

WALTER HERBERT SCHACHE (11.5.1901 – 19.11.1941)

Walter Herbert Schache joined the Royal Australian Navy in Jan 1919 when he was 18 and progressed to the rank of Chief Petty Officer Cook.

Sydney was home port during the 1920's. He married Elsie Josephine Anderson in Sydney in 1922. They had two sons during this period Douglas Vincent Schache born at North Sydney in Feb 1924 and Leonard Vernon Schache born in Gore Hill in Oct 1926. Melbourne became home port during the late 1930's.

Walter was posted to *HMAS Sydney* while still in the Mediterranean Fleet in Nov 1940. He was to remain with *HMAS Sydney* during the remainder of her active service in the eastern Mediterranean in late 1940; the refit in Malta then return to Australia in early 1941 and final duties off the Western Australian coast through 1941.

After WWII, Elsie lived in Melbourne until her death in May 1988. Douglas held a profound, lifelong interest in everything related to the fate of *HMAS Sydney*. Although he married, he had no children and died in Jan 2005 just a few years before the wreck of the *HMAS Sydney* was found. Leonard was tragically killed in a motor vehicle accident in Melbourne in Feb 1951

The original Schache family migrated to Australia on the sailing ship *Leontine* which left Bremen in April 1848 and arrived in Adelaide in Aug 1848. Walter's great grandparents traveled as steerage passengers with their 7 children whose ages ranged 13 – 26.

The family records from the 18th century indicated they were farmers from the Liegnitz area in Silesia (now Legnica, part of Poland since WWII). The family were devout Lutherans with some members of this family group heavily involved in the development of the Lutheran church in South Australia and later in Victoria.

At the time, the South Australian government was encouraging free settlers. This coupled with possible encouraging reports back to Germany from earlier German settlers contributed to the family choice to migrate to Australia, although it is thought another real motivation was to escape religious persecution in Prussia or for the children to be free from military service in Prussia (or a combination). Walter's great grandfather served in the Prussian Guards at Waterloo and it is possible his grandfather also served a period in the Army before the family migrated.

After farming and other activities in regions around Adelaide, some members of the family moved into the western districts of Victoria when land became available from the 1860's.



**Walter Herbert Schache as a Petty Officer with his wife Elsie
and son Douglas taken in June 1926**

Walter's father Andreas Heinrich Benjamin Schache (also known as Henry) was among the first generation of the family born in Australia (1857). Henry married in Murtoa to the east of Horsham in June 1899. He was a carpenter. It is thought the economic downturn brought on by the great "Federation" drought forced the family to relocate. A sister (1900) and Walter (1901) were born in Mt Gambier, SA. Two more sisters were born during the few years the family lived in Adelaide (1902 & 1905); a brother in Melbourne (1907); two sisters and brother in Sydney (1910, 1911 & 1913) then finally, another brother born in Brisbane (1917). Seven of the children lived to adulthood.

During WWI, Walter's father was repeatedly hounded out of jobs because of the family's German name. Henry apparently lied about his name to hold work until he was recognised and the cycle repeated. The family seemed to move home around Brisbane several times a year, money and food always problematic.

It may have been that same economic reality that led to his enlistment in the Navy in 1919 at a time when most the focus of many Australians was to return to civilian life. Walter's father died in Brisbane in 1925 leaving his mother to fend for three children under 16 years old. By one of those strange family coincidences, Walter's brother Bernard also joined the Navy as an 18 year

old (1926); also served for 22 years and also progressed to the rank of Chief Petty Officer Cook and served a substantial part of WWII aboard *HMAS Hobart* – sister ship to *HMAS Sydney*.

It seems quite ironic that after the appalling economic hardships and vilification that Henry's family faced during WWI, that during WWII four of his sons including Walter served in the Australian armed services. Walter and Bernard served in the Navy while younger brothers Ronald and Norman both served in the Army.

Walter's own sons Douglas and Leonard each joined the RAAF during WWII as soon as they were of military age.



Walter Herbert Schache during the 1930's

Postings:

Type of Ship	Ship	Period
Training Ship	<i>HMAS Tingira</i>	1919/1921
Cruiser	<i>HMAS Brisbane</i>	1921 / 1922
Cruiser	<i>HMAS Adelaide</i>	1922 / 1923
Seaplane Carrier	<i>HMAS Albatross</i>	1929 / 1932
Heavy Cruiser	<i>HMAS Canberra</i>	1932 / 1933
Destroyer	<i>HMAS Waterhen</i>	1933 / 1934
Heavy Cruiser	<i>HMAS Australia</i>	1937 / 1938
Seaplane Carrier	<i>HMAS Albatross</i>	1938
Cruiser	<i>HMAS Sydney</i>	1940 / 1941

Ranks Held:

Rank	Date	Rank	Date
3 rd Cook's Mate	Jan 1919	Leading Cook	Aug 1921
2 nd Cook's Mate	May 1919	Petty Officer - Cook	Aug 1923
Assistant Cook	Sept 1919	Chief Petty Officer - Cook	Jan 1927
Cook	Nov 1919		

Medals:

Period / Type	Medal Awarded
World War II - Campaign	1939/1945 Star Africa Star
World War II – General Service	1939 / 1945 War Medal 1939 / 1945 Australian Service Medal
Commemorative*	King George VI Coronation Medal Navy Long Service & Good Conduct Medal

* It is believed that Walter would have been entitled to the 50th Anniversary George Cross Medal issued by the Republic of Malta in 1992

ANOMALY – OPERATIONAL SERVICE IN INDIAN OCEAN

SEPT 1939 – DECEMBER 1941

It is understood Australia adopted the British award system for Campaign and Service Medals for WWII except that - similar to some other Commonwealth countries – Australia issued one separate medal, the Australian Service Medal 1939/45.

It is therefore, not unreasonable for the British government to have designated award parameters aligned to the operational service of British defence forces. The focus was thus Europe, Africa and the Atlantic theatres until Japan entered the war in December 1941. That is not to say the British defence forces were not engaged in other areas but reflects the fact that there was minimal operational service in such areas; few actions and minimal if any loss of life compared to the core action areas.

It could be argued that such service was recognised within the definition for award of the 1939-1945 Star or the 1939-1945 War Medal. However, these were general awards that were none specific to areas outside the main theatres of action. In the situation described in this note, many of the servicemen involved would have entitlement for these awards for other duties.

In the Indian Ocean, those actions associated with elimination of the Italian forces in Somaliland seem to have been recognised by the award of the Africa Star. Other naval duties remain unrecognised. British, Australian and warships of other Commonwealth countries were engaged at various times in that period September 1939 – December 1941 in searches for:-

- German Pocket Battleships
- German Commerce Raiders
- German Auxiliary/support ships

History tells us that several engagements occurred where British or Australian heavy cruisers outranged and sank such German ships. These were one sided affairs until the *HMAS Sydney : Kormoran* engagement during the evening of November 19 1941.

For the first time there was heavy loss in Allied lives – but they were Australians, not British. One is left to speculate if this had involved a British ship and British lives, whether some medal would have been denoted for that service. As there was indeed, no British participation it is not surprising then that these various operations in the Indian Ocean during the first 27 months of WWII remain unrecognised in the British system and thus by definition – for the Australian defence forces. But does this make it fair?

In every other service where Australian may have been "*In Harm's Way*" - Australia has recognised such service even for minor activities – often by the award of a General Service Medal with an appropriate clasp. In the periods either side of WWII, Australians would have been recognised by the Naval General Service Medal.

It is an anomaly.

Because Australia adopted the British system for WWII and because the British did not recognise service in this theatre – no recognition was offered to Australians.

It is not a matter of breaching protocol to acknowledge a specific unit or ship (*eg HMAS Sydney*). It is a matter of fairness and balance to realise that no Australian defence forces regardless of unit or ship so engaged and who were definitely in "*In Harm's Way*" received any recognition for that service – especially the 645 crew of *HMAS Sydney*.

It is understood that there are strict protocols devised for the issue of medals and Royal approval is required for a change in "Regulations" that define entitlements. It is also understood that such matters require careful and considered decisions to avoid precedents and to appreciate difficulties that may be involved in any such change contemplated.

Nevertheless, it is open to the Australian Government to even now actively consider that situation and perhaps finally, bring the recognition deserved to those involved and eliminate this anomaly.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'I. S. Schache', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

I S Schache

Jan 9 2009