

Dressing Ship

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The 130th Opening Day of the Squadron will be held in November this year. This is the time when we 'Dress Ship', and for a long time I have been unable to find out whether there really is a correct way of doing this or whether it was at the whim of the owner. Most of the literature seemed to give ambiguous opinions about this.

An article by Theresa Biggelaar in the February issue of *Cruising Helmsman* this year rekindled my interest in this subject. She outlined the historical importance of flags, not only on ceremonial occasions including the dressing of a ship, but also as a method of communication between vessels.

There seems to be agreement on a number of points in relation to the flying of Code flags for Dressing Ship. For example, flags should fly during the day only between sunrise (usually after 0800) and sunset. They should be hoisted

on taut lines, evenly spaced, and all forty of them should be flown. Other flags can be flown at the same time and are generally not regarded as part of the Dress Ship procedure. However, there are flags that must *not* be part of the line — for example Racing Division and other personal or private flags. The Australian Red Ensign is flown from the stern.

I am indebted to John Vaughan, a well-known International vexillologist and vexillographer in Northbridge NSW for providing some additional information as to the order of the flags. In arranging the flags on the dressing lines, triangular flags and pennants should as far as possible, be placed between rectangular flags. In general the order, reading from the bow, should be:

E, Q, p3, G, p8, Z, p4, W, p6, P, p1, I, Code, T, Y, B, X, 1st, H, 3rd, D, F, 2nd, U, A, O, M, R, p2, J, p0, N, p9, K, p7, V, p5, L, C, S.

(The prefix before the numeral indicates that this is a pennant)



Nyroca leaving the (one and only) pontoon on Opening Day 1954. She had no triatic stay, which is presumably why immediate Past Commodore Henry Rymill CBE did not follow strict flag protocol by stringing flags from mainmast to mizzen as did his cousin, Sir Arthur Rymill on Avocet, in the background. Suzelle in the front row did not mark the occasion in this way. Renamed Iliana, she was 17th in the 1961 Sydney-Hobart Race under the ownership of Rupert Murdoch. (Henry Rymill's album)

In a single-masted vessel, the line from the bow to the masthead could finish with the 3rd substitute, and the line from the masthead to stern is carried on from 'D'. The line between masts in two-masted vessels starts with 'Y' and finishes with 'O'. Ensigns should be flown from each masthead when the ship is dressed.

This is the pattern recommended by the Royal Yachting Association and which John Vaughan endorses. He also points out that it is important not to send mixed or embarrassing messages when dressing ship.

On days of national significance, the Australian Red Ensign or Australian National Flag is raised on the stern staff, with another at the masthead.

The first recorded 'national' flag for Australia was designed by Captains John Bingle and John Nicholson in the 1820s. It consisted of the British White Ensign with four eight-pointed stars of the Southern Cross, one on each arm of the red cross of St. George. The modern version of this flag has a blue cross, and there is an extra star in the centre. This is referred to as the Australian Federation Flag. It is the same as the New South Wales Ensign (1831-1901). It might be a fitting time to fly this flag from the crosstrees during the celebrations for the New Year.

Yachts visiting a foreign port should fly the relevant international flag (of the country concerned) on the starboard crosstree or spreader. To make a good impression, the courtesy flag should be in good condition and be no smaller than 600mm by 300mm. At times yachtsmen have been embarrassed and even threatened with fines for this oversight of protocol.

The correct and *only* flag that should be flown from the stern or the gaff is the Australian National Flag (blue) or the Australian Red Ensign.

The design of Our National Flag and the Australian Red Ensign resulted from a public competition in 1901 that attracted 32,823 entries. The five winners each received the princely sum of £40. They were Ivor Evans, a fourteen year-old schoolboy from Melbourne; Leslie John Hawkins an apprentice optician, also a teenager; Egbert John Nuttall, a Melbourne architect; Annie Whistler Dorrington, an artist from Perth;

and William Stevens a ship's officer from Auckland, New Zealand.

Under the Federal Shipping Registration Act, 1981 the Australian Red Ensign was retained as the national colour of Australian merchant ships. Private pleasure craft were given the option of using this Red Ensign or the Australian National Flag. John Vaughan in an article for *The Australian Sea Heritage* recommends that private vessels in home waters fly the Australian Red Ensign, but use the national colours overseas.

Members will have noticed in the Year Book of the Squadron that two small asterisks appear by the names of certain vessels listed in the Boat Register. This indicates that these vessels hold a Warrant to fly the Blue Ensign. This Warrant is assigned to the vessel itself and the flag is very much like our National Flag except there are no stars present. It is described as a flag with a dark blue field with the Union Jack located in the upper hoist and is not 'defaced' by stars and that the length is twice the breadth. Warrants for this flag ceased to be issued when the Shipping Registration Act was proclaimed in 1981.

The British Red Ensign was flown on merchant and private pleasure craft belonging to Australians from 1801 until the federation of Australia. It was commonly referred to as the 'Red Duster'. This has a red field with the Union Jack located in the upper hoist and is not 'defaced' by stars.

I am not sure how important it is to conform to the tradition described, but Squadron Members may be interested to discover as I did that there is a protocol for the flying of code flags in dressing ship that has at least the approval of the Royal Yachting Association.

Acknowledgment. I am grateful for the assistance of John Vaughan (vexillographer) in the preparation of this article. (Personal communication) *References:* *Cruising Helmsman* February 1999: 18-20. *Flags and Visual Signals* Royal Yachting Association. Commander R.L. Hewitt MVO, RN. March 1985.

Editor's Note. Vexillology and its derivatives are quite new words of American origin, the first citation in *Oxford English Dictionary* being 1959. They are derived from the Latin *vexillum*, a flag.

The publication *Newspaper Cuttings 1889-1949* has one for February 1924, which is relevant —