



Call the Hands



Issue No. 81

December 2023



From the President

Welcome to this the 81st edition of Call the Hands our last for 2023. Edition 82 will be published in early February 2024 as we take a break for the festive season.

As we look forward to Christmas, it is important to recall the tragic Decembers endured by many RAN personnel and their families during the darkest periods of World War 2. In 1941 the Cruiser HMAS *Sydney* (II) and the Sloop, HMAS *Parramatta* (II) were lost on 19 November and 27 November respectively. In the following year the Minesweeper HMAS *Armidale* (I) was lost on 1 December 1942.

In true Australian spirit, the sacrifices of all who were lost in these ships continue to be commemorated with ceremonies conducted around Australia in recent weeks. On page three we draw your attention to the excellent HMAS *Armidale* podcast series which includes recollections from her survivors.

Occasional Paper 176 serves as a reminder of Merchant Navy losses which are not always as well commemorated. This paper looks at the American Liberty Ship, SS *William Dawes* which was torpedoed by the Japanese submarine I-11 on the morning of 22 July 1942 approximately fifteen miles off the Australian east coast township of Merimbula. Occasional Paper 175 by Dr Tom Lewis is an analysis of the Fairmile motor launches which served in Australian waters in order to identify which one lies wrecked of Darwin's East Point. Tom will welcome any assistance from readers which may assist with the vessel's naval identity.

Whilst Society volunteers are continually researching and writing papers, contributions such as that on SS *William Dawes* by Ken Wright are greatly appreciated. If you have a story or know of one, please contact the Society.

My thanks to all members who participated the Society's recent AGM. There was just one change to the Committee with Scott Davidson elected to the position of Honorary Secretary. Scott replaced David Blazey who stood down after many years of dedicated service in the position.

For all those who responded to our November appeal for donations in support of ship model cases and the website marine art enhancement, thank you as well. The more than \$1,400 raised will make these initiatives a reality. I look forward to reporting on these in the New Year.

For those who like a bargain, there are only a few days left to take advantage of the Christmas book sale. Page 14 has the details along with information on a new Society baseball cap which is now available for sale through the website shop.

Finally, to all our members and subscribers, thank you for your support throughout 2023. I wish you all a safe and Merry Christmas and happy New Year.

Kind regards,
David Michael



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Christmas Rounds 1936

In 1936 HMS *Danae* was in Adelaide in South Australia on Christmas Day. On Christmas Day morning it was traditional for Captain's Rounds to be conducted by a posse of the ship's youngest ratings who make the customary tour round the ship.



The photograph above was taken of the troupe that Christmas. On the left is Boy Hare in the Master at Arms frock coat and sword. Next to him is Boy Roberts in the Commander's jacket and then comes Makee Learnee, the youngest of the Chinese crewmen aboard and aged about twelve years old. He is wearing the Captain's coat. This young crewman polished the brass strips on the quarterdeck but intended to work his way upwards. Then there is Boy Roberts dressed as Commander (E).

You can read more on this at [HMS Danae in Adelaide - Christmas 1936 - Naval Historical Society of Australia](#)

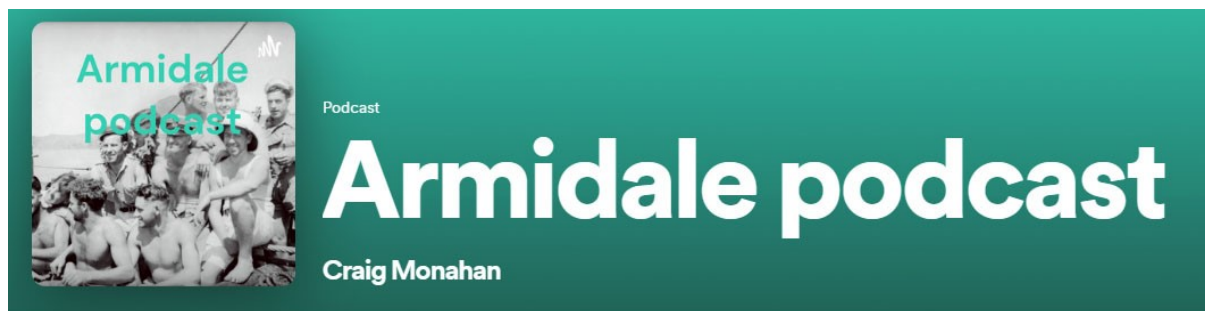
HMAS Armidale Podcast Series

On the First of December 1942 at the height of the Second World War the RAN Bathurst Class minesweeper HMAS Armidale commanded by Lieutenant Commander David Richards with his ships company (average age of 21) was despatched on an overnight mission from Darwin to Betano Bay, Timor. The objective was to relieve wounded, ill and battle-weary Australian troops and to evacuate Portuguese civilians. Another key objective was to land 63 Dutch East Indies (Javanese) fighters. After being detected by the Japanese Air Force, Armidale was attacked on three separate occasions and was lost shortly after 3:00pm after the order to abandon ship.



Members of the HMAS Armidale ships company.

Out of a total of 83 naval personnel, comprising five officers and 78 ratings, 40 (two officers and 38 ratings) lost their lives. Losses of Netherlands East Indies personnel were two officers and 58 soldiers.



Craig Monahan, Australian film maker.

This podcast on the wartime sinking of HMAS *Armidale* and the subsequent search for survivors is an epic of leadership and resourcefulness that was little known some 50 years after WWII owing to a veil of secrecy over the security classification of the ships mission.

Inspired by the story of *Armidale* in the 1980s, Craig embarked upon a mission to find and interview as many of the survivors as possible, recording each account for posterity. Years of searching official records was, to put it mildly, difficult but gradually, the true story of the mission to land allied Dutch Army troops in Timor was revealed and the role of the RAN, RAAF and AIF personnel became clearer.

The story of the sinking of *Armidale* was in truth just the beginning of one of the most incredible feats of human endurance and survival in Australian military history. The men who survived the sinking were amazing in their determination to salvage what wreckage they could and though with very little in the way of rations and water, their ingenuity helped many survive a vicious machine gun strafing from their attacker's aircraft and then seek rescue.

The podcast highlights much of the search being conducted from Darwin, itself being attacked almost daily from Japanese aircraft. Scarce resources from the RAAF and RAN were tasked and performed brilliantly in what was a search for a needle in a watery haystack and in areas dominated by enemy aircraft and superior strength in warships.

Leadership and the courage to overcome fearsome odds – sharks, poisonous sea snakes, hunger, thirst, the sun – is brought to life by the survivor personal accounts that are frank and indeed brutal. Split into three groups, the raft, a whaler, and the motorboat, all heavily damaged and literally sinking, their story is truly extraordinary. The motorboat was rescued after being at sea five days, the whaler after an incredible eight days. As for those left on the raft at the scene of the sinking, although they were spotted and a very famous photograph of them was taken, they were never seen again.

The podcast has an introduction from Vice Admiral Mike Noonan who supported this project whilst still serving as Chief of Navy and Craig Monahan who has managed this entire project on a not-for-profit basis (funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs) and deserves high praise for this revealing epic of history.

Access to this is available via this <https://open.spotify.com/show/34KowP7tNecneMGwv4Kxdx>



HMAS Armidale Bathurst Class AMS 1942.

Lieutenant George Langford, Executive Officer HMAS Parramatta (II)

Recently added to the Society's archive are copies of 91 letters written by Lieutenant George Langford to his wife while serving as Executive Officer HMAS *Parramatta* (II). The letters loaned by his daughter Jill Green were written between 29 June 1940 and 25 November 1941.

The following is his last letter dated 25 November 1941. It is quite short relative to the majority of his earlier letters.



This will only be a scribble of a few words but very good news! I have been appointed to "Penguin" additional which means a home job starting off in Sydney anyway.

I was having an afternoon sleep when they brought me the signal & couldn't believe it! Everyone else is to be stepped up one and a Sub to join. I went ashore for a bit of a party that night.

Trouble is I don't know when I can get away and I shouldn't like to leave the ship straight away. The trouble is we are so terribly busy just now.

However, I am coming sometime darling which is the great thing and perhaps you might know more than I do.

Am much too incoherent to write much but you should know how I feel – I can't register very well!

Am going to hop ashore this morning and see what I can find out. Wish I could wait ashore and get more shopping done as we are never in harbour long enough lately.

Must close in haste.

I'm longing to see you both.

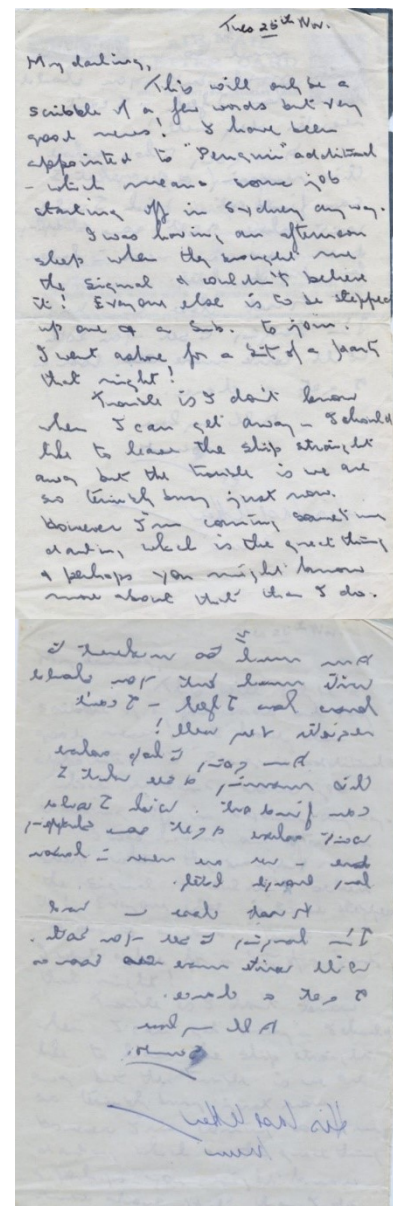
Will write more as soon as I get a chance.

All my love,

George



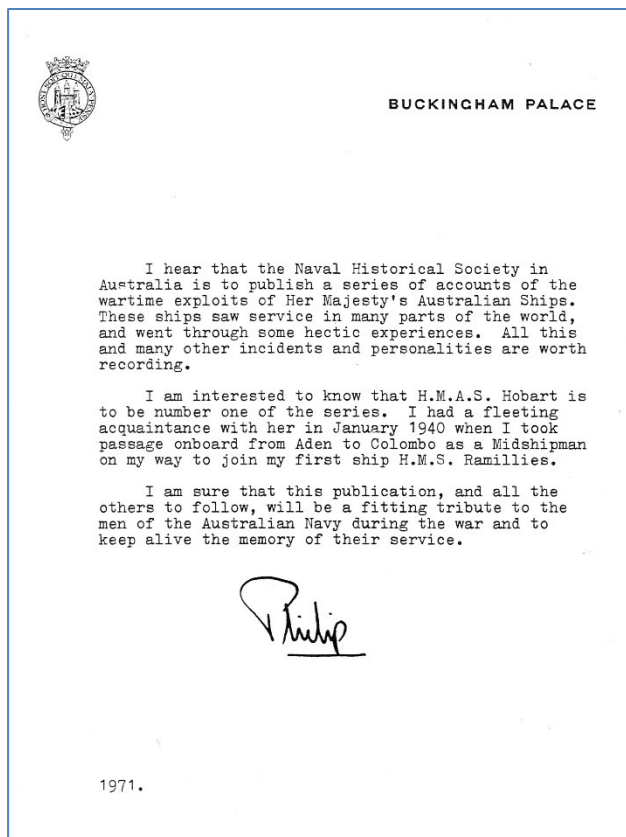
Studio portrait of
Lieutenant (Lt) George
William Allen (Bill)
Langford.



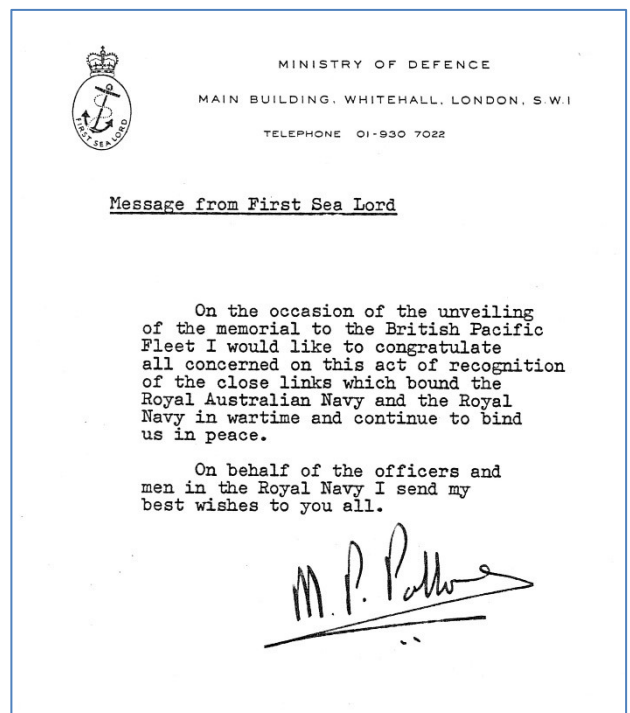
From the Archive: Friends in High Places

Lew Lind, the founder and inaugural President of the Naval Historical Society did not hesitate to seek help from the highest levels when furthering the interests of the Society. A man of vision, some of Lew's projects for the Society in the early 1970's included; writing and publishing ship war histories, erecting a memorial to the British Pacific Fleet and salvaging sections of the former HMAS *Parramatta* (I) from the Hawkesbury River. Correspondence received from Prince Phillip, Lord Mountbatten and the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Michael Pollock concerning these projects are appear in the following pages. The First Sea Lord was engaged concerning the British Pacific Fleet memorial while Lord Mountbatten and Prince Phillip were engaged to write prefaces for books on HMAS Sydney (II) and HMAS Hobart (I) respectively. Stocks of these original books are still available for those interested. However, the print quality is inferior by modern standards.

Letter from His Royal Highness Prince Phillip re preface to book on HMAS Hobart



Letter from First Sea Lord re British Pacific Fleet Memorial



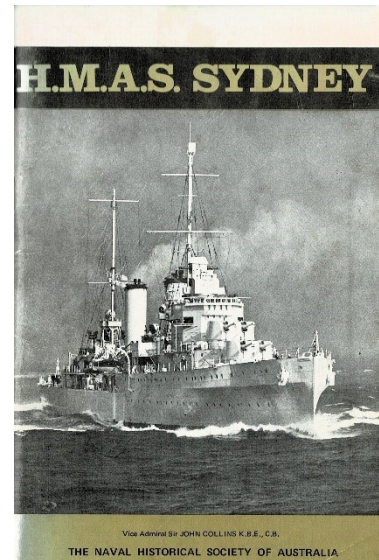
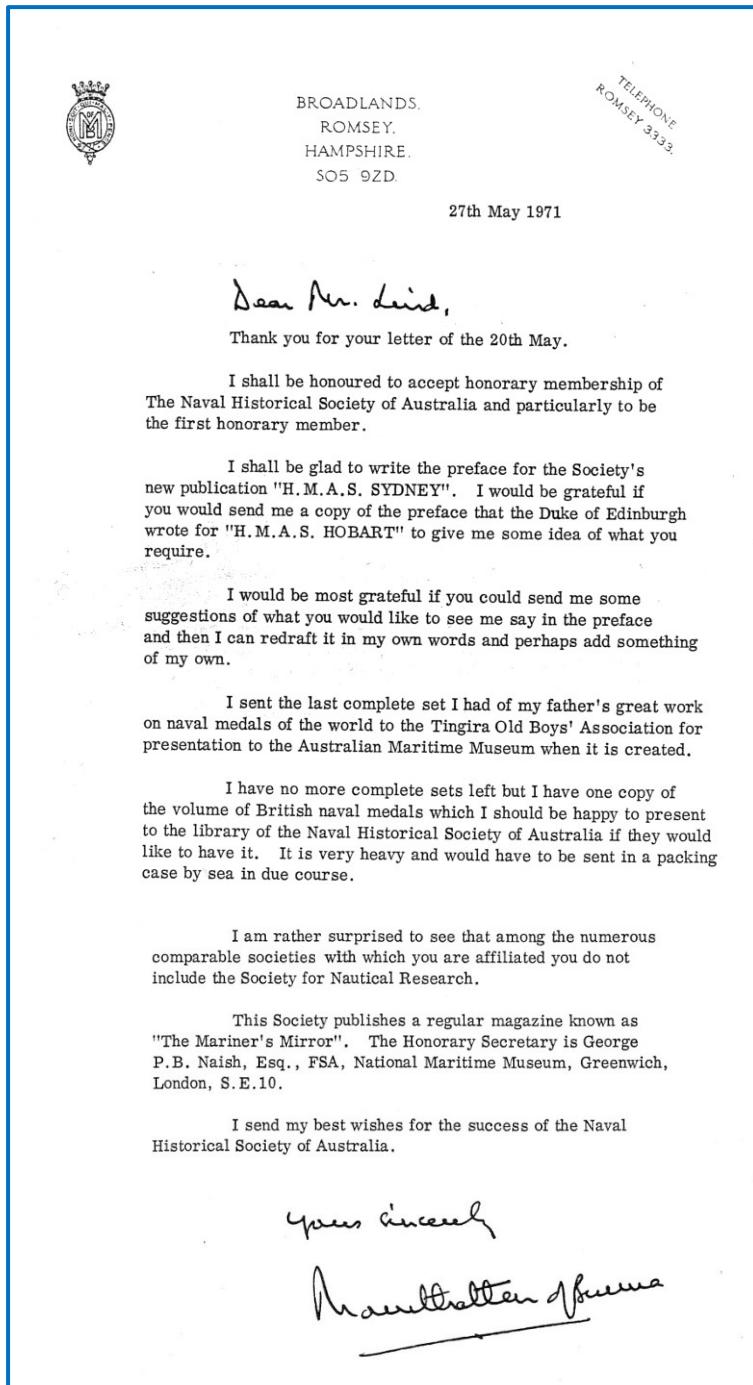
Lew Lind delivering his address during the unveiling of the British Pacific Fleet Memorial in 1971.



These first two books; HMAS *Hobart* written by L. J. Lind and M. A. Payne, and HMAS *Sydney* by Vice Admiral Sir John Collins, KBE, CB were followed by a long publishing program.

Copies of some are still available if readers have a particular interest. However, the print quality is inferior by modern standards.

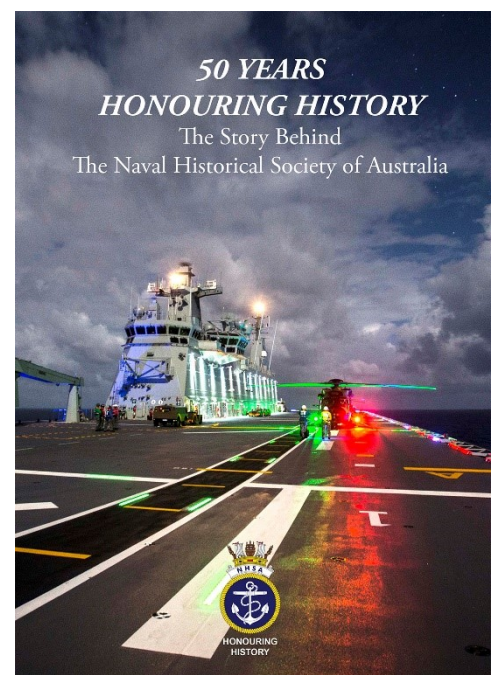
Letter from Lord Mountbatten re preface to book on HMAS *Sydney*.



50 Years Honouring History: The Story Behind, the Naval Historical Society of Australia.

Produced for the fiftieth anniversary of the Naval Historical Society in 2020, this book describes the evolution of the Society over time, its many interesting projects and colourful characters who founded and continued to grow the Society over the decades.

It is available through the website [shop](#) in digital format (\$10) or printed and posted to an Australian address for \$30.



The 'Scrap Iron Flotilla' Turns into Tobruk Ferry Service

Published with thanks to the Naval Association of Australia, Queensland Section which conducted a memorial ceremony at the Jack Tar memorial on Thursday 28th September 2023.

Tobruk, like Gallipoli, is a name that is etched in the history of Australians at war. At Tobruk, the all-conquering German forces received their first setback at the hands of Australians whose vital supply lines were kept open by the Royal Australian Navy's 'Scrap Iron Flotilla.'

January, 1941, saw the British forces, with the Australian 6th Division at the fore front, sweep the Italians from the Western Desert all the way to Benghazi. However, with the arrival of General Rommel and his German Afrika Corps it was the Allies turn to retreat. Rommel attacked Tobruk with tanks and infantry, but the defenders were able to turn him back. This was the first time anyone had been able to stop the German forces in the North African campaign. Tobruk with its fortifications and harbour had to be held at any cost. The Australian and some Indian and British troops were under constant bombardment and artillery fire but the 'Rats of Tobruk' (so named in response to reports that Nazi radio propagandist 'Lord Haw Haw' had described them as being caught 'like rats in a trap') dug in. In defiance, the soldiers proudly adopted this nickname as a badge of pride, even going so far as to strike their own unofficial medal bearing the likeness of a rat.



They were surrounded by Rommel on land but the sea, under Allied control, supplied the fort with food, water, ammunition, medical supplies, tanks and fresh troops and evacuated the wounded and prisoners of war. The Royal Australian Navy sent a fleet of five old WW1 destroyers, *Stuart*, *Waterhen*, *Vampire*, *Voyager* and *Vendetta*, scorned by Nazi propagandist Goebbels as the "Scrap Iron Flotilla", as the Tobruk Ferry Service to and from Alexandria. Operating under constant fire from aerial bombing, enemy ships and submarine attacks, they were joined by vessels from the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy. Later HMA ships *Nizam* and *Napier* also joined the ferry service with *Nizam* doing 14 round trips, including the last carried out in full moonlight.

One sailor's diary tells their story,

"We leave Alex in the early a.m. All yesterday afternoon and last night we loaded stores and ammunition, pushing and lifting and packing until our backs ached.... it took us about eight hours to get everything into place. And we have to unload it in a quarter of that time! By the time we turned in for our last few hours' sleep for two days the deck was littered with every kind of store - ammunition for field guns, anti-tank guns and light weapons, explosives, boxes of carefully packed detonators, land mines, great sacks of vegetables, boxes of oranges, tins of everything from oil to peaches, rifles, machine guns and medical dressings."

The return trip was very different, the destroyers turned into hospital ships, every inch of space taken up with the wounded and in some cases the dying and battle fatigued men, enroute to medical facilities in Alexandria. In all, the Tobruk Ferries evacuated 32,667 troops and replaced them with 34,113 fresh men. Even a herd of 108 live sheep, food for the Indian Army, was delivered by the Scrap Iron Flotilla!

Two ships, HMAS *Parramatta* and HMAS *Waterhen* were sunk by an enemy U Boat and dive bomber respectively with heavy loss of life. On *Parramatta*, 137 sailors lost their lives including 8 young men from Queensland.

Daniel Beer from Toowoomba
 Andrew Watson from Fairfield
 Leslie Savage from West End
 Reginald Chamberlain from Toowoomba
 John Davies from Rosalie
 Harold Koy from Talwood
 James Martin from Wynnum
 John Streeter from Sunnybank

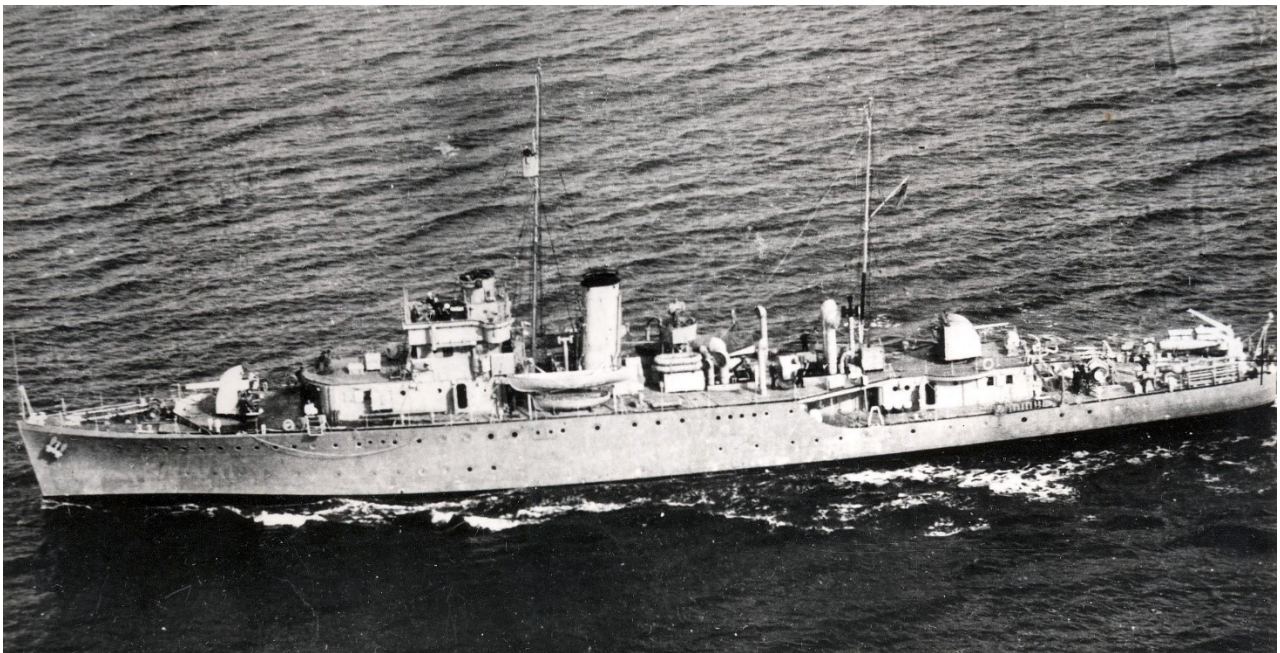
In all, the Australian destroyers made a total of 139 runs in and out of Tobruk during the period of the regular 'Ferry'. *Vendetta* held the record with 39 individual passages into Tobruk.



Soldiers on the upper deck of HMAS Vendetta (I) a V and W Class Destroyer.



Wounded soldiers on the upper deck of HMAS Waterhen (I) a V and W Class Destroyer.



HMAS Parramatta (II) Grimsby Class sloop. Commissioned 8 April 1940. Lost 27 November 1941

Photo of the Month



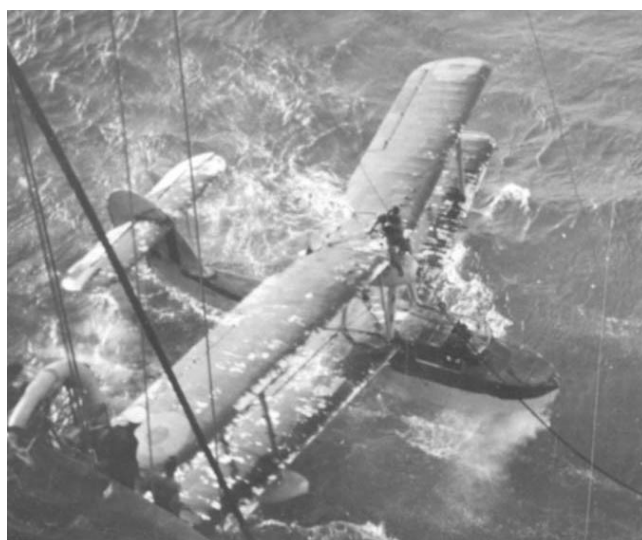
A Christmas card posted from Flying Officer Ray Barrey, RAAF, Sydney's aircraft pilot, to his brother John who was serving in England in the RAF. The picture of Sydney, taken in Geraldton in October 1941, shows her painted in her final disruptive camouflage paint scheme and is one of the last known images taken of Sydney prior to her loss.



Left - Flying Officer (FO) Raymond Barker Barrey, pilot of 9 Squadron RAAF, of Grange, SA. A warehouseman in civilian life, he enlisted in Adelaide, SA, on 29 April 1940.

He was one of six members of 9 Squadron posted to HMAS Sydney to fly and maintain the ship's aircraft. FO Barrey was killed in action during HMAS Sydney's engagement with the German auxiliary cruiser HSK *Kormoran* on 19 November 1941. He was aged 25.

Right - Walrus Mk I Seaplane L2177 on approach to HMAS Sydney for recovery by the ship's crane in late 1941, somewhere in Australian Waters, possibly off South Australia. This photo shows Ray Barrey in the cockpit taxing the Aircraft, while the Naval Observer Jack Bacon RN assists the Aircrews TAG sitting on the top wing waiting for the crane to lower the hook which he had to catch and hook up to the wing so it could then be winched onboard. In view on the deck of HMAS Sydney is a Carley Float in its stowed position, while looking on are a RAN Petty Officer and a RAAF Member of the crew. It is believed that this Photo was taken by LAC Keith Homard RAAF, who was a former Newcastle Press Photographer then part of HMAS Sydney's RAAF Detachment as the Reconnaissance Photograph Section's Commander. Family via Keith Homard's NOK, Late 1941 - Possibly taken by LAC Keith Homard RAAF S/N 35338.



News

Australia's Hunter-class frigate program hits a milestone

BAE Systems' Hunter Class Frigate Program has successfully completed its Preliminary Design Review (PDR).

The review, which started in July, is a technical assessment that ensures the design is operationally effective and underpins the more detailed work that will now be undertaken.

More than 1,800 people are now working on the Hunter program. Companies from across Australia are working with BAE Systems to support the manufacture of the first batch of three Hunter class frigates.



The expected time frame for the first of the Australian Navy's Hunter-class frigates is 2031, according to Defence Minister Richard Marles. BAE Systems received a £3.7 billion contract in 2017 for the construction of the first three vessels. Australia's Hunter-class frigates are based on the design of the Royal Navy's Type 26s.

HMAS Toowoomba supports sanctions on North Korea

The crew of HMAS *Toowoomba* have supported United Nations Security Council sanctions against North Korea during a regional presence deployment.

Under Operation *Argos*, *Toowoomba* and its embarked MH-60R helicopter, *Valkyrie*, deployed to monitor and deter illegal ship-to-ship transfers of sanctioned goods in the Indo-Pacific region.

Argos enforces sanctions that support the international community's goal of the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of North Korea, which the ADF supports through the deployment of RAN vessels and RAAF maritime patrol aircraft.



After supporting Operation *Argos*, *Toowoomba* continued conducting activities, exercises and engagements with regional partners during the regional presence deployment.

This Month in History

December 1907	The Prime Minister of Australia, Alfred Deakin, announced that Australia would purchase 9 C-class submarines, and 6 torpedo boat destroyers, over three years, to be built, manned and maintained by Australia.
December 1914	HMA Ships PARRAMATTA and WARREGO reached the limit of navigation on the Sepik River, New Guinea, unsuccessfully searching for a German ship.
December 1918	CMDR J. Bond, RAN, of HMAS SWAN led a party of Australian and French officers to Novochoerkassk to meet General Krasnoff, Commander of White Russian troops in South Russia.
December 1925	HMAS STALWART decommissioned. She remained in reserve after decommissioning until she was eventually sold for breaking up on 4 June 1937.
December 1939	HMAS STUART was battling heavy seas off Corsica. Christmas fare was a piece of cake and a glass of beer. Christmas Day on HMAS PERTH was heralded by the playing of the hymn 'Christians Awake' over the ship's PA system. The menu for Christmas dinner was; soup, roast turkey, York ham with French beans, green peas, roast and boiled potatoes, Christmas pudding with brandy sauce, fresh fruit and nuts.
December 1941	MIDN L. J. Tathan, RAN, and the crew of the whaler from HMS KANDAHAR which he was commanding in rescue operations were killed when the boat was heavily strafed by German aircraft. KANDAHAR had gone to the rescue of HMS NEPTUNE which had struck a mine before the aircraft launched their attack.
December 1944	HMAS HOBART was re-commissioned in Sydney. Damage inflicted by a Japanese torpedo in 1943 required 17 months in dockyard hands for repairs.
December 1950	HMA Ships BATAAN and WARRAMUNGA assisted the Commonwealth Fleet in evacuating Chinnampo, Korea.
December 1958	808 Squadron, flying Sea Venoms, decommissioned at Nowra.
December 1964	HMAS TEAL intercepted two Indonesian sampans off Borneo. The sampans opened fire, and TEAL retaliated, killing three of the crew. LEUT K. Murray, RAN, TEAL's captain, was awarded the DSC for gallantry in the action.
December 1970	There was an extraordinary act of flying skill by Lieutenant Buchanan, RAN, and his crew for which the Australian pilot was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. While engaged in the medical evacuation of a wounded crew member from a South Vietnamese patrol boat, the group came under heavy enemy fire. Another patrol boat, some 50 metres away, exploded following a direct hit from an enemy rocket. Realising that the boat with which he was operating was disabled and drifting toward the enemy held shore, Buchanan, in his own words: "Tilted the rotor, as though I was going to do a skidding take off and the friction of my skids on the deck of the patrol boat was sufficient to drag the boat in the direction I wanted to go. This was in the opposite direction from the trees at the edge of the river and the nasty-minded individuals who were hiding under them and trying to impede my progress with various weapons."
December 1985	HMAS STALWART made an emergency voyage to Macquarie Island for ANARE to land Christmas stores for the staff, when the Antarctic supply ship NELLA DAN developed defects.
December 1992	HMAS TOBRUK II departed from Townsville for Somalia as a part of Operation SOLACE, the Australian Defence Force's contribution to the US-led operation to bring peace and humanitarian relief to the war-torn African nation.
December 2000	HMAS OTAMA was decommissioned. OTAMA, was the last of the RAN's Oberon class submarines to be decommissioned.
December 2011	817 Squadron decommissioned and last Sea Kings withdrawn from RAN service.
December 2018	HMAS GASCOYNE II returned to Australia after completing the longest voyage undertaken by a vessel of its class. Gascoyne, along with sister ship, HMAS HUON, had visited ports and exercised in the Republic of Korea, Japan and the Philippines. GASCOYNE and HUON steamed in excess of 4,000 nautical miles during the voyage and were the first Australian Mine Warfare vessels to travel to the Republic of Korea

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/>

Video of the Month

HARS Aviation Museum Navy Albion Park NSW

Tracker 844 Flight Tests 10 September 2022



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64fIEv52h74>

HARS

With over 50 historical commercial & military aircraft, half still operational, the HARS Aviation Museum is an all-volunteer group of aviation professionals & enthusiasts located at Shellharbour Regional Airport (YSHL), Albion Park 100 kms south of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

Website: <https://hars.org.au>

Occasional Papers

- Occasional Paper 175 - Which Fairmile is that?
- Occasional Paper 176 - A ship is burning

Pre-Christmas Book Sale: Reminder

Last month we offered a significant discount on Society publications. Many members and subscribers took advantage of this opportunity. Thank you.

If you still plan to make a purchase, please place your order by 7 December to achieve delivery before Christmas.

The Society will shut down on Thursday 14 December and reopen on Tuesday 16 January.

Spend \$130 or more at the reduced prices and receive a further \$30.00 discount

To obtain the discount select books and quote Code SBK30 at checkout

The book sales offer can be accessed at [Books](#) at the NHSA website shop.



Society Baseball Cap



We are pleased to announce the arrival of the Society's new ball cap.

It is available for sale through the website shop for \$35 posted to an Australian address.

Stocks are also being shipped to the Victorian and WA Chapter Committees for sale locally from January. Members in these areas will be able to purchase them direct at a reduced price of \$30.

Click here to see the [NHSA Baseball Cap](#) at the NHSA website shop.

Readers Forum

By Michael Dowsett

I was interested to see the photo of the month in the latest issue of the newsletter. I was posted to the ANZUK Force in Singapore in 1971 and one of less than 100 RAN members serving in Singapore; mainly communicators. I had spent about 4 months as the mobile Fleet dental officer on *Stuart* in 1966 as part of the RAN contribution to the Far East Strategic Reserve and was aware of the tradition of having a piper standing on the turret during Procedure Alpha. I made the Commanding Officer of 6RAR aware of this tradition and he arranged for his band, which was a pipe band to welcome the ship to ANZUK in a Scottish style. 6RAR and was the Australian infantry battalion at the time was part of the ANZUK Force, the others being 1 RNZIR and the UK contribution was the Royal Highland Fusiliers.



HMAS Stuart and her Piper.



Commander MJ Stock, RAN is rowed ashore on relinquishing command to Commander J Parsons, RAN, 23 April 1986.