



Observer Mailbag

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Howard Whittaker



■ **Howard Whittaker**, a World War II sailor who fortunately escaped death when the **HMAS Kuttabul** was sunk by a midget Japanese sub in **Sydney Harbour** and later became a community leader and mayor of **Williamstown** has died. He was aged 85.

Whittaker was on shore leave staying on the depot ship **Kuttabul** moored at **Garden Island**, on May 31, 1942.

The war was brought home to **Australia** when the **Japanese** attacked the harbour from the sea. Three midget subs were launched from mother submarines stationed outside the heads and all made it into the harbour late that night.

Whittaker was rostered to be on board that evening but asked another **Williamstown** boy, **Jack Gardner**, who had just come on board en route home to see his new baby daughter, to stand in for him at the 9pm roll call, allowing **Whittaker** to go ashore for the evening.

At 12.30am one of the subs fired at the **American** heavy cruiser, the **USS Chicago**, but missed and hit and sunk **Kuttabul**. Nineteen **Australian** and two **British** sailors on the **Kuttabul** died. On his return next morning, **Whittaker** found the **Kuttabul** submerged - and tragically - his mate **Gardner's** body was the last to be brought to the surface.

This wasn't **Whittaker's** first lucky escape. Seven years earlier on July 29, 1935, **Whittaker**, then 12, had been present in Haslam Street **Williamstown** when a group of boys had sprinkled gun powder from rockets taken from the ketch **Clamin** berthed at **Gem Pier** into a tin of nugget on fire, resulting in the deaths of two of them - **Harold Tully**, 9, and **Keith Joseph**, 14. **Whittaker** received shrapnel to the cheek but was otherwise unhurt.

Whittaker served on **HMAS's Australia** and **Arunta**, before transferring to the **Coast Watchers (M Special)**, serving in **New Britain** on the **Fairmile HDML 1321**, covertly dispatching and collecting commandos from the islands occupied by the **Japanese**.

He became a leading stoker and survived the rigours of action mainly in the **Pacific**. After the War, **Whittaker** purchased with his cousin a **Fairmile** at the **Brisbane Disposal Sales** and after fitting it out, spent several years trading around **New Guinea** where much work was available for a vessel of that size. Again, lucky for **Whittaker**, he sold his share in the vessel to return to **Williamstown** just before it ran around and sunk in **New Guinea** up the **Fly River**.

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Observer Latest Gossip

Cheers to the 2/2 Pioneers



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Every Wednesday in the Observer

"There are only two types of journalism - dull journalism and exciting journalism. The true journalism is exciting and decidedly unobjective. True journalism, in my view, is devoted entirely to the revelation of facts which someone does not want revealed. That is the high point of journalism; it is the real meaning of being a journalist; it is also exciting and is interesting to read." - Maxwell Newton

Observer Larry Noye

Watch this space!

■ The **Corio** seat in **Geelong** looms as a most interesting one to watch in the **Federal Election** on Saturday week (Nov. 24).

Indications are that the **Labor** hierarchy may have created a new independent member.

That would be **Gavan O'Connor**, sitting **Labor** MHR, who, standing as an independent, was announced last month as getting of the boost of **Liberal** preferences.

The **Liberal** camp apparently see this as more desirable than **Labor** continuing to hold the seat. The **Greens** may have preference impact, too.

O'Connor has held **Corio** for 14 years. The part in **Melbourne**, in their penchant to look down their noses at their own party's local candidates, has saddled up **Richard Marles**, former **ACTU** Assistant Secretary.

None too happy, **O'Connor** decided to stand as an independent. **Glenn Milne**, as astute

pundit, wrote in **The Australian**, of the advantage **Liberal** preferences would give **O'Connor** in holding the seat.

Corio was only a few years back a swinging seat. It became fairly safe **Labor** after **Bob Hawke** used it to enter **Parliament** after he ousted **Bill Hayden** as party leader about 1983.

Labor had little trouble holding **Corio** through the **Hawke** years, but **Liberal** preferences make it a different matter altogether.

Labor centrally is tipped by some pundits as being too smart by half.

They turned aside their sitting member, **Bob Sercombe**, for another candidate, **Bill Shorten**.

Shorten is a young go-getter who got considerable mileage by winning headlines when the **Tasmanian** miners were trapped below.

But a **Parliamentary** seat comes with prestige and power - not to mention superannuation!

■ The **Remembrance Day** feature by **Jane Holmes** in last week's **Melbourne Observer** proved popular with readers, and also to listeners of **Keith McGowan's Overnights** radio program on **3AW**.

Ian Goodes of **Kew** wrote to the: "Early Thursday morning I heard you talking on **3AW** about the **2/2 Pioneer Battalion**. I went and bought a copy of the **Melbourne Observer** today and read with interest the article on the **2/2 Pioneers**.

"I believe my father (**Arthur Bramwell Goodes**, Service Number - **VX67378**) was in the **2/2 Pioneers** and I thought I would send you some information about him.

"I have attached a letter from my father which was published in **The CGA Service Messenger** September 1945 which I believe was a publication circulated to staff of the **Colonial Gas Association** which my father worked for prior to and after the 2nd World War.

"Along with my grandfather, my father worked at the **Box Hill Gas Works** and then later at **Shepparton Gas Works** as Manager and finally on retirement at **Castlemaine Gas Works** with the then **Gas and Fuel Corporation**.

"I find the letter fascinating in describing the **Balikpapan** landing and in particular I am amazed at the reference to "... the efficient spraying of a new kind of disinfectant called **DDT** from low flying aircraft. They spray the place about every three or four days and it sometimes gives the effect of a heavy smoke screen ..." The references to the suicide troops and the description of a primitive weapon used by the Japanese is chilling."

ce Messenger

September, 1945

The Balikpapan Landing

"BIGGER SHOW THAN TARAKAN"

From Bram Goodes to his father (Mr. Arthur Goodes) at Box Hill:—

"I suppose by now you know I was in the landing at Balikpapan, with the 7th Division this time. It was a bigger show than at Tarakan. They gave it a good pounding before we landed, and just about flattened everything. The Japs sent up quite a lot of flack, etc., and downed a couple of our planes, but I was quite surprised at their lack of air-strength; we never saw any enemy planes during the invasion, but next morning they sent one or two over, and dropped a few eggs without causing much damage. The oil wells and refineries are just a mass of tangled iron and steel; it will cost the Dutch a lot of money to replace everything. There have been some beautiful engines and boilers here, but most of them have been burnt or hit by our 6-inch naval shells. The Japanese had quite a lot of big guns along the coast, but most of them were destroyed by our bombers the day before the landing. There is also what we call dual-purpose guns; they can be used for ack ack or ground work; they are wicked things. The shell they fire has a time-fuse in it, and it bursts in mid-air throwing shrapnel everywhere; it has taken its toll of our chaps.

Suicide Troops

Things are progressing very well now and the Japs are on the run, but you cannot tell what the little yellow so-and-so's will do next. They were sending suicide troops into our lines with mortar bombs tied round their waists, and believe me our chaps make short work of them. I must tell you about one of his weapons—rather primitive, I say. It is a long stick with an 8-inch forged steel knife blade, and is used mostly at night for silence. It is a very deadly weapon and they know how to use them.

Well, enough of the war—I can tell you a lot more about it when I come home. The weather here is very hot, but pleasant, not like New Guinea, where the humidity is so high. The water situation is not the best; all the water has to be boiled or heavily chlorinated before use, and that doesn't make the taste any too pleasant. I often long for a nice long cool drink of clear water. When we are here we Melbourne people don't realise how lucky we are to have such a good water supply. There seems to be very little malaria or other diseases here. I think that is due to the efficient spraying of a new kind of disinfectant called **DDT**, from low-flying aircraft. They spray the place about every three or four days, and it sometimes gives the effect of a heavy smoke screen.

Women Suffered

I have seen very little of the civilian population. They must have fled into the mountains and high ground, I have seen a few of the natives and they seem to be in pretty good nick. Some of the native women have been treated pretty badly, but this is no place for details. I hear that the coal shortage is very acute at Box Hill. Let's hope it doesn't mean closing down the plant, as our consumers might think our motto, "Good Public Service," is not so good after all, but I expect everybody must be prepared for some inconvenience in wartime (even the soldier). Give my kind regards to all at Box Hill."

● A 1945 press clipping

To The Max

Display

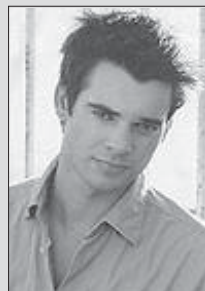
■ The Annual Display Day of the **Historic Commercial Vehicle Club Aust.** will be held at **Sandown Race-course** from 9am to 4pm on Sunday, November 25. Details are available from **Shirley Pollard**, 9434 7827. There will be about 300 vehicles in display. These include commercial vehicles, buses, engines and military vehicles.

\$185,000



■ A bathing box at **Dendy St, Brighton Beach**, has been auctioned for \$185,000. There was bidding between four people for the licensed building. There are between 100-120 boxes on the foreshore.

Unclaimed



● **Daniel Collopy**

■ Former **Home & Away** actor **Daniel Collopy** has \$408.80 to claim in the **Forgotten Fortunes** lists being published in the **Melbourne Observer** over the coming month. **Cr John So's** cash-strapped **City of Melbourne** also has a number of amounts to claim. This week's lists start on Page 15.

Simulcast

■ **Melbourne** community radio station **89.9 Light FM** is simulcasting the week-night **National Nine News** bulletin on radio. The initiative sees **Peter Hitchener's** half-hour TV bulletin being broadcast on radio, especially useful for car and train commuters unable to get home by 6pm.