

CALL THE HANDS

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HMAS *Voyager* (I) or What's in a Coat of Paint?

During WWII ships of the RAN were painted in a number of different colour schemes as these photos of *Voyager* illustrate and information on both peacetime and wartime camouflage paint schemes can be found in Appendix 1 and the accompanying papers. During the early years of the war, *Voyager* may have remained in peacetime livery without camouflage as this picture taken from the RAN ships histories page showing her in the Mediterranean dated 1940 suggests.



Brett Morrow, a member of NHS who is currently updating our records, studied RAN paint schemes and provided the information leading to the Appendix. He also provided these two photos, the first taken in early 1940 showing Vampire in a very different paint scheme, which would have been identical to *Voyager* for this time period. The 2-tone scheme shown is 507B for hull, and 507C for upperworks. (N.B. For ease of reference, the various shades used in ship's paint schemes are described by alpha-numerical codes)



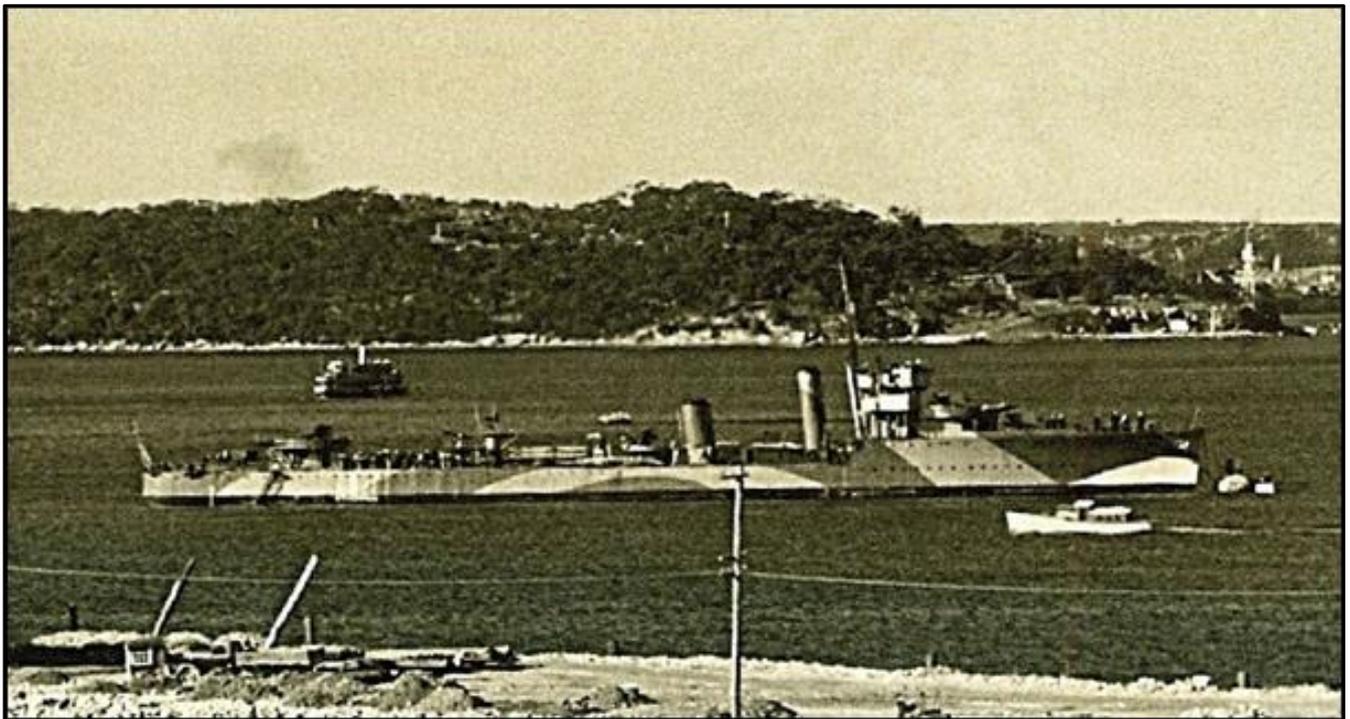
And then *Voyager* in camouflage in dry dock in Alexandria in late 40, early 1941. In this later case, she wears the `D` flag superior in her pennant number. This was changed to the letter `I` sometime before mid-41, but it is unclear exactly when.

This photo of her with the pennant number I 31, was taken off Suda Bay, Crete during the evacuation of the island in May 1941.

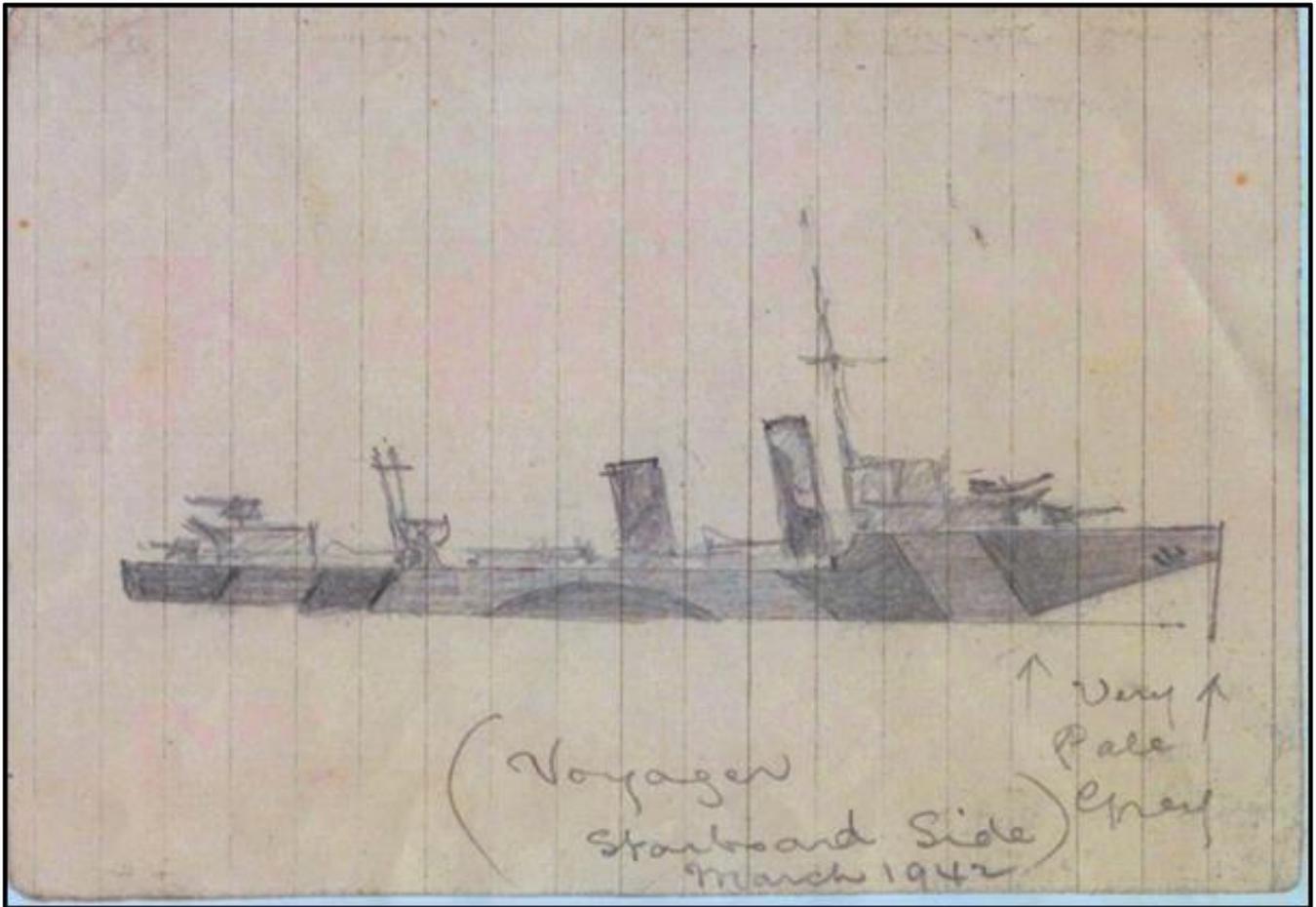


It appears that all ships were under constant painting whenever possible, and *Voyager's* colour changes were normal when compared with other ships in WWII. When the RAN V/W's first served in the Mediterranean they were painted in the darker hull, with light upper works, and served in this 2-tone scheme until mid-40, when a directive was issued concerning the application of camouflage to all admiralty destroyers. This being the case, it is possible that the picture of *Voyager* from the RAN ships histories page is in fact pre-war in origin. *Voyager* then wore her familiar Mediterranean scheme until returning to Sydney for refit in September 41.

Very recently Brett has unearthed a very rare and historically significant find – the only known photos of the ship in a new camouflage. This picture of the construction of the Captain Cook Dock and the enlargements following show the starboard side of *Voyager* in the background, and the accompanying sketch drawn by naval photographer A.C. Green in 1942 illustrates this paint scheme. Note there are subtle differences to Green's original drawing and the actual scheme applied.

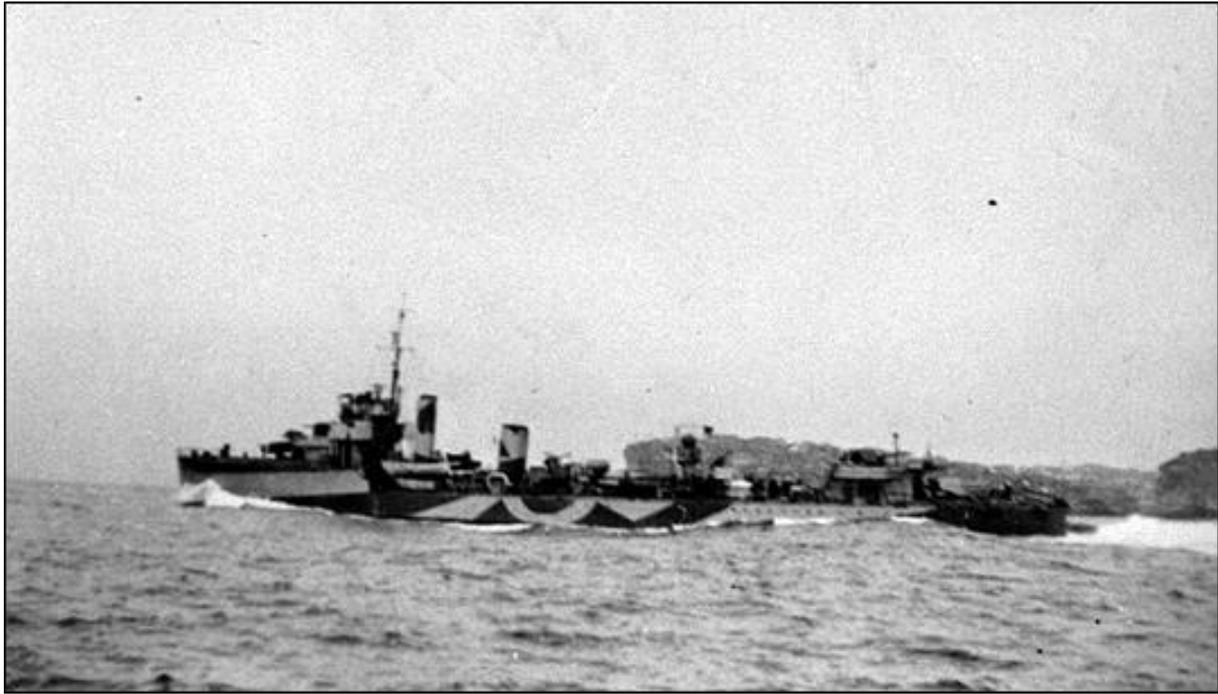


HMAS *Voyager*'s starboard side 23 March 1942



As *Voyager* exited Sydney Heads, the port side, different again, can clearly be seen. This unknown camouflage scheme for *Voyager* has gone un-noticed and unregistered for the past 76 years, and has also been held unknown and undetected until now, within NNSA records.

Further evidence has emerged that strongly suggests she may have been initially painted in the starboard scheme shown, identically on both sides, and subtle changes to the pattern continued after leaving refit in late Feb/early March 42. At this time *Voyager* appears to have been used as a pattern for camouflage tests. The port pattern shown has probably been applied over the initial scheme sometime early April as part of the test programme, and unless further evidence appears it is unknown if her starboard side followed suit.



The colours of both schemes shown are likely to have been made up of 507A, 507B and 507C, but the possibility also exists that it may only have 2 colours contained of 507B and C. A white false bow wave was applied to both schemes. By early May 42 thru to Sept 42 she had been repainted in Home Fleet Dark grey 507A overall.

It seems that *Voyager* remained in this guise until she ran aground on the beach in Betano Bay during operations on 23 September 1942.



When one considers the number and variety of paint schemes applied to *Voyager* (and other RAN ships) during her short life from commissioning on 11 October 1933 until her loss barely 9 years later, there is little doubt that she epitomised the female attributes of ships. One cannot help but sympathise with her – and many other First Lieutenants as they were called upon to paint ship so frequently.

Appendix 1

An Analysis of HMAS *Voyager*'s Unrecorded Paint Schemes February to April 1942

A concise analysis of HMAS *Voyager*'s unrecorded paint schemes between late Feb 1942 and early May 1942.

In relation to colours listed in this report, I will refer only to them in their commonly known numbers, the true nature of these colours can be dealt with at a later date. Comments made in the article pertaining to new evidence, suggests that at the time it was recorded, the starboard pattern was applied to both sides, and was identical. These observations were probably recorded late Feb or early March, they indicate that subtle changes may have been ongoing between that time and 23.03.42 when the starboard photo was taken.

It appears that her secondary armament was still being relocated at that time and the 12 pdr gun was in a different position as opposed to its final location behind the aft funnel in the late March photo. The ongoing weapons changes also indicate that her refit at that time was incomplete and still in progress, whilst she had been pressed into trials and also used at this time for convoy duty. As ROP comments note, her bridge flag deck single Oerlikons and A290 RDF fitting were not completed until late April.

This would have been a perfect time for the camouflage directorate to do some testing of schemes, whilst she was still undergoing protracted fitting. I believe *Voyager* was part of a test program being conducted at that time. This would then point to possible subtle ongoing changes to the starboard scheme, to evaluate effectiveness, and also a strong indicator why the port side had received a completely different pattern painted over the initial scheme, to then observe its effectiveness against results observed on the starboard pattern.

April's ROP notes for the 3rd whilst at Jervis Bay, 'Paint ship A.M. Exercises P.M.' The new port pattern may have been applied at this time, a large team could probably paint almost the full side of a destroyer the size of a V/W class in one day, we have no other official indicators. The colours used in the makeup of the schemes are not officially recorded, the fore mentioned evidence specifically points to combination 507B and 507C, but this may also pertain to the specific time this recording was made. As stated previously, subtle changes may have been made to the first applied colours, as part of the assessment process.

Our visual perception of tones can be governed by a number of factors, which include light, angles, glare, reflection and position of observation. The position of *Voyager* within the photo of Dry Dock reclamation shows she is anchored with bow pointing ESE approximately, the shadows thrown by objects ashore indicate a westerly sun between 1500 and 1600, for that time of year. Her starboard face is therefore receiving full sun not much above horizontal, but at a stern quarter aspect.

In referral to the large forward camouflage swatch, and taking into account the flare of the forecastle edge and curvature of her hull at that particular location, it cannot be stated categorically whether this particular swatch is the same colour as the trailing swatches of 507B, or is the darker colour of 507A. The same principle can be applied to the small triangle swatch on the bow peak.

As stated in the article, the colours applied could comprise 507A, B and C, but the scheme could also be built with 2 colours only of 507B and 507C. Until solid evidence appears, and by using the variables listed, this is left to the reader's interpretation.

The same can be said for the new port pattern, the image is of rather low quality, and we do not know if it was full sun or overcast at the time the photo was taken. The midship section rise to forecastle level at the bridge superstructure, shows what could be a darker patch, compared to the other dark patterns, but this could also be a photo imperfection. Therefore, the same approach is made to the

port scheme colours and left to the reader's interpretation. We have no official records and the darker swatches could all be 507A, 507B or a combination of both, with the overall lighter colour being 507C. We do not know if the starboard pattern was repainted again the same as port, but my opinion is that it was left intact.

The white false bow wave was an integral part of the port and starboard patterns and was incorporated frequently in camouflage schemes around that time period.

Therefore in mid-April it firmly appears that *Voyager* was dressed in 2 separate distinct schemes at the same time, which is confirmed by weapons fit. By early May these patterns had disappeared, and she had been repainted in 507A overall, she remained in that colour until her demise at Betano Bay, Timor.

This short lived sequence of camouflage patterns applied to *Voyager* have remained hidden away from view, and unrecorded for 76 years. It is astounding that no records had been kept. Evaluation results of camouflage tests would have been recorded, but it is unknown if they are stored somewhere deep within the archives or disposed of long ago.

Brett Morrow

Further Reading:

Royal Navy Colours of World War Two – Standard Camouflage Colours

<https://www.navyhistory.org.au/royal-navy-colours-of-world-war-two-standard-camouflage-colours/>

Royal Navy Colours of World War Two - Patterns 507, G10 and G45

<https://www.navyhistory.org.au/royal-navy-colours-of-world-war-two-the-pattern-507s-g10-and/>