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Cadets' epic trek honoured

By Cathy Morris

ONE hundred years ago a group of Ballarat naval cadets set out on an epic march to Melbourne to visit the American Navy fleet.

The cadets decided to make the trip on foot after the State Government refused to pay their train fares to the capital.

It took the boys, aged between 12 to 16 years, three days to walk to Melbourne and the story was covered by *The Courier* and Melbourne's newspapers.

On August 25, 1908, *The Courier* reported that having failed to get the same recognition as the military cadets the youngsters started their long march to Melbourne.

A couple of days later the paper described how the boys "probably had little idea of the stir they would make" and that an anonymous correspondent in Melbourne had sent £10 to one of the metropolitan dailies "to be used in whatever way was thought to best add to the pleasure of the lads".

The story of the boys' trip is well known to 81-year-old Shirley Walters.

Mrs Walters' father Stanley Alfred Gedling, then aged 14, was one of the cadets who took part in the march.

She said about 30 to 40 boys headed for Melbourne on foot and they were met by thousands of people in the streets when they arrived at Footscray.

"He used to tell it as our bedtime story," Mrs Walters said.

"He was very proud of it."

Mrs Walters said her father had sent a postcard from Melbourne to his mother saying: "Please buy



a pair of new boots because my boots have worn though."

She said the Americans visiting Melbourne also heard about the boys' effort and entertained them by taking them on board and giving them tours of the ship.

The government had a change of heart and provided them with a train trip home.

Mrs Walters said the trip was inspirational for her father who later joined the navy and served in World War I before returning to Australia and working on the railways as an electrician.

The anniversary of the naval cadets' three-day march to visit the US Navy's "Great White Fleet" will be commemorated with a civic reception at the Ballarat Town Hall this morning.

As part of the centenary celebrations of the US visit, Mayor Stephen Jones will be a guest at a cocktail party on board the USS John S McCain.

Ballarat will also join in the celebrations when a contingent of 20 officers and sailors from the John S McCain visits the city on Wednesday, September 3.



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ON THE ROAD: The cadets during their three-day march



READY TO GO: One of the young cadets who took part in the march.



RECOGNITION: A copy of the certificate given to each of the Ballarat naval cadets who took part in the three-day march.



MEAL BREAK: A group of Ballarat naval cadets line up for a meal during their historic march to Melbourne in August 1908. Pictures courtesy of the Ballarat Historical Society.



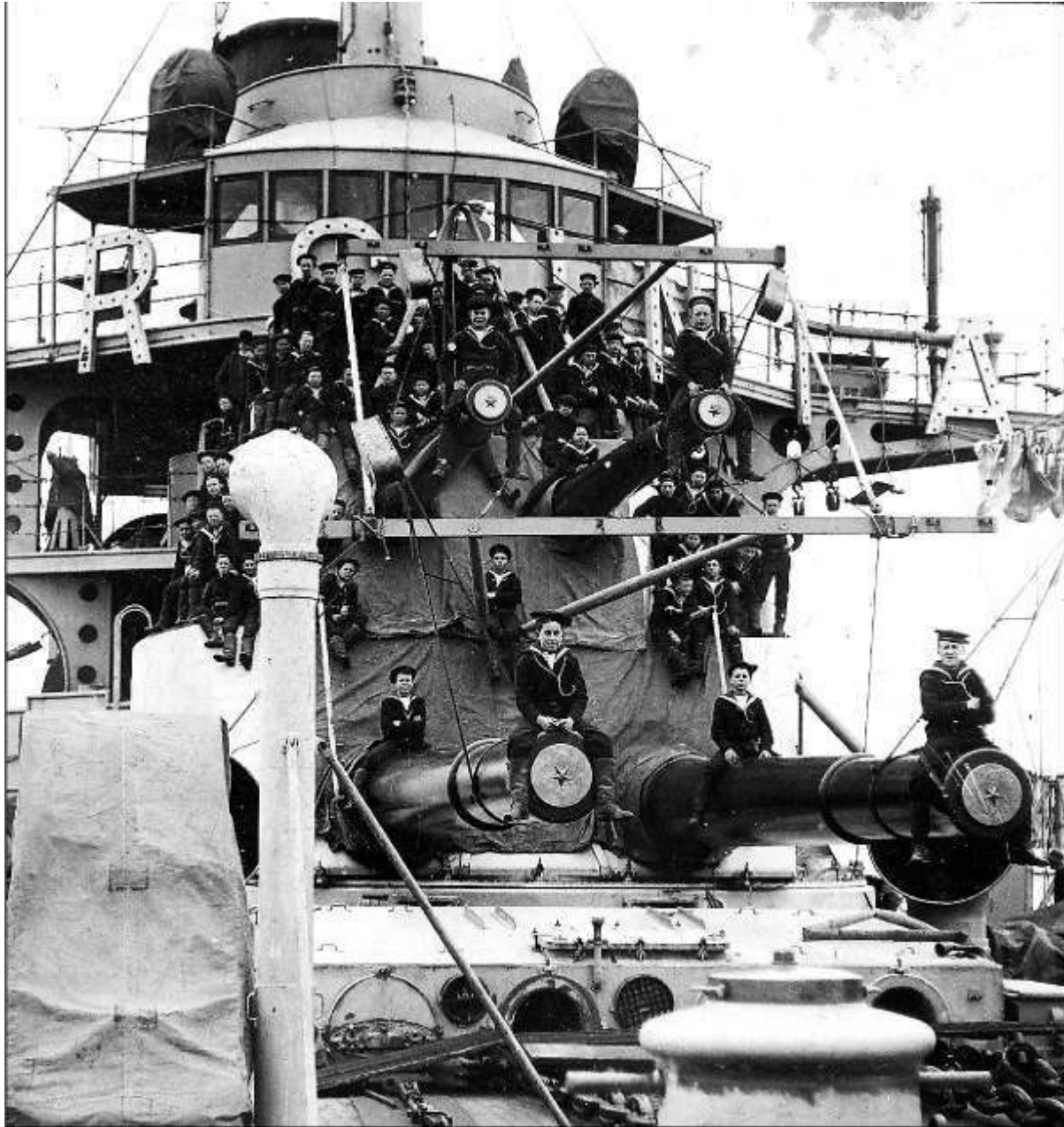
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ALL ABOARD: Ballarat naval cadets aboard US Navy ship Virginia