

H.M.V.S. Cerberus

Reformation of the Victorian Navy

PROPOSAL FOR RAISING FUNDS FOR THE RESTORATION OF HMVS CERBERUS

Submitted by Brad Golding, PO Box 440 Mitcham 3132

We as a community do not have much time left to do something about this ship. Let us not be the ones who will be judged by history as those who let this unique piece of Victorian, and world shipbuilding heritage, sink to oblivion because it was all just a bit too much trouble. I believe that the effort we make to carry this project through must be innovative, with long term aims and objectives as well as those more immediate ones. I further believe, more so as time goes by, that there is really only one option with this project, the complete restoration of the ship. This option is the one which I feel would also have a much broader base of community support.

FUNDING

Initial funding by way of a government grant or corporate sponsorship is required urgently to prevent further deterioration of the ship. Once the vessel is stabilized there will be time to engage in fund raising activities to carry on the work of restoring the ship to her former glory. The concept outlined herein is based on the re-formation of the Royal Victorian Navy. This would be done under the sovereignty of HM Queen Victoria, whose portrait would adorn all RVN facilities. Membership would be based on the idea of commissioning members as officers in the RVN in a manner similar to that in the Confederate Air Force in Texas, USA, where members are all commissioned as colonels. I would however, suggest a modification to allow the usage of the entire range of naval ranks. The following is a suggested rank structure;

Admiral of the Feet	Patron, hopefully the State Governor
Admiral	President of the Management Committee
Vice Admiral	Vice President
Rear Admiral	Both, Secretary and Treasurer
Commodore	Committee Members
Captain	Active Members, appointed
Commander	<u>Standard membership commission.</u>
Lt. Commander	Junior member on Committee
Lieutenant	Older junior commission
Sub Lieutenant	Younger junior commission

Promotions could also be considered as rewards for lengths of membership. For example, after 10 years a member could be promoted to Captain, after 20 years to Commodore, and so on. Further to selling membership commissions to those living in Melbourne or Victoria, they could also be sold in the following additional categories including a junior or concession membership;

Out of Port Members: Those living beyond a certain practical distance from Melbourne, but within Australia.

Allied Member: Anyone living overseas. (It would be a better sounding category than to call them foreign members.) I am absolutely positive there is a huge number of people overseas, particularly in the USA, who would love to be able to put 'Commander, **Royal Victorian Navy**' on their business cards.

Honourary Members: These would be offered to the Commanders of visiting warships of any nationality. It may also be possible to offer them to Naval Attaches appointed to the many embassies in Canberra as a good will gesture.

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As well as selling commissions to people, private vessels could also be commissioned into the **RVN** with an appropriate hull number as a further revenue raiser. As a gesture of good will visiting foreign warships could be given honorary commissions in the **RVN**. Other honorary commissions could be given to those individuals whose organisations helped with sponsorship of the ship's restoration. Further funds would be raised with the sale of ensigns badges uniforms and accoutrements as well as the ever present base ball caps.

To my knowledge, no other society dedicated to the preservation of warships anywhere in the world has used a non existent navy as the basis for their organisation. This is usually because their navy was beaten in war and no longer exists, or it is still extant. Thus even if another society wanted to return the favour of an honorary commission, I do not think that they could. They could only offer honorary membership. This option would allow the **RVN** to have a potential **Navy List** of several US Battleships, one Japanese Battleship, numerous cruisers and destroyers, including the Aurora in St Petersburg, WW II U-Boats in the USA and Germany and numerous ships of the steam and sail eras (including HMS Victory?).

This form of network would make **HMVS Cerberus** known to a dedicated group of people who would in turn spread the word and in due course encourage tourism to see the ship. It would also allow the **RVN** to become the primary source of information on preserved warships around the world and if the **RVN** were to publish such a list, it would have a world wide market.

Membership would entitle free access to the ship and her immediate surround (with one guest?) and a regular periodical. This Magazine would encompass Victorian based, though not exclusively, information on maritime news and preservation with a strong emphasis on Naval matters. It could also include pictorials, quality articles from overseas and maybe a naval wargaming column. Meetings would be aimed at getting quality speakers on Naval subjects and be held every month, and an active social calendar would be encouraged along ward room lines, and eventually held on board. A committee would also be formed to decide on what uniforms would be required and their design.

To ensure that all insignia was clearly not able to be confused with that of either the Royal Australian Navy or the Royal Navy, or any other navy I would suggest that all insignia of the **RVN** be done in silver instead of the traditional gold. To my knowledge all navies throughout the world have gold insignia.

The original ensign of the **RVN** was the Blue Ensign, ie. blue field with the Union Jack in the upper hoist (left) with the badge or seal of the colony of Victoria centrally positioned in the fly (right), as promulgated in the Colonial Naval Defence Act of 1865.

With **HMVS Cerberus** as the flagship of the **RVN** Victoria, and Melbourne in particular, would have a unique venue which would provide yet another reason for people to visit our state and would likely be the focal point of more than one maritime reunion.

To obtain permission to use the term "Royal" requires a warrant from His Excellency the State Governor. Likewise to use the term "Navy" requires permission from the Hon. minister for Defence.

Once restoration of the ship is underway it would be appropriate to form a volunteer crew who would be kitted out in basic navy uniform for display purposes. Whilst today's uniforms are not the same as those of the 19th century they would be the similar enough, at least for the time being, and may possibly be "donated" (?) by the RAN. This crew would be taught as many skills as possible to enable them to bring the ship to life and make her more than just a static display, preserving the old skills much like Sovereign Hill does. For members it is probably best to limit their "uniform" to some type of jacket with shoulder boards showing rank, and a baseball style cap with the ships badge along with "scrambled eggs" for flag rank. Needless to say all items of uniform and insignia would be purchased by members. In addition to the crew of **HMVS Cerberus**, it is highly likely that the local re-enactment society would be able to provide a detachment of "Royal Marines" for display purposes.

Another source of revenue available would be the issuing of vehicle registration plates numbered "**RVN 000**"

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to "RVN 999". Done in dark blue with gold or silver coloured lettering and with the title "**ROYAL VICTORIAN NAVY**" across the top. They could be issued with the ensign of the RVN between the letters and the numbers and I would venture to suggest that they would be highly sought after by collectors around the world.

RESTORATION PROPER

There are two options under consideration.

- (1) Float the ship off her present site, get her in dry dock and restore the hull to a stage where she can regain her seaworthiness and become a floating attraction and hence relatively easily moved. If necessary replace the hull with a concrete caisson which could facilitate her ability to float.
- (2) Restore the ship as a static attraction to a more or lesser degree subject to the demands of her location.

Despite the much greater cost I believe the former plan is the more viable in the long term. I further believe that the proposal outlined herein will raise sufficient funds to also make it a practical proposition.

Whichever choice is made, the first step necessary would be to paint the ship in her black, white and buff livery as soon as possible. This would make the ship stand out and attract people's attention to the fact that something was happening. The effect would also give people some idea of what may be possible. It may be useful, from the point of view of attracting attention, and of course membership, to create a temporary upper works structure, ie. bridge funnel etc., to make the ship look a bit more like she should.

I further believe that the restoration should be part of a more comprehensive plan so that the final result would give people more than one reason to visit the ship. If the ship is done in situ just as a preservation operation then we have a number of years to wait until it is completed. However if some sort of development could be done in association with a major restoration then people would be attracted to the site well before the ship was completed. Such a development could include an extension of the marina in association with the Black Rock Yacht Club with additional mooring facilities on the protected side for pleasure craft to come alongside. If a pier was constructed to the weather side it could be used as a wharf for bay ferries to use, including a Melbourne to Black Rock, and places beyond, ferry service for commuters. The city end terminal could be part of the Docklands redevelopment which would link up with the city tram service. The more reasons for people go to the area then the more interest will be generated in the restoration.

The water around the ship is quite deep and this could give a wide variety of vessels the opportunity to use a pier structure to tie up alongside. Thus visitors could arrive by land or by water. Vessels like the Alma Doepfel and Lady Nelson could also utilise the pier as a stopping off point on their bay cruises along with many other cruise vessels.

If however the ship was to be refloated the sense of urgency created would hasten much of the restoration work. Consideration could also be given to the installation of a power plant sufficient to give her the ability to manoeuvre herself, and act as an alternative power source, so that she could be occasionally relocated, albeit with assistance, as circumstances permitted, to suit the demands which would surely be placed upon her. Naturally as a tourist attraction she would best remain in one area. The original proposal had her as part of the Maritime Museum with the Polly Woodside. This location makes her too landlocked to act the part of the flagship of the RVN whereas a Bayside location would allow this aspect to be more fully exploited. Maybe she could be tied in with the Docklands development. As there is unlikely to be available a coal fired reciprocating steam engine available to install in her engine room, a manoeuvring diesel is an alternative.

Once the ship reaches a reasonable state of preservation where she can be used as a meeting venue, there are, I believe, a number of societies dedicated to things maritime which would take advantage of the ship to conduct their meetings on board. Such usage would also encourage another practice to which the ship could adapted, namely the art of flag signalling. HMAS Cerberus, the naval training school on Westernport Bay, has within it's precincts the Communications School where the art of flag signalling is taught. I believe that if a

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reasonable case was put to the Navy it would receive a large measure of support and assistance.

To bring this about it would be necessary to rig a mast with appropriate yardarm and halyards, and to obtain the necessary signal flags. It is very likely that HMAS Cerberus would be able to assist here with flags and associated equipment. A signal light fitted to the ship would add an extra dimension to this application.

When the ship is to the stage of having her ship's boats on board **HMVS Cerberus** could also be used to develop a school of boat handling where the ship's boats could be lowered over the side and recovered all from the ship's own resources. Signalling could also then be carried out between the ship and her boats.

The use of **HMVS Cerberus** as a preserve of the art of flag signalling would enhance her position as a major component of a National Maritime Museum. As far as I am aware no other maritime museum anywhere in the world is so organised to encompass such an art, demonstrations of which could be a feature for visitors, ie wishing a visitor happy birthday. Who wouldn't photograph that?

The restoration of the guns and turrets, though a mammoth task, would allow volunteer crews to learn the old gun drills and thus provide another attraction for visitors, particularly if the guns can fire a blank charge for saluting. The removal of the guns and turrets is an urgent priority whatever occurs as the resultant reduction in weight would ease the task for the ship's initial preparation prior to the start of any restoration.

To get the **RVN's** journal up and running quickly could be achieved by advertising throughout the education system, particularly in secondary and tertiary schools and colleges, that articles are required covering naval and maritime aspects of the history of Victoria. Not only would this provide a large number of articles from which to select those for the journal, but it may also in time establish the journal in academic circles and in due course provide a forum for vigorous debate. Some sort of gift may be offered as a token of appreciation along with a certificate stating that a particular person's article had been published, a nice addition to anyone's CV. Publish their picture and they will keep that issue for ever. As well, they will show all their relations which may in turn encourage even more new members.

Such a scheme would go a long way in making the **HMVS Cerberus** restoration an important part of Victoria's education system. After a while the organisation would have on hand the beginnings of a substantial archive collection which would be invaluable to historians many years from now. For most kids if a submitted article is not published in a periodical it is either discarded or stored away and forgotten. The student will probably discard the original at the end of the year or course which he or she may complete. With the concept envisaged here all submissions would be collated and catalogued and retained for the future. Again a note of appreciation would be forwarded to the author advising them of the status of their work. As mentioned previously, if you give the kids a part in this and show that you respect what they have to say, they will be the future generations which will keep this project going.

The subject of the journal or periodical is most critical as it must be published as soon as possible after this project gets off the ground. There must be something substantial to offer prospective members beyond membership alone albeit with a naval rank. Social fund raising activities must also be planned to help keep the ball rolling and coincide with the journal organisation.

We have here a window of opportunity to help make Victoria's spot on the map even bigger. **HMVS Cerberus** could easily become a magnet for many marine oriented groups, societies and enthusiasts, and the focal point for a renaissance of Victoria's maritime heritage. We could prop up the ship and carry out some sort of restoration or, we could do it right the first time round and by right I mean refloat the ship. If we do a half baked facade restoration only, we may be passing on an even bigger problem for future generations to deal with. But if we do the very best we can and do it properly we will earn the gratitude of those same future generations. So let us not fall victim to the excuses which arose as recently as a decade ago, let's just do it!

Brad Golding.