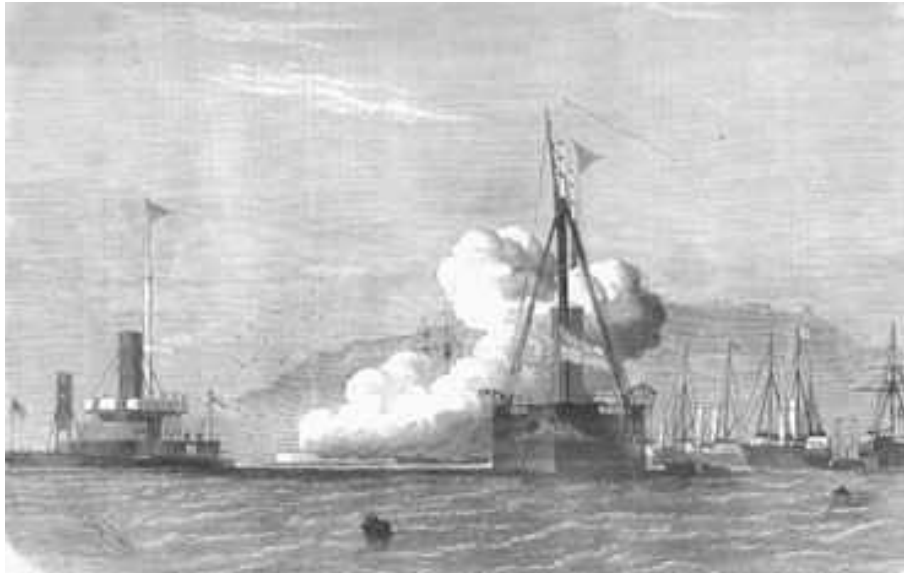


HMVS Cerberus:



THE COLONIES IN WAR TIME.

The Dash At Melbourne

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Background

- France had been humiliated, lost territory and been forced to pay war reparations after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71.
- Russia had been forced to retreat by Britain after invading Turkey in 1877-78 and was again embarrassed by Britain in 1885.
- In 1886 France and Russia appeared to be scheming against Germany and forming an alliance. Troop mobilisations were also taking place.

<p style="text-align: center;">THE EUROPEAN SITUATION</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">(BY CABLE FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.)</p> <p>NAVAL MOVEMENTS OF RUSSIA. LONDON, FEB. 12.</p> <p>The <i>Spectator</i> considers that the naval movements of Russia indicate a war between that Power and either England or Germany.</p> <hr/> <p>THE FRENCH FORTRESSES. LONDON, FEB. 13.</p> <p>The fortresses in Northern France, on the German and Belgian frontiers, have been placed upon a war footing in the matter of armaments.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">(REUTER'S TELEGRAMS.)</p> <p>LARGE RUSSIAN SQUADRON ASSEMBLING AT JAPAN. LONDON, FEB. 11.</p> <p>Telegrams received here from Yokohama report that a large Russian squadron is assembling in Japanese waters.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">RUSSIA AND BULGARIA.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">NO PROGRESS TOWARDS A SETTLEMENT.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CONSTANTINOPLE, FEB. 13.</p> <p>The preliminary negotiations between Kiamil Pasha, the Grand Vizier, and the Bulgarian envoys, have been so far void of result, M. Zankoff, on the part of Russia, insisting on the imposition of extreme conditions, notably the appointment of a Russia general as Bulgarian Minister of War. The ambassadors of the various European Powers have not taken any part in the discussion.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">THE REPORTED RECALL OF TROOPS FROM ALGIERS.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">OFFICIAL DENIAL.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PARIS, FEB. 13.</p> <p>The statement that a number of officers and several battalions of troops had been recalled from Algeria for service in France has met with an official denial from the Government.</p> <hr/> <hr/>
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The Argus page 5, 14th February 1887

Against the above background the following series of four fictional articles was written.

THE DASH AT MELBOURNE.

A FORECAST OF 1887.

By "H. W."

The Argus 29 January 1887

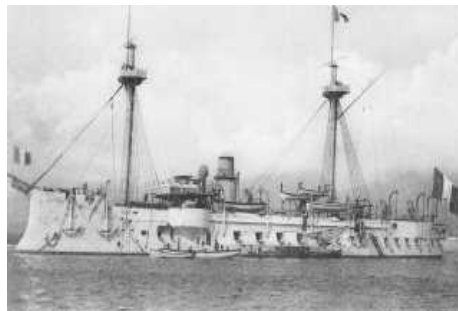
The following article is communicated to us as an unwritten chapter of the history of the winter at the present year:—

An understanding between France and Russia had been much talked about as a possibility. Yet no credence had been attached to the rumors of a secret offensive and defensive agreement. The importance of the alliance to France was too little thought of. It was not recognised that Russia could not ask terms too high, for France to pay. With armies of 500,000 to 750,000 men threatening the Eastern frontier, Germany must be semi-paralysed. She could not dream of taking the offensive against France, but would have instead to defend the Rhine frontier at odds of two to one. For this aid France promised to use her navy against Great Britain should England object to the Russian occupation of Constantinople, and to find one hundred millions of money towards the expenses of war. Better pay the money, it was said, as a subsidy to a friend than as a ransom to a foe. And the French thought that England would shrink, after all, from the encounter, and at the worst, if the risk had to be run, a naval struggle would be very different from the contests of the Nelson's days.

The defensive torpedo, they argued, had made most ports safe. And to an English army, the belief was that, by stirring up strife in Egypt, Burmah, and India, the British forces could be so accounted for as not to leave 50,000 men available for any expedition. Neither the French Government nor the French people had any desire to rush into an encounter with the great naval power. But they saw that the assistance of Russia on land was indispensable if France was to crush Germany instead of being crushed by Germany, and they were willing to sacrifice anything – to run an outside risk – to make sure of revenge on the Rhine. Admiral Aube was still Minister of Marine. He proceeded at once to put into operation his scheme of avoiding encounters with the English fleet, but of wearing out the nation by alarms, dashes, and secret and sudden blows in all parts of the empire, adding to all this his incessant mosquito attacks in the Channel.

Thus it happened that the 10th September, 1887, saw a combined French and Russian fleet riding anchor in the Armstrong Channel, between two of the isles of the Flinders group, near Tasmania – a spot out of the track of Australian and Tasmanian vessels, and yet near to it. The population on the mainland, though so close at hand, had no idea of the presence of the armament. It had met there within two days, secretly and punctually. The French flag floated from the *Vauban*, the *Sfax*, the *Cécile*, and the *Chasseur* a formidable squadron truly.

The *Vauban* had sailed from the Cape, ostensibly for Toulon, a month before. She was now in harbour near the Australian coast.



French cruiser *Vauban* July 1882

Her comrades had formed part of the China squadron, and had been ordered home on the first report of the impending war obtaining publicity, and they also must have deviated from their route considerably. The

Vauban was flying the flag of Admiral Laprade, who will be remembered as second in command at the Foochow affair of 1885 – that is, she was metaphorically flying that distinguished officer's flag, for really not one of the fleet displayed pennant or ensign. The Vauban was a magnificent ironclad of 8,000 tons, carrying four breechloaders, each firing 500lb. shot, and two 43 ton guns, each throwing 720lb shot. She was a ram, was fitted with two torpedo tubes. and had machine guns at every point of vantage. Her type was that known as the "central battery." The Sfax was a frigate built cruiser, of 4,000 tons, carrying ten 6 inch breechloading guns, four of which were fixed on revolving turn-tables, two forward and two aft, so that these pieces possessed an allround fire. She also had the large supply of the Hotchkiss machine guns common in the French navy. The Cécile was a torpedo cruiser, corresponding to the Scout class in the British navy steel-built vessels of 3,000 tons, with an armament of two 6in breechloaders, and eight torpedo ejectors. For speed the Cécile was the pride of the French navy, for at her trial trip she accomplished the desire of her designer, and did her 19 knots inside the hour, and at a 10 knot rate her consumption of fuel was unusually low. The Chasseur was a sea-going gun-boat, carrying one heavy piece aft and another forward. She also possessed great speed – not less, it was said, than 17 knots under a full head of steam. A heavy steam collier was visiting these vessels in turn. Astern were two other large craft. How the Russian turret cruiser, the Dimitri Donskoi, found her way to the South Seas is still a mystery. She was "shadowed" in the Chinese waters by H.M.S. Northhampton.



Russian Turret Cruiser *Dimitri Donskoi*
four 8-inch breech-loading guns, twelve 6-inch breech-loading guns
waterline belt of 6-inch compound armour

It is now believed that a dummy ship reported herself at Singapore and sailed to the East with the Northhampton after her, leaving the Russian ironclad free to keep her Australian appointment. The Dimitri Donskoi carried four 400-pounders in 6in. plated turrets, and 300-pounders mounted *en babette*. A 5in. belt of armour plating was supposed to protect her vitals.

A glance at the second ship showed that she was a merchant steamer. She was indeed the magnificent Anglo-American liner Donald. The name Donald could still be perceived cast into her bells, although it had been obliterated from stem to stern, and the new title Moskwa painted in its place. To relate how she came into Russian possession would be to repeat the astounding story of the Bates and Nuttswysed fraud; how, that London shipping firm of four or five years standing was nothing but a Russian agency in disguise, and how the fine vessels it had chartered ostensibly for the Australian, the Indian, and the American trade were treacherously passed to the enemy, though here and there the acumen of a British captain defeated the plot.

On the morning of 11th of September the s.s. Flinders, of the Tasmanian Steam Navigation Company, was making a bee line from St. George's Heads to the Schanck when the look-out reported a large vessel under a full head of steam bearing down upon her. The suspicions of the captain were aroused. He went off several points. So did the stranger. Still more alarmed, the order was given to put the helm over, and the Flinders was soon on her way back to Launceston. But fast as the Flinders was, the Cécile steamed three feet to her two.

The first shot was disregarded by the Tasmanian vessel, the second cut through her rigging, and in justice to his passengers the master of the Flinders was compelled to heave-to. The Cécile was crowded with men. Some 300 were placed on board the Flinders, whose crew and passengers were rapidly transferred to the French vessel, to be landed a few hours afterwards at Flinders Island. The Flinders herself sped on her way to Port Phillip Heads, But for the interruption, she would have been a couple of hours before her time, as

calculated from her telegraphed hour of starting, and it excited no surprise that she was a couple of hours late. She signalled Point Lonsdale, and was passed as a matter of course by the gunboat inside Point Nepean. If she had been examined three or four heavy boats would have been noted on deck, and the armed force would have been discovered below. But at 9 o'clock she was steaming down the West Channel at her ease. At half past 10, when off Cheltenham, she suddenly altered her course, crossed over into the South Channel, and, with extinguished lights, was soon running full speed towards Dromana. Her object was the South Channel fort. At 300 yards she was invisible, but she slowed, and stopped a mile away from the fort. Then six boats were pulled with muffled oars well to the rear of the fort towards the Mud Island shallows. They were packed with men – were loaded down with gunwale. The two hundred men in all were crowded in. The fort watch could not have seen these low-lying craft on that dark night more than a hundred yards away. The electric lights at the Heads were at work, but they were religiously searching the outside and not the inside of the harbour; and the fort watch looked to the Heads, and never thought that a foe was between it and Portalington. Within 50 yards of the fort two of the French boats collided, and then, throwing off all disguise, the enemy ceased paddling and raced in. The sentry first challenged, and then fired his piece, but the next instant he was clubbed. If the strife was bitter, it was brief. In a few moments the South Channel fort and the South Channel torpedo field were in possession of the foe, and there was an open way to Hobson's Bay to any vessels which could run the Heads. The great defence of Melbourne had disappeared.

There were 112 men in the fort, but three-fourths were asleep in their bunks. As they hurriedly turned out in response to a bugle call, they were cut down or captured. Major Newton, R.A., who had arrived from England but a few months previously, was in command, and taken by surprise as he was, he did his duty. "Lads" he said to group of a dozen men who were near him with Sargeant Kirkland in their midst, "You must rally and let me fire the 10-inch gun." The sergeant was the sole survivor of the party, but the gun was fired, and thus it was that an alarm was given to the other forts. With a south easterly wind blowing the noise of the hand-to-hand struggle would not have reached any shore, but the flash and the boom of the heavy piece startled every sentinel. Point Nepean used her electric light to signal the fort, and could obtain no reply. The Albert gunboat steamed down, and returned to report that she had been fired upon – as the watchers had perceived for themselves. Every man in the respective garrisons had now turned out, and well it was so, for the telegraphic messages to Melbourne that there was a mystery at the South Channel Fort was followed in 10 minutes by another that the electric light had revealed a fleet steaming towards the Heads only eight miles away.

The light on the hulls showed the enemy that they were discovered, but it made no difference in their movements. They came slowly on, the *Cécile* and the *Sfex* leading, and the *Vauban* and *Dimitri Donskoi* a dozen cable lengths astern. The design of the foe was evidently to run the gauntlet of the batteries and the torpedo lines at the Heads, provided that the South Channel fort coup had succeeded, and rocket signals from the *Flinders* and the work told them of the capture. The slow rate was maintained until within three miles of Point Nepean, when orders were evidently given to steam full speed ahead, with the object of running the gauntlet as each vessel best could, and rendezvousing at the south fort. From the south fort, as it was afterwards learned, a departure was to be taken to Melbourne. No landing was to be attempted. But the infant Victorian navy was to be sunk, the commercial shipping was to be burned, the Government railway shops at Williamstown were to be destroyed, and the piers were to be subjected to dynamite explosions, and then the foe, having destroyed property to the amount of a million to two millions, and having alarmed the colonies, was to dash out, and avoiding the British fleet was to make for the next rendezvous, abandoning any disabled vessels of its own – and such an expedition of course involved the risk of serious loss.

The Point Nepean battery was the first to open fire. Soon the heavier metal of the Cliff was heard. The *Cécile* was first through the Rip, coming on in grand style with the wind and tide in her favour. The *Sfex* followed, next was the huge *Vauban*, and last the *Dimitri Donskoi*. The enemy replied to the fire but seldom. The sound but trying rule for ships engaged in running past hostile works – "Do not fire unless you sight an embrasure or a magazine" – was strictly observed. The only damage done was by a shell from the *Sfex*, which, bursting in the very embrasure of an 8in. gun, killed two men and wounded three, and temporarily jammed the piece. The batteries made capital practice – excellent considering that the artillerymen were under fire for the first time. But although the ships were hit and hulled, they continued on their way. The result surprised some who had worked themselves up into the belief that to hit a ship was to sink it; but, of course, it was perfectly well known that guns which have only the chance of a few shots can not destroy hostile vessels except by some

lucky accident. The axiom of the naval service is "forts cannot stop ships;" that is, forts which can be run by. The American Commander Goodrich, in his exhaustive comments on the bombardment of Alexandria, has said that if the rule had not been established before, that action would have induced the observer to formulate it. The dependence was upon the torpedoes. Admiral Laprade, however, evidently shared the general belief that to be destructive submarine mines must be in pretty close contact to the ships bottom, and with 60ft. or 70ft. of water at the Heads, he deemed that he was not running any undue risk in attempting the passage. The shallow mines of the South Channel, which would assuredly have stopped him, he knew was safe. He was not aware of the local experiments of Major Rhodes, which showed that, given a rocky bottom, the caves and chambers, the charge can be so deposited as to strike upwards with nearly all its force, the perpendicular line then being the line of least resistance, and as such followed by the explosive power. It looked at first as if Major Rhodes was wrong. As the *Cécile* ran the gauntlet – not firing a shot – the water burst up in eruption on her bows, on her quarters, and close astern, but the French flyer took no notice. So with the *Sfex*, whose bows and whose stern were wreathed with smoke as she fired shot and shell from her 6in. breechloaders, which her turntables enabled her to aim at every battery and every suspicious building. The bubbling torpedo water did not harm her. It seemed as if a vessel must be exactly over the focus of the liberated forces in order to suffer from the shock. But soon the Victorian fighters had a great reward. The *Vauban* was the third vessel. The great ironclad had not the advantage of a steel turtle-backed deck as had her predecessors, and she did not like the plunging fire from the Nepean guns. According to the survivors, at least one and probably two shots had crashed through the deck, and had done mischief below. At any rate, the Admiral stood well over to the Nepean side, so as to make it difficult to train the guns upon him.

He went clear over the Lightning patch, where even blasting has only given some 35ft. of water. Here lay one of the heaviest of the submarine mines, and it was exploded by the electricians fairly as the cross-bearings showed that the vessel had touched the spot. The great bows of the *Vauban* were thrown clear out of the water, as though the vessel was rearing at a fence. Her stern was correspondingly depressed. The stern never came up. The bows seemed to melt away in the air, and then the huge fabric abruptly disappeared. If the wreck struck the Lightning rocks as it went down it rolled into deep water, but probably the momentum from the shallow site of the fatal charge. [The divers afterwards found that this was the case.] There was hardly time for a death wail. If one was uttered it was lost in the cheer which went up from the batteries. The *Sfex*, which was rounded-to, sent out a launch instantly under a flag of truce, and a dozen boats put off from Queenscliff to pick up survivors, but small, indeed, was the number of the rescued.

The Dimitri Donskoi joined her consorts, and there was a consultation at the South Channel fort. The *Vauban* had been relied upon to crush the *Cerberus* – as she probably would have done – and her loss was the greatest possible blow to the enterprise. But Captain Vojin, of the Russian ironclad, now took command as commodore, and he was a determined man, resolved to risk anything and everything to win glory and to cripple his foe. The way was clear to Melbourne. He resolved to go there, to fight the local flotilla, and to carry out orders by destroying as much property as possible.

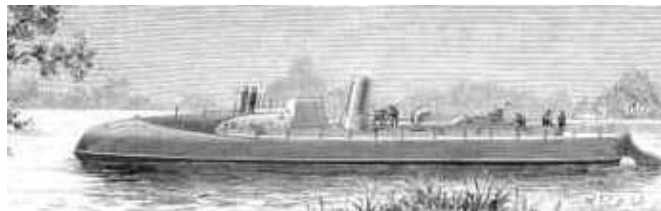
The news had been flashed at once to Captain Thomas. The tactics of this gallant officer bore witness to his grasp of the situation. In view of the experiments at Berehaven in 1885, and at Milford Haven in 1886, Captain Thomas had provided the *Cerberus* with not single but double torpedo nets – the nets out of which the *Hotspur*, at Berehaven, shook nearly a dozen Whiteheads which had been discharged against her. His first orders were for the *Cerberus* to "down with the nets." This reduced the speed of the ironclad to five knots, but she was now wanted only as a float battery. The enemy would strike at the shipping, and Captain Thomas had therefore decided not to leave the shipping and the port. He steamed up to Port Ormond with the gunboats behind him, and he remained there waiting for the enemy's vessels to come to him.

It was now broad daylight. The newspapers had got the news from the Heads into their second and third editions. Every home in Melbourne knew that the enemy was at hand, and every hour the rumours grew more alarming. The committee of the City Council met a committee of the Cabinet. The Premier reported that the land forces were rapidly concentrating, and that he would have 4,000 men in and about the city within a few hours to resist a landing if one were attempted, and it was unanimously agreed to pay no ransom, but if the Victorian flotilla was defeated to run the risks of a bombardment. Notices were rapidly printed and posted to allay alarm and avert a panic. "No city was ever destroyed by bombardment from the sea." "A shell is visible as it falls. Fall flat on your face if it is near you, and the explosion is usually harmless." "The suburbs beyond

East Melbourne, Fitzroy, and Hotham are beyond the range of fire." "Every fire brigade will be at its post to put out the fires." The effect of these notices was excellent. There was an exodus of women and children from the seaboard to the inland suburbs, but there was no stampede. One significant precaution was taken. The gold was removed from the coffers of the banks, put on a special train, which at 9.30 a.m. steamed off to Albury, and at the same time the following notice was posted :_ "Cash payments are suspended for 48 hours. By order of His Excellency the Governor, made in Executive Council. – Duncan Gillies, Premier.

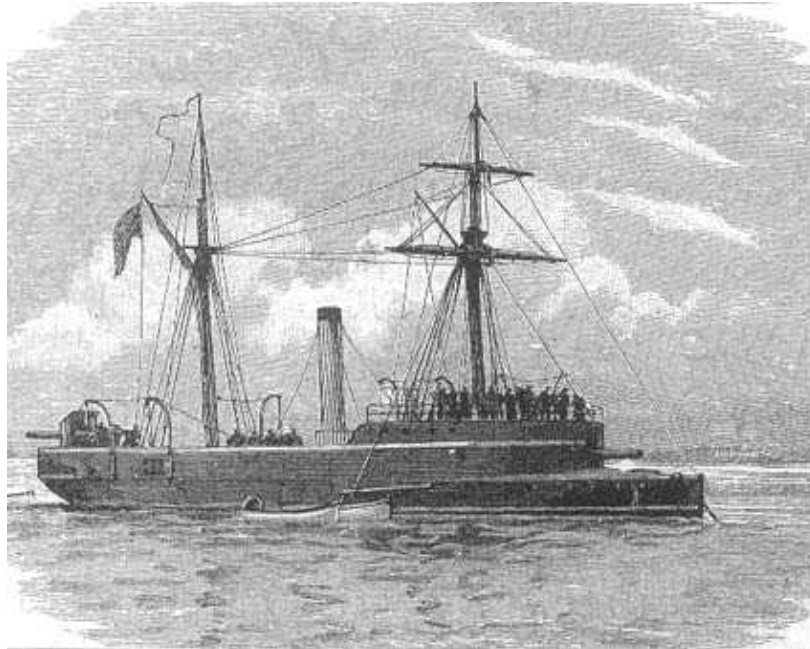
The hours passed by, and still the enemy's fleet did not appear. At 11 o'clock the news came that they had moved from the fort. The time, it seemed, had been passed in repairing the steering (sic) gear of the Dimitri Donskoi, which had been badly damaged by a shot in passing the Upper Queenscliff battery. At half-past 1 the three vessels were in sight from Point Ormond, but still Captain Thomas did not alter his position. The booms from the Dimitri Donskoi showed that she also has her torpedo netting out. The Dimitri Donskoi was the enemy, and she opened a slow fire upon the Cerberus at a distance of 3,000 yards. Her fourth shot ricocheted, and struck the bow of the Victorian turret ship without doing the slightest injury, but the Cerberus, now at 1,500 yards distance, replied. At the same time the Sfex and the Cécille (sic) steamed forward, the one on the port and the other on the starboard bow, and at once the Victorian mosquito fleet was signalled to dash ahead into action. The engagement was general and brief. The Sfex and Cécile, splendidly handled, were too much for their diminutive foes.

The Childers, under a full head of steam, ran past the Cécile, firing two torpedoes as she went. The French cruiser, obedient to her helm, gracefully avoided both. Quickly turning and ranging on the other side the Childers endeavoured to torpedo the Sfex, when a crashing shot from one of the turntable guns went through her boilers, and as she lay helpless she received a broadsider from the frigate. One shot ripped her side below the water line, and the Childers went down like a stone.



HMVS Childers 1st class torpedo boat
two 14 inch torpedo tubes, 4 sets of torpedo dropping gear
2 Hotchkiss 1 pounder machine guns.

Captain Thomas signalled to the two gun boats – the Victoria and the Albert – to retire to the mouth of the Yarra in order that at the least they might stop boat parties from ascending the river, and the Harbour Trust steamers went with them, the little crafts firing as they fell back. Had the enemy now united to assail the Cerberus all might have been over, but the Sfex and the Cécile followed the gunboats, and once among the shipping they commenced to sink and destroy. The English sailing vessels slipped their anchors, and ran ashore, but soon the fine clipper ships, Pathfinder, Windsor Castle, and Dunbar were in flames. The Orient liner Potosi and the P. and O, steamer Nepaul, two magnificent ships, were at the Williamstown pier. The Cécile disposed of these vessels by torpedoes, which exploded in their machinery and sank them, and rendered them worthless. The Sfex had a steel prow for ramming purposes, and successive taps from her settled the cargo steamers, Port Lincoln and Africa, and then one vessel after another endured this fate. On the two gunboats stealing out for a shot the Albert was cut off by the Sfex, was rammed, and was sunk. The French vessels were following up the destruction when suddenly the Dimitri Donskoi steamed off in a circle towards Brighton, hoisting signals of recall. She had fared badly with her foe. The 11 in. armour of the Cerberus deflected shot after shot, and not one torpedo penetrated the double net, though in places the outer net was torn away. But the 6in. plating of the Russian vessel was no defence at close quarters against the 400lb. shot of the Victorian ironclad. One shell penetrated the conning tower, and not only killed half the men there, including the captain, but destroyed the steering-wheel.



HMVS Albert 3rd class gunboat
one 8 inch breech loading gun, one 6 inch breech loading gun
two nine pounders & two Nordenfält "machine guns"

For a time the vessel was got under control by ropes to the rudder from the captain's cabin, but the position was understood on the Cerberus, and shot after shot poured in made the aft portion of the vessel a charnel house. The steering apparatus was again blown away, and the ship, under no control, took her own course – a wide circle – towards the eastern shores of the bay. Just as she grounded a shell penetrated her aft turret, burst against the right trunnion of the right gun, killed every man in the turret, and dismantled the piece, which crashed through the deck, carrying ruin and consternation below. To save further slaughter a surviving lieutenant hauled down the colours.

The Sfax and the Cécile saw that the end had come. They did not care for a pounding from the Cerberus, and, moreover, having struck as hard as they could, their duty was to escape before the Imperial fleet – which they knew had been summoned from Sydney – appeared upon the scene. Both of them could steam round the turret ship, and for a time they cleverly dodged her, getting behind one merchantman while they destroyed another. But as the harbour gradually became clear of vessels – whose masts standing upright showed their position – they became more exposed to the fire of the ironclad, and at 2 o'clock they turned their heads outwards and left the bay. The Cerberus did not follow, as Captain Thomas was afraid that after he had been lured 20 miles away the speedy foe would return to complete the mischief. Their movements were watched, however, from the Ozone, whose great pace enabled her to be employed for this purpose. She could keep out of range and return with pleasure. The enemy's ships stopped at the South Channel fort to pick up the men left there, and to blow up the torpedo field, which they did effectively.

Evidently thinking highly of the Flinders, and believing that she could be of some use as a tender, they took her with them. Soon after nightfall they were at the Heads, and again they ran through the passage under a hail of fire. As she went through, the green water was pouring for the scuppers of the Sfax, telling a tale that the pumps were hard at work. Outside the Heads her engines were stopped. Her crew transferred themselves to the Cécile, and the fast steel cruiser was soon under the water 10 fathoms deep. The gunboats probably hurt her, and she would be badly shaken by her own ramming feats, and the hulling she received from the Queenscliff batteries would do her no good.

Thus only the Cécile went out of the Heads to tell the tale. Yet it could only be claimed on behalf of the ruined flotilla that it had served its country by inflicting serious damage on the foe, for English shipping and Victorian interests had been smitten heavily. Our loss, in property, was the greater of the two by far, and in life also we suffered severely, as the splendid use made by the French of the Hotchkiss guns led to terrible carnage on the gunboats and the hastily fitted up Harbour Trust steamers. The only shot fired at the city was a

shell, which the Sfax, on leaving, pitched at Government house. The temptation of the tall shaft was evidently too much for her. But the shell fell wide in the domain near the observatory.

There were six vessels at anchor on the 10th September in Armstrong's Channel. Only four passed Port Phillip Heads on the 11th. The other two, the Chasseur and the Moskwa, had their work to do, and the next day that work was heard of.

OFF WILSONS PROMONTORY.

A FORECAST OF 1887.

A RAID ON COMMERCE.

By "H. W."

The Argus 5 February 1887

The Russian cruiser Moskwa, and the French first-class ocean gun-boat the Chasseur, were still lying at anchor in Armstrong Channel in the Flinders group, when the vessels under Admiral Laprade sailed to run the gauntlet of Port Phillip Heads. But only a few hours elapsed before they were moving under easy steam, and Perserverence Inlet was left as empty and desolate as when it was sighted by the first sealer. The two vessels, however, steered due north. The swift-flying hours soon made their plan of operations evident. About the time the Vaubon and her consorts were sighted off the Queenscliff Heads the two steamers had crept close to the Promontory – without lights – and were sending boats ashore. So soon as the boats were sighted the lighthouse watchers knew that something was wrong; but resistance was impossible. In a few minutes 35 armed sailors were in possession of the place. The officer in command of the Moskwa's boat spoke excellent English, and he told the inmates not to be alarmed; that no hurt would be done them; that their visitors would remain only for a day, but that any man who attempted to leave the settlement would be shot, and any woman would be ducked.

The enemy calculated that the moment the news of the dash at Hobson's Bay was known in Sydney the flagship Nelson would steam round towards Melbourne with any available ships of the squadron to pick up the aggressors in perhaps a crippled state. Before she could get round, however, the cruiser and the gunboat would have had a quiet day at the Promontory. The point was well chosen, for it is the general rendezvous for vessels coming either east or west, to or from Melbourne or Sydney. No other point on the coast is sighted by so many ships at this, the most southern projection of all Australia. Established here, the visitors could sink, burn, and destroy until they were driven off by the Nelson or relieved by Admiral Laprade. The Promontory was seized during the night of the 11–12th. It was expected that Admiral Laprade would be in sight at dawn on the 13th, prepared to fight the Nelson if he were strong, or to make signals for a run if he were unequal for an encounter.

The enemy wished no one to leave the place, to prevent the wires being tapped, as in that case of the ships *en route* for the Promontory might be warned away. Their object in capturing the lighthouse was simply to prevent the intelligence of their presence being flashed to Melbourne. Admiral Fairfax – in command of the Australian fleet – had done his best with the means at his disposal to guard against a raid upon the high seas. Three of the great liners trading to Australia had been taken up by the Imperial Government and armed as cruisers, crews from Her Majesty's ships being placed on board. The P. and O. steamer Rome cruised off Kangaroo Island, to Adelaide for coals. The Orient liner Austral ran from Cape Otway to Wilson's Promontory, taking orders from those stations and from Cape Schanck, and coaling at Melbourne or at Port Albert. The Coptie at Melbourne (the Shaw, Saville and Albion, N.Z. line) watched from Cape Howe to St George's Head, coaling at Jervis Bay, and taking orders from Cape Howe, the Green Cape, and her depot. The little obsolete gunboats on the station – the Swinger, the Raven, – were sent to Brisbane, where they were protected by the earthworks the colonists had hastily thrown up. The corvette Rapid was by far the most formidable of the wooden ships of the fleet, and she was detached to King George's Sound as best able to protect that important isolated station, and the best able to run if she were overpowered. The Admiral remained at Sydney with the corvettes Opal and Diamond, flying his flag on his magnificent ironclad the Nelson, with which ship, practically, for fighting purposes, the British fleet commenced and ended.

The dawn had broken, a light land fog still clung to the coast as the Austral, after coaling at Port Albert the previous evening, steamed up from behind Cliffy Island. Half her fires were banked. She was going at seven knots. The bells had tolled and finished forward, and the fourth bell was striking aft, when boom came the

report of a cannon. Captain Seymour, so soon as he was called, gave the orders of all hands to their posts, the fires to be made up, and the ship to be cleared for action. He was scarcely on deck when two more shots were fired from the same direction, preceded by one more to the southward, and the westerly wind brought with it a confused noise of shouting. Steering a S.W. by W. course, full speed, the Austral left the land fog behind in a few minutes, the view behind the Promontory was opened out, and Captain Seymour could see at once what had happened. A steamer, the Luna, from Adelaide for Sydney and Brisbane, had been fired at by the Moskwa, which had emerged from the deep water passage between the Anser Isles as the vessel came up. Her master, Captain Grainger, was on deck on the look out to report his vessel to the Austral and obtain an "All's well" from her, and he saw at a glance that this firing vessel was not the Orient patrol, though she was her equal in size. He gave the order at once to port the helm – over, intending to make a run to Launceston – for his boat had just been cleaned and could do its best – but before he travelled a quarter of a mile a low craft with black hull and raking mast shot out from the lee of the Rondondo rock and fired across his bows. The strange steamer astern yawed at the same moment, and, as if angry at the attempt flight, fired two heavily shotted guns from her starboard side. The one shot struck the foremast of the Luna near the foot and crashed through the forecastle, killing one William Jeans, a steerage passenger, while the splinters from the mast mortally wounded one of the crew, and severely wounded three others. There was a terrible uproar in the vessel for a moment, as the passengers were taken by surprise, but the men and the women calmed the instant the situation was explained. Captain Grainger, seeing that he was outpaced behind, and was cut off in front, stopped his vessel, and ran up the white flag, and it was just as the Chasseur had gone alongside him that the Austral appeared on the scene, coming up sharp out of the fog from Cliffy Island. The enemy knew her at once. The Chasseur took no notice of her, but went on with her work at the Luna as if the cruiser were not present. Half-a-dozen men were put on the Adelaide steamer, and the master was ordered to take his vessel in shore, and to land his passengers, his crew, and himself, but to leave the engineers on board. The Chasseur steamed in with her capture to see that this was done. In the meantime, the Moskwa, under a full head of steam, had gone out straight for the Austral. A magnificent sight it was to see these two noble liners approach each other – each a street length – each towering like a citadel. The Austral carried eight long-range Armstrong 80-pounders, several smaller pieces, and four Nordenfeldt machine-guns. The Moskwa had more pieces, but no heavier metal. They went into action at once. Captain Seymour endeavoured to run under the stern of the Russian, with a view of raking her, but the Moskwa was steered so as to keep her broadside to her foe, with the result that both vessels were forced into a circular movement – steaming round a common centre in opposite directions, and maintaining a vigorous fire at about 900 yards distance.

The Austral received several shell (sic) in her hull, which soon showed rifts and gashes; but the coal-bunkers constructed about her machinery had an excellent effect in deadening the explosive force of the shells, and so protecting the engines. The spars of the Moskwa – which was barque-rigged – suffered severely. The mizenmast went over the side, and with its hamper threatened to embarrass the Russian cruiser considerably. A shell, which penetrated and burst a little abaft the port quarter, created great confusion on board. Thus the contest seemed to be going well for the English patrol, when the Chasseur, having finished with the Luna, turned her attention to her consort. The vessels were between the Rodondo and the Crocodile rock when the Chasseur steamed down, and opened fire from her heavy bow gun. The first fire shot told Captain Seymour that his chance was gone. The 300lb. projectile went through everything, coal bunkers and all.

The second shot was an impact shell, which burst on the port bow, and made a clear waterway into two of the compartments. Every shot told. The Austral was as a haystack to the Chasseur. It was impossible to miss her almighty hull, whereas the Chasseur was comparatively a pigmy, and her steel deck and her light armour on the water-line saved her more than once when she was hit. It was the battle of the swordfish and the whale. And so it was in all the after-events of the war.

The merchant cruiser and her uses. She kept other merchant cruisers – the Alabamas and Shenandoahs of the seas – away, and as a scout she was admirable; but it was found absurd to match her against men-of-war even one-fifth her size. The staunch, strong, heavily-armed craft had the big galloon at its mercy, and consequently the orders were given to the cruisers never to use their guns when a man-of-war was in the case, but to rely upon their heels. As the Austral sank by the head her screw came out of the water. A torpedo was launched from the Chasseur, and the disabled vessel could not avoid it. The weapon struck fairly amid-ships, and all over. The enemy was not cruel but ceased firing at once, and signalled "Get your boats out." The torpedo must have created a cavern, for the influx of water amidship almost brought the Austral to

an even keel as she settled down with rapidity. Her boats were hard at work. The Moskwa was too far off to lend assistance, but the Chasseur lowered every available craft, from her launch to the captain's gig. They were too late to do much.

Rising slightly on a long swell – her forepart already under water, and no portion of her deck a foot above it – the Austral slid into the hollow, and never rose again. The British ensign had not been hauled down. It fluttered from the main-truck, and was the last thing to disappear. But the Austral did not take the flag alone with her. Scarce any of her wounded could be lifted into the boats. Captain Seymour would not leave until all were off his vessel, and he went down in the vortex also. "I did not think," he said to Lieutenant Gascoigne, as the latter pushed off with the starboard lifeboat, "that the gunboat carried such heavy metal. I ought to have run. But tell them I did my best."

The Chasseur lay head in to the Rondondo, almost invisible, from the seaboard; the Moskwa steamed back to the channel between the greater and lesser Anser Isles, and when a sail or smoke was sighted from the lighthouse the position of the vessel was signalled to them by their friends there, and either the Moskwa or the gunboat sailed forth. But after 4 o'clock p.m. the ocean traffic fell off. Neither to the east, the west, nor the south was a speck to be seen on the waters. The lighthouse people well knew the importance of giving the alarm, and the threats of their captors had not deterred them from making the attempt. The word was quietly passed round that the first man who could escape into the bush should make for old Jack Kenneth's, the half fisherman, half farmer of Sandy Inlet, who could use his boats or his horse to strike a telegraph line. If the captors had counted the numbers of the little settlement at 7 a.m. they would have discovered that a bright bush girl, Jenny Clausen, aged 14 was missing. She had gained the bush almost at a bound, and was indeed half way advanced through the dense scrub to the hamlet of the solitary resident of the coast. At 8 o'clock Kenneth's boat, with only a rag of a sail displayed – a bit of a sail not to be picked out from the tops of the breaking waves – was stealing round the northern headland, and once round and out of sight of the strange streamers, the cutter went under a press of canvas as though it were a racing yacht, straight for Waratah Bay. where, as Kenneth knew, the steamer Emu, belonging to Mr. Walker, the Minister of Customs, was taking in a cargo of lime. The Emu was ready for sea, and was headed at once for the newly opened telegraph station at Cape Patterson, and then every part of Australia learned the news that the enemy's steamers were at work off the Promontory sinking, burning, and destroying. The s.s. South Australian and the P. and O. boat Valetta were stopped off the Otway, and directed to run between the Cape and King's Island day and night and warn all vessels westward bound to bear up and run to the Queenscliff anchorage for shelter and orders. The Coptic was told at the Gabo, and she detained the N.Z. boat Rotomahans. of the Union line, and the Barcoo, of the U.A.C. service to assist her in warning all ships eastward bound to head round and to run for Sydney. And the patrol system once put in motion proved thoroughly effective, every vessel making for the Straits being notified of their danger. But the enemy's vessels had a capital ten hours' work, their captures being as follows:–

STEAMERS.

Duke of Beaufort, screw steamer, 3,115 tons, outward bound.
Julie, s.s., 2,317 tons, from Hong Kong.
Na*al, new steel steamer, 1,825 tons, from Sydney.
Glamour, 1,600 tons, from Newcastle.
Dandenong. 1.500 tons, from Newcastle
Kibora, 1.300 tons, from Invercargill.

SAILING VESSELS.

Palestine, ship, 1,600 tons, in ballast from Melbourne to Newcastle.
Goshawk, barque , 287 tons. from Maldon Island.
Zephyr. barque. 270 tons, from Hobart.
Eveline, schooner, 155 tons, from Kaipara, New Zealand.
Coquette, schooner, 98 tons, from River Don.

The most important capture was that of the s.s. Duke of Beaufort. This vessel had 5,000 bales of wool on board, 1,500 tons of wheat, and 8,500 oz. of gold. The insurance officers had taken a war risk on her and the cargo of £165,000 at 9 per cent, and this left a large amount uncovered. The Julie had been chased by a French cruiser in the China seas, and had escaped, owing to the appearance of H.M.S. Swiftsure on the scene, and she was now caught near the end of her voyage. The captured people took their fate very differently. Some, when they found that they were to be torn from their little possessions, wailed and raged; the most accepted the inevitable and repressed their feelings. The Luna, whose engineers had been kept on board, was run alongside each captured craft, and each load of prisoners was landed at the Promontory, where at sundown 520 persons in all were gathered. No effort was made by the foe to transfer any of the cargoes except the 8,500 oz. gold. Half the gold boxes were sent to one vessel and half to the other. The enemy's object was not plunder, but merely the destruction of property and the thorough frightening of commerce. The Chasseur disposed of the vessels, though the Moskwa usually brought them to. So soon as the ship had been bought to and the crew removed, the Chasseur steamed close up to the abandoned craft and fired her heavy shot with a one-third charge of powder, and the 300 pounder with this low velocity did not penetrate, but smashed in timber and iron work. A second shot was seldom needed. The big steamer, the Duke of Beaufort, was torpedoed.

When the morning of the 13th broke the lighthouse people saw smoke to the east and to the west. On two guns being fired from the Chasseur the sailor garrison hurriedly left the Promontory and re-embarked. The one smoke puff was that of the Nelson, and the other that of the Cécile. The signal of the Cécile – "Stand out to sea" told the enemy what had happened in the dash at Melbourne and no time was lost in obeying the order. The three ships of the foe steered to the south as though to round the Hogan group. Admiral Fairfax had learned from the Gabo signals the facts of the position, and knowing that he had only these three vessels to deal with he abandoned his voyage to Melbourne, and went in pursuit. The question was one of speed. The Nelson had recently docked. She was put at her full speed, and with every furnace aglow she nearly accomplished her 16 knots. An hour's steaming showed what the result would be. Strained by her long voyage, and in want of docking, the Chasseur could make barely from 12 to 13 knots, so that she was being overhauled rapidly. The commander, a wise man, took his decision at once. The Moskwa and the Cécile steamed back to him. In their boats and his own he transferred his crew to them. Then the Cécile torpedoed her abandoned comrade, and 10 minutes afterwards, there was no Chasseur on the surface of the waters.

The delay had bought the Nelson up rapidly, and she tried the effect of a fire from her bow guns. But the range was too great, and the Moskwa and the Cécile, steaming 17 knots, made the distance between them and their pursuers slowly but surely greater.

Twelve days after H.M.S. Nelson, iron-armoured, 7,600 tons, 6,640 h.p., was in the Alfred Graving Dock, Williamstown, with a crowd of artificers at work upon her, and a Yarra-bank firm having undertaken a contract for heavy repairs. Admiral Fairfax was in the Executive Council Chamber, Spring street, and there also were His Excellency the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry B. Loch, Lord Carrington, the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Wm. Robinson, Governor of South Australia, the Premiers of the three colonies, the respective military commandants, Mr. Lorimer, the Victorian Minister of Defence, and Captain Thomas.

A cleared wire and an instrument brought into the building enabled the conference to hold instant communication with the Governor and Premier of Queensland, who could not reach the city in time to be present at the meeting. Next day the morning papers announced that the Council had under consideration the following memorandum, written by Admiral Fairfax :—

Memo for the information of the Governments of the Australian colonies:—

On the 13th inst., H.M.S. Nelson sighted and gave chase to the group of the enemy's vessels then engaged in sinking and destroying off Wilson's Promontory. These vessels were a gunboat, a torpedo corvette, and an armed cruiser. The gunboat Chasseur was abandoned and sunk. During the succeeding night I lost sight of the Cécile and the Moskwa, but as they were steering a direct course to New Caledonia I had no doubt as to their destination, and followed them to Noumea. On opening out that port the vessels were discovered close in shore, together with two large merchant steamers. The glass revealed that Noumea had been fortified by earthworks, in accordance with our previous information. I deemed it to be my duty, however, to steam in with a view of destroying the enemy's shipping. This effort, I regret to say, was unsuccessful. Before I could

open fire on the vessels I became engaged with the works on the N.E.Head, and guns of which had sufficient power to penetrate the armour of the ironclad. The Nelson was repeatedly hulled. One 9in. shell, bursting in the bow port while the men were loading, exploded the powder-case, and thus three of the gun's crew were killed, while the others were scorched, and the piece was dismounted. I need not mention the broadside injuries, which are now under repair. Just as they were received Captain Lake reported that two torpedoes from the enemy's works had carried away not less than 40 yards of our torpedo netting forward. Our shell fire into the works was, I believe, not thrown away, and I would have continued the engagement, in the hope of success, but my orders were imperative to reserve the Nelson as much as possible for the direct protection of the Australian ports. You are aware of special instructions about Noumea. In accordance with these I have convened this council. There is no immediate probability of aid in ships from England, owing to the work imposed upon the home fleet in covering the British ports, and clearing the channels.

The blockade of the French and Russian fleets in the Siberian ports was taxing the resources of our Pacific squadron to the utmost when the cable was cut, and that misfortune is probably evidence of an escape of one or more of the enemy's vessels. The position, therefore, is that the enemy has, lying in a fortified port close at hand, two cruisers faster than any of Her Majesty's ships in these waters, who can sally out at any time for a raid upon Australian commerce, escaping to their base again. Or with these vessels and the merchantmen in his port the enemy can assume the aggressive by suddenly throwing many thousands of convict soldiers upon these shores. If the Australian colonies will land a force, say of 8,000 men, in New Caledonia to turn and capture the batteries at Noumea, I will undertake to convoy the troops over, and if their operations are successful, I will undertake to account for the shipping in the harbour; and I unhesitatingly recommend this course to the various Australian Governments. This decision arrived at, and its consequence, is now a matter of history.

THE PERILS BY LAND.

By "H. W."

The Argus 19 February 1887

The decision of the military council to attempt the seizure of New Caledonia was well received throughout Australia, more especially when next day came the news that the *Cécile* — which had followed the ironclad *Nelson* after her repulse — had taken two prizes into Noumea, two colliers which had attempted to run from Newcastle to Sydney, and had been smartly cut out. Intercolonial commerce, it was seen, would be paralysed no longer as the enemy had a secure haven for his cruisers within two day's steam of the Australian shores. The attempt could not be made without 7,000 men. The French were understood not to have more than 2,000 regular troops on the island, but the 14,000 convicts were almost all men who had been in the ranks, and it was known what they had been formed into regiments in large numbers. So far back as 1882, Mr. Julian Thomas, when visiting the island as "The Vagabond," for *The Argus*, had described how bodies of these men were constantly drilled, probably, as he remarked at the time, for no good purpose. New South Wales was to furnish 2,000 men for the service, Victorian(sic) 2,500, South Australia and Queensland 1,000 each, the expedition to start from Sydney 21 days after the date of the council. Urgent as the case was, that time was required for equipping the force and completing the arrangements for feeding it after its arrival. Nor would the ironclad *Nelson*, which was to convoy the troops, be out of dock much earlier. The command was offered to Major General Downes, R.E., and was by him accepted.

The movement was anticipated. Probably the French obtained intelligence of it from the captured colliers, but more probably a raid on the mainland had been contemplated beforehand, and was only hastened by events. The enemy with such a plan in his mind would realise that the docking of the *Nelson* gave them their great chance. The ironclad could swoop down upon any flotilla disembarking men, but the Noumea squadron could venture to face any other vessels on the eastern coast. The decision, therefore, was taken to act at once with convict troops and to act with Sydney as the object, Sydney being little more than half the distance of Melbourne from Noumea, and not having the services of an ironclad harbour vessel such as the *Cerberus*, which would disturb a flotilla either in Port Phillip or Western Port, or any adjacent bay. General D'Erlon, the military commandant in New Caledonia, followed closely in 1887 the plans of General Hoche, with the *Legion Noir*, or convict corps, in 1797. The expedition, which left Noumea in the October of the one year was a repetition of the Brest expedition of the earlier period. There was the same felon force; the instructions were substantially the same with the word "Bristol" left out and "Sydney" substituted. "The expedition will not attempt to enter Sydney Harbour, but will land the troops after nightfall at the nearest convenient spot — Bondi, Coogee, or Botany, as the weather will allow, the nearer to the city the better. Everything depends upon a rapid disembarkation. No stores will required to be landed. On shore the men can feed themselves. Nor will artillery be required. Machine guns will suffice. Consequently the troops can be thrown upon any sheltered coast without difficulty. They will advance as soon as landed upon the city, burn the docks, fire the shipping, blow up bridges, damage the railroads, seize any available treasures, and return to the flotilla." Confidential instructions to the officers added — "All the operations should be over in 48 hours, to avoid encounters with reinforcements from the country. Keep the regulars well in hand to cover the re-embarkation. Leave the wounded to the foe, who will be humane. If the retreat is pressed, secure the embarkation of the regulars of the *Legion Noir*."

The Noumea squadron made the run to Sydney in little over three days. The *Moskwa*, Russian cruiser, carried 2,200 men, and two merchantmen stowed away 3,800 men between them. Of the 6,000 men, 5,000 were felons wearing their sombre prison dress, relieved by a red scarf, and 1,000 were regulars, the latter composed of companies of the 1st battalion of the 18th Regiment of the Line of the 2nd Battalion of the 102nd Regiment, under Colonel Lavaur. General Reille was in command of the expedition. The two war vessels convoyed the fleet, the *Cécile* steaming sometimes ahead, and sometimes around the squadron. The decision taken was to land the troops at Coogee, the vessels to remain off that spot if possible, and to run to Botany Bay if the weather became unfavourable. Disembarkations were once the horror of the soldier, but, as General D'Erlon had said, it is a comparatively simple matter to land men without material, more especially with the steam launch now in existence. The steam launch, as regards men, has changed the situation. The enemy's

flotilla lowered 30 boats, each containing over 30 men. One launch took these boats in tow, and thus 1,000 men were thrown upon the shore in quick succession each trip. The first troops to land were the regulars, who promptly formed on the beach and seized the hamlet. By the time the second trip had been made Colonel Lavaur had posted sentries, had occupied the high hill above the abrupt tramway turn, and had planted there two machine guns, which commanded both the beach and the approaches to it. Five hours' hard work sufficed to put the whole force ashore and to find it ready to move. As the landing had commenced at 5 a.m., this brought the time up to 10 o'clock.

Throughout Australia the people were preternaturally vigilant at this juncture. Before the first boats touched the shore the alarm had been given by land and sea. In an hour bells were ringing in Sydney, bugles were sounding, and whistles were screaming to convey the alarm, and then there was silence again. The period he had chosen was not altogether opportune for the enemy, inasmuch as the preparations were proceeding for the Noumea expedition. Some 1,200 of the Victorian militia were already in Sydney, and were under canvas at Moore-park; while 2,000 men of the New South Wales forces were in camp at Dawes Point, on the Randwick course and elsewhere. These men were available at once. In addition, it was agreed instantly to land the crews of Her Majesty's ships then in harbour. The wooden corvettes, slow and old, would have had but little chance against the fast steel torpedo cruiser and the heavily-armed, half armoured consort which the Cécile had picked up at Noumea; while 500 steady men to hold the centre might be the salvation of the battle.

General Downes had his troops in motion while he was deciding this matter with the senior captain and Lord Carrington. Now came the test of his staff, Skirmishers had to be hurried to the front instantly, with orders to sacrifice everything in order to hold the foe for a few hours, and then the position on which the little army itself could best give battle, had to be chosen. At half past 7 o'clock two companies of the Victorian rifles were in touch with the foe on his Bondi flank, and directly afterwards a company of the New South Wales rifles felt the enemy's outposts near the Randwick tram line. Shots were exchanged, and then the firing ceased. The orders to the defenders were not to provoke an attack, but to resist an advance. A conflict only of skirmishers would have added to the troubles of the population that was flying into Sydney, partly by instinct, and partly on the urgent advice and orders sent from headquarters. The dread of the officers was that the convict soldiers would commit outrages, which would so inflame the Australian troops as to render civilised warfare impossible, and the commands were pressing to send women and children into the capital.

The G.O.C. had disposed of his indispensable tent work — had issued a hundred orders — by 8 o'clock, and was in the saddle surveying the positions selected by the staff for stopping the advance. A spot nearly two miles beyond Randwick was chosen. The centre was a hill near the tram line, crowned by a handsome verandahed edifice (the residence of a wealthy citizen). The right flank was protected by a ti-tree swamp, the hillside falling abruptly to it, and the left by a group of houses which could be loopholed for musketry. Two fine houses impeded the front of the right centre, and were ordered to be blown up without delay; but, unfortunately, this could only be half done, and the foe had the advantage. The left of the position was the most exposed. The men with the trenching tools were set to work, and they soon had thrown up mounds behind which the men could lie, and trees (indigenous and ornamental) were cut down for an abattis. By 10 o'clock General Downes could countermand the orders to the skirmishers, and could allow them to harass the enemy as much as they liked, and to fall back before an advance. The enemy had no choice but to attack. If he attempted to detour across country he was in danger of being rolled up from the flank, and to succeed would be to place an army between himself and his shipping. Besides, every hour's delay gave him a stronger foe to fight, and so he elected to come on at once. The whole position could be viewed from the headquarters of the Australian commander — and a pretty spectacle the advance of a division or brigade into action is. The puffs of smoke denoted the advance of the enemy's sharp shooters, and the retreat of the Australian skirmishers, who fell back firing. The black masses on the tram and high roads were the advancing columns. General Reille and his officers had obtained horses from the stable of the large white Coogee Hotel, where they had breakfasted, and were to be seen reconnoitering. (sic) The first artillery shot was fired at the group, and as the battery began to get the range the officers fell back.

The Australian front was nearly half a mile in length, and was held by over 4,000 men, General Downes rapidly rode its whole distance to speak to each body of men the few words which, when well spoken by the G.O.C. on the eve of the clash, will double his forces. From a felon army he said nothing was safe — not homes and not women. So there must be none of the ordinary "first fire" nervousness. It was not sufficient to

repulse the enemy, he must be annihilated. So soon as the foe was staggered the bugles would sound for the whole line to advance and the charge must clear the country.

The Victorian rifles had the right, the sailor's brigade the centre, and the New South Wales rifles left of the position. The artillery could be used with effect, as here and there rising ground occurred. Fifteen pieces, 12 and 16 pounders, were brought into action, The force were sadly deficient in cavalry, (sic) but a hundred of the Sydney Lancers were kept on the right flank with the view of heading the enemy's retreat off from his shipping. The foe waited no time. His advance was made in open order. Thus, his front was a mass of skirmishers, on which the artillery opened fire at 2,000 yards, with no great effect, though here and there a shell cleared a little space. So soon as the fire began the enemy halted his reserves, having good shelter for them behind some buildings and in undulating ground. The red-trousered men of the line were all in the reserve, except one company on either flank, and the advance was by the Legion Noir alone. The heavy attack was upon the left flank. The right attack halted, indeed, at the ruined houses, and utilised that cover, while the centre was honoured mainly with a heavy fire from their machine guns, but the skirmishers closed up for a rush on the left, and General Downes at once marched two companies of sailors and strengthened the artillery there, But whatever their "first fire" nervousness might be, the Victorians used their rifles well from their semi shelter. The trenches had not been half completed, but with new troops the slightest cover – anything to cling to – assists wonderfully to preserve stability. The men with the sashes suffered heavily as they mounted the hill, and the halt at the abattis was fatal to them. This check was well within "the zone of aimed fire" – the Victorians had the exact range, and the effect of the Martini–Henry was terrible. Some officers of the Legion endeavoured to come on, the men remained a minute firing, then stragglers dropped back, until the next moment the line collapsed in full flight. There reserves stopped them. Ranks were dressed by the officers, new companies were brought up, and a second charge was attempted. This time the line wavered before the abattis was reached, and seeing that the moment had come, General Downes gave an order, and the bugle notes were drowned in the cheers with which the whole lined charged to clear the way. The Legion Noir broke the sight of the bayonet, and when the halt was sounded the Australian line was on the enemy's ground. General Reillie, (sic) seeing that if there was to be a rally it must be under the guns of his ships, withdrew the regulars – who had not been in action – in good order, the rear rank keeping up a steady rifle and machine gun fire. They had only a mile to march to gain the fire of their fleet, and seeing that they could not be stopped without cavalry, General Downes directed his efforts to detach the fugitive Legion Noir. The artillery limbered up and came into action again, sweeping the Coogee–road; the handful of horse (sic) pressed the fugitives from the right also, and at last a line of "fours" at the double forced its way between the troops and the demoralized mob. General Reille made no effort to avert the catastrophe. With the battle lost, his object evidently was to save his regulars for Noumea. In this he succeeded, with the loss of the two companies who had charged on the flanks. The one clung to the deserted buildings on the Australian right, and made a desperate fight there, causing the New South Wales rifles to suffer heavily, and the other company was overwhelmed in the mass of the Legion Noir. Before General Reille had embarked the last of the men with him, he was informed, under a flag of truce, that the other portion of his force had surrendered at discretion.

In this sketch history is made to repeat itself. The events of 1797 were so exciting that little attention is paid usually in historical narratives to the landing of the armed felons in England. The battles of St. Vincent, and of Camperdown, and the actions at Cadiz and at Santa Cruz, the battle of the Nile, the alarm excited by the collection of 150,000 French soldiers at Boulogne, crowd out the smaller episode. But it is full of instruction for Australia, The particulars of the Legion Noir are given in Adolphus's *History of England*, vol.6; in the *Annual Register* for 1797, Stewart's *Military History*, and various contemporary publications. The French Directory had resolved upon an "expedition for the liberation of Ireland." The command was given to the brave and determined Hoche – an implacable Republican – who had greatly distinguished himself by his success in crushing the landing of the English and the emigres at Quiberon. Hoche sailed with the 18,000 men for Ireland. He had drilled and had placed arms in the hands of 2,000 galley–slaves and malefactors, whom he put under the command of a Colonel Tate. Either to inspire terror, or in recognition of the character of his "pets" and "lambs," as they were called, Hoche dressed this force in black, and hence the name of the legion. Hoche signed Tate's instructions in the name of the Directory, but whether with or without their consent is not known. Tate's orders were to land near Bristol, at night. His men were to be well supplied with combustibles, and they were to fire the city upon the windward side, and, if possible, reduce it to ruin. Docks and shipping were to be destroyed, and roads and bridges; and everything possible was being done "to interrupt and embarrass commerce." The force could either join Hoche in Ireland after this coup, or, if Houche was

successful, he would strengthen them. Two frigates, a corvette and a lugger sailed accordingly from Brest, and – although Nelson was on the seas -- they made the Bristol Channel safely. They landed, however, on the wrong side of the channel in Fishguard Bay, and, once on shore, the men were out of hand of their officers. They spent the night and the next day near the coast, plundering the farmhouses, and eating and drinking. The alarm spread, and Lord Cawdor, with the local militia, soon confronted the foe. Men and women crowded the hills to witness the conflict, but on Lord Cawdor offering terms, the enemy at once surrendered, "preferring" says Adolphus, "the good and idleness of an English prison to the labours of the galley–slave." Colonel Tate said afterwards that he was misled by the beaver hats and red cloaks of the Welsh women, and supposed that he was surrounded by grenadiers. The Hoche expedition also came to an inglorious end. It evaded the English fleet, but it could not evade the tempest. The frigate with Hoche on board never reached Bantry Bay, but was driven back, disabled, to Brest. Such of the ships made the rendezvous were waiting for the commander, when one of the most violent storms ever known on the coast occurred, blowing the fleet out to sea and scattering it far and wide. Some of the vessels were swallowed by waves. One ship -- Le Seduisant, a 74, with 1,800 men on board -- was driven on the rocks, and only 60 men escaped. Some were captured by the English cruisers, and the remnant reached Brest and Rochefort in a wretched condition.

Though the Hoche expedition was a failure, there remains the fact of the landing of Legion Noir -- a convict corps -- near Bristol, under circumstances far more difficult than would attend the landing of a convict corps on any part of the eastern shores of Australia.

THE PERILS BY SEA.

By "H. W."

The Argus 5 March 1887

Telegraph communications with Europe was interrupted within a fortnight of the outbreak of hostilities. The cables were deliberately cut within a league of the Javan coast; and were severed in various places. Towards the close of September, however, telegrams were brought from India to Port Darwin by Her Majesty's despatch gunboat Lynx which vessel was afterwards kept in employment in the service. There was much anxiety in Great Britain for the receipt of news from Australia, though of course, not the same feverish desire and longing as obtained in Australia for intelligence from Europe. The Lynx brought commercial news of the first importance. The Argus Extraordinary, published in the forenoon, contained a number of striking headings reporting war incidents and rumours—of—war incidents. One portion of the summary of the news was as follows:—

LONDON Sept 21

No naval engagement has yet taken place. French fleets at Brest and Cherbourg are preparing for expeditions. It is expected that while the one fleet engages the British vessels an effort will be made by the other to land an expeditionary force of 50,000 men in Ireland. A strong squadron is cruising off Bantry Bay to render a landing impossible. Public opinion in Great Britain is strongly against any reinforcement being sent to the Baltic or the Black Sea, or the colonies, until the great event of the supremacy of the Channel is decided.

The sea about England swarm with the torpedo and the gunboat cruisers of the enemy, who are inflicting great damage upon commerce. No attempt is made at capture. The vessel is either torpedoed or is crushed by a heavy shot, fired with a low velocity at the water line. An address issued by Admiral Aube, Minister of Marine, says, "French sailors, you are not the privateers' men of earlier wars. Their object was money, but your's is to serve France by destroying the commerce of the enemy. They fought bravely for themselves; you inheriting all the traditions of their vigour and endurance, will fight yet more bravely for your country." Out of 17 steamers due from America last week nine have arrived. It is known that three have been sunk, their crews having arrived at port. They were compelled to take to their boats. English feeling is bitter about the barbarity of this proceeding.

Of the three Australian steamers due during the period one has arrived. This vessel, The Massilia, was chased by a gunboat, but H.M.S. Leander, cruising for the protection of vessels, interposed, and the gunboat fled to the coast. The cargo steamer Gulf of Genoa was torpedoed in sight of the British Ironclad Hotspur. The ironclad could not pursue the 20-knot torpedo craft, but rescued the passengers and crew of the Gulf of Genoa, and put them the same day on a Plymouth tug. There is no news of the Chimborazo. The sailing ships Long Fyne and Acropolis, with wheat on board, have run into Lisbon, and will sell their cargoes there.

The French Government has published the text of an opinion obtained from the judges of the Prize Court. The case submitted was with regard to the destruction of the steamer Celtic, formerly a Liverpool liner, but flying the Danish flag when captured, and with a cargo of American wheat on board. The Prize Court holds that transfers of British ships made to neutral powers within six months prior to the declaration of war are not recognisable, and therefore the Celtic was properly destroyed by the torpedo boat Tigre. The American Ambassador, who had presented a protest and a claim for damages, has been requested to inform his Government of this decision. It is declared to be "conformable to the law of nations," and the neutral Governments are requested to remove from its registry all vessels transferred from Great Britain within the prescribed time. Consequent upon this declaration the war risk upon the British steamships flying neutral flags has increased to the rate demanded upon English Vessels.

The non arrival of the Australian mails have left the coupons of South Australia and New South Wales due on the 1st October uncovered. Her Majesty has issued a proclamation that for six weeks from date all proceedings for default payments from Australia, whether public or private, are stayed consequent upon

"obstruction caused by the enemies of the realm." It is expected that this proclamation will be renewed until the channels are cleared of the infesting cruisers.

The whole coast of France, from Dunkirk to Bayonne swarms with marauding craft, which issue at night, and run back to shelter in the darkness after a day's depredation at sea. Every creek seems to have its battery and its torpedo mine, protecting one or two of these marauders, and the shallows would prevent the approach of the British men-of-war, even if the vessels could be spared from the present watch on the great ports, Torpedo and gun-boats are being equipped with desperate haste in Great Britain. There is much indignation that the navy should be so deficient in these vessels, which it is now seen, are the masters of the situation. It is believed that the Channel cannot be cleared until the fleets fitting out at Brest and Cherbourg have been dealt with, and the navy left free to turn its attention to this new work. Corn has jumped in price from 37s. per quarter to 75s., and is rising. Colonial bonds have dropped seriously, and are not saleable. Victorian four per cents., £76. Contributions to the Patriotic Fund are pouring in. The temper of the people is excellent. The impending Channel engagement absorbs attention.

So ran the one portion of the intelligence. The news of the fate of the produce-laden Australian ships carried consternation with it in Melbourne. What created the greatest sensation was the condemnation of the Celtic in the prize courts, (sic) as the hope had been indulged in that a large amount of trade could be carried on by means of ships formerly engaged on the foreign lines, and taken over by foreign owners. With the English ships in danger of capture, and the French ships shut up in port, the neutral commercial marine itself was far too weak to attempt the carrying trade of the world, and commerce might be brought to a standstill. In the semi-panic the insurance rate for war risks rose to prohibitory prices. The consequence was the price of produce fell in proportion, and for a time shipments ceased. The crisis would have been more severe but for the action of the banks. A meeting of the managers was held, and it was announced that large advances would be made on wool and wheat, to be held to their order in the colony until a time for safe shipment arrived. This time it was felt, could not be far distant. Thus the market was steadied greatly. A committee of the managers had an interview with the Premier. It is understood that they pointed out that they might need the assistance of the Government in order to maintain the public credit. Ministers are believed to have given a pledge that should a run be threatened on any of the institutions that they would direct the suspensions of cash payments for a given term. The banks pointed out the undoubted solvency of the colony, and declared their belief that temporary measures would render impossible any financial cash, provided that all went well in England.

There was no need for the surprise which this news occasioned. The mode of warfare to be adopted by any naval power in conflict with England had been explicitly explained by American experts, such as Admiral Porter, by the writers for the Patriotic Committee, Moscow, and by a cloud of French authorities, including the Prince de Joinville, Baron Grivel. Admiral de la Graviere and Admiral Aube. The Prince de Joinville, in an essay published in the *Revue des Mondes*, 1871, commented at length on the naval experiences of the American war, and argued that blockades are things of the past, so far as marauders are concerned, and that nothing can prevent fast steam vessels leaving ports at night for raiding purposes.

Nok (sic) blockade, says the Prince, could be more effectual than that which the Federals established off Charleston and New Orleans, and yet four out of five of the blockade runners made the coast, and this though their base was far away, and was a neutral port, at which their actions could be watched. If the Confederates had gunboats and fast raiders, it would have been comparatively easy to have sent them out. The French coast, with its shoals and inside passages, is peculiarly adapted for such work. In the time of Bonaparte the French fleets were defeated, but none of the English Admirals could keep the invasion flotillas from making their way up and down the coast at pleasure inside the sandbanks, and under the protection of the batteries.

Baron Grivel, in his *The Past and the Future of the French Navy*, spoke of the old engagements between line of battle ships as "detestable in their results," and declared that the Minister who organised a guerilla warfare on the seas with a view of rendering the safe transit of the enemy's goods impossible, would render France a greater service than did either Colbert or Richelieu. Admiral de la Graviere argued that in men-of-war England must always be the superior power, but that her widespread commerce invited and could not resist attack. France can conduct her commerce overland. She can strike, therefore, at English commerce--so the Admiral contends without a fear of reprisals. The mistake of Bonaparte (sic) was that he was always striving for a fleet to crush England by a blow instead of creating a flotilla that would have harassed her.

Nor had English authorities been silent. Sir Thomas Brassey, analysing the returns for 1793–5, had shown that in that period the French took 2,095 English merchantmen, large and small, while the French vessels captured during the same time numbered only 319 vessels. The explanation is, that there were not the French merchant vessels to capture, and even in those days it was impossible to prevent small craft stealing out to sea.

Nelson writes, 1795 :– "The whole of the coast is swarming with French privateers." Again he deplores the capture by French privateers of the official despatch boats, the *Swift* and *Hindustan*, the former with important and confidential communications on board, and the other with private effects including portraits of Lady Hamilton. The nation, in supposing that the war would be conducted on the old lines of combat between the fleets, had forgotten the maximum of its naval hero. Nelson wrote to the Admiralty before taking the command that ended in Trafalgar, " We must guard against all eventualities. On the seas nothing is impossible, and everything probable.

NOTE ON "A DASH AT MELBOURNE." --

The object of the article thus headed -- the first of the series now closed -- was to point out that an enemy wishing to get at Melbourne would certainly attempt to run past the distant forts at the Heads by some surprise or fraud -- surprises or frauds being called stratagems in war -- and that the burdens of the day might thus be thrown upon the actual bay defences. The bay defences are the flotilla. An enemy can never evade meeting that. It appears to the writer that too much attention is being paid to the forts, which are of uncertain value, and too little to the flotilla, which is of certain worth -- too much to the Heads and too little to the bay. Since the publication of this article the *Pall Mall Gazette* of January 13 has been received, containing a letter from Sir Andrew Clarke, ex-inspector-general of fortifications, on the general subject. This distinguished authority declares that he advocates protection of ports by a flotilla, and he adds -- "*I have vehemently urged the colony of Victoria to build no more forts, and to devote their money and energy to active defence.*"

typed by Cherylle Thurling

the images did not accompany the original article.