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## RNIOA Article 14 [11-03-2020] WW1 Instructors Dr Frederick Wheatley & Commander Moyes RAN

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) was well blessed with a high calibre of instructors when it first opened the doors of the Royal Australian Naval College (RANC) in 1915. Two outstanding instructors among its ranks were Frederick Wheatley and Morton Moyes; in the July 1914 Navy List they are shown as: Frederick Wheatley DSc, BA, Senior Instructor with seniority dated 06 Feb 1914, and Morton Moyes BSc, Instructor with seniority dated 28 February 1914. At this time both were serving in the RANC at its temporary home at Osborne House, Geelong, Victoria; the college relocated to its permanent home at Jervis Bay, New South Wales, in February 1915 and was commissioned as HMAS *Creswell* in 1958.

The accounts of their careers that follow are taken from the Biography of Australian Naval Personalities and show that they both came from South Australia where they attended the University of Adelaide and they both moved to Queensland where Wheatley was headmaster at Rockhampton Grammar School, and Moyes taught at the same school. This formidable duo was then recruited into the RAN at the commencement of the First World War. Of significance in Wheatley's future successes was the fact that his mother may have come from a German family as many Germans migrated to South Australia prior to the war. His language skills would subsequently become of vital interest to Naval Intelligence.

### Commander Morton Henry Moyes RAN



Commander Morton Henry Moyes (1886-1981), Antarctic explorer and naval officer, was born on 29 June 1886 at Koolunga, South Australia, and the second surviving son of John Moyes, headmaster, and his wife Ellen Jane, née Stoward. His two brothers were John Stoward (1884-1972), Anglican bishop, and Alban George (Johnnie) (1893-1963), journalist and cricket commentator. Moyes was educated at the Collegiate School of St Peter, Adelaide, and the University of Adelaide, graduating with a BSc in physics and mathematics in 1910, and representing the university at football and athletics. He was South Australian high and broad jump champion in 1906-08 and in 1909, while teaching at Townsville Grammar School, and also represented Queensland in the Australasian amateur athletic championships. At university Moyes had been greatly impressed by his geology lecturer (Sir) Douglas Mawson and from Rockhampton Grammar School he successfully applied to join Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition of 1911-14. He was meteorologist for the western base party

under Frank Wild, which was to winter on the Shackleton Ice Shelf; he had received only a few days of instruction in meteorology in Hobart in November 1911. In November 1912 Moyes was left alone in the winter-quarters hut while a

group, led by Wild, went on a sledging trip. The loss of a sled delayed the group's return and Moyes endured nine weeks of anxious solitude, sustained by his strong religious faith.

After returning to Australia in March 1913 Moyes became Headmaster of the University Coaching College in Sydney. He was recruited as a Naval Instructor at the newly established RANC in February 1914. Initially he specialised in mathematics but soon began to teach navigation and in 1915 spent some months in the cruiser HMAS *Encounter*, gaining practical navigating experience. He was promoted Senior Naval Instructor in January 1916 and his polar experience was recognised when he was made Navigating Officer of the *Aurora* which, commanded by Captain JK Davis, sailed from New Zealand to the Ross Sea in December to rescue marooned members of (Sir) Ernest Shackleton's Trans-Antarctic Expedition.

Moyes found it galling to be 'chained to an office' at the Naval College while others went to war. The Naval Board twice refused him leave to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force and rebuffed his plea for 'active service in the Navy' as his duties were considered of national importance. Finally, in October 1918 his resignation was approved for 31 January 1919, too late to achieve its purpose. On 11 January 1919 Moyes married Miriam Esther King at St James' Church, Sydney. He applied to re-join the Navy and was accepted as an instructor lieutenant in December with seniority for previous service. For nearly a decade his postings alternated between time at sea in cruisers instructing junior officers and sailors and shore service at HMAS *Penguin* and HMAS *Cerberus* where he supervised schoolmaster and instructor officers; he was promoted Instructor Lieutenant Commander in 1920 and Commander in 1924.

In September 1929, at Mawson's request, Moyes was seconded to the British, Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition, which was to assert British territorial claims in Antarctica by means of two voyages in the auxiliary barque, *Discovery*. Moyes hoped to sail as a ship's officer but Davis, again in command, believed he lacked appropriate training. He joined the scientific staff as Survey Officer, spending long hours operating a defective echo-sounder, taking sights and drawing charts, helping with tow-nets, and assisting Mawson in executive matters. The first BANZARE voyage, from October 1929 to April 1930, was not a happy one. Everyone became 'heartily tired of the bickering' between Mawson and Davis; Davis considered the crew and scientists formed 'two distinct parties' and was sceptical of the value of Moyes' work. However, the New Zealand meteorologist RG Simmers recalled Moyes as being 'very serious, precise and conscientious about his work' and 'a good steadying influence' on the younger expedition members. For private reasons Moyes did not undertake the second voyage in November 1930.

Resuming his naval career, Moyes spent nearly six years in HMAS *Australia* as Fleet Instructor Officer and became the Navy's first (acting) instructor captain in June 1941. Debarred from sea service by age and seniority, in November 1943 Moyes was appointed the first Director of Educational and Vocational Training at Navy Office, Melbourne, where he set up correspondence courses for those at sea and began a psychology section for vocational guidance. When his naval career ended in 1946 he became the Chief Rehabilitation Officer for the Commonwealth until 1951 and supervised the post-war training of some 11,000 ex-servicemen and women. In his long retirement he was an active President of the Naval Association of Australia and with rising public interest in Antarctic affairs became a minor celebrity as one of the last veterans of the 'heroic age' of Antarctic exploration.

In recognition of his three Antarctic expeditions Moyes was awarded Polar Medals in silver and bronze and a bronze clasp; he was appointed OBE in 1935. He was a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and President of the Geographical Society of New South Wales in 1933-35.

Moyes was sturdily built, erect in bearing and with a direct gaze; his sanguine temperament stood him in good stead during his Antarctic expeditions. A widower without children, he died in Sydney on 20 September 1981 and was cremated after a service at St Andrew's Church, Roseville. He is commemorated by several Antarctic place-names.

*Denis Fairfax*



County-class heavy cruiser HMAS *Australia* in 1937 (public domain)

## Senior Instructor Dr Frederick William Wheatley RAN

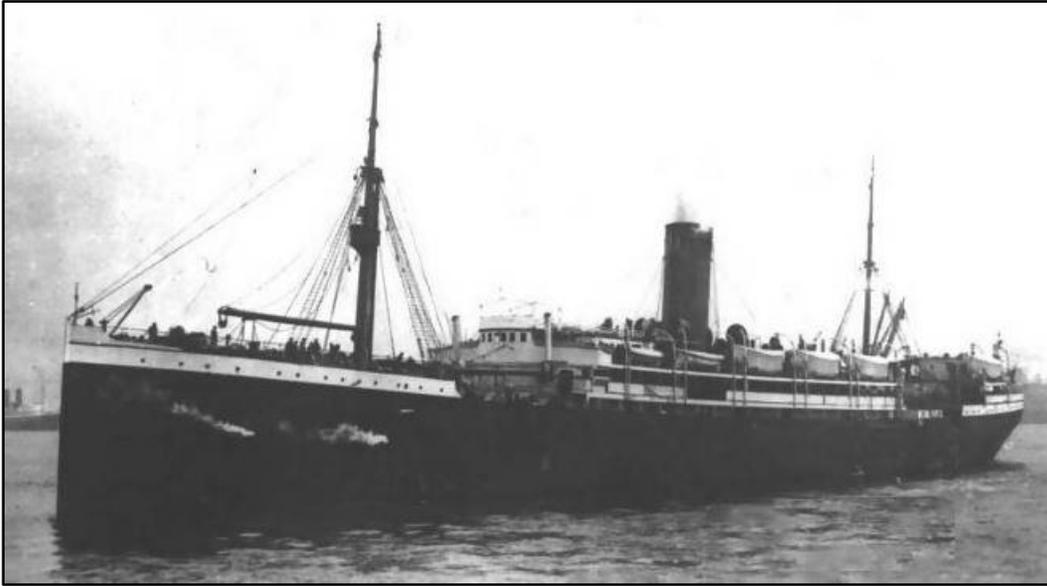


Frederick William Wheatley (1871-1955), headmaster and cryptographer, was born on 7 June 1871 at Kapunda, South Australia, son of James Edward Wheatley, music teacher, and his wife Wilhelmina Magdalena, née Basedow. Educated at Prince Alfred College, Adelaide, in 1890 Frederick joined the teaching staff of Way College. On 28 June 1898 at St Peter's Anglican Church, Glenelg, he married Alice Ruth Kimber; they were to have three children. He taught at Prince Alfred College from 1901, studied at the University of Adelaide (BA, 1904), then transferred to King's College, Goulburn, New South Wales, in 1905. Appointed headmaster of Rockhampton Grammar School the next year, he resigned in 1911 after clashing with the School Board. Meanwhile he had become a captain (1908) in the Senior Cadets and had begun an association with the proposed RANC, helping to draft the academic syllabus and college regulations.

Enrolling at Lincoln College, Oxford, Wheatley studied the ionization of gases and graduated with a BSc in 1913; in that year the University of Adelaide awarded him a DSc. Before returning to Australia, he visited Germany where he improved his knowledge of the language and, by his own account, had conversations with Admiral von Tirpitz and General von Hindenburg. Appointed Senior Naval Instructor on 6 February 1914, he joined the RANC at Osborne House, Geelong, Victoria, to teach mathematics and physics. On the outbreak of World War I he was seconded to the Navy Office, Melbourne, to work with Captain WHC Thring [q.v.] and was placed in charge of intercepted enemy radio messages.

On 4 August 1914 the German steamer *Seydlitz* left Sydney hurriedly and Naval authorities were convinced that she intended to warn German vessels on their way to Australia to turn back, as many would not yet know that a state of war existed between Britain and Germany. The German liner *Hobart* was one such vessel which had left Fremantle

the same day bound for Melbourne. To prevent *Hobart* from receiving messages from *Seydlitz* wireless stations in southern Australia were ordered by Captain Thring to jam signal traffic continuously day and night. The plan succeeded and when *Hobart* entered port she was boarded by Captain John Richardson, the District Naval Officer, and a naval party disguised as quarantine officials. After bluffing his way on board and ensuring that the vessel was safely under the land batteries, Richardson took control, but still allowed the crew a degree of freedom.



German ship SS *Seydlitz* – source: <http://www.searlecanada.org/volturno/volturno93.html>

Despite the presence of two expert searches from the Customs Department, Richardson's party initially found nothing of interest. But that night he elected to retire to the captain's bunk, and there feigned sleep. Just before 4:00am, two men stealthily opened the cabin door and entered. They had just begun to force open a panel under the desk when Richardson brought up his revolver, flashed on a light and took the master and his carpenter prisoner. A search revealed a hidden safe, containing among other papers a copy of the German Merantile Code Book or *Handelsverkehrsbuch* (HVB) and more importantly its cipher key. These were passed to Wheatley for translation.

With the aid of a captured code book, Wheatley worked out the cypher key used to encrypt messages sent by Vice Admiral Graf von Spee's Pacific Squadron. Wheatley's brilliant work earned him the thanks of the Admiralty:

*The intelligence he supplied may have validated the decision to position the RN's superior forces which destroyed von Spee's ships in the battle of the Falkland Islands in December*

In 1915 Wheatley returned to the RANC taking with him a letter from Captain Thring expressing the hope that history will give Dr Wheatley the recognition he deserves.

During his absence from the College it had been relocated at Jervis Bay, part of the Australian Capital Territory situated on the New South Wales south coast. He became headmaster in 1920, the year when the academic staff were reclassified as civil officers. Throughout his tenure the College suffered from its geographical isolation and faced threat of closure. These problems may have cramped Wheatley's intellectual capacity and contributed to his sensitivity to real or imagined slights. While a difficult colleague, he was a proficient educationist and gained the affection of the cadets among whom he was known as 'Pa'. Bespectacled, with blue eyes and curly hair, he was an imposing figure, despite being only 5 ft. 8 ins. (172.7cm) tall. He left the RANC in 1930 when it was transferred to Flinders Naval Depot, Victoria, taking with him the appreciation of the Naval Board for his 'conspicuous success' in

educating cadets to standards which enabled them as officers to take high places in examinations during subsequent training with the RN.

From January 1931 to February 1932 Wheatley was Director of Studies at the Cranbrook School, Sydney. Appointed CBE in 1932, in his retirement he was an Office Bearer in the Royal Empire Society. Although Wheatley is remembered chiefly for his codebreaking work his greatest legacy was judged to be the secure direction of the RAN's officer education.

Survived by a son and daughter, he died on 14 November 1955 at Cremorne and was cremated. His son Ross served in the RAN in 1914-53 and held the rank of Acting Captain.

*Special thanks to Robert Hyslop and Dr David Stevens from whose works this biography was edited.*

## **References**

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