

Chapter 7 - The Permanent Force

From the arrival of HMCS *Victoria* in 1856, the permanent force comprised the crew of *Victoria* and *Sir Harry Smith*. Until the arrival of *Nelson* in 1868, this force generally ranged from 50 to 95 men, briefly dipping to a low of seven in June of 1864.

With the replacement of *Victoria* and *Sir Harry Smith* by the larger *Nelson* and *Cerberus*, the numbers of men in the navy increased. By 1874, the permanent force consisted of 115 officers and men. During war scares such as 1877-78 and 1885, extra men were put on for six months (**Error! Reference source not found.**) and then laid off after the threat had passed.

With the expansion of the fleet in 1885, the navy again expanded and reached its peak in 1889 of 385 men and officers. During the recession of the 1890s reductions gradually reduced the size down to 143 in 1900. Conditions changed over the years and those for the later years are described on page 112.

The arrival of HMVS *Cerberus* on the 9th of April 1871 meant that real firepower from modern ten inch rifled guns was supported by heavy armour of up to ten inches thick. The Victorian Navy had acquired some real teeth.

After the arrival of *Cerberus*, the Victorian Navy was a three ship navy if *Victoria* was withdrawn from survey duties. Even if available, *Victoria* was not armoured and was only relatively lightly armed. Although heavily armed, *Nelson* was not armoured either and presented a large target. *Cerberus* was therefore the colony's most powerful and only effective warship.

The statement in the Volunteer Commission's Report that "The *Nelson* is at present used as a training ship, and might be useful as a harbour defence ship and for protecting torpedoes in the channels" may have been the impetus for *Nelson's* role as a Naval Training Ship to be discontinued. In any case it was stated in the Legislative Assembly¹⁰⁶ "that the Government proposed to send to the Industrial School buildings at Sunbury, the children at present on board the *Nelson*, which would be required for defence purposes". The colony's experiment with Naval Training Ships therefore ended after 11½ years.

The recommendation of the Volunteer Commission that steam steering be fitted to *Cerberus* was undertaken in 1876. Hydraulic steering equipment was designed locally by the Government Inspector of Machinery, Alexander Wilson and built by a Thomas Tozer of the Vulcan Foundry, Melbourne. The result was that whereas previously up to ten men were required to steer *Cerberus*, now only one or two men were required, a considerable saving for a small navy.

On more than one occasion the Treasurer, who was responsible for the navy, overrode the commanding officer with regard to staffing matters. Lieutenant Tandy had been criticised by Captain Stanley RN of HMCS *Victoria* as “worse than useless in his current position”¹⁰⁷ and by Captain Panter (Commander of the Victorian Naval Forces) as insubordinate and incompetent. In 1876 Lieutenant Tandy’s services were dispensed with. The *Argus* editorial stated that Tandy “had no practice with heavy ordnance, but he has political influence, and that is more to the purpose just at present”.¹⁰⁸ When the Treasurer (Graeme Berry) of a new government appointed Tandy to the position of Lieutenant of *Cerberus*, Captain Panter tendered his resignation.

Commandants of the Victorian Naval Forces

The first four Commandants, Commander Lockyer, Captain Norman, Captain Panter and Captain Mandeville were all local appointments. Captain Mandeville was however only appointed on a temporary basis, while discussions were undertaken regarding appointing the commanding officer from the Royal Navy.¹⁰⁹

Subsequent appointments to command the Victorian Naval Forces of Captain Thomas, Captain Mann, Captain White and Captain Neville were all serving Royal Navy officers on loan to the colony.

Commanding Officer	Background	Period in Command
William Nicholas Love Lockyer	Ex Royal Navy	July 1853 – 8 March 1856
William Henry Norman	Ex Merchant Navy	8 March 1856 - 12 Dec. 1869
William HENRY Panter	Ex Royal Navy	16 May 1871 ^A - July 1877
Colbrooke Thomas Mandeville	Ex Royal Navy	10 July 1877 - 30 June 1884
Alan Broderick Thomas	Royal Navy	1 July 1884 - 31 Jan. 1889
William Frederick Stanley Mann	Royal Navy	26 Feb. 1889 - Feb 1892
Richard William White	Royal Navy	25 Feb. 1892 - 24 Nov. 1894
George Neville	Royal Navy	25 Feb. 1895 - 27 Nov. 1897
Frederick William Tickell	Victorian Navy	27 Nov 1897 - 1904
Acting Commanding Officer	Background	Period in Command
Charles Bradley Payne ^B	Ex Royal Navy	28 June 1869 - 8 Aug. 1870
Robert Russell Fullarton	Harbour Trust	8 Feb. 1887 - 10 Sept. 1887
Frederick Sidney Pelham	Royal Navy	29 Dec. 1893 - before 20 Jan. 1894
Henry Coare Kingsford	Royal Navy	24 Nov. 1894 - 25 Feb. 1895
John Tracy Richardson	Victorian Navy	July 1900 - April 1901

Table 1 - Officers in Command of the Victorian Naval Forces.

During the command of Captain Thomas, the first British officer on loan to Victoria, it was discovered that for British naval officers to keep their seniority on returning to the Royal Navy, they needed to be in command of a ship while in Victoria. As a result, in June 1887 the title of the officer in command of the Victorian Naval Forces was changed from “Naval Commandant of the Victorian Naval Forces” to “Captain of the *Cerberus* and Officer in command of the Naval Forces of Victoria”.

In 1897, in spite of the departing Royal Navy Commander of the Naval Forces writing, “I would urge the importance of having an Imperial officer in command”,¹¹⁰ the Victorian Government decided to discontinue the services of Imperial naval officers commanding the Victorian Naval Forces. Instead the Government promoted a local, Frederick William Tickell, although with no increase in pay from his previous rank, to

^A Although W. H. Panter was only appointed “Captain Commanding the Naval Forces of Her Majesty’s Government in Victoria” on May 16th 1871, he had been appointed “Captain in the Naval Forces of Her Majesty’s Government in Victoria” on April 18th 1871. Prior to this he had been a Lieutenant on HMVS *Nelson* until leaving for the UK in April 1870 to bring *Cerberus* to Victoria.

^B Although not specifically designated as commanding the Naval Forces, Captain Payne was designated as responsible for certifying the accounts of HMCS *Victoria* during the absence on duty of Commander Norman [in the UK]. He was also Captain of HMVS *Nelson* from April 18th 1868 to August 8th 1870.

command the Victorian Naval Forces. Captain Tickell had joined the Victorian Navy without having previously served in the Royal Navy. He was only the second Victorian Naval Forces commandant not to have served in the Royal Navy, Captain Norman being the first. On Captain Tickell's appointment, all of the officers in the Victorian Navy were now described as being Victorians.

As noted earlier, Commander Lockyer resigned as his wife refused to travel to Australia, Captain Norman died in office and Captain Panter resigned as his desire to get rid of Lieutenant Tandy was refused. Although a temporary appointment, an end to Captain Mandeville's term of office may have been hastened by the 1881 Torpedo Accident. The next four appointments were serving Royal Navy officers on loan and served their full terms with Captain Thomas' term being extended when the Admiralty found a solution to recognising colonial service. After federation, Captain Tickell eventually applied for the position commanding the Queensland Naval Forces due to that position's higher salary.

Royal Navy Officers

In 1876, Commodore Hoskins RN, Captain Townsend RN, and Lieutenant Dugdale RN, were commissioned to make recommendations¹¹¹ as to how the colony's naval defences could be improved. Recommendations were made in 1876 (in a report dated 1877) that an officer experienced in torpedo warfare be obtained from Britain. It was also recommended that a Captain of the Royal Navy be appointed to command the Victorian Naval Forces and that Gunnery and Torpedo Instructors should be appointed.

As a result, Gunner Robert Groves (RN)^A arrived in Victoria in 1877, and took responsibility for the defensive torpedo force. In February 1877, Gunner James Henry Tubb (RN) was described as a Gunnery Instructor to the men & officers of *Cerberus*.¹¹²

^A Gunner Robert Groves was one of the five men killed in the 1881 Torpedo Accident off Queenscliff.



Figure 29 - Captain Alan Broderick Thomas R.N.

The first, the longest serving and the most influential of the four Royal Navy officers on loan to Victoria to command the Victorian Naval Forces was Captain Alan Broderick Thomas.

During most of the period between 1884 and 1897, three other Royal Navy officers were on loan to the colony. They undertook the roles of:-

1. Executive Naval Officer
2. Torpedo Lieutenant
3. Gunnery Lieutenant.

Role	Officer	Period of Service
Executive Naval Officer (2 nd in Command)	Lieut. Cmdr. P.M. Hely-Hutchinson ^A	1888 - 1889
	Commander J.B. Hay	1889 - 1892
	Commander F.S. Pelham	1892 - 1894
	Commander H.C. Kingsford	1894 - 1897
Torpedo Instructor	Gunner R.S. Groves	1877 - 1881
	Lieutenant P.M. Hely-Hutchinson	1883 - 1888
	Lieutenant H.L. Heath	1888 - 1891
	Lieut. Cmdr. J. de Courcy Hamilton	1891 - 1894
Gunnery Instructor	Chief Gunner J.H. Tubb ^B	1867 -
	Chief Gunner O. Richards	1878 - 1883
	Chief Gunner J. Smith	1883 - 1889
	Chief Gunner J.M. Drewitt ^C	1887 - 1897
	Lieut. Cmdr. S.V.S.C. Messum	1888 - 1891
	Lieutenant A.H. Christian	1891 - 1894

^A Lieut. Cmdr. Hely-Hutchinson succeeded Commander R.H.M. Collins (VN) as Executive Naval Officer.

^B Lieut. Dugdale (RN) described Gunner Tubbs (RN) as a Gunnery Instructor on *Cerberus*.

^C From 1887 until at least 1899 James Drewitt was listed in the Victorian Defence Forces Lists as being in the Royal Navy. Additionally, a reference in the Williamstown Chronicle of 26 August 1893 suggests that his salary was not paid by the Victorian Government. He was succeeded as Drill instructor in 1899 by E. Hayes VN.

Table 2 - Additional Royal Navy Officers on Loan to Victoria

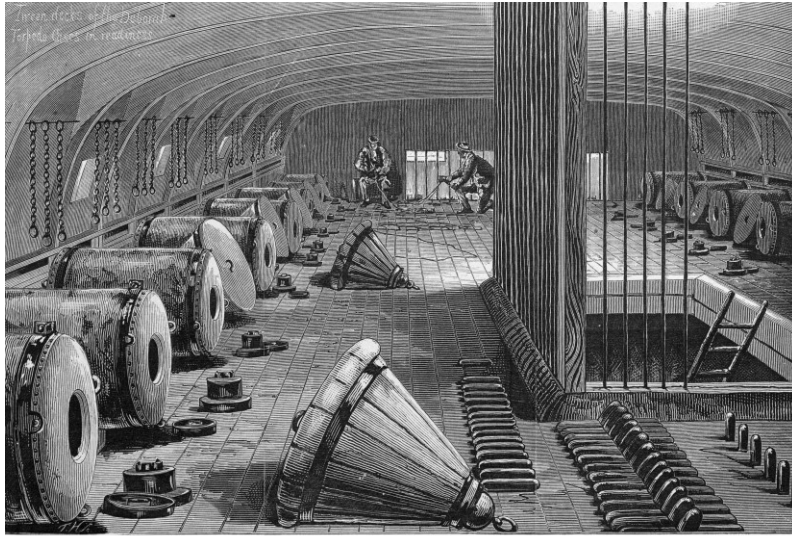
- Rank is shown on appointment.
- In 1894 the positions of Lieut. Cmdr. de Courcy Hamilton & Lieutenant Christian were dispensed with as a savings measure.

Naval Torpedo Corps

On the 10th of July 1878 control of defensive torpedo (sea mine) operations was transferred from the Land Forces to the Naval Forces.¹¹³ Although the Signal & Torpedo Corps had been established in 1870, outside of the Naval Forces, the pending acquisition of boats in 1878 supported Captain Mandeville's argument that the Navy could run the Torpedo Corps more efficiently, and crucially for the government, more cheaply than was currently being done. The new Corps operated from the old prison hulks *Deborah* and *Sacramento* moored at the mouth of the Yarra river.

Four years later, bowing to the established practise in other navies, and possibly influenced by the Torpedo Accident off Queenscliff on the 5th of March 1881, control of defensive torpedoes was handed back to the Land Forces with the creation of the Victorian Military Torpedo Corps in July 1882.¹¹⁴

The Naval Torpedo Corps then took on responsibility for offensive torpedoes as fired from, the, soon to arrive, torpedo boats.



Torpedo. Circuit Closer. Circuit Closer Jacket.

**Figure 30 – 'Tween Decks of the *Deborah*.
Torpedo Cases in Readiness.**

Engravings: *The Australasian Sketcher*, 8 June 1878



**Figure 31 -
Torpedo in
Position**



**Figure 32 - Structure of Victorian Naval Forces for 1878-82
with strength for 1881.**



CAUSE AND EFFECT
 A Liberal Government Disbanded the
 Torpedo Corps to Save Expense.
 Behold the Result! And Calculate the
 Gain to the Country.

Figure 33 - Torpedo Explosion.
 Engraving: *Melbourne Punch*, 10 March 1881

Williamstown Naval Depot

As the Naval Torpedo Corps operated from the hulk *Deborah*, the taking over control of defensive torpedo operations by the Military Torpedo Corps in 1882, meant that construction of a shore based storage facility for the Military Torpedo Corps became necessary. A torpedo shed was built at Williamstown in 1882 and enlarged two years later. In 1886 this torpedo shed was handed over to the Naval Forces, and the Military Torpedo Corps moved across Hobson's Bay to a Drill Room built for them in Port Melbourne, near Watson's Baths.

The Williamstown Torpedo Shed was extended, and in 1886 consisted of a shed (180 feet x 100 feet), which contained a store room (100 feet x 90 feet), a boat shed (50 feet x 90 feet) and a workshop (50 feet x 90 feet). A wharf, 350 feet long, extended from the Railway Pier to the Dockyard fence and a cottage was built for the use of the drill instructor.¹¹⁵ These buildings became known as the Williamstown Naval Depot. In

1887 the tall torpedo boat sheds were added and in 1893 a Drill Room, complete with gunports (see Figure 3), was built. Measuring 164 feet by 76 feet (50m x 23m), it was the largest Drill Room in the Southern Hemisphere.

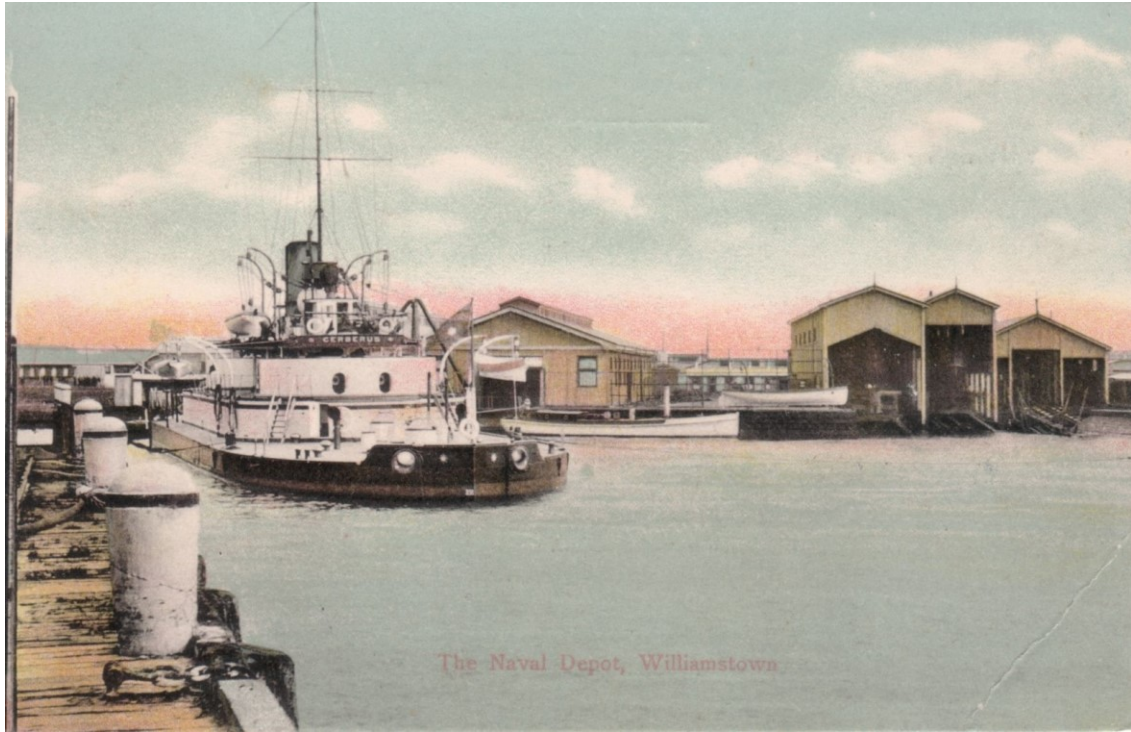
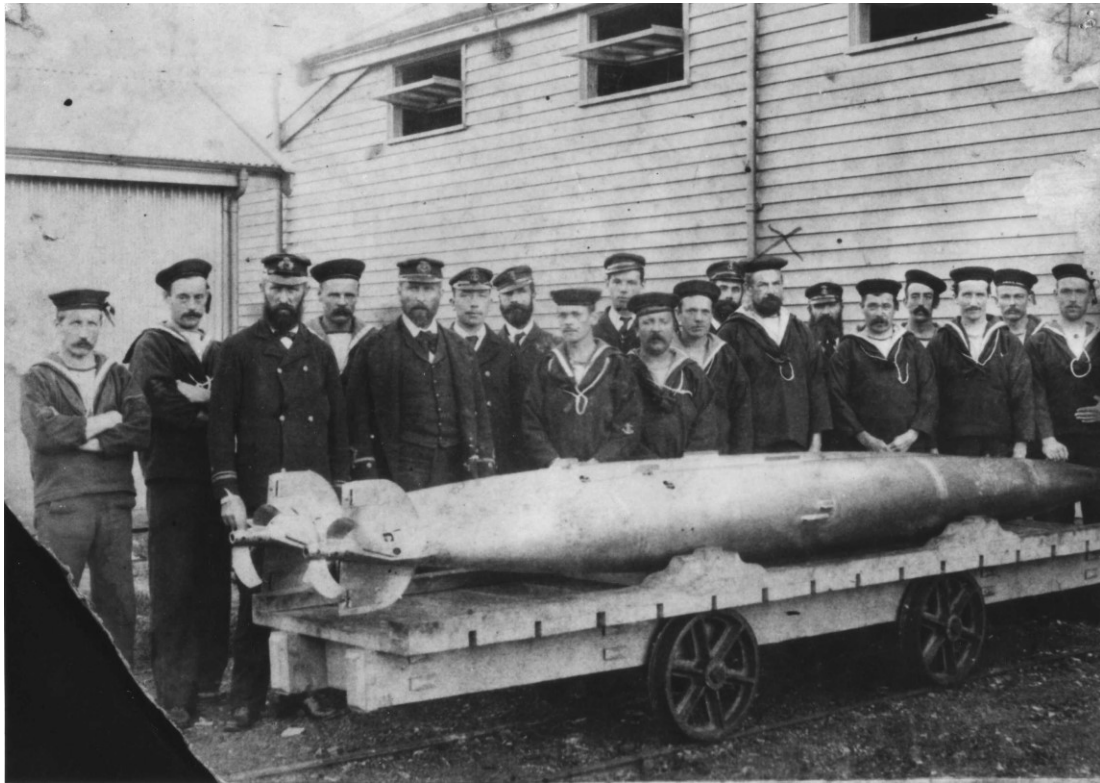


Figure 34 - Williamstown Naval Depot in 1902.

Photo: Elder's Naval Postcards

By 1924 when the Drill Room was moved to Pasco Street and the Naval Depot demolished, the depot had grown substantially and consisted of numerous buildings including officers' quarters, warrant officers' quarters, a tennis court, two parade grounds, engineering workshops, two tramlines (20 inches) from the torpedo store to the wharf, a medical area, numerous offices, a wireless mast, a carpenter's shop, and a blacksmith.



**Figure 35 - Peter Ratley (X) & Shipmates at the Depot.
Cardigan Dann is fifth from the left.**

Photo: courtesy of Bruce Watts

Machine Guns

The machine guns referred to below differ from those of today in that they were not automatic. Rather than rounds being loaded by the recoil of the previous round, a crank or lever had to be continually operated to load the next round.

As torpedo boats, recently introduced in foreign navies constituted a threat, a machine gun was acquired for use on *Cerberus* in 1882. This gun was a .45 inch 10 barrel Gatling Gun. In 1883 the Gatling was joined by a Nordenfelt one inch four barrel Machine Gun (Figure 37). As more Nordenfelt guns were added to *Cerberus* the Gatling Gun was moved to Nelson or Fawkner. Able to pierce boilers, the one inch Nordenfelt Gun was more suitable for combatting torpedo boats and by 1884 *Cerberus*

carried four of these guns. So important was the torpedo boat killing feature^A of the Nordenfelt guns that the Victorian Navy only used one inch Nordenfelts in both two and four barrel configurations.



Figure 36 - Gatling Gun with Broadwell Drum

Engraving: *The Illustrated Australian News*, 23 January 1884



Figure 37 - Four barrel Nordenfelt one inch Machine Gun on Cerberus.

Photo: *The Weekly Times*, 29 April 1905

^A Piercing the torpedo boat's boiler disabled the boat while the escaping steam disabled the boat's crew.