintance was helpful, but he obviously did not feel so trusting of giving business information to him! He met some charming girls through another friend *"in fact I have been thinking that when the war is over I would be just the very chap to open a branch of A.F.K & sons in Perth!!"* *"However when I come to think of it there's no place like home and I'll be very pleased to see you all again."*

In a letter dated 21st Oct. ----- More letters from home and a friend, had been received. Also *“received a nice block of dk.Chocolate from Glendearg Grove Comforts Circle (Mrs. H. Binder Ho. Sec.)”*

He speaks of *“two v/s 3’s who came to the ship with me have both been drafted to corvettes, so it looks as though I may get one too. Of course there is nothing certain about that at all, but it is just a possibility. I don’t really want a shift now because I have settled down here and got used to the conditions.”* *“I have become quite attached to the old ship in many ways so I am hoping to stay with her for a while yet.”*

He concludes this letter – *“Please give Janice a big kiss from me for her birthday and tell her I will bring something home for her when I come home. Goodness knows when that will be. Hope it’s soon.”*

On 25th Oct. --- More letters from home --- *“All were as usual very welcome. A big parcel from the Glendearg Grove Junior Auxiliary duly arrived and all the edible contents were promptly devoured. There was a jar of gherkin spread and one of cheese ditto, also a tin of sweets. There is quite a joke about that tin. When the parcel arrived I saw this tin with “HORLICKS” written all over it and so did some of the other boys. So we decided to all have a drink of this delicious stuff and I raced around getting the cups and some nice cool water from the tank outside the galley. Somebody washed and dried a spoon and the clamouring mob read out the directions for making a delicious cool cup of “Horlicks”. This was the crisis; but there was to be a terrible anti-climax. The lid was prised off only to reveal a mass of highly coloured and rather sticky looking sweets. I must admit they certainly were very nice sweets, but it was a bit of a kick in the pants just the same.”*

He mentions some black and white film arriving back from home and is pleased with the result and after information from his brother Lincoln about colour film, decides he will try some Kodachrome. Unfortunately the films taken must have perished with the ship or have deteriorated beyond saving.

“Things on the ship are going quite well now. There have been a good few drafts out of the signal department so we are not nearly so crowded down below as we were before. Three of our really bad boys are now well out of the way. One is doing an extended stretch at Garden Island and the other two will be following him there in a couple of days. Everyone is very relieved to have them out of the way and life is much more peaceful on the mess decks as a result of their removal”

“Crayfish in this part of the world are both plentiful and good. They even gave us a crayfish lunch on board today and I’m afraid I made a bit of a hog of myself; but that can be excused because it is so seldom that we get the chance to overeat.”

30th Oct. ----- Letters are rolling in from home. *“We have been for another little pleasure cruise and I can now add a couple more towns to my list of “places visited”*

"I have just bought a new overcoat (2 pounds) and it has made quite a hole in my finances. Looks as though that colour film will have to wait for another fortnight. Oh well, such is life but there's always something to be thankful for. At least I haven't got a wife and family to support!"

Final letter dated 7th Nov. 1941. ----I am writing this at sea because we may not be in harbour long enough to answer the letter I expect from you when we arrive. Yes, it is as bad as that now - plenty of sea time because the job we are on is such a slow one that it takes a long time to get anywhere. Anything from eight to fourteen knots and rolling like a beaut all the time. This morning we ran into a very heavy fog and for about two hours lost sight of the ship we are with. It is a most uncomfortable experience, what with the siren screaming every few minutes with a note that makes the ears sort of tickle, and not being able to see anything. It's a bit creepy at first but after a while that feeling wears off and it just gets annoying. We haven't had any really rough weather but there is a continually heavy swell and a real cold wind most of the time. I think this grey funnelled tub would roll in dry dock; but we can take it!

"Now here is a bit of real news Of course you must not have too much faith in the truth of this but it is what we call a very strong "buzz". Within the next two months I may be having a spot of leave, perhaps even a month or so; but you can believe that when I arrive home and not sooner, so don't be disappointed if it doesn't come off. I will leave this open till we reach harbour then add a bit more".

Now 10th (9 days before the ship went missing). "Your letters arrived OK." "Thanks May and Nollian for your nice letters. It was lovely to have one from my niece especially with a drawing of "the good ship" Sydney on the back of the page."

"Well it looks as though we have seen the last of WA for a while but that does not necessarily mean Melb. just yet.

That's all for now.

Love to all,

Lloyd".