



Call the Hands

Issue No. 61

March 2022



From the President

Welcome to the March 2022 edition of *Call the Hands*. I trust that you will find it of interest. As always, we invite you to contact the Society if you have stories to share or can add to the body of knowledge on subjects highlighted Society publications. A good example of this is the information provided by the daughter of Chief Stoker Thomas William Ellston awarded the DSM for Gallantry in HMAS *Nestor*. His daughter's important contribution on page three adds to the *Nestor* story and ensures credit is given where credit is due.

Accompanying this issue are two occasional papers. The first (131) by Dr Tom Lewis provides a detailed analysis of the last action of USS *Peary* which was lost in Darwin Harbour on 19 February 1942. This paper examines the sequence of events and describes the most likely reason for the propellers, shafts and other debris being located several kilometers away from the remainder of the wreck.

Occasional paper 132 by Lieutenant Commander A.W. Grazebrook examines the extraordinary career of the RAN's first Admiral, Sir G. Francis Hyde, KCB, CVO, CBE. After his early years in the merchant service and as a Royal Naval Reservist, Hyde rapidly climbed the ranks and was appointed as Commander (D) to the RAN's destroyer flotilla formed in 1911. In 1912 he transferred to the Royal Australian Navy on a permanent basis and went on to become the First Naval Member in 1931.

As noted in the February edition of *Call the Hands* the Society suffered a major setback in February as it relocated at short notice within Garden Island Dockyard. After a month of turmoil, operations have resumed, albeit without access to its excellent library which has been stored. Several frustrations remain including Telstra delays with redirecting landlines. Please use the mobile numbers listed below until further notice.

Finally, the treacherous behaviour of the Russian leadership and terrible military attacks on Ukraine reminds us that "Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it." Has President Putin learnt from history? Will the long-term outcome be as he expects? Described in the EU Parliament as 'geopolitical terrorism' the events since 24 February are not dissimilar to those of September 1939.

Kind regards,

David Michael

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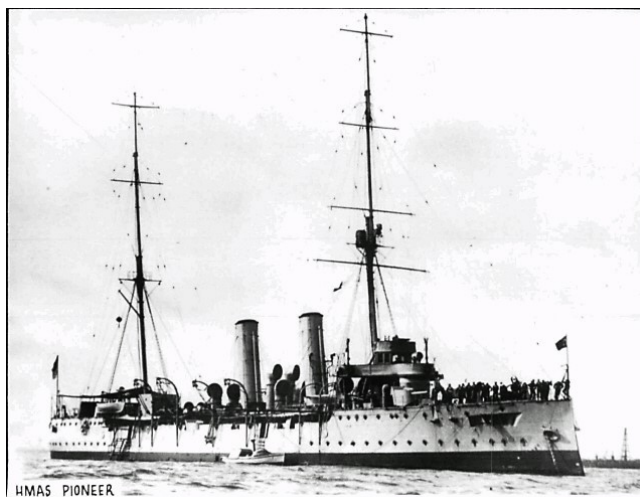
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HMAS *Pioneer* Section of Topmast in Boatshed Roof

As major works on Garden Island to renovate the Boatshed which is both home to the Naval Historical Society and a museum annex of the RAN Heritage Centre Society volunteers reminded builders to take care not to damage a significant heritage item located in the rafters. The item is a section of the HMAS *Pioneer* topmast which was used as a "strongback" for removing engines and other heavy items from the vessels on the slip. It is understood that *Pioneer* lost her topmast in rough weather crossing the Great Australian Bight after the outbreak of WW 1. However, it is not clear whether this section is the original or a station spare.

As HMS *Pioneer*, the ship served on the Australian Station from September 1905 until 1912. She was paid off and commissioned on 1 March 1913 as HMAS *Pioneer* with a nucleus crew, and became a tender to HMAS *Penguin*. On 1 January 1914 she then commissioned as an independent command for service as a seagoing training ship for the Naval Reserve, operating under the orders of the Director of Naval Reserves.

On 1 November 1914 *Pioneer* sailed as part of the escort to the First Australian Convoy comprising 38 transports but, just as she was taking up position between the Australian and New Zealand divisions, her engines broke down and the Flagship, HMS *Minotaur*, ordered her to return to Fremantle.



On 24 December 1914 the Admiralty requested the aid of *Pioneer* as a blockading ship on the German East African coast, where the German cruiser *Konigsberg* had taken shelter up one of the mouths of the Rufigi River a few miles south of Zanzibar.

The role of *Pioneer* and other British forces was to maintain a blockade to prevent supplies reaching German forces ashore in East Africa and neutralisation of the dangerous *Konigsberg* which had already destroyed *Pioneer's* sister ship *Pegasus*.

During her time off East Africa from January 1915 to August 1916 *Pioneer* is credited as having fired more shells in action than any other RAN ship in WW 1.

Further Reading

Sea Power Centre Australia, [HMAS Pioneer](#), located on the SPC-A website.
Semaphore - Issue 12, July 2005, [Blockading German East Africa, 1915-16](#).

Chief Stoker Thomas William Ellston: Gallantry in HMAS Nestor

The following was received from Wendy Horder, Nee Ellston concerning the award of a Distinguished Service Medal to her father, Petty Officer Thomas Ellston for his actions during the loss of HMAS Nestor in June 1942.

Dear Sirs,

I refer to [Occasional Paper 11](#): The Remarkable Short Life of HMAS *Nestor*, The Ship That Never Came Home published on 1 July 2017. In the paper the actions of the Medical Officer, Surgeon Lieutenant Shane Watson are recorded but not those of my late father. The following is provided to provide the complete story.

Following the bombing of Nestor and damage to No 1 Boiler Room, my father was the first to enter the Boiler Room having volunteered to slide down a funnel into the room. Here he helped the injured to evacuate the Boiler Room. He dived into the flooding water many times in order to report back to Command the location and extent of the damage.



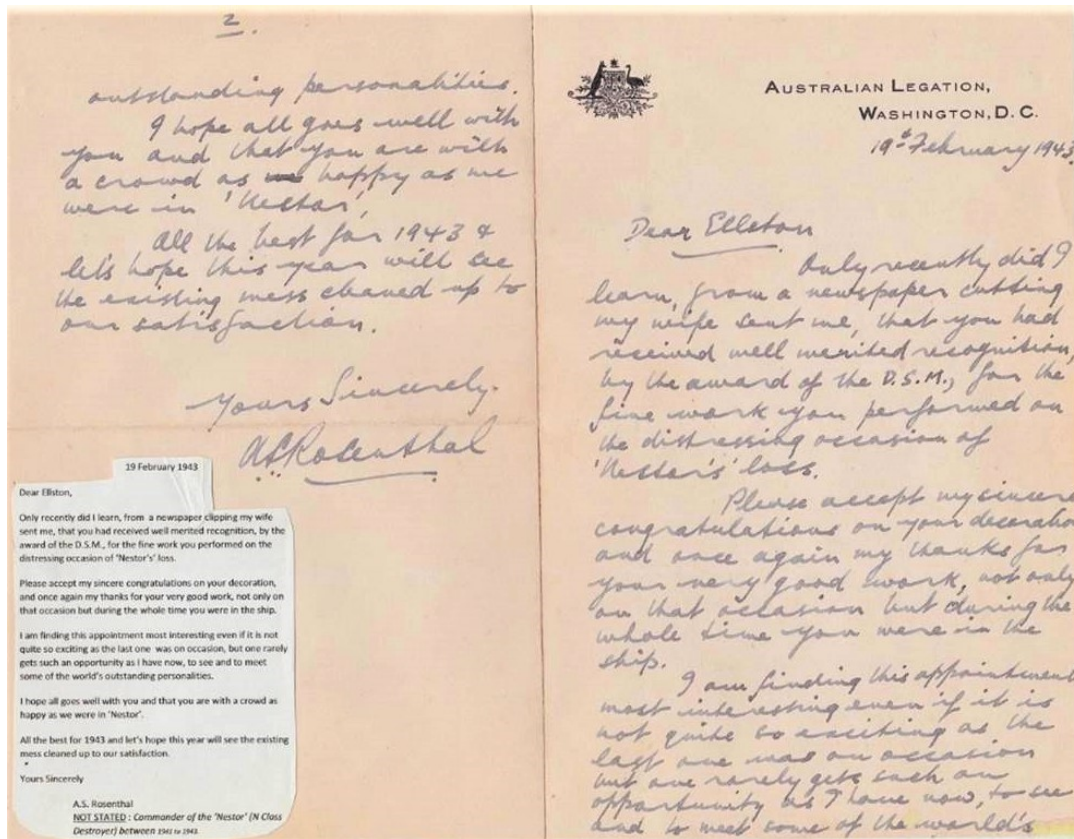
Petty Officer Stoker Thomas William Ellston

Surgeon Lieutenant Watson and my father were among the oldest members of the crew. My father having re-enlisted during the war. He had reached the rank of Chief Petty Officer during his time in the Navy in the 1930's. He and Dr Watson took it upon themselves to remain on board while the Nestor was in tow, to keep the pumps working, until all were safely off the ship and aboard HMS *Javelin*. Once the tow rope broke there was no saving the Nestor.

Petty Officer Ellston was awarded the DSM for Gallantry in *Nestor* and Surgeon Lieutenant Watson the DSC. They were presented with their medals at Admiralty House by the then Governor General, the Duke of Gloucester.

NAME	ELLSTON, Thomas William		
Award	D.S.M.	Reg. No. 14753	Rank STOKER P/O Service R.A.N.
Recommended by Governor-General on	17/11/42.		
Promulgated in London Gazette on	G. H. File R.A.N. N/101		
Promulgated in Commonwealth of Australia Gazette on			
Citation (G. H. File RAN N/101)	Gallantry & devotion when HMAS NESTOR was lost		
Insignia received from London	22/11/43.	PN LONDON.	18/9/45. G. H. File L/7.
Insignia presented by	The Governor-General,		
At Admiralty House, Sydney,	On	23/7/45.	G. H. File SYDNEY/9.
Address of recipient on presentation date	A/N/A		
Remarks			
Other Awards			

More precious to my father than any medal was a letter he received from Captain Rosenthal congratulating him on his award. Dad carried that letter in his wallet until the day he died.



Tom never talked of the war or his service on four of the N Class ships, and never marched in ANZAC Day marches, but in later years enjoyed a get together in a Naval club in Kings Cross with members of the "N" Class Destroyers group on Anzac Day. On one such occasion when Tom was in his 80's he noticed a younger man had seemed to be avoiding him all afternoon. Tom walked up to the man and said hello, I'm Tom Ellston, and your name is? The man sheepishly gave his name, whilst not looking Tom in the eye. Then said, I have been so afraid all these years to face you sir. You no doubt think of me as a coward. Tom asked which ships he had served on and it came to light that he was a 17-year-old (lied about his age to enlist) on the Nestor. All these years he had carried the guilt of leaving the ship knowing that PO Stoker Ellston and Ship's Surgeon Lieutenant Watson were maintaining power for the pumps until all got off safely.

Tom's eyes filled with warm tears, as he told the man that he had nothing but admiration for every noncommissioned crew member aboard the Nestor that fateful June day, and every man should hold their head high with pride. This brought a smile to the other man's face, and each of them looked forward to seeing each other every ANZAC day from then on. Tom passed away on the 7th January 1996 at the age of 91, after having suffered a stroke in the early hours of New Year's Day. His beloved wife Nell (Ellen Dulcie Ellston-nee Swanson) had passed away 9 months earlier on the 28th March 1995. Nellie was 85. Now they are together again.

I was most disappointed that your research omitted my father's efforts. I trust this can be rectified now. I look forward to receiving your reply.

By Editor.

We are thankful to Wendy for providing this important additional information which recognises the service of her beloved father. An updated version of Occasional Paper 11 has been posted to the [website](#).

Year 2001 in Retrospect

Year 2001 is probably best remembered for the 11 September terror attacks on the United States and commencement of the 'War on Terror' to which Royal Australian Navy ships and personnel were committed in significant numbers. 2001 was also Australia's Centenary of Federation year with events scheduled around the nation. Many of which were to be supported by the RAN. Vice Admiral David J. Shackleton, AO was the Chief of Navy at this time. As expected by Government the RAN successfully achieved its program of routine training, exercises and operational goals and committed to a range of demanding operations which, at their peak, saw 1,100 personnel deployed.

Important milestones during 2001 included HMA Submarines *Sheean* and *Dechaineux* and minehunters *Gascoyne* and *Diamantina* joining the Fleet. At the other end of the spectrum the steam era came to an end with the decommissioning of the DDG, HMAS *Brisbane*.

War on Terror (Operation Slipper). The first units to deploy to the Arabian Gulf in October 2001 were HMA Ships *Adelaide* and *Kanimbla*. Navy people then made up more than half the total ADF commitment to this overseas deployment.

Operation Tanager – East Timor. The high-speed catamaran *Jervis Bay*, LCH *Balikpapan* Class, LSH *Tobruk* and SMLs *Mermaid* and *Paluma* all provided logistics transport and survey support to United Nations forces in East Timor.

Operations Cranberry and Relex. Fremantle Class patrol boats, Hydrographic ships and other fleet units were continuously deployed in Australia's northern waters for surveillance of the Australian fishing zone (Operation *Cranberry*) and to deter unauthorised boat arrivals (Operation *Relex*).

Operations Bel Isi. In addition to contributing to a group of 40 specialist ADF medical, logistic, communications and transport personnel the RAN provided one heavy landing craft (LCH) on a continuous basis to assist the peace process and weapons disposal in Bougainville.

Operation Trek. This operation to provide stability in the Solomon Islands involved HMAS *Kanimbla*, HMAS *Tobruk* and the Minesweeper Auxiliary, MSA *Brolga* which supported patrols to outlying islands. The two Seaking helicopters embarked in HMAS *Tobruk* demonstrated their value in the utility role after 25 years of operational service in the anti-submarine role.

Centenary of Federation. Navy's major contribution to the Centenary of Federation celebrations was to have been a Fleet Review scheduled from 2-9 October. Forty-five warships were expected to visit Sydney for the Review which was cancelled due to the 11 September terror attacks. A great disappointment to those who had planned this major event.

In terms of more routine exercises, the Collins Class submarines proved just how quiet and capable they were particularly in the littoral environment by remaining undetected by USN forces during Exercise *Tandem Thrust*. Similarly, after more than five years of modernisation in Sydney and Newcastle to convert them to Landing Platforms Amphibious (LPA) HMAS *Kanimbla* and *Manoora* proved their extensive amphibious and medical support capabilities during this exercise.

After almost 10 years of planning and development the LPA's Primary Casualty Receiving Facility (new hospital facilities) manned by 21 medical staff from the Navy, Army and Air Force were also put to the test during this exercise.

On a not unfamiliar note, Christmas bushfires were raging across New South Wales with Fleet Air Arm personnel and aircraft heavily committed supporting fire fighting activities.

Research Query

HMAS Moresby 1934 Hydrographic Surveys of Chambers Bay Northern Territory. Mystery Contraption.

The following was received from Mr Lloyd Browne

Dear Sirs

The wheeled contraption in the attached photographs is almost certainly associated with the 1934 Van Diemen's Gulf survey by HMAS *Moresby*.

It is located in close proximity to the site where a trig marker was erected and a brass plaque installed in 1934. The area is remote and can only be accessed by boat with some difficulty (it is on a perennial lee shore) or by walking some 15/20 kilometres along the beach - so it is rarely if ever visited.



I recently mounted an expedition to look for the *Moresby* plaque and traces of a hunting camp established in the vicinity in 1864 by the Escape Cliffs colonists. We didn't actually find the plaque but believe it to be located under the trunk of a large fallen bombax tree. Instead, we found this contraption, and an ancient Nellie Bly type 44-gallon drum, which is characterized by its large separate reinforcing rings rather than the moulded ridges on modern drums.



It is surely no coincidence that the three artifacts – the plaque, the drum and the contraption - are all located within a few metres of each other – in the shade of an enormous banyan tree with a waterhole (and its resident crocodile) nearby. The *Moresby* had four local Aborigines aboard, who most probably knew of the banyan and the presence of fresh water (rare along this coastline) and directed *Moresby* thereto.

I can't think of any way the contraption could have been used by the surveyors. In other parts of the Cape Hotham peninsula lines of sight had to be cut through the bush for a hundred metres or more but it would be difficult to use as a trolley in the sandy/muddy soil.

I am inclined to think that it was not purpose built for survey tasks but part of standard (?) warship equipment – for carting shells or cordite bags and such like hither and yon throughout the ship???

But why did they bring it ashore??

Any information you can supply to clarify its use/purpose would be greatly appreciated.

Regards
Lloyd Browne

By Editor

Society Researchers were unable to shed any light on the contraption and concluded that it does not look like a naval stores item and that it would have been very difficult to manhandle ashore from *Moresby*.

Nevertheless, this conclusion is not the end of it. Should readers know what it is we would be pleased to hear from you.

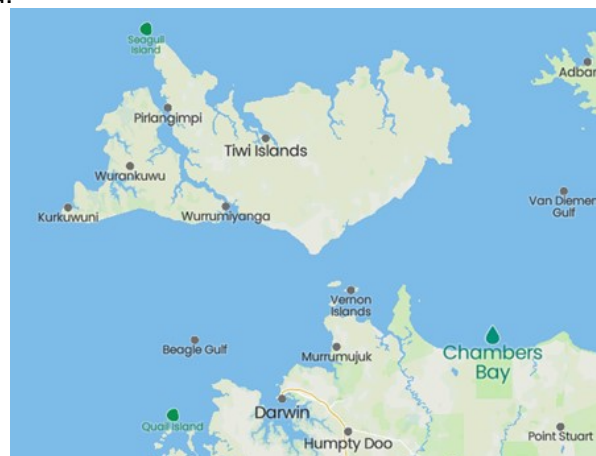


Photo of the Month



The Sea Otter was a long range maritime patrol sea plane (amphibian) produced by Vickers Armstrong (Aircraft) Ltd, formerly Supermarine Aviation Works (Vickers) Ltd, who also produced the renowned Spitfire fighter aircraft. The Sea Otter (originally call the Sting Ray) was a bi-plane and a longer range version of the Walrus. The main difference between the Walrus and the Sea Otter was in the mounting of the engine. The Walrus had a rear-facing engine with pusher propeller and the Sea Otter's engine (normally a 855 horse power Bristol Mercury XXX) was mounted on the upper wing, facing forward with a 'tractor' or puller propeller. Production of the Sea Otter commenced in early 1942 and 292 were built and operated by the RAF and Royal Navy (RN). Nine RAF and 21 RN Squadrons were equipped with the Sea Otter which operated extensively in the Atlantic and Mediterranean.

As an amphibian the aircraft could land and take off from both land based runways and from the sea and had a range of 700 miles. The original Sea Otter Mk I was used primarily in the reconnaissance and communications role while the Sea Otter Mk II was a dedicated Search and Rescue (SAR) platform. The Sea Otter had a crew of three/four with the cockpit seated aft of a nosecone assembly. The front and sides of the cockpit were lined with Perspex windows to allow better observation for the crew. The biplane wing arrangement consisted of a lower unit fitted to the roof of the fuselage and an upper unit suspended high over the fuselage.

The RAN acquired three Sea Otters in 1948 for use as carrier borne air-sea rescue aircraft and operated by 723 Squadron. They were embarked in the aircraft carriers HMA Ships *Sydney* and *Vengeance*, but with the increased usage of helicopters for air-sea rescue duties they were sold in 1953 and replaced by the Sycamore helicopter.

News in Brief

HMAS Supply

The Royal Australian Navy's (RAN) lead ship of the Supply-class replenishment oilers, HMAS Supply, completed its first replenishment at sea (RAS) with HMAS Adelaide, the second of two Canberra-class landing helicopter dock ships. HMAS Supply arrived in Tongan waters as part of Operation Tonga Assist 2022 on 12 February, and the RAS was conducted the same day. Supply and Adelaide's crew conducted the inaugural RAS slowly and methodically, which set the precedent for future fuel transfers. The technicians test the fuel for quality in between the initial hose hook-up and the start of fuel distribution. The ships closed to 60 metres and travelled at 12 knots to conduct the refueling. It was essential for both ships to maintain consistent distance to avoid collision and ensure the hose line didn't pull and spill fuel or damage the ships.



Laser aimed at P-8A

The Australian Department of Defence has confirmed that its patrol aircraft P-8A Poseidon detected a laser illuminating the aircraft while in flight over Australia's northern approaches. In an incident that occurred on 17 February, a laser was detected as emanating from a vessel belonging to the People's Liberation Army Navy (Chinese Navy). The vessel, in company with another Chinese ship, was sailing east through the Arafura Sea at the time of the incident.



HMAS Hobart

Royal Australian Navy guided-missile destroyer HMAS Hobart has provided an impressive backdrop in the Derwent River for the 184th Royal Hobart Regatta from February 12-14. No stranger to the region, Commanding Officer HMAS Hobart Commander Andrew Pepper said it was an honour to support such a vibrant community event. "It's a great feeling sailing home to Tasmania and I know the crew were looking forward to their time there," Commander Pepper said. The Royal Hobart Regatta is steeped in tradition and provides three days of fun events and activities.



This Month in History

March 1803	CAPT James Colnett, RN, in HMS GLATTON, was appointed Senior Officer of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels in Port Jackson.
March 1883	The German corvette SMS CAROLA, sailed from Sydney with orders to lay claim to eastern New Guinea and islands of the Bismarck Archipelago, on behalf of the German Government. The Queensland premier, Sir Thomas McIlwraith saw this as a threat and dispatched the Government steamer PEARL to Port Moresby. While his actions caused serious concern within the British Foreign Office, it did forestall the Germans annexing all of eastern New Guinea. The northern portion of New Guinea became the colony of German New Guinea, with the southern section controlled by the British.
March 1915	HMAS SYDNEY coaled from the collier BURESK in the Abrolhos Islands north of Rio de Janeiro. The collier was a new ship named after the German collier sunk by Sydney in the Cocos Islands in November 1914.
March 1919	After their service with the RN is finished HMA Ships HMAS Melbourne , Torrens, Huon, Warrego, Swan, Yarra and Parramatta sailed from Malta for Australia
March 1925	The cruiser HMS CONCORD, (CAPT A. R. W. Woods, RN), joined the Australian Squadron for an exchange deployment. She was met by HMAS SYDNEY at Broome Bay, WA. CONCORD's place in the Royal Navy was taken by HMAS ADELAIDE which joined the 1st Cruiser Squadron at Gibraltar.
March 1936	The Seagull amphibian aircraft, from HMAS AUSTRALIA was damaged when it fell from a crane at Malta. AUSTRALIA was on exchange duties with the RN at the time.
March 1942	HMS NAIAD was sunk while escorting a convoy to Malta. The cruiser's First Lieutenant, LCDR A. S. Storey, RAN, was awarded the DSC for conspicuous bravery in the operation. A Bar to the DSC was awarded to this officer some months later "for gallantry, skill and seamanship in a brilliant action against strong enemy forces" when serving in his next ship, HMS CLEOPATRA.
March 1944	HMA Ships NAPIER, NORMAN, NEPAL, and QUIBERON and HM ships QUALITY and QUEENBOROUGH, participated in Operation Diplomat, the reinforcing of the British Eastern Fleet.
March 1953	HMAS Culgoa sailed from Sydney for Japan to take up her role in the Korean War. She arrived at Sasebo on 14 April and relieved her sister ship HMAS Condamine.
March 1961	RAN clearance divers cleared underground ducts in tunnels of the Snowy Mountains Authority's project at Lake Eucumbene, NSW. The team worked in depths of 80 metres in freezing conditions to clear a 23 km tunnel system leading to the Tumut River.
March 1982	HMAS TOBRUK transported 10 Iroquios helicopters to the Middle East as part of a multi-national force of observers enforcing the cease-fire agreement between Egypt and Israel. RAN aircrew and maintainers operated the helicopters, which were based in El Gorah, in Northern Sinai. They were withdrawn in 1986.
March 1990	The first RAN Seahawk helicopter landing on a guided missile frigate was made on HMAS ADELAIDE, in Sydney Harbour.
March 2000	TU 645.1.1, (LCH Task Group consisting of HMA Ships BALIKPAPAN, BRUNEI, LABUAN, and TARAKAN), awarded the Meritorious Unit Citation for service in East Timor.
March 2004	The frigate HMAS STUART departed Sydney for service in the Persian Gulf as part of Operation Catalyst. In keeping with tradition the ship, nicknamed the "Tartan Terror", had a lone piper play as she departed the wharf.
March 2006	A Kalkara (aboriginal for storm bird) unmanned aerial target successfully flew mission 100 on 27 March 2006 (from Gilbert Point at HMAS Stirling) and despite having been in use for a number of years, providing aerial targets to ships and aircraft missile systems, the Kalkara unmanned aerial target system did not achieve operational release until 10 August 2006 despite the first flight having taken place on 19 June 1998. 21 aircraft were produced and it was phased out of service in 2008.
March 2020	WO Agnes 'Lennie' Maiden, the first woman to be promoted to the highest rank as a senior sailor passed away aged 82. WO Maiden served in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) for nearly 29 years, from 1956 until 1984

The entries selected for publication this month are randomly generated from an extensive database of historic naval events. The absence of a significant event is in no way intended to cause offence. The objective is to provide a cross section of events across time. The Society's website enables you to look up any event in RAN history. Searches can be made by era, date look up or today. The latter appears on the home page. The others are accessed via the Research page. <https://www.navyhistory.org.au/research/on-this-day/>

HMAS Canberra II Commissioning

HMAS Canberra (II) was the second of six Adelaide Class guided missile frigates built for the Royal Australian Navy. She was commissioned on 21 March 1981 in Seattle, USA. The commissioning commanding officer was Commander Bryan Wilson RAN.

In attendance as the guest of honour was Sir Nicholas Parkinson, Australian Ambassador to the United States and American flag-rank officers of the Coast Guard and Navy. The Canberra Times of 25 March reported,

'The highlight of the half-hour ceremony on Sunday was the Canberra's 183 precision-stepping crew members following their captain aboard as the band played 'Waltzing Matilda' and 'Anchors A weigh'.

Following the formal ceremony an exchange of gifts occurred. Commander Wilson presented a 28cm ships crest to the Ambassador. The reciprocal gift was in a ribboned box.



From left to right CMDR B. Wilson and Sir Nicholas and Lady Parkinson during the ship's commissioning ceremony



Sir Nicholas Parkinson makes a presentation to CMDR B. Wilson, during the ship's commissioning ceremony at Todd Pacific Shipyards Corporation

Forty years on, after the passing of Sir Nicholas his daughter contacted Navy asking if the crest might be returned. We understand that this has now occurred. Now the natural question is, what was in the box?

Additional images of the HMAS Canberra II [Commissioning ceremony](#) and [sea trials](#) are available online.



Australian frigate *Canberra* (F-02) during Todd Pacific Shipyards Corporation Sea trials

Submariners Family book

[Friends of Holbrook Submarine Museum](#) have recently commenced a project to record and publish stories from wives and/or children of submariners on how the submarine service impacted their family life during and after service. Please assist by spreading the word to retired submariners. Project leader, Thor Lund would like to receive their stories (good bad and ugly) and or interview them by telephone or zoom interviews. Thor Lund can be contacted at tlund@bigpond.net.au.



Occasional Papers

Included with this edition of Call the Hands are the following occasional papers: -

- Occasional Paper 131 - USS Peary's final combat action
- Occasional Paper 132 - Admiral Sir George Francis Hyde

Tours and Cruises



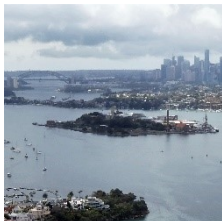
These events are ideal for groups wishing to learn about the RAN's history in Sydney since 1788, how Navy has operated and how it has been supported.

The maiden Navy in Sydney Harbour cruise was conducted on 25 February and endorsed by all as a great success. Cruises will now be conducted on the last Friday of the month.

Please tell others particularly those in social and other groups with an interest.

[Details on the website.](#)

Book Now

Submarines in Sydney: Sub Base Platypus Tour Hear about the RAN's story of torpedoes, submarines, submariners & the men and women who supported them. Tour conducted monthly. Info for organisers 	Sydney Harbour in War and Peace: Bradleys Head Tour Learn about the naval history of Sydney Harbour from 1788; the earliest defences, role of the Royal Navy, colonial navies and the RAN since 1911. Info for organisers 
Navy in Sydney: Cruise: West of the Bridge Learn about Royal Australian Navy activities and support facilities in Sydney Harbour such as Cockatoo and Spectacle Island from 1788 to the present. Info for organisers 	Sydney under Japanese Attack 1942: 80th Anniversary Cruise This cruise highlights the events of 31 May 1942 when three Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour to attack Allied warships. Info for organisers 