

## A hazardous sea rescue

HMAS *Sydney* under the command of Captain Anthony Synnot RAN was on a training cruise around the barrier reef near the Fitzroy River, and received a signal that the United States submarine USS *Tiru* had run aground on Frederick Reef in the evening of 4 November 1966. The *Sydney* arrived the following day and stood by to render assistance. The submarine was hard and fast on the reef with huge waves breaking over her. Her watertight integrity had not been breached, but one of her sailors had been tossed by a wave while rigging safety lines. He returned on board, where he developed increasing abdominal pain. He was the biggest man on board, well over 6' 5", so the captain gave up his cabin. Even this was so cramped that a square was cut out of the bulkhead at the foot of the bunk to accommodate the sailor's feet.

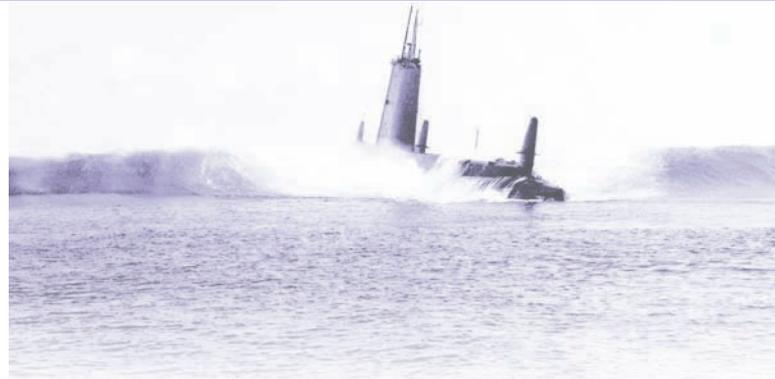
HMAS *Vendetta* was dispatched from Sydney. She picked up a US salvage team flown out from Hawaii, but no doctor was on board. I transferred to the *Vendetta* on 4 November 1966 and the *Sydney* continued her cruise.

The seas had only slightly abated on the morning of 5 November. I donned a wetsuit and flippers and was taken by the ship's cutter to just beyond the line of breakers. A gun line was fired to the *Tiru*, where a heavier line was fixed while the cutter took the strain at the other end. I and a sailor were able to pull ourselves hand over hand in an inflatable liferaft, thankfully without going in the drink.

The injured sailor was unwell with a silent abdomen. He had been well looked after by a US sickbay man, Ralph Mummy USN, and we formed a great team. We "sucked and dripped" him, keeping careful fluid balance and records in alternating 4-hour watches.

The seas remained high. It was not possible for the warships to carry out the tow. The ocean-going tug *Carlock* was dispatched from Brisbane, arriving the following day. The *Tiru* was towed off on a rising tide in the early afternoon, and proceeded to Brisbane under her own power.

We arrived in Brisbane early on 8 November. The next hurdle was to move this huge man out of the tiny cabin through a maze of dogleg passages and watertight doors. I gave him a very large dose of morphine. Five of the strongest sailors lifted him out of the bunk and out through the door into the passageway, where he was strapped into a flexible stretcher. He was then manhan-



dled to the forward torpedo space, winched out through the torpedo hatch and transferred to an ambulance. At the Greenslopes Repatriation Hospital, he was assessed, resuscitated and had 22 cm of necrotic small bowel excised. His recovery was swift and he was on his way home within a week.

The following year when HMAS *Sydney* was undergoing refit I transferred to HMAS *Melbourne*. The *Melbourne* had a dual mission of a goodwill visit to the west coast cities of the United States and Canada and to collect Skyhawks, Grumman Trackers and matériel for the Vietnam War. On our way, we stopped at Pearl Harbour. To my amazement and the ship's delight, we were greeted by a large banner proclaiming "Aloha Dr Sam" held up by some members of the crew of the USS *Tiru*. Their hospitality was fantastic and a fitting start to a fabulous visit to Vancouver, San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles and Pearl Harbour.

To my great surprise, I was awarded the MBE(Mil) in the New Year Honours list 1968.

**Sam Sakker MBE(Mil)**

### HONOURS AND AWARDS 1ST JANUARY 1968

**APPOINTED A MEMBER OF THE MILITARY DIVISION OF  
THE MOST EXCELLENT ORDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE**

**SURGEON LIEUTENANT SAMUEL SAKKER, R.A.N.  
CITATION**

For exceptionally meritorious service in boarding the stranded United States Submarine in rough seas, and for outstanding devotion to duty in treating a seriously injured man in difficult conditions.

On 4th November, 1966, U.S.S. TIRU grounded on Frederick Reef in the Coral Sea and H.M.A.S. SYDNEY was sent to assist on 5th November. It was learned that a U.S. Petty Officer had been flung against equipment in the submarine suffering serious internal injuries. Rough seas prevented boarding the submarine that night and although there was only a slight moderation by the next morning Surgeon Lieutenant Sakker prepared to swim from the destroyer H.M.A.S. VENDETTA to the submarine. In the event a hazardous boarding was achieved by liferaft.

On board the submarine Surgeon Lieutenant Sakker worked to keep the Petty Officer alive throughout the 6th and 7th November and until the early hours of 8th November when after transferring the patient and a full case history to the General Repatriation Hospital, Greenslopes, Brisbane, he was finally able to rest. Surgeon Lieutenant Sakker's conduct was in keeping with the highest traditions of the medical profession and the R.A.N.

