

Basic Detail Report



00046172

Title

HMAS SYDNEY (I) entering Sydney Harbour

Date

1913

Medium

Oil on canvas, wood

Dimensions

Overall: 760 x 690 x 35 mm

Name

Painting

History

This painting would appear to be a representation of HMAS SYDNEY as part of the First Australian Fleet Unit arriving in Sydney in October 1913. Its companion painting of HMAS AUSTRALIA is also in the National Maritime Collection. HMAS SYDNEY commissioned at Portsmouth on 26 June 1913 under the command of Captain John CT Glossop RN and departed Portsmouth on 25 July 1913 arriving on the Australia Station at Albany on 19 September. Following a period spent in eastern Australian ports, SYDNEY proceeded for Singapore in March 1914 to act as escort to the two new Royal Australian Navy submarines, AE1 and AE2. Before the outbreak of war in August 1914 SYDNEY operated in Queensland waters. On 3 August 1914 she was joined at Townsville by the destroyers HMA Ships WARREGO and YARRA before proceeding north to form a unit of Admiral Patey's Pacific Squadron. Following the outbreak of war on 4 August 1914, SYDNEY operated in New Guinea and Pacific waters and in the brief campaign against the German Pacific possessions carried out a series of punitive patrols. Highlights during this period included the capture of Rabaul (9 to 11 September 1914) and destruction of the Angaur Island Wireless Station on 26 September 1914. In October 1914, SYDNEY and HMAS MELBOURNE detached from the Flagship HMAS AUSTRALIA, and returned to Australia to form a unit of the escort of the first Anzac convoy consisting of 38 transports escorted by SYDNEY, MELBOURNE, HMS MINOTAUR and the Japanese cruiser IBUKI. The entire convoy sailed from Albany on 1 November 1914. It was timed to pass some 50 miles east of the Cocos Islands on the morning of 9 November 1914. At about 0620 on 9 November, wireless telegraphy operators in several transports and in the warships heard signals in an unknown code followed by a query from the Cocos Island Wireless Telegraphy Station, 'What is that code'. It was in fact the German cruiser EMDEN ordering her collier BURESK to join her at Point Refuge. Shortly afterwards Cocos signalled 'Strange warship approaching.' SYDNEY, the nearest warship to the Cocos group, was ordered to proceed at full speed. By 0700 she was 'away doing twenty knots' and at 0915 simultaneously sighted the island and the EMDEN some seven or eight miles distant. EMDEN opened fire at a range of some 10,500 yards using the then

very high elevation of thirty degrees. Her first salvo was 'ranged along an extended line but every shot fell within two hundred yards of SYDNEY.' The next salvo was on target and for the next ten minutes the Australian cruiser came under heavy fire. Fifteen hits were recorded but fortunately 'only five burst.' Four ratings were killed and several wounded. SYDNEY's first salvo went 'far over the EMDEN'. The second fell short and the third scored two hits. Meanwhile, EMDEN's captain (Captain Von Muller), aware that his only chance lay in putting SYDNEY out of action quickly, maintained a high rate of fire said to be a salvo every six seconds. It was to no avail. SYDNEY took advantage of her superior speed and fire power and raked the German cruiser. Her shells wrecked the enemy's steering gear, shot away both range finders and smashed the voice pipes providing communications between the conning tower and the guns. Shortly afterwards the forward funnel toppled overboard and then the foremast carrying away the primary fire control station and wrecking the fire-bridge. Despite the damage and the inevitable end, Muller continued the engagement. Half his crew were disabled until 'only the artillery officer and a few unskilled chaps were still firing.' Finally, with his engine room on fire and the third funnel gone, he gave the order 'to the island with every ounce you can get out of the engines.' Shortly after 1100, EMDEN was seen to be fast on the North Keeling Island Reef. She lost 134 men killed in action or died of wounds. On 15 November 1914 SYDNEY arrived in Colombo and from there was ordered to proceed to Malta where she arrived on 3 December. From Malta she was ordered to Bermuda to join the North America and West Indies Stations for patrol duty. For the following eighteen months SYDNEY was engaged in watching neutral ports in the Americas, mainly in the West Indies with Jamaica as the base and off Long Island with Halifax as a base and Squadron Headquarters at Bermuda. On 9 September 1916 SYDNEY finally left Bermuda, arrived at Devonport on 19 September and from there proceeded to Greenock for refit. On 31 October 1916 she was temporarily attached to the 5th Battle Squadron at Scapa Flow. On 15 November she sailed for Rosyth and on arrival joined the 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron consisting of the four sister ships, HMS SOUTHAMPTON, HMS DUBLIN, HMAS MELBOURNE and HMAS SYDNEY, attached to the 2nd Battle Squadron of which HMAS AUSTRALIA was the flagship. For the remainder of the war her service was confined to routine North Sea patrols. On 4 May 1917, while on patrol from the Humber estuary to the mouth of the Firth, SYDNEY fought a running engagement with the German Zeppelin L43 until SYDNEY had expended all the anti-aircraft ammunition and the L43 all her bombs - 'the combatants parted on good terms.' In August 1917 SYDNEY commenced a three month refit at Chatham, during which she acquired the tripod mast now sited at Bradley's Head, Sydney. Of more significance however, she was fitted with the first revolving aircraft launching platform to be installed in a warship. On arrival at Scapa Flow in December 1917, her commanding officer, Captain Dumaresq, borrowed a Sopwith Pup then being operated from a fixed platform on the cruiser DUBLIN. On 8 December 1917 the aircraft was launched successfully from SYDNEY's platform in the fixed position. It was the first aircraft to take off from an Australian warship. Nine days later the Pup flew off the platform turned into the wind; the first time any aircraft had been launched from such a platform in the revolved position. Early in 1918 SYDNEY took on board a Sopwith Camel, the standard fighter plane superseding the Sopwith Pup. On 1 June 1918 the Sopwith Camels from SYDNEY and MELBOURNE were launched on their first and only operational flight against the enemy. A large naval force including the 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron had assembled to carry out a raid into the Heligoland Bight. When the force was well under way, two enemy fighters appeared between a break in the clouds. SYDNEY's Camel (Flight Lieutenant A.G. Sharwood) took to the air within two minutes of the alarm.

Sharwood's prompt launching paid dividends. In a 60 mile chase he overtook and sent the enemy seaplane into a spinning dive and then turned to attack a second plane on his tail. Soon afterwards one of his guns ran out of ammunition and the other jammed, forcing him to break off the engagement. Unable to locate SYDNEY, he ditched ahead of the destroyer HMS SHARPSHOOTER. To ditch was the only method landplanes operating from ships other than carriers then had of returning to their parent ship. The Camel remained floating with Sharwood clinging to the tail for twenty minutes before being picked up. SYDNEY was present at the surrender of the German Grand Fleet on 21 November 1918. She sailed from Portsmouth on 9 April 1919 for the return passage to Australia. Except for visits to New Guinea in 1922 and New Caledonia and the Solomons in 1927, SYDNEY spent the remainder of her seagoing career in home waters, serving as Flagship of the Australian Squadron from September 1924 to October 1927. She paid off at Sydney on 8 May 1928 and on 10 January 1929 was delivered to Cockatoo Island for breaking up.

Source: Ship Histories, Sea Power Centre, www.navy.gov.au