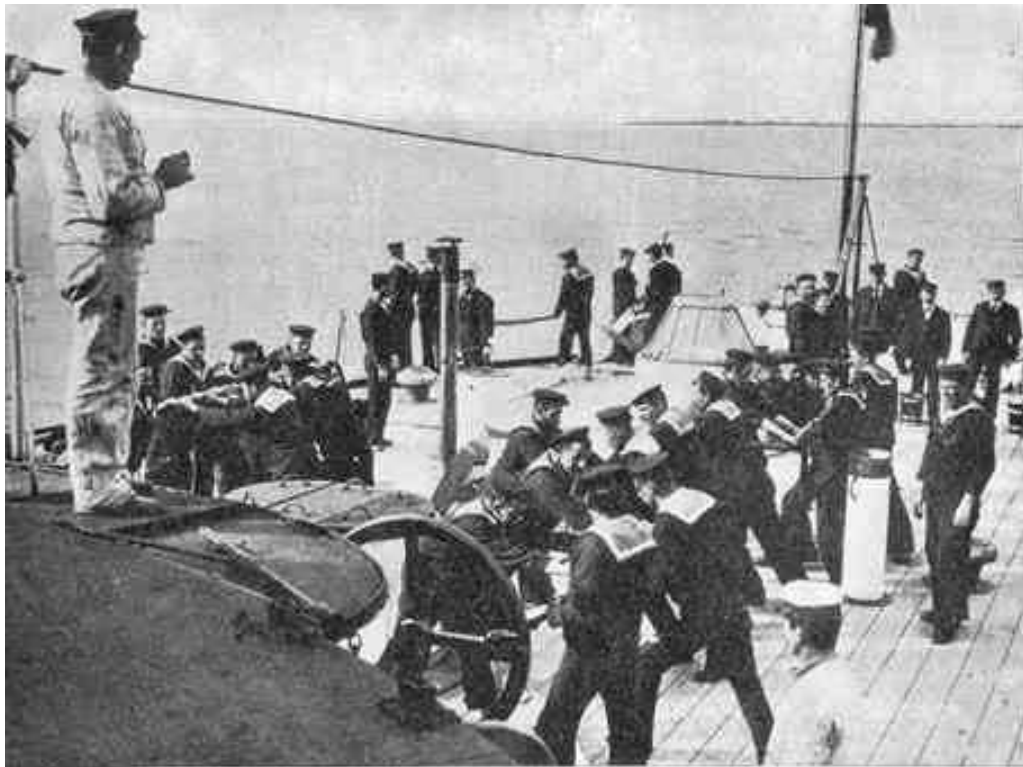


HMVS CERBERUS:



Life on a Victorian Man-Of-War.

Table of Contents

LIFE ON A VICTORIAN MAN-OF-WAR.....	1
CREW COMPOSITION.....	1
DAILY ROUTINE.....	2
ENGINEERS.....	2
ENTERTAINMENT.....	3
RATIONS.....	3
TURRET DRILL.....	3
LANDING PARTY.....	4
FIRE DRILL.....	4
SIGNALLING.....	5
BAND.....	5
TIMETABLE.....	6

LIFE ON A VICTORIAN MAN-OF-WAR.

Williamstown Chronicle February 23 & March 1 1884

One of the most conspicuous objects in our harbour, and one which is most calculated to excite the curiosity of visitors to Melbourne, is our ironclad turret-ship Cerberus as she lies at her moorings, about midway between Sandridge and Williamstown, and some 300 yards to the Sandridge side of the fairway. To those who are unfamiliar with naval architecture of the modern school, her appearance is a strange anomaly, and it is no easy matter for them to understand that, small and unassuming as she looks, she ranks amongst the most effective fighting ships that science, assisted by practical experience, has yet devised. Compared with the Nelson, which is moored but a short distance from her, she appears but a mere pigmy, the contrast between the two being most striking. The Nelson is one of the fine old ships of which England was once so proud when she was wont to boast of her wooden walls and hearts of oak. Cut down and altered as she has been, she is still a stately vessel. Her great hull, with its many painted ports, lofty masts, and massive spars, all present an appearance of grandeur which cannot fail to excite admiration. On the other hand, there is nothing what-ever of an imposing character in the outlines of the Cerberus. Her low black hull shows but some 3 ft out of the water. This is only relieved by her two white-painted turrets, the overhead deck supported by massive ironwork, her short smoke funnel, the steering house, and a stumpy little mast, which can be used for lookout and signalling purposes. Protruding, however, from the two portholes of each turret are to be seen the polished muzzles of her great guns, and it is in the possession of these that she shows her power, whilst it is at once seen that the very insignificance of her appearance is in her favour, rendering her but a poor mark for an enemy, whilst her ironclad sides and turrets are well calculated to withstand the blows administered by an antagonist.

As a rule, her decks present but little appearance of animation, and it is seldom that more than the figures of the two or three men on duty are to be seen thereon. Quiet, however, as all seems to the passer-by, a busy little world exists beneath those decks regulated by a discipline that would do credit to any man-of-war, and the visitor who is fortunate enough to be shown over her by her courteous officers is delighted to find that not only do we possess a magnificent vessel, but a right good crew as well. Notwithstanding the fact that the Cerberus is but seldom away from moorings, she is provided with a fair complement of men, who are sufficient to work her at any moment her services may be required, and who are kept thoroughly efficient by regular exercises and drill.

The Nelson has no regular crew, but is in charge of a few men drafted from the Cerberus; but, should she be required, she would be manned and officered by the Naval Reserve, who are a splendid body of men. As but few people have any idea of what life is on board a man-of-war, it may not be uninteresting to Victorians to know something of the crew of their own ironclad, and the routine to which they are subjected.

CREW COMPOSITION

In the first place, it should be stated that the crew of the Cerberus numbers seventy-seven all told. Her commander is Captain Mandeville who has command of the permanent naval force of the colony. His next in command is Lieutenant Collins, who is at present in England. The gunnery and instructive branch is under the supervision of Mr John Smith, R.N. and Mr J.H. Tubb, who has for many years been gunner in the naval forces. The chief engineer is Mr Huysman, who has under him two engineers (one being away on leave), and one artificer, and fifteen stokers. He has charge of the engines, twenty in all, and also supervision of the engines of the Nelson. The apparatus for generating the electric light is under his care, as well as the two steam launches belonging to the Cerberus. Besides being a first-class engineer, Mr Huysman possesses a thorough knowledge of torpedo boats and the Whitehead torpedo, with the working and construction of which he is fully acquainted. Mr J.A. Thompson is the paymaster. He keeps all the accounts of the naval forces, including the Naval Reserve, conducts the correspondence, receives all stores and hands them over to the different branches of the service, checks the accounts for the same, and is also responsible for the victualling of the force. He is, in fact, accountant, paymaster, corresponding clerk, and storekeeper, all in one. Mr Frogley is the chief boatswain, and Mr Nielson chief carpenter, but they are located on the Nelson, as their services are more required there.

DAILY ROUTINE

The ordinary daily routine of the crew is one that most lands-men would regard as rather monotonous, but to the tar there is a charm in being afloat which compensates for all drawbacks. The crew are necessarily all early risers, and have also to 'turn-in' early at night, and it is no wonder that, with their regular mode of life and the pure air they breathe, they are a fine robust lot of men. The first to be called up in the morning are officers, the boatswains' mates, and hammock-stowers, who are aroused at a quarter past 5 o'clock, the hands being 'turned-up' a quarter of an hour later. At twenty minutes to 6 they muster and wash decks, and at half-past 6 the hammocks of night-duty men (who are allowed the extra hour) are lashed up. At a quarter to 7 a flag, 'letter B', is hoisted, which is a signal to recall 'liberty men' who are on shore, and who are supposed to leave the Williamstown pier by the time the flag is lowered, which is five minutes afterwards. At five minutes to 7 the cooks of messes prepare breakfast, which is served at 7 o'clock. At half-past 7 o'clock the boatswain crews 'clean, in the rig of the day', that is, they tidy themselves and dress in the costume of the day, blue or white 'rig' as may be ordered. The watch on deck fall in at quarter to 8, at which time the watch below cleans the lower deck and steerages, and the boat for officers and the post is got ready. The recall for officers is hoisted at ten past 8, and at ten minutes past 9 hands are set to clean. There are divisions and inspection at half-past 9, and drill in accordance with routine. Drills are dismissed at half-past 11, and the decks are cleared up. Dinner is partaken of at noon, and a quarter-past 1 o'clock the men fall in again and are drilled. At the same time a boat is sent away for the post. The drills are dismissed, decks cleaned, and pumps rigged at half-past 3, and at 4 a well-earned 'supper' is sat down to. Quarters at half-past 4, when 'liberty men' are landed, and a boat is got out for officers and the post. 'Liberty men' are those of the crew who are permitted to go ashore. The boats not required are hoisted in at sunset, and the order is 'stand by hammocks'. The lower deck is cleared up at a quarter to 9, and at 9 o'clock the order is 'out lights on the lower deck', and 'the weary sailor turns to rest'. Petty officers turn in at 10 o'clock, and officers at 11 o'clock.

The commanding officer has to visit the different parts of the vessel once each day and night. Besides the duties mentioned a fixed weekly routine is followed in the following order: On Sundays the decks are cleared at 6 o'clock in the morning. The church party is landed at 10 o'clock, and dinner is served when they return, which is generally at about 1 o'clock. At 6 pm. they 'shift clothing'. On Mondays they have general quarters in the forenoon, and class drill in the afternoon, reference to which will be made further on. On Tuesday mornings, small-arms men are landed, if practicable, or the men are exercised at turret drill, and in the afternoon at cutlass or pistol drill. Wednesday mornings are set apart for rifle drill, and the afternoons to fire quarters (which will also be referred to again), also rifle and sword bayonet drill. At half-past 4 o'clock on the same afternoons, hammocks are scrubbed. On Thursdays they land small-arms men if practicable, or have class drill in the morning, and in the after-noon 'liberty men' are landed, and extra drill men fall in for drill. They are put to turret drill on Friday mornings. After dinner to cleaning and paint work, and at half-past 4 o'clock sling clean hammocks. Saturdays are set apart for cleaning the ship, and liberty men are landed in the afternoons. The foregoing are the regular routine duties of the crew, which are of course distinct from those of the engineer's staff, who have plenty to do, as will be seen by the following outline of their particular work:

ENGINEERS

They have daily to turn main and all auxiliary engines, and effect all necessary repairs to the same. On Sunday they clear up, generally. Each Monday they have to examine and work all watertight doors, ventilating, sluice, and magazine Hood valves and cocks, and the connections to the same. On Tuesdays they examine the interior of the double bottoms, longitudinals, air valves, fresh water condensers, fire pumps and connections. Each Wednesday there is an examination of boilers, super-heater and connections, turret engines, and gear for revolving the turrets. On Thursdays they examine and refit, as may be necessary the steam launch and cutter, steering rams and connections. On Fridays there is an examination of the electric lights and dynamo machine, telegraph gear in connection with the different parts of the ship, both mechanical and electrical. Saturdays are set apart as general cleaning days. The crew have most time to themselves in the evenings, and they then amuse themselves as they like. In fine weather, after the duties of the afternoon have been performed, they 'tumble up' on deck, and indulge in various kinds of pastime, singing and step-dancing, jumping, and a dozen other modes of amusing themselves; and there are not a few of them who spend a good deal of their spare time at fancy work, in which some sailors display great taste.

ENTERTAINMENT

When the weather is bad they find plenty of amusement for themselves below and many hard-fought games of crib, euchre, whist, draughts, and chess have been played upon their mess-tables whilst their quarters have rung again with the boisterous laughter which has followed the narration of a tough yarn, or the perpetration of a good joke. Manly as sailors are, there are no men who give themselves over to pleasure with more abandon and boyishness than they do, and the very wantonness of their mirth does one good to witness.

RATIONS

The men are rationed in first-class style, and, of course, fare much better in port than they would if at sea. Fresh provisions, meat, vegetables, bread, etc are brought off from the shore at half past seven o'clock every morning. Before being received over the gangway they are inspected by the quartermaster cook, and steward. If passed, they are checked by the paymaster, and apportioned to the cook of each mess. The men are each allowed half a gill of rum per day, or an equivalent in money, which is recorded to their credit.

The half of each watch is allowed to go ashore on alternate nights, leaving the ship at half-past 4 pm. and returning at 7 o'clock next morning. The men not absolutely required on board are allowed Public holidays.

The conduct of the men is, as a rule most exemplary, and the officers have but little trouble with them, as they are thoroughly amenable to the discipline of the ship, and do their work in a willing and satisfactory manner. Should however, any of them misbehave themselves, the vessel is provided with a 'dungeon deep' in the fore compartment, where they can be confined pending inquiry when in port, or imprisoned when at sea. The prison has, however, been 'to let' up to the present, and may it long continue so.

TURRET DRILL

The best day upon which to visit the Cerberus is Monday, which is known as general quarters day. It is on this day that the whole crew are put to quarters, and go through turret and other drills, the men from the Nelson taking their places with the others. The turret drill is most interesting, but it is much slower than it would be at sea, as the turrets, etc. have to be worked by manual power, whereas, when the vessel is at sea or in action all is done by steam power. All the work is done by the sound of the bugle, the different calls of which are understood by the men. The first thing done is to clear the ship for action, and upon the sound of the order the crew rush up from below and swarm the decks. Each man knows his post, and in a wonderfully short space of time the deck fittings railings, etc are all removed, hatchways and ventilator gratings are covered in by great heavy iron plates, secured on the inside. The vessel then presents a singularly bare appearance. No means of entering her is to be seen, excepting the turret port holes, and the grim muzzles of the guns there offer but a slight inducement for any boarding party to negotiate that mode of entry. The ship having been cleared for action the turrets are manned, and an officer takes charge of each turret to take sights on the object to be fired at, and also to fire the guns, by means of an ingenious contrivance, which enables them, whilst standing in the 'well' of their respective turret, to fire which gun they please.



In the Turret – "Elevate".
The Australasian, May 28 1898
photo courtesy of "Newspaper Collection,
State Library of Victoria"

The muzzle of each gun is elevated or depressed by appliances within the turrets, and the lateral sight is obtained by revolving the turrets themselves. The guns being muzzle-loaders have to be run back in order to load, but being mounted on inclined planes, they slide out again to position of firing.

When firing, the 'kick' or rebound sends them right back to the loading position, but in drill, tackle has to be used to haul them back. When merely drilling, a dummy charge, representing 50 lbs of powder, is used, and an ordinary chilled 400 lb projectile. After the guns have been brought to bear on an imaginary vessel, and are supposed to have been fired, the turrets are immediately swung round, so that the portholes will not be exposed to the enemy's fire whilst the guns are being reloaded, and they are swung round again as soon as all is ready for further firing. The whole work is done very smartly, and notwithstanding the celerity with which the movements are carried out, there is no undue noise or bustling about, the ponderous guns and massive turrets being worked with wondering ease.

LANDING PARTY

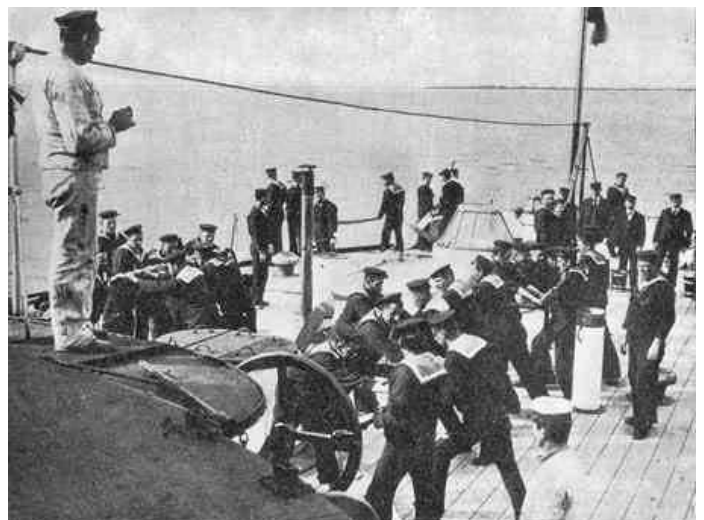
The crew are then put through review exercises as a landing party, and right well they look as they stand in company upon the deck, in their easy-fitting garments, with belts and cross-belts, and carrying their Martini-Henry rifles. They go through the bayonet drill and firing exercises, after which arms are grounded, and they do half-an-hour or so at cutlass drill, in which they are very proficient, as has been seen when the men have appeared in public assaults-at-arms. Besides these exercises, there are classes for ammunition instruction, etc. so as to make them proficient in every branch of their work.



Cutlass Drill. *The Weekly Times*, July 14 1900
photo courtesy of "Newspaper Collection, State Library of Victoria"

FIRE DRILL

Another interesting feature on quarter days is the fire-quarter drill. The first intimation of fire drill the men have is the alarm rung out by the big bell. In an instant the bugle calls the crew to man pumps, and, for a few seconds only, there is a bustle and excitement as the men go to their quarters. The signal given denotes the locality of the supposed fire, and, in a few minutes, four powerful jets are brought to play, two being supplied by pumps forward, and two aft. There are two 9 in. pumps, and two 7 in. These are worked by manual power when in port, but when at sea steam is used, when, of course, a much greater pressure is maintained. Even by manual labour, however, a splendid supply of water can be obtained, each nozzle throwing jets of water to a distance of over 20 ft. In the event of fire, buckets and wet blankets would also be brought into requisition.



Fire Stations. *The Australasian*, May 28 1898
photo courtesy of "Newspaper Collection, State Library of Victoria"

SIGNALLING

Signalling also forms a portion of the drill, and some of the men are very proficient at this. The mode adopted on the Cerberus is the semaphore system, in the day time flags half yellow and half red being used, as these two colours are supposed to show out best. At night the signalling is effected by flash light.

Signalling Orders to the Fleet. *The Illustrated Australian News*, April 15 1885



BAND

At one time the Cerberus possessed an excellent band, and its strains were often listened to with pleasure by those on the other vessels in the Bay as they were wafted over the water. The band used frequently to appear in public, and was greatly appreciated. Although some of the members still practice together, the majority no longer belong to the crew, and therefore the vessel may be said to be without a band.



The Crew of the H.M.S. Turret Ship Off Duty
The Illustrated Australian News, May 13 1878.

It is a great pity that the crew are not afforded better opportunities for practice in the Bay, for, no matter how perfect they may be in their drills, still nothing can do so much to make them thoroughly proficient as the actual manoeuvring of the vessel and firing practice. The Cerberus has recently undergone a thorough overhaul, and is in perfect order for trials of any kind. *Daily Telegraph*

TIMETABLE

Deeds not Words Wilson P. Evans, Hawthorn Press, 1971, Melbourne.

During the years from 1884 to 1895 the daily routine changed slowly, and in the last mentioned year the Victorian Naval Forces were working to the following routine;

- 4 am** Light galley fire.
- 6.00** Call Officers and Men. Lash up and stow hammocks.
- 6.15** Fall in. Scrub decks.
- 6.30** Up Guard and Steerage hammocks. Men away in boats after 10 o'clock the previous night were allowed to sleep 15 minutes extra.
- 7.10** Bugle for cooks. Two men dropped out for five minutes to prepare breakfast. Men on overnight leave were now on board after pulling back to the ship from Williamstown.
- 7.15** Breakfast. Half an hour was allowed for this.
- 7.45** One watch clean lower deck and the other watch dress in rig of the day.
- 8.00** Colours. Watch in rig of the day falls in for work.
- 8.20** Officers return from overnight leave and take breakfast.
- 8.45** Cleaning lower deck. Watch changes to rig of the day.
- 8.55** All hands to clean arms and accoutrements.
- 9.05** On belts, or return arms. Officer inspects lower deck and reports all in order.
- 9.10** Hands to Divisions. Prayers.
- 9.20** All hands fall in to be told off for drill, classes, or working parties as required.
- 11.30** Secure guns and return gear to Petty Officers.
- 11.45** Clear up decks, sweep down, and place everything in order.
- Noon** Dinner for which 75 minutes were allowed.
- 13.15** Both watches fall in on the upper deck. Drills, classes or duties as for forenoon.
- 15.30** Dismiss drills, classes and working parties.
- 15.45** Clear up decks.
- 15.50** Bugle for cooks.
- 16.00** Supper. Time allowed was 30 minutes. Hands on duty shift to night clothing and liberty men to best clothing. Officers proceeding on leave left the ship at this time.
- 16.30** Hands at evening quarters. All hands inspected. Away liberty boat. Watch on board

proceeded to pump up all tanks. This required about 800 gallons. All required boats were readied for night lowering. Four men of the watch aboard were told off for keeping the night watches. This meant 6 hours night watch in the gun- boats, &4 hours in Cerberus &the Depot.

17.30 Away mail boat to Port Melbourne to pick up mail after arrival of 6.30 pm. train from Melbourne.

19.00 All hands to hoist in mail boat.

21.00 Officer on duty made rounds and received reports from men stationed for special duties.

22.00 Pipe down.

typed by Cherylle Thurling 2003