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## **Andreas Woonings**

Topic of essay from May 1939 till 1948 in the Dutch Navy.

I was born on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1920 in Kampen in Holland. I started school at the age of six till my thirteenth birthday. After which I started an apprenticeship with a blacksmith.

Working hours then were 10 hours a day and 4 hours on Saturday. I was also going to school at night. My father was an inspector with an insurance company. But he was going to get transferred to another town.

Work was hard to find especially in another town, so I applied for the navy in 1938 and was admitted on a six year contract as a stoker 3<sup>rd</sup> class in May 1939.

I joined my first ship the G15, which was a small patrol boat, coal fired with a triple expansion steam engine, in January 1940.

When the war broke out between Holland and Germany on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 1940, we were at the naval base of Den Helder. We were attacked by German planes and were also fired upon with rifle fire by our own country men, who were German sympathisers. A couple of hours before Holland capitulated we set course for England. Under the coast of England we were escorted by a British coastal vessel through minefields to Portsmouth.

From there we went to Falmouth, where we picked up some Dutch fishing trawlers and escorted them to Bristol where they were converted into minesweepers. We continued to Holyhead where we were stationed until Christmas 1940 on patrol duties in the Irish sea. We took the G15 to Belfast in Northern Ireland where I believe it was later used as a balloon ship, with others, against low flying aircraft.

Most of the crew were transferred back to Portsmouth to join HMNS 'Heemskerk'. This was a Dutch light cruiser and had escaped from Holland with a skeleton crew without any guns on board. Here she was fitted out with 5 double barrel 4 inch anti aircraft guns.

While in Portsmouth German planes attacked us practically every day. After our refit we were stationed in the Irish Sea to escort convoys of merchant ships between Milford Haven, Belfast and Glasgow till the end of 1941.

We were then called upon to be part of a big convoy with battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers and destroyers to escort troopships with troops going to Egypt via Cape Town. In Cape Town we left the convoy for maintenance as our main top deck had a crack right across it. This was due to the placement of our gun turrets. The "HEEMSKERK" was designed to carry three turrets with twin six inch guns. After we left Cape Town for Columbo and Indonesia to join the Dutch fleet.

Arriving in the Strait between Sumatra and Java, we were ordered back to Columbo as Indonesia had capitulated to the Japanese. Being very low on fuel and so we could reach Columbo, we steamed, at slow speed, on two boilers. Because of the maintenance in Cape Town we did not have to enter the Java Sea. That morning we sighted two Japanese aircraft and in the afternoon seven more arrived and were getting ready for a bombing run. Our anti aircraft guns kept the aircraft at a high altitude. In the engine and boiler rooms we were warned to stand by to change from cruising turbine to main turbines and four boilers. When the warning came we were going at full speed in minutes. All the bombs dropped behind us and because of our black smoke we had suddenly made, causing the Japanese to announce that they had sunk a light cruiser.

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We proceeded to Columbo at slow speed, arriving there with very little fuel in our bunkers. From Columbo we joined the British fleet in Mombassa in East Africa for exercises in the Indian Ocean. Our main ports of call were the Seychelles, Columbo and the naval base at Trincomale. We were there when a large Japanese battle-fleet was reported to be heading for Columbo and we were ordered to retreat with the British fleet into the Indian Ocean.

The Japanese fleet attacked Columbo and sunk the aircraft carrier "HERMES" and an Australian destroyer off the coast of Ceylon. Later we were sent to Sydney for maintenance, from there we went to Fremantle where we did convoy duties from the Indian Ocean to the Bight in South Australia.

With HMAS "ADELAIDE" we intercepted a German blockade runner in the Indian Ocean. We fired our guns and the ship stopped, but when we came close, the crew were getting into lifeboats, they had opened the ship's valves and it was sinking. The "ADELAIDE" picked up the crew and took them to Fremantle.

Fremantle harbour was also the base for American submarines with two submarine tenders. After some months in Fremantle we escorted the tenders to Exmouth gulf, we left them there to go and pick up a convoy. But to our surprise, when we arrived back in Fremantle, the tenders were also back in Fremantle. The Japanese had bombed Broome, and it was not safe for them to stop in Exmouth.

On escort duty again we escorted five troopships with the Australian ninth division on board who were returning from Egypt. We escorted those ships to Melbourne and from there we escorted the troopship the "NEW AMSTERDAM" with New Zealand troops on board to Wellington in New Zealand.

Returning to Fremantle I met my dear wife in Perth, we were engaged early in 1944. It was here that I was transferred to HMNS "TROMP" where I was placed in the workshop. I was sent to a school in West Leederville near Perth to do a welding course. We were transferred because we wanted to stop in Australia as here were a lot of the crew who were married or intended to marry in Australia. The HMNS "HEEMSKERK" returned to European waters.

The "TROMP" was a sister ship of the "HEEMSKERK" but was fitted with three double barrel six inch turrets. We left Fremantle and joined the battle fleet in Trincomale. We did one voyage from Trincomale to Exmouth with the whole fleet, and our aircraft bombed places in Indonesia. We refuelled at sea and in Exmouth and the whole trip took six weeks.

Next we raided the harbour of Sabang, an island on the western end of Sumatra. We entered the harbour with several destroyers, while further out to sea battleships were battering the island. The Japanese were pretty accurate in retaliating, we received five direct hits on board but none of the grenades exploded. After this we went to Sydney for maintenance and while there the wife and I were married on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 1944. I had to get a special permit from the church minister saying that we intended to wed on that day, so as to get permission for my fiancé to travel by train from Perth to Sydney and back. Without this a civilian was not permitted to travel on a train interstate. After our maintenance we joined the Pacific fleet under American Command. We were in action with American cruisers landing Australian troops in Balikpapan on the east coast of Borneo. We returned to the island of Manus, and we were there when the war finished. We immediately sailed to Batavia on Java then Dutch East India, as this was still run by the Japanese. Some of the crew on board were allowed to visit their wives who had been interned by the Japanese in camps on Java.

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From there we sailed to Banga an island in the Malacca Straights. We took over from the Japanese and put them in a camp on the island. After a few weeks we sailed to Bangkok and picked up some Dutch sailors who had been prisoners of war in Thailand. We went back to Indonesia and from there to Sydney.

The crew who married in Australia left the "TROMP" and the sailors we picked up in Bangkok took our place on board and the "TROMP" returned to Holland. The crew members who married in West Australia were transferred to Crawley Bay which was then a Dutch naval base.

We were put to work in a shed at Claremont Show grounds where we packed odds and ends that were sent to Indonesia by boat. This was our holiday at home.

After about five weeks I was transferred to Melbourne to await the arrival of HMAS "KALGOORLIE" which was sold to the Dutch navy. The "KALGOORLIE" arrived in Melbourne three weeks later, we could have spent that time at home in Perth, but that is a sailor's life. After some time in Melbourne and Sydney for a refit the corvette's name was changed to "TERNATE", and we did get some time to visit our wives.

After this we set sail for Indonesia, and did patrols around the islands.

In 1947 I left the corvette in Surabaya and was placed in the workshop there to await my discharge. After writing a lot of letters to different parliamentarians, we were discharged in April 1948, I had nearly served 9 years. As crew on a merchant ship we sailed to Brisbane, then by train to Perth, home at last. I started work in Perth as a welder with Hoskins Foundry.

In 1949 my wife and I relocated to Albany where we had bought a house. There I worked in a garage until May 1951 when I was offered a job as a fitter/welder with the Cheyne Beach Whaling Co which had just started to build their factory. I was promoted to engineer in 1960. I stayed with the Cheyne Beach Whaling Co until 1979 when the company closed down. I retired in 1980. I have been back to Holland five times, the first time was 1965.