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# THE AMERICAN FLEET RIFLE SHOOTING MEDAL OF 1908

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The visit of the American Fleet to Australia in 1908 was one of the most outstanding public relations successes in our then brief history.

The American Fleet left Hampton Roads on 16 December 1907 under the command of Rear Admiral R.D. Evans. Due to illness Evans was replaced in San Francisco by Rear Admiral Charles S. Sperry. In fourteen months it was to sail the world visiting twenty ports and covering some 46,000 miles.

In Australia the American Fleet visited three ports; Sydney, Melbourne and Albany. The timing of the visit was important to its success, as it followed a significant event in world history, the defeat of the Russian navy by the Japanese in 1905. This victory by an Eastern country caused major concern. Perhaps an extreme example of this concern can be found in a report on the visit of the American Fleet published in the *Lone Hand* of August 1908:

“In a flashing white it comes, as it were a symbol of a racial ideal to be upheld, and yet with a pacific purpose...The interests of the world are bound up with the White Race which stands in the vanguard of evolution”

*The Sydney Mail* reported the arrival of the fleet on 20 August 1908 in a somewhat less dramatic but comprehensive fashion. After all, as the report noted, the arrival was witnessed by 650,000 people! Such a huge turn out does not reflect the simple rampant racism of the *Lone Hand*, but a genuine and immediate fear that the balance of power in the Pacific region might be moving against Western interest, and therefore placing Australia in peril.

Every conceivable form of entertainment was arranged for the visiting sailors with the emphasis being on parades and dinners. The enthusiasm of the people of Sydney was so great that Admiral Thomas had to ask them (in *The Daily Telegraph*) to refrain from furnishing the men with intoxicating liquor. Liquor on board the ships was prohibited and the men were not accustomed to its use.

Included in the planned fixture of events was a rifle match. *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 6 August reported that the Council of the National Rifle Association had decided to have a challenge match with twenty men a side, fired over two distances. So great was public interest in the doings of the fleet and its personnel that even the practice of the visitors for this match was reported in detail. It seems that fifty sailors practiced daily at Randwick using Krag Jorgensen rifles with sharp pointed bullets.

Eventually it was decided that the match would be twenty per side, seven shots each at 300, 500 and 600 yards. The U.S. team used Springfield rifles with Hudson Thomas pointed ammunition specially prepared for the event and the Australians used Lee Enfield rifles with service issue ammunition.

The Rifle Match was held on 26 August and reported in the daily papers the following day:

“The day was perfect for rifle shooting, and on the visitors side tall scores were in evidence. Local men, however, made but poor effort, and were easily defeated!”

The Association team, it was stated was selected more as an entertainment committee than a strong shooting body, and nobody thought they had a chance of winning.

The Annual Report of the National Rifle Association for 1908 stated casts a slightly different light on the event:

“During the year the United States Atlantic Fleet visited Sydney and your Council invited a team of 20 to take part in a rifle match, the invitation was accepted and the United States team took up the matter in real earnest, practically going into training the whole week prior to the match. They were encamped on the rifle range and practiced daily over the distances to be fired in this match. The Council confined the selection of its team to the Members of the Councils of the N.R.A. and the Metropolitan Association, and although a fairly strong team was got together it was not by any means a representative one. The American team used specially prepared pointed ammunition, whilst the N.S.W. team used the ordinary Service issue. The result was a fine victory for the American Team, whose scores were exceptionally high.”

A bronze medal was struck for the event and was awarded to all members of the Australian and United States Teams. As mentioned above, the Association team was limited to members of the Councils. This fact is recorded in the wording of the medal, fig.1.

The 39mm. bronze medal (Carlisle 1908/4) awarded to the twenty members of each team was struck by Amor of Sydney. Each medal was inscribed with the name of the recipient on the edge. The present rarity of the medal can be easily understood, not only were only forty issued, but twenty immediately left the country.

The accounts of the Association show that the match cost just over ninety-three pounds, a large sum of money at that time.

The medal illustrated was awarded to H.E. Mills, (Hon. Treasurer of the National Rifles Association) who finished eighth in the Australian team. The medal forms part of a small group of medals won by Mills, the others, illustrated fig. 2 to 4 are the Northcote Trophy, the Gordon Highlanders Trophy and the Parramatta Rifle Club Trophy.

The names of the medals and results of the competition were:

#### U.S.A. TEAM

	200	500	600	TOTAL
1 Stover, R.L. (Midshipman) .....	34	35	33	102
2 Vossler, F.A. (Midshipman) .....	33	35	33	101
3 Farquharson, E. (Corporal) .....	32	34	34	100
4 Thomson, T.A. (Midshipman) .....	33	34	33	100
5 Bruce, B.H. (Midshipman) .....	32	32	34	98
6 Bowdey, G.H. (Midshipman) .....	30	32	35	97
7 Bensen, J. (Master)at)arms) .....	33	32	31	96
8 Hughes, L.R. (Cox.) .....	32	34	31	96
9 Stewart, R.R. (Midshipman) .....	29	33	33	95
10 Allen, E.G. (Midshipman) .....	32	30	32	94
11 Turrill, J.T. (Captain) .....	31	33	30	94
12 Harold, J. (C.Q.M.) .....	34	32	28	94
13 Carey, M. (Fireman) .....	32	29	32	93
14 Giffen, R.C. (Midshipman) .....	29	34	28	91
15 Williamson, E.D. (C.Y.) .....	32	32	27	91
16 Lyman, C.H. (Captain) .....	32	32	27	91
17 Jones, C.A. (Midshipman) .....	31	27	31	89
18 Nottage, S. (Cox.) .....	30	30	29	89
19 Schopp, J. (C.Q.M.) .....	27	29	31	87
20 Bates, C.A. (M.A.A.) .....	29	31	26	86
	627	640	617	1884

N.R.A. COUNCIL TEAM

	200	500	600	Total
1 Brown, E.J . . . . .	33	33	30	96
2 Stanton, O.J . . . . .	33	31	32	96
3 Dawson, R.C. (Lieut.) . . . . .	32	32	31	95
4 Westbrook, T.L. . . . .	32	30	32	94
5 Holt, R.W. . . . .	30	32	31	93
6 Coggins, C.H. (Lieut.) . . . . .	31	31	31	93
7 Lindsay, G. . . . .	32	30	29	91
8 Mills, H.E. (Lieut.) . . . . .	33	31	27	91
9 Mathison, J.J. . . . .	31	33	27	91
10 Neale, H.J.F. . . . .	30	31	27	88
11 Hearne, E.W. . . . .	31	28	28	87
12 Jamieson, H.B. . . . .	30	30	27	87
13 Thomson, J.B. . . . .	32	23	31	86
14 Warden, A.W. (Captain) . . . . .	29	29	28	86
15 Beardsmore, R.H. (Captain) . . . . .	32	28	26	86
16 Douglass, G. . . . .	31	24	29	84
17 Wallace, J.J. (Sergeant) . . . . .	29	29	23	81
18 Trulock, R. . . . .	26	26	26	78
19 Wallace, J.R. . . . .	26	25	26	77
20 Dakin, H. (Lieut.) . . . . .	27	18	30	75
	610	574	571	1755



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4