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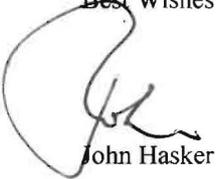
Dear Les,

Surgeon Commander John Reid Hasker

Back in late 2008, Glenys McDonald sent you some material I had written on John and copies of a few photos from his school and university college days. Since then, I have really jumped off my tail and endeavoured to seek more material. The further I have gone the more interesting it has become. What has emerged is that John was undoubtedly one of the great amateur sportsman of his time. I am attaching a copy of my current notes. Should you wish, these could be sent to you electronically.

The best close up photo I now have is a copy of the 1923 Trinity College Athletics team sent to me by Nina Waters from the Trinity College Archives. My efforts to get any photographic material of his last 13 years from the Navy has not yet yielded any fruit.

Best Wishes



John Hasker

Email: hasker@bigfoot.com

SURGEON COMMANDER JOHN REID HASKER RAN

John Reid Hasker was lost at sea along with 644 other sailors on HMAS Sydney on 19 November 1941, in what has been described as Australia's Greatest Naval Disaster. Sydney II sank with all hands after an exchange with the German armed raider HSK Kormoran in the Indian Ocean frighteningly close to Australian shores. Kormoran was carrying 340 sea mines which were intended dropping in the path of Australian ships heading from Fremantle to the war zone in Europe. It was also sunk but unlike Sydney, there were survivors who were picked up on the nearby coast. Sydney and Kormoran remained undiscovered at the bottom of the sea for 67 years before being found by American shipwreck hunter David Mearns and members of the Finding Sydney Foundation almost 2.5 km below the ocean surface.

The loss of HMAS Sydney included many great Australians amongst its crews of 645. One such individual was undoubtedly John Reid Hasker – Surgeon Commander. John Hasker (known to many as “Jack”) was an extraordinary athlete, medico and much loved character.

The story below will include an overview of John Hasker's life, boarding at Geelong Grammar, studying Medicine at Trinity College at the University of Melbourne and his career in the Navy. He was an extraordinary athlete, perhaps one of the greatest amateur athletes of his time. A renowned medico, specializing before he joined the Navy and brilliantly recorded in a tale by Allan Guthrie. A “great bloke” as noted by Judy Patching and extremely popular in the mess, clearly one of the lads. Fondly remembered by all he met. Conspicuous member of a group of Haskers born around the turn of the century, which included sister Meg and cousins Dulcie, Ted and Jack. First of a long line of Hasker descendants who entered the medical profession and achieved fame on the athletics track. John is remembered on honour boards including such compelling places as the Melbourne Cricket Ground. These writings, patchy as they are, conclude with stories of John that emerged from total strangers on the HMAS Manoora for the “At-Sea” memorial service above the Sydney grave site on 19 November 2008, 67 years after the Sydney went down.

John Reid Hasker was born in Ballarat in Victoria on 3 November 1900. He was a boarder at the Geelong Grammar School, leaving at the end of 1918 to study Medicine at Melbourne University. At Geelong Grammar, he distinguished himself as an all round sportsman representing the School at football, cricket and athletics. He was a member of the first XVIII for three years, captaining the team in 1918. There were three Haskers at Geelong Grammar and Melbourne University around this time. John Reid Hasker (universally known as Jack) and his two first cousins Ted (also born in 1900) and Jack (born in 1905). The fact that there were two Jack Haskers may have been confusing, but being 5 years apart may have smoothed this out. When all three were at Melbourne University together the problem may have been reignited. John (1925) and Ted (1929) graduated in Medicine and the younger Jack in Civil Engineering. John had a sister Meg. The three Hasker cousins Dulcie, Ted and Jack were born in Nagambie in the Goulburn Valley in Victoria. John and Ted were the first of the extended Hasker family to do Medicine. Ted became an Obstetrician/ GP in Rockhampton and had a son Bill a Surgeon in Mackay. Dulcie's eldest son John Learmonth was a Physician, also in Rockhampton in Central Queensland and daughter Mary a nurse in Melbourne. Jack's younger son Thomas was a Gynaecologist in bayside Melbourne, Jack's daughter Janet (born 3 months after the Sydney was reported missing and given the name J.R.Hasker) a PhD medical scientist and his eldest son, John a civil engineer, like his father, who went on to head up and chair a number of corporations. Dulcie's son Brian Learmonth recalls John visiting his mother at their Western District merino wool property near Coleraine. Brian says he received an urgent message to return to the ship as it was to sail. This may well be the last time the family saw John before he was killed.

John lived in Trinity College whilst studying Medicine. His name is remembered in the College on the Honour Board attached to the Memorial Building alongside other former students of the College who lost their lives in the second world war. Also on the Honour Board is one of his two Sydney II medical colleagues. This is Surgeon Lieutenant Mervyn Townsend. He was much younger being born in 1917 and only 24 when Sydney went down. Mervyn was the ship's dentist. John is also honored along with 5 other medicos on the 1914/18 and 1939/45 War Memorial Board at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The third member of the Sydney Medical team was Surgeon Lieutenant Francis Genge who was born in Paddington, Sydney in March 1897. John continued his sporting success at Melbourne University. He was a resident in Trinity College between 1919 and 1923. What is more he was in the Trinity football, cricket and athletics teams every year he was in residence. In his first year he was also a member of the first XVIII rowing crew. The obvious question to ask is "How did this man find time to do any studies, particularly as he was doing medicine?" Trinity College have photos of him in sporting teams in their archives including one in the College Athletics Team. History does not tell us what events he competed in. Three of the next generations of Haskers did represent Victoria in Athletics and all won State Titles over the hurdles. However a study of John's confidential Navy Personal records held in the National Archives would suggest the modern day Haskers are much lighter in build. John uniquely won six full blues for sport at Melbourne University. Three for cricket and three for Australian Rules football. A famous Naval Surgeon Lionel Lockwood also commenced his medical studies around 1919 and lived in Queens College, across the oval from John in Trinity. Lionel was also a top footballer and cricketer. Perhaps there was strong rivalry. Lionel captained the University Blues and John the University Blacks. Lionel won a full blue for football in 1919, 1921 and 1922. John in 1922, 1923 and 1924. John's cricket full blues were in 1923, 1924 and 1925. Lionel was captain of the Blues where possibly in the only time in history, the Blues played the Blacks in the Grand Final with John's team winning by the narrow margin of 5 points. Lionel was to join the Navy in 1924 soon after graduating whereas John set off to do clinical work before joining in 1928. Lionel survived the war years before retiring as a Surgeon Rear Admiral to live in Toorak. Written material on Lionel lists his mothers' profession as Temperance Campaigner. It is unlikely a similar note would be on the Hasker family tree.

Some notes on John's involvement in Australian Football (also known as "Aussie Rules"). Back in history, Melbourne University had played in the VFL (now called the AFL). As an amateur side they struggled and announced in 1914 that they were pulling out. They continued to play in the VFL Reserves until the end of the war. After 1921, University entered two teams in the Amateur competition. It was expanded in 1922 to include two equal competitions of 8 teams. Blues were on top in one and Blacks finished second to Hampton Rovers in the other. Blacks played Hampton in the prelim final where it was reported in the press that the game got out of hand in the last quarter. Blacks defeated Wesley Collegians in the Grand Final. A report of the game said "John Hasker dominated as a capable forward who kicked 4 goals".

This may sound remarkable in the modern age, but 1923 saw the introduction of numbers on football jerseys for the first time in the amateur competition. Blacks made the Grand Final in 1923 but could only field 17 men due to injury. Newspaper reports say that late in the game "Hasker all but crippled hobbled on to the field". Scotch won easily.

1921 was John's third year at the University and must have been a very challenging one for him. Geelong Grammar in their Corian magazine in an article about their old scholars reports that "J R Hasker went down with measles at the beginning of term and had been back for a very short period when he was attacked by scarlet fever. It was hoped to see him back early next term. Needless to say Trinity had to find someone else to captain their team". This may explain why a football blue did not come his way in 1921. John left Trinity at the end of 1923 and undoubtedly became a hospital resident before graduating M.B., B.S. In 1925. He captained the University Blacks in 1924

and 1925. It was reported that “the wily John Hasker lead the competition with 74 goals”. Another piece of writing says 84 goals. One wonders what that would be in modern times with better grounds, covered wickets, longer seasons and innovations to speed up the game such as the kicking out on the full rule.

The Melbourne University Cricket Club won inter varsity in 1922-23 for the first time in 10 years. They won the next year and then set a record winning for three years in a row in 1924-25. It must have been a great side and coincidentally these were the 3 years John won his 3 cricket blues. After 4 years with the Melbourne University Cricket Club, John continued to play first grade District cricket with Hawthorn-East Melbourne for two seasons where they won the premiership in 1928 at the MCG in his last game of District cricket. His best year was 1925-1926 where in consecutive innings he scored 88 against South Melbourne, 113 N.O. against Essendon and 91 N.O. against Northcote. After that he played with a number of Navy sides. The rule was when you were at University, you played cricket for University and when you left, you had to play elsewhere. His batting averages improved over time. All in all, he played 51 games of A grade district cricket scoring 3 centuries and 6 half centuries. Highest score was 133 in 1925. Batting average was 30.48 over 51 games. Not a bowler of note with only 3 wickets but did take 26 catches. A piece of writing by one of the authors as an aside to the book “Black and Blue- A History of the Melb Univ Football Club” states “On completion of his qualifications he played football briefly from 1926 with Old Scotch Collegians, although he did not attend the school”. Subsequent generations of Haskers have continued the Aussie Rules tradition with John II umpiring some 350 games spanning over 5 States his sons Stephen becoming the leading field umpire in the emerging USAFL and Andrew umpiring in London. He continued with clinical practice before joining the RAN in 1928, Janet Guthrie feels this may have been at the Royal Women's in Melbourne. His Navy Personal Records acknowledge that he had over this time gained specialist skills in “Genito-Urinary” Medicine. In his 13 years in the RAN, he served on HMAS Canberra, Moresby, Australia, Swan and Adelaide with two periods on shore at Cerebus in Westernport before joining Sydney in March 1941.

John saved many lives. Three that we know of are Les, Harold and Ernest. A fascinating article was published in 2008 in the HMAS Sydney Blue Funnel Line magazine. It was jointly written by the late Les Gillet and his son Kev. Les had served on Sydney II. In sailing through the tropics after successful service in the Mediterranean, Les had become ill when a tropical insect became embedded in his ear drum. This led to nerve damage that dogged him for all his days with severe neuralgia. This article also talked about another Sydney II sailor, Harold (Fanny) Adams. Les and Harold had both been summoned as the Sydney made a short and unheralded stop in Fremantle on the Sunday before turning around and setting off on what was to be the fatal voyage. It appears John Hasker had concluded both were too sick to remain on board and had discharged them for medical reasons. Son Kev Gillet had made a point of seeking Harold out when Kev was in Brisbane and described their meeting. It made good reading. Harold was very much in evidence at the Service of Thanksgiving attended by the Prime Minister, held at St Andrews Cathedral in Sydney on April 24, 2008. There is a magnificent colour photo of Harold, resplendent in his medals, shaking hands with a young Naval cadet, William Westbrook. I was really looking forward to meeting Harold myself to learn more about his medical condition and his emotions at being discharged by John Hasker on that Sunday in November 1941. Harold's son Allan was a guest of the Navy on board HMAS Manoora for the at-sea memorial service over the grave site on November 19, 2008. Allan said that his father Harold had died in June, not all that long after the memorial service in the Cathedral. Allan scattered his fathers ashes at sea over the grave site of Sydney II from the deck of the Manoora. He said Harold had acquired an aggressive form of tropical tinea which required him to be wrapped in a body sock. Harold and Les were the only two I believe to leave Sydney on that fateful Sunday in Fremantle.

Another story emerged on the Manoora about the Sydney. Kerry Ryding, Perth based daughter of

Ernest Ryding, was also a guest on the HMAS Manoora. Kerry raced up to me, literally out of the blue, keen to meet me just prior to the main Memorial Service. I asked her had her father been on the Sydney. When she said yes, I expressed my sorrow. No she said, John Hasker had discharged her father back in May 1941 when the ship was visiting Sydney with suspected appendicitis and he had lived until 2 years ago. Kerry just wanted to meet me to share this. The voyage was all about sharing and this was undoubtedly one the many memorable moments for Lisa and I. The Navy are to be congratulated on what this voyage achieved and also their excellent hospitality. Kerry spread her father's ashes on the sea. Ernie Ryding is shown in a photo by Ross Swanborough attending a memorial service in Perth for the loss of Sydney on November 18, 2004. An article describing Kerry's thoughts and reflections was in the Australian (WA) some 3 years earlier following the family's attendance at the dedication of the magnificent Geraldton War Memorial to Sydney II. Ernie was there with his wife of 62 years Edna and daughter Kerry. Ernie had served for 4 years on Sydney II before being discharged. The work life of a Surgeon Commander on a large ship would never be easy. These emotional stories reveal it was difficult enough to cater for the health needs of 645 sailors without the added complication of war.

John Reid Hasker died aged 41 in November 1941. It now almost impossible to meet people who can tell you about John. However the recent discovery of the remains of Sydney II has created enormous publicity and interest throughout Australia. This in turn has prompted the sort of research that I and other relatives and associates of the ill fated crew have carried out, many of us being guests on board HMAS Manoora for the at-sea memorial service over the grave site. J L (Judy) Patching AO OBE did help with some history, but he died in February 2009 aged 92. Judy achieved fame as an Olympic athletics starter in 1956 and thereafter a well admired Australian team manager and official. Judy served in the RAN for 13 years as a Phys Ed Petty Officer and knew John through their sporting connections. He remembers John as a "great bloke" and played in the Navy cricket team under his leadership. Judy also speaks particularly well of Navy Surgeon Charlie Downard. Judy and Charlie must have served on the same ship together. John also served at an earlier time with Charlie at HMAS Cerebus and their good friendship rates a mention in John's Personal Records. Unfortunately Judy has gone and it is not possible to seek further elaboration on this. Judy was a great fan of Charlie's surgical skills. I gather this was not from particularly first hand experience but Judy said sailors used to all regularly watch Charlie operate, unbeknown to him, through a skylight on the deck !! A note written to the Rolls Royce Car Club reveals another story. The Car Club traditionally provides cars to transport the less mobile along the march route to the Shrine on Anzac Day. Immediately following the discovery of Sydney, the RSL made a superb gesture in inviting those who had served at one time on Sydney II and all relatives of the deceased to join the 2008 March at the head of the procession. Sitting awaiting the arrival of a Rolls Royce was Allan Guthrie. Allan had served on Sydney II but only for a short period as a Temp" to allow another sailor to get married. He was besieged by TV and radio. I walked up at a quiet moment and introduced myself. "I am John Hasker". Quick as a flash, Allan said "John did my medical to get into the Navy 70 years ago". It took some time for me to recover my composure and the best I could blurt out was "Allan you look pretty good to me, best we both congratulate John on his clinical assessment 70 years ago!!" Allan also said he was an outstanding guy who was both liked and respected by the sailors.

I have been fortunate to obtain from the National Archives copies of the confidential personal records of John's career in the RAN. My impression is that a hand written report was made on a standard form each time an officer was transferred to a new posting as well as every time the ships Commanding Officer left for a new posting. The reports are hand written and not always easy to read. Whilst not wanting to jump to conclusions from limited data, several conclusions are possible. Most used terms are "loyal, good personality, common sense, very popular in ward room, good leadership etc". Most reports refer to his sporting skills even as he heads towards 40 - "excels as a cricketer and plays a good game of tennis and golf". There are comments about John's physique. He

was large and powerful. John was obviously a confirmed bachelor. His last two reports were written in April 1940 and April 1941, both by Captain Showers. It is worth quoting in full the written part of his last ever report in full. Extracted from Captain Showers writings “A most loyal, conscientious and public spirited officer. Possesses a quiet yet firm personality and exerts a good steadying influence. His manner to sub-ordinates is good and, being well endowed with common sense and tact, his powers of leadership are very good. His social qualities are good and he is an excellent messmate”. One more. Commander Dowling (later to be Admiral Sir Roy Dowling) as his Commanding Officer in 1937 on the eve of John’s transfer from HMAS Swan to Cerebus makes similar comments. “A loyal officer with a good personality and common sense. He is an excellent messmate but, having a strong dislike for official social functions and dances, confines his social activities where possible to club life. Excels as a cricketer (at age 37—my comment) and plays a good game of tennis and golf. Has carried out his medical duties with success”.

John was a bachelor and never married. He had one sibling, younger sister Meg, born in 1906 and she was the youngest of the 5 Haskers. Meg married Jeff Patterson but they had no children. This arm of the Hasker family has therefore died out. As a result there are no direct descendants and little personal material or memorabilia is available. Exceptions are sporting photos held in the archives of Geelong Grammar, Trinity College and Melbourne University, plus of course the navy personal records from the National Archives. Let me tell you a little about Meg. Meg Patterson was a lovely person and along with her husband Jeff, farmed a small property at Officer, not all that far from Dandenong on the Princes Highway. After Jeff retired they sold the farm and moved to a house right on the Gippsland Lakes at Metung. Jeff died and Meg became well known as she had a motor boat moored at the back fence and would happily set off on her own to cruise and fish in the beautiful Gippsland Lakes. The Pattersons were particularly generous and in 1978 purchased a large piece of land over the road from their waterfront house which they donated to the local community to be used as a Park. This is called Patterson Park. Now 31 years later in 2009, John Bate and a group of local residents have banded together and with Council support and approval are going to erect a plaque inside the Park to honor the memory of Meg and Jeff. The plaque will read:

Patterson Park
This land was generously donated
in 1978 to the village by Jeff and Meg
Patterson for the purpose of public
open space and passive recreation