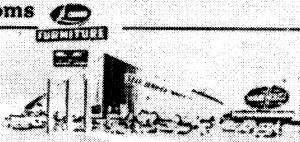




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Mr. Mike Dyer,
Manager,
Royal S.A. Yacht Squadron,
NORTH HAVEN. S.A. 5018

17th October, 1983

Dear Mike,

Following your request for details of 'Lauriana's' exploits in the last war, I have taken the easy way out. The following are extracts from "Australia in the War of 1939-45. Royal Australian Navy 1942-1945" by G. Hermon Gill, also from "My Ship is So Small" by Lloyd Rhys:

"She was commissioned in the Naval Auxiliary Patrol on 27th August, 1941. She was the first vessel to sight one of the Japanese midget submarines in Sydney Harbour on the night of the raid, 31st May, 1942. She was the first Naval Auxiliary Patrol boat to go to Milne Bay, whither she proceeded under her own power, and where she was detailed for air-sea-rescue duties in operational areas; and she was the first N.A.P. to cross to the Trobriand Islands. During her period in New Guinea she frequently carried the Naval-Officer-in-Charge, Milne Bay (Commander Branson, R.N.) on tours of inspection, and became fondly known to him as "the Flagship of the Royal Papuan Navy". Then she had the honour of taking General Douglas Mac Arthur on his tour of inspection of the fleet in Milne Bay when he went to New Guinea from Australia. Not satisfied with these doughty deeds she made her appearance at Wewak and Aitape at the time of the occupational landings at those ports. Of all these experiences the night of the submarine raid on Sydney Harbour must have been her highlight. By the courtesy of Skipper E.H. Arnott and Skipper L.H. Winkworth, who was Flotilla Skipper on that eventful night, I have been given permission to make extracts from Lauriana's log for 31st May, 1942. Put into narrative form it runs thus:

'1800 (6 p.m.). We slipped our moorings and contacted N.A.P. vessels Yarrawonga, 52 and Allura, 121, giving them their instructions: Lauriana was Flotilla Leader, and the others were with us in the patrol of the area between North and South Heads. Proceeding, about a quarter of an hour later we contacted the Channel Patrol Boat, from whom we received information for that night regarding the local fishing boats, which were licensed and permitted to fish in certain, but restricted, areas.

It was then dark, and we proceeded to Patrol with all lights out. The moon was up, but a patchy sky clouded it at frequent intervals. There was a nice steady roll. No ships were sighted coming into port and all was well.

At 2225 (10.25 p.m.) a fast launch with navigation lights showing was observed coming into Harbour by the East Channel. We at once signalled her and she informed us in reply that she had reported to the examination vessel outside the Heads and had been instructed to come straight in. In the beam of our searchlight we saw that she was proceeding at fast clip, and appeared to be towing a small dinghy. From information we had received evidently she was an Air Force launch. She passed on down East Channel.

Five minutes later (2230) there was a large explosion at the West Channel Room. We saw an orange-coloured flash roar 20 to 30 feet above the sea, followed by a charge which sounded to us like a depth charge. It threw a surge of water 40 feet high.

Immediately search lights were thrown on to the Boom, and we watched these and the Channel Patrol Boat for a signal. At the same time we saw a mine-sweeper come in, with lights on. Visibility was fair, the night still cloudy, and from where we were standing to, near Inner North Head, we saw the mine-sweeper come in and head down past the red blinker.

Allura, at that time was off South Head. Yarrawonga had gone off duty for her hour's spell.

At 2238 (10.38 p.m.) we were proceeding from our position off Inner North Head towards South Reef, when we noticed a flurry on the water ahead and to port. At first we thought it might have been a paravane wire from the mine-sweeper, or even a shark, but we decided to investigate and speeding up, put our searchlight on the spot at about 60-80 feet. Imagine our feelings when it showed us the conning tower of a submarine about 2 points to port. The submarine appeared to be almost stationary as the seas washed over the conning tower. She immediately submerged and we passed on, keeping our searchlight on the area. At the same time we sent a flash to Port War Signal Station and in the direction of the mine-sweeper, reporting (in naval phraseology), 'suspect object'. The mine-sweeper rushed across at full speed and dropped depth charges, which lifted the 60 ton 'Lauriana' right out of the water - we actually felt the launch airborne for a moment. We then gave 'Allura' instructions to stand by with us and called 'Yarrawonga' on duty.

From then on, 0045, the operations of 'Lauriana', 'Allura' and 'Yarrawonga' consisted of contacting the Channel Patrol Boat, receiving new signals, and standing by near the Boom, while the Channel Patrol Boat continued the search for submarines in Chowder and Taylor Bays.

Inside the Boom 'all hell had been let loose'. Searchlights and signals were flashing depth charges were dropped, shells ricocheted about the Harbour, and with a terrific explosion the depot ship H.M.A.S. Kuttubul was sunk by one of the Japanese torpedoes. That, however, is another story.

At 0645 (6.45 a.m.) 'Allura' was at South Reef, but shortly after she reported that she was running short of fuel and was sent off duty. An hour later we received instructions to stand by until we were relieved, and approximately two hours later we were joined by 'Soeka', 536, reporting for duty. At 1140 Carinya, 25, relieved us, and we proceeded to Rushcutters Bay, reaching our moorings at 1210 after a period of 17 hours, 10 minutes running time.

When it was all over, and after portions of the destroyed submarines had been raised, Rear-Admiral Muirhead-Gould presented the Skipper of 'Lauriana' with a part of a dial from a submarine's electrical equipment, as a souvenir of 'Lauriana's' part in the destruction of the submarines on the night of the raid. A drawing was made, and together with the Rear-Admiral's letter, a copy was presented to each member of the crew.

A portion of the conning tower was also presented to Naval Auxiliary Patrol Base Depot at 'Rushcutter', where it is now to be seen at the foot of the ladder leading to the quarter deck. Finally the Naval Board sent a special letter of congratulations 'to the Skipper and the crew of the N.A.P. boat 'Lauriana' for their efficient work'.

It is said that a plan found in one of the raised submarines showed a complete chart of the port, with a note that a number of fast heavily armed small craft were continuously patrolling between the Heads and in the Harbour.

About June, 1943, 'Lauriana' was sent from Milne Bay to the Trobriands, passing through Dawson Strait, between Fergusson and Normandby Islands, to Dobu, formerly the headquarters of the Methodist Mission; it was a pioneer voyage.

In the little known Dobu passage is some of the most beautiful scenery around New Guinea and its many neighbouring groups of islands. The soil is very fertile, and all growth is lush. Coastal ranges rise to about 6,000 feet, and behind them mountains rise to 8,000 feet.

From Dobu, 'Lauriana' with her small crew went to a mooring at Sia, a small island off the northern tip of Kiriwina, the main island of the Trobriand Group. The voyage was uneventful but a strong wind arose and they had a rough and uncomfortable time."

The following is extracted from the Australian Official History of the 1939-1945 War:

"Milne Bay came into the picture on 14th April when, in its twenty-fourth air raid, 40 to 50 bombers and about 60 fighters attacked, and concentrated on ships in the bay. Warning of the impending raid, and an intimation of its size, were given when the enemy aircraft were approaching over the Trobriands. Commander Branson, the N.O.I.C., took advantage of the breathing space personally to tour the harbour in the air-sea rescue launch 'Lauriana', dispersing ships and taking all possible precautions to avoid offering targets. The enemy arrived overhead about 12.15, 30 high-level bombers in close formation and 10 dive bombers, with an uncertain number of fighters. The high-level aircraft opened the attack by dropping a pattern of about 100 bombs right across the anchorage. This, however, had been cleared, so that no ships were lost in this attack. "Van Outhoorn" suffered damage from near misses by high-level bombers, had eight killed and 20 wounded, and was succoured by "Whyalla", who did a fine job with anti-aircraft fire. "Gorgon" was hit a number of times by dive bombers, and set on fire, with her engines out of action. Six of her company were killed or died of wounds, and 28 were wounded."

From "My Ship is So Small" by Lloyd Rees:-

"Then the buzz went around that General Douglas MacArthur himself was to arrive from Australia to establish his headquarters in New Guinea. C.F.B. (Commander, R.N.) continues his story with an account of General MacArthur's arrival:

And then came the Commander-in-Chief. Over the hills flew a shining silver fortress with a heavy escort of P39 and P40 fighters, and we know that we were nearly through with the waiting and watching. The R.A.N. took him in the air-sea-rescue craft 'Lauriana' down the Bay with General Kreuger to inspect the fleet.

The Naval Auxiliary Patrol vessel 'Lauriana' referred to above, had proceeded to Milne Bay under her own power. As has already been stated, N.O.I.C. Milne Bay, became very attached to her, and it was due to her usefulness in operational duties that he became strongly impressed by the advantages of small craft for speedy and economical coastal work.

As the N.O.I.C.'s "flagship" 'Lauriana' was well known to everyone in that area. Now, as you see, she is promoted to the class of "air-sea-rescue" vessel, and honoured by carrying the Commander-in Chief on his tour of inspection.

An eye witness has given his own account of MacArthur's visit.

'N.O.I.C., who was accustomed to escorting Dukes and Royal Personages, was perhaps not so impressed as he should have been. When the General came on board 'Lauriana' (with his name embroidered on his left breast), he was accompanied by General Kreuger and other high-ranking officers, and the usual bevy of American correspondents and photographers. Cameras clicked like machine guns, taking pictures of General MacArthur arriving, the General going on board, the General on the bridge, and so on.

The photographs, of course, were for American home consumption; few, if any, were published in Australian papers. Perhaps that was because certain features of 'Lauriana' had been touched up until she was made to appear an American craft!

At first General MacArthur was rather abashed that so small a vessel was to carry him on such an important mission, and asked: 'Where is the escort?' There being no naval escort available he proceeded in 'Lauriana', but with a good cover of fighting planes."

I have home three photographs of General MacArthur taken on board 'Lauriana' at the time. An extract from a letter written to me by the Engineer on board (Roy Turner) could be of interest:

"The 'Lauriana' was tied up at a place called Lai Lai, a small atoll in Milne Bay, under the protection of Ach Ach Battery ashore. She was opposite the sunken vessel 'Aurbun'.

You should have seen what we put up with, every night at dusk the Atoll would come alive with rats and they would swarmed aboard the 'Lauriana'. For the first two nights I couldn't think of sleeping as they would run over you. I used to watch them nibbling at the soft skin on the feet of the crew, and the blokes didn't even wake up, after a couple of nights you became so tired you forgot them. The Ach Ach crew ashore used to sleep on the tables with the table legs in barrels of water. I'm not kidding there were hundreds of them, you would see no sign of them during the day, they would go back under the coral all day."

After the war 'Lauriana' was used as the radio relay vessel for the Sydney to Hobart Yacht races on seven occasions, she was then acquired by Bill Tyree (later Sir William) and stripped to the hull before being rebuilt internally under the supervision of Warwick Hood, the Australian Naval Architect who designed 'Dame Pattie'. I purchased her after she was rebuilt and have been happily cruising from Streaky Bay to the Great Barrier Reef since February 1970.

I am enclosing several photographs of 'Lauriana' taken in the islands during the war which may be of interest to you. One of them shows General MacArthur with 'Lauriana'. I am also enclosing the Lines you sought.

Kind regards,

(L.R. Le Cornu)

Encl.

LRLeC:RAB