



Captain J. T. RICHARDSON CNF

[1862 – 1941]



Captain Richardson was President of the Club in 1907 and 1909 ¹

John Tracy Richardson was born in Islington, England on 30 October 1862.

His father was Henry Richardson [1805-1862] and his mother was Harriet (née Tracy) [b.1823].

John was the youngest of their children:

Edward Graham	[b.1846?]
Alice Mary	[b.1849?]
William C	[b.1851?]
George C	[b.1856?]

¹ *Captain Richardson's multiple terms of office as President are explained by the following. Under the Club's original 1892 "Rules" or "Constitution", the Presidency of the Club alternated "as of right" between the senior Army and Naval Commanders in the Colony (and later the State) of Queensland. A separate elected position of "Chairman of Committee" also existed who, as implied by its name, actively managed the Club through its volunteer Committee Members – including Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. In 1910 the Rules were amended to reflect a governance model, which has essentially existed ever since, where the elected President chaired the Club Committee.*

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.

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After his father's death, some of the family came to Brisbane, Australia in 1865 on the *Melmerby* ex Liverpool.

John married Jessie Thompson (née Young) [1862-1929] in 1888 in Victoria. She was born and died in Victoria. They had two children:

- Noel Tracy [1891-1974] ² Born and died in Victoria. A Marine Engineer, he married Dorothy Melvine (née Court) [1890-1964] in Melbourne in 1915. They had a son and a daughter.
- John Tracy [1892-1898]

In Brisbane the family lived at *Netherway*, North Quay.

John Richardson was commissioned in the Victorian Navy as a Sub-Lieutenant in 1888 and ten months later was promoted to Lieutenant. In the 1890s he completed specialist training in gunnery and torpedo with the Royal Navy in the UK and served on the battleship HMS *Swiftsure*. He was appointed Acting Naval Commandant of the Victorian Navy in 1900 and promoted to Commander in 1901.

After a period on the unattached list 1902-6, he was appointed to the position of Acting Naval Commander Queensland, in the Commonwealth Naval Forces ³ - and then confirmed as Commandant, Queensland Naval Force from 1907-11. His formal promotion to the rank of Captain and posting as Naval Commander Queensland was backdated to July 1909.

He served as District Naval Officer Melbourne throughout World War I until 1917 and retired in 1920.

It would appear that the first Australian naval action in the First World War was undertaken by the ex-Victorian torpedo boat *The Countess of Hopetoun*, and the ex-Victorian Naval officer, Lieutenant John Tracy Richardson (a Captain from 1909). This Australian naval action preceded the taking of German New Guinea by the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force by one month. On approaching Port Phillip on the 11 August 1914, the German cargo ship SS *Hobart* took on a pilot unaware that Britain had declared war against Germany just seven days earlier. On entering the South Channel, the *Hobart's* Captain Paulsen was informed that he needed to slow down. On then being told that war had been declared, Captain Paulsen rushed for the wheel in an attempt to escape to sea. The pilot pointed out that the *The Countess of Hopetoun* was alongside with her torpedo tubes fully loaded. Captain Paulsen did not resist any further.

Captain Richardson RAN, either boarded with the pilot wearing civilian clothes over his naval uniform, or from *The Countess of Hopetoun*. After allowing *Hobart's* captain and crew the run of the ship, Richardson hid in the captain's cabin. When two crew members sneaked into the cabin after dark to retrieve code books, Captain Richardson, with torch in one hand and pistol in the other, seized the books. These code books allowed communication between German merchant ships and German warships. These, the only German codebooks then in allied hands, allowed the reading of German naval radio messages and contributed to victory in the Battle of the Falklands in December 1914.

² Chief Petty Officer N.T. Richardson. RANR 1911-12; RAN Bridging Train 1915-17; served at Suvla Bay 1915, Mentioned in Despatches.

³ The post-nominal "CNF" was used to denote a Commonwealth Naval Force officer - after Federation in 1901 and before the establishment of the Royal Australian Navy "RAN" in 1911

The Countess of Hopetoun continued to serve at the entrance to Port Phillip throughout the war. Her last war duty appears to be in late November 1918 when she enforced the quarantine of a transport full of returning soldiers who objected to proceeding to the Quarantine Station at Portsea. Captain Richardson's cocked hat box is held by the Nepean Historical Society in Sorrento.

Captain Richardson died on 28 May 1941 at Manly, Sydney.

Sources included:

- *Various web pages*
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992 by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton*
- *Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports, and sundry documents*
- *AWM, NAA & DVA Archives*