

Appendix 8 *The Cerberus*

The History of the *Cerberus*.

“The ever-present threat of Russian Pacific action, and the activities of the American raider Shenandoah had convinced the Victorian colonists that some form of maritime protection other than that afforded by armed sloop Victoria was imperative.

The Colonists realized that unless the Heads were made impassable to enemy vessels, the defenses of the Bay would be incomplete, without the assistance of a suitably armed man-of-war stationed within the Bay (2). Important Imperial as well as Colonial interests were at stake. In 1866 eighty percent of the shipping frequenting the port of Melbourne was the property of British owners.

Previous requests for assistance from Her Majesty’s Government had not always been received favorably, and so it was decided that the Treasurer, the Honorable George Verdon should go to Britain as Victoria’s special representative.

Verdon was obviously a highly skilled diplomat, for within a short time after his arrival C.B. Adderley on behalf of the Lord of Carnarvon (2) wrote the following letter to him.
Downing St. 15th November 1866.

“Lord Carnarvon directs me to inform you, that if you, on behalf of the Colony, are prepared to accede to the following arrangement, which is based on the terms of your application, and to other papers to which I have referred, Her Majesty’s Government will be ready to propose to Parliament the pecuniary appropriations necessary to give it effect.

The Controller of the Navy will arrange with you the details of an armor-plated monitor or turret ship, to be constructed in a private yard, but under Admiralty superintendence, and to be capable of carrying 22-ton guns.

The cost of the ship is not to exceed 125,000 pounds of which the colony will furnish 25,000 pounds. The cost of armament is to be borne by the Colony. The maintenance, manning, and command of the ship is to be undertaken by the Colonial Government, receiving such occasional aid as heretofore in the selection of such officers and men from home as may be asked for.

It is clearly understood that this ship is maintained for the protection of the important British as well as Colonial interests that require naval defense in the waters of the Colony. She will, therefore in time of war, be under the command of the Senior Naval Officer on the station, who, in the event of any serious emergency, will not be precluded from withdrawing her for a time from the immediate waters of the Colony, in case the general safety should, in his judgement, make such a temporary withdrawal absolutely necessary. It is of course, understood that such an emergency should be a serious one, and that due regard should be had to the wishes of the Colony.

Further, a wooden line of battle ship, with steam power, will be selected and given to the Colony, with such masts, yards, and necessary stores as have been specially appropriated to her; and such additional stores, work, and costs., provided as may be needed, to be paid for by the Colony.

Updated 12 June 2018

Copyright © 2018 Kerry Cardell, Cliff Cummin and Robert Bakker

All rights reserved.

This file is for reference purposes only and may not be reproduced in any way without the permission of the authors, obtained via the publisher.

<https://petediggins.wordpress.com/contact/>

The Colony will bear the cost of fitting out this vessel, of conveying her to Melbourne and when there, of manning and maintaining her, and in time of peace of using her as a training ship for a local naval force.

Steps will be at once taken by the Colony for raising such a force. If either of these vessels shall cease to be maintained and used for the purposes for which it is given, the property in it will revert to Her Majesty's Government, discharged of all the above stipulations.

The graving dock, now in progress of construction at Melbourne, will be completed to the necessary depth, and with the necessary approaches, so as to receive the largest vessels of war now built, and will be at the command of Her Majesty for any of Her Majesty's ships that may require repair; and with this object, Lord Carnarvon understands that the Colony will be ready, on the requisition of the naval officer in command, to move any other ship cut in order to allow Her Majesty's ships to go into the dock. In the event of this dock, which is now a government work, being leased to any private company, provisions to this effect should be introduced into the lease.

Understanding that you are desirous of leaving the country shortly, Lord Carnarvon loses no time in communicating to you these proposals on the part of Her Majesty's Government, and he will be glad to learn from you as soon as possible, whether you are prepared to close with them on behalf of the Colony of Victoria."

Your most obedient servant

C.B. Adderley.

The concept of an armored man-of-war was not a new one, the French had built the *La Gloire*, a wooden frigate 255' x 55' covered in 4.75 inches of wrought iron armor in 1859. The British countered by building the *Warrior* 420' x 58', protected by an 18 inch layer of teak and 4.5 inches of iron, in 1860, however, the full potential of the "iron-clad" was not realized until the 8th of March, 1862, when the Confederate built iron-clad *Virginia/Merrimack* steamed out of the Norfolk Navy Yards into Hampton Roads, sinking the sloop of war *Cumberland* and battering the frigate *Congress* into surrender. The following day the *Virginia/Merrimack* attempted to repeat the previous day's success, only to be met by the Union built ironclad *Monitor*, designed by J. Ericsson. The first battle between two ironclad warships ended in a standoff, but it did demonstrate that the only effective countermeasure to an armored man-of-war was another armored Man-of-war.

In the mid-1860's the design and construction of ironclad warships was still in the experimental phase. The Chief Constructor to Her Majesty's Navy E.J. Reed was asked to design an ironclad monitor suitable for the defense of the Port of Melbourne. Reed found the requirements as regards ordinance and armor very difficult to meet under the restrictions imposed.

Reed's design for the *Cerberus* was a complete break from established tradition and unlike anything as yet seen afloat. The *Cerberus* was the first of seven "near to sister" armored coastal defense ships constructed in Britain between 1867 and 1877 (3).

Construction of the *Cerberus* was entrusted to the Palmer Ship Building and Iron Co., Jarrow-on-Tyne, the keel being laid down in September, 1867, she was launched in December, 1868 and completed in September, 1870.

Updated 12 June 2018

Copyright © 2018 Kerry Cardell, Cliff Cummin and Robert Bakker

All rights reserved.

This file is for reference purposes only and may not be reproduced in any way without the permission of the authors, obtained via the publisher.

<https://petediggins.wordpress.com/contact/>

OFFICIAL DESCRIPTION

The following is an official description published at the time she was built (4).

“The design is based upon the breastwork principle, the object of adopting the central armor-plated breastwork being to protect all the principal apertures into the ship to a height of ten or twelve feet above the water, and thus to add greatly to the security of these low-decked vessels. The only apertures through the low deck in this ship, outside of the armor breastwork, are three skylights for giving light and air below in a direct way when in harbor. Each of these skylights is surrounded by armor, and provided with an armor-plate cover for use in action. The ship, although of moderate dimensions, is coated with very thick armor, and carries 4 10-inch R.M.L. guns, and 4 1-inch Nordfeldt Machine Guns and has a speed of about nine knots.

Dimensions:

Length between the perpendiculars 225 ft. 0 in.

Length of the keel for tonnage 195' 7 "

Breadth, extreme and for tonnage 45 ' 0 "

Depth in hold 16' 6".

Burden in tons, O.M., No. 2107 23/94.

The nominal power of her engines is 250 h.p. and she is propelled by twin screws. She sits on an even keel, with a draught of water of 15 feet 6 inches, and is steered by a balanced rudder, which is well protected by the overhanging stern.

Her freeboard is 3 ft., the side being covered with armor from stem to stern, and to about 4 ft. below the waterline. This armor is in two strakes, the upper one being 8 in. and the lower one 6 in. thick, each tapering towards the extremities of the vessel to 5.5 in. and 4 in. respectively. The teak backing is worked horizontally between outside stringers, and the whole secured to two thicknesses of 0.625 in. plating.

Her frames are 3 ft. apart, excepting in the double bottom, which extends from the armor-shelf on one side to the armor-shelf on the other, through the whole length of the midship body, where the frames are 4 ft. apart.

The keel is composed of two flat plates, strengthened by a continuous vertical keelson. There are also four longitudinal frames, composed of steel plates, running fore and aft the vessel on each side of the keel, the upper longitudinal forming the shelf or recess for armor; the remainder of the hull is built of iron.

The upper deck outside of breastwork is protected with two thicknesses of 0.75 in. plates, and the skylights upon it are formed of 6 in. armor plates, 3 ft. 6 in. high, with strong watertight covers.

The breastwork stands upon the midship part of the upper deck, and is 112 ft. long, 34 ft wide, and 6 ft deep, having circular ends, which are protected by 9-in. armor in wake of turrets; elsewhere 8 in. armor is placed on the sides of the breastwork; the frames are 3 ft. apart, and well secured to the upper-deck beams; the top of the breastwork is protected with two thicknesses of 0.5 in. plating upon the ordinary transverse beams, excepting where the turrets pass through it, and also where the funnel, air-shaft, etc., enter it. Besides these, the breastwork encloses two small engines for working each turret, a steering-wheel, cooking-ranges, and the hatchways leading directly down to the ammunition, as well as those leading to the fore and after parts of the lower deck where the crew are berthed.

The turrets, two in number, one at each end of the breastwork, and about 5 ft. 6 in. above it, are each constructed to fight two 18-ton guns, and may be turned either by manual or steam power.

Updated 12 June 2018

Copyright © 2018 Kerry Cardell, Cliff Cummin and Robert Bakker

All rights reserved.

This file is for reference purposes only and may not be reproduced in any way without the permission of the authors, obtained via the publisher.

<https://petediggins.wordpress.com/contact/>

These turrets are protected in front by 10 in. and in the rear by 9 in. armor, extending down a short distance within the breastwork; the teak backing is worked horizontally between stringers, which are outside of the two thicknesses of 0.5-in. skin-plating, and the tops of the turrets are protected by 0.5-in. plating upon the beams.

A flying deck, 20 ft. wide, is worked above the turrets, for the whole length of the breastwork, and the communication from the latter to the flying-deck takes place through watertight iron trunks; all openings in this and the other decks are protected from a vertical fire.

The pilot-house is supported from the top of the breastwork, and extends to 4 ft. above the flying-deck; the sides of the pilot-house are protected with 9 in. armor, and its fore and after parts with 8 in. armor, the teak backing being worked as before described, and upon two thicknesses of 0.5 in. plating without internal frames.

The davits and other outriggers for boats, etc. will admit of being lowered, so as to clear the range of the turret guns.

The fresh air for ventilating the vessel will be admitted by means of the airshaft, the ash-shoot, and the openings in the decks over stokehole. A fan at the bottom of air-shaft, and another at the fore-end of the boiler-room, will be worked by steam, and will drive the air forward through main pipes under the lower deck, and aft through similar pipes at the upper part of shaft-passage, and from these pipes branches will be led wherever required.

There are seven water-tight transverse bulk-heads continued to the upper deck, and having water-tight doors in them, either at the lower deck or in the hold.”

For the voyage out to Melbourne temporary sides were constructed extending from the curve-in of the breastwork to the bow and stern, a full three masted rig was also provided.

A contemporary account published in the Illustrated Australian News of April 22nd, 1871 provides us with an insight into the trials and tribulations encountered in preparing for the voyage to Melbourne and the voyage itself.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE VOYAGE

“With reference to the passage out of this unique vessel of war, we may remark that twelve months has scarcely elapsed since Lieutenant Panter left these shores for the purpose of bringing out the *Cerberus* to Port Phillip Bay. He left Melbourne by the English Mail on the 24th of April 1870, and has consequently arrived within a fortnight of the twelve months. When on his way to England he successfully made arrangements with the necessary authorities for the *Cerberus* to pass through the Suez Canal. He arrived in England in June, and at once reported himself at the Admiralty, presenting his credentials from the Victorian Government Authorities, authorizing him to take charge of and bring out the new warship.

A long and wearisome delay thereupon took place in order to decide under what flag the *Cerberus* should be sent out, as there was no precedent for a ship of her class being navigated under the merchant flag. This question was not satisfactorily settled until the early part of October 1870, the ship meanwhile lying at Chatham fitting up. During the whole of these five months Lieutenant Panter was unremitting in his attentions to his duties, not being more than 48 hours absent from his ship. At last the business of taking stores for the outward voyage was commenced, but at this time only 25 men had been shipped, and as the shot weighed 400 lbs. each, the work was necessarily slow. When the *Cerberus* was handed over to Lieutenant Panter by the Admiralty, there was not a single article in the way of stores on board her, and he, therefore, had the whole of this work to do to get the vessel ready for sea. At this stage of the proceedings

Updated 12 June 2018

Copyright © 2018 Kerry Cardell, Cliff Cummin and Robert Bakker

All rights reserved.

This file is for reference purposes only and may not be reproduced in any way without the permission of the authors, obtained via the publisher.

<https://petediggins.wordpress.com/contact/>

another piece of red-tapeism cropped up, and Captain Chamberlain, superintendent, objected to the vessel being supplied with provisions from the yard, as they did not come under the title of stores. This question had to be referred to the Admiralty, entailing a further delay of three weeks, but at last the matter was decided in Lieutenant Panter's favor.

Everything being on board ready for sea, it was discovered that the two shot rooms which were on the one side of the vessel, had 40 tons of shot, having been taken on board against 20 tons of powder on the other side, thus the vessel had a strong list of six degrees. Another communication was forwarded from the Admiralty instructing him to fill up one of the watertight compartments so as to bring the vessel on an even keel.

STILL DELAYED

Lieutenant Panter, however, objected to this course, and after some little delay, the officials at the Admiralty agreed to remedy the defect, which caused a further delay of four days. All these little inconveniences having been adjusted, the *Cerberus* proceeded down the river to Sheerness to adjust her compasses, which were found to have a deviation of 66 degrees. This matter having been settled, on the 29th October the *Cerberus* made her first start on her voyage, the first port of call being Plymouth. In the Downs, however, she met with a stiff gale of wind, which with a heavy head sea, tried all her sea-going powers, and kept her lower deck thoroughly washed all the time. Indeed, to such an extent was the latter process carried out that the whole of the 25 men comprising the crew were constantly employed in baling the deck out with buckets. During this gale the vessel was perfectly unmanageable, as she would neither steer nor steam more than 1.5 knots per hour, but as the cause of this was set down to her trim, it was fully anticipated that the next port would put matters all right. Spithead was at last reached, and as showing the heavy weather then prevailing, it may be mentioned that on the day following no less than 60 vessels put into anchorage through stress of weather. Proceeding thence to Plymouth, which was to be the final port of departure from the English coast, the crew of able-seamen was increased from 25 to 63 although the announced loss of H.M.S. *Captain** militated strongly against a full complement of men being obtained for such a service. The requisite supply of coal having been taken on board, the port was left on the 7th November.

NOTE: * H.M.S. *Captain* (6,950 tons) a turret ship designed by Captain Cowper Phipps Coles, R.N., and strongly disapproved of by *Cerberus*'s designer, capsized off Cape Finisher on 6th September, 1870. Only eighteen were saved from her complement of 493, the death toll included her commander Captain H.T. Burgoyne, V.C., R.N., and Captain Coles her creator."

AWAY AT LAST

Two days afterwards a very heavy breeze sprang up, which lasted until the 12th. During this time the *Cerberus* behaved in a very bad manner, rolling so heavily that on one occasion the bilge pieces were fairly thrown out of the water. The ship rolled quite 45 degrees each way, and it is a current rumor in the ship that a man who was asleep on one of the lockers at the time she rolled so heavily was thrown 30 feet without touching the ground. At this time the only canvas shown was a close-reefed main try-sail with the head hauled in, and a fore staysail or fore try-sail used occasionally. Even with this canvas and the steam it was found almost impossible to keep the vessel head to wind, and Lieutenant Panter puts this down as one of the worst gales he has experienced. Upon arriving at Gibraltar a few days subsequently he was told it was a far heavier

Updated 12 June 2018

Copyright © 2018 Kerry Cardell, Cliff Cummin and Robert Bakker

All rights reserved.

This file is for reference purposes only and may not be reproduced in any way without the permission of the authors, obtained via the publisher.

<https://petediggins.wordpress.com/contact/>

gale than the one in which the Captain was lost, and surprise was evinced that he had not had to cut away his masts. This was particularly stated, as he carried 1,900 tons above the water mark, and only 1,800 tons below water line. The Admiral at Gibraltar told him that he should not allow his vessel to roll more than ten degrees before he cut his masts away, but this advice he had not found necessary to carry out.”

At Malta on the 28th of November nearly all hands on shore broke ship and one crew member was drowned when a boat overturned. Men on shore continued to break leave the following day and it was necessary to post a guard boat day and night to prevent further deserting. The next day 10 men were sent ashore to gaol. (5)

Cerberus reached Port Said on December the 19th and two days later under tow began the passage through the Suez Canal.

In the Red Sea approaching Aden temperatures in the engine room reached 123°F, the stokehold was 142°F. This problem was further aggravated during the voyage across the Indian Ocean when the ventilation engines were turned off to save coal. The men could hardly breathe and the paint work in some cabins turned brown. (5)

Cerberus reached Batavia on January the 17th and sailed on February the 25th, the Australian coast was sighted on March 15th. Three days later she arrived in Freemantle. She then proceeded to Albany to paint ship in preparation for the last leg of the voyage to Melbourne.

On the ninth of April, *Cerberus* entered Port Phillip Bay, her arrival was described as follows in the *Illustrated Australian News*. (4)

“At an early hour on the 9th, a sharp lookout was kept for the arrival in Hobson’s Bay of the latest addition to the Victorian Navy. Nothing, however, was seen of her until about 12 o’clock, when her hull was seen looming in the West Channel, and by half past twelve she had passed the light ship, and shortly after brought up of Williamstown about two cables’ lengths astern of the Nelson.

When she was first sighted down the Bay, Captain Payne, chief harbormaster, and Mr. Call, P.M., put off in the harbor boat and proceeded to meet her, but beyond this no official notice was taken of her arrival, and coming out as she did, under the merchant flag, she was only boarded in the usual manner by the custom’s authorities. Some little recognition of her quality was, however, given as she steamed past the Nelson, the boys of which manned the rigging and saluted her with three hearty cheers, the ensign being dipped at the same time. Shortly after her anchoring, Captain Koltovskoy, of the H.I.R.M.S. *Haydamack*, sent an officer on board with his compliments to Lieutenant Panter. No sooner had the ironclad anchored in the bay than the news was disseminated throughout the suburbs, and there was a general rush to Sandridge in order to have a look at the novelty.

The boatmen at the pier drove a roaring trade, and in a very short time the decks of the vessel were crowded with a throng of gaily dressed pleasure seekers who swarmed over every part, from hurricane deck to stokehold. The crew were very obliging, and eager to show the visitors over every part, but owing to the crush, it was impossible for everything to be seen at one view.”

Lieutenant Panter was promoted to Captain and Senior Officer of the Victorian Navy.

Updated 12 June 2018

Copyright © 2018 Kerry Cardell, Cliff Cummin and Robert Bakker

All rights reserved.

This file is for reference purposes only and may not be reproduced in any way without the permission of the authors, obtained via the publisher.

<https://petediggins.wordpress.com/contact/>

The removal of the top-hamper and the reconditioning of the *Cerberus* took over five months and it was not until the 25th of August she carried out her first trial in Port Phillip. This turned out to be a rather sorry affair with an inexperienced crew. The following day a number of passengers including members of Parliament were taken on board. The members of Parliament were allowed to fire the guns and the *Cerberus* then proceeded to Geelong. On entering she ran aground but got off without damage and anchored in Corio Bay where she remained the centre of attraction for some Days.” (6)

After completing her trials, the *Cerberus* spent most of the next fifty years quietly rocking at her moorings off Williamstown. She was a regular participant in the Easter Manoeuvres and other exercises, it was during one of these that five men were killed at Queenscliff when a torpedo (mine) accidentally exploded.”

REFERENCES

- (1) Anonymous – Notes on the *Cerberus* from the Sandringham Municipal Library.
- (2) Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1st Session, 1867, Volume 4.
- (3) BALLARD, G.A. The Black Battlefleet. Nautical Publishing Corporation, Lymington, 1980.
- (4) *Illustrated Australian News*, Melbourne, April, 22nd, 1871.