A number of publications tell the story of the war in Northern Australia, but they deal mainly with actions or events. Details of fixed-defences have either been omitted or mentioned only peripherally, along with a particular incident. This was the case with Darwin’s harbour defences.

Today, many Darwinians will proudly tell you that an anti-submarine boom net that stretched across the harbour was 6 km long, and the longest floating net in the world. Very few of them ever saw the flotation buoys that supported the net, and fewer still knew what was below the surface. Similarly unknown were the submarine indicator loops that lay on the seabed and warned of approaching ships or submarines, and the part played by ASDIC (sonar), fitted to ships in the defence of Darwin.

Our lead article attempts to throw some light on the A/S boom net and associated defences, coordinated by the Port War Signal Station (PWSS) at Dudley Point, all of which played a vital part in the defence of Darwin.  

(See p7 article)
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Last Post

The Newsletter here records the names of Club members, their partners and friends and shipmates from the wider naval community, whose passing has come to our attention.

LCDR C R FISCHER RAN ret
CMRD B L HAGARD RFD RD RANR
RADM R G LOOSLI CBE RAN ret
CMRD G M NEKRASCOV OAM RAN ret
LEUT K S NICHOL RNVR ret
*CAPT G KABLE RANT ret
*LCDR J LEAK RAN ret
*CDRE P D McKAY RAN ret
*CMRD W MILFULL RANR
*CAPT B NYE OAM RAN ret

ORANGE NSW
LEABROK SA
EDGECLIFF NSW
MOUNT ELIZA VIC
WAYVILE SA
AVALON NSW
GOLD COAST NSW
CANBERRA ACT
CANBERRA ACT
CANBERRA ACT

*Not NOC Members

New members

CMRD N D BRITTON RAN ret
CMRD S R HAMILTON RAN ret
CAPT E T KEANE OAM RAN RET
LCDR J PLUNKETT-COLE RAN ret
CMRD J S SCOTT RAN ret

Mail address changes
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Email changes
Intentionally Blank

Promotion

CMDR P A BUTTON RANR
PYRMONT NSW
Notice Board
This page carries club announcements, details of forthcoming social events, and other information. All Divisions are encouraged to make use of it to bring such matters to the attention of their own constituents, and to other Club members generally. And all members are encouraged to read it.

Division Social Functions

New South Wales
Christmas Lunch, NSW Parliament House
Strangers Dining Room, Thu 15 Dec 2016
Cost $95 pp (See flyer this issue) (JH)

Members Lunch Lord Nelson Brewery Pub
The Rocks, Thu 2 Feb 2017 at 1200.
Dress: smart casual. Cost $45 cash on the day.
Places limited, so please confirm booking (KP)

Annual NOC Sydney Harbour lunch cruise
Sat 18 Feb 2017, 1200 – 1600 (JW)
Kings St Wharf (1200) or Circular Quay (1230)
Dress: smart casual. Cost: $100 pp
(see flyer this issue)

Victoria
Christmas Lunch
Wednesday 7 December - The Hero's Club.
Guests are most welcome. Booking by 2 December is essential.

Western Australia
NOC WA will continue with bi monthly luncheons and alternate months meetings with dinner but venues are “up in the air” due to extensive renovations to both current venues. NOC WA members will be advised by email prior to the events. Visiting members should call Bob Mummery on 0408 811 201 for advice.

ACT
Mike Taylor (02) 6288 3393

Annual Christmas Brunch
Sat 3 Dec 0900 - 1100 at Commonwealth Club.

Members’ Lunch
Mon 6 Feb 1200 - 1400 Lunch in Orion Room, Southern Cross Club (SXC).

Members’ Lunch
Mon 6 Mar 1200 - 1400 in Orion Room, SXC.

Annual General Meeting & Lunch
Mon 3 Apr 1130 - 1400 Orion Room SXC.

South Australia

Members and Guests Lunch
Fri 2 Dec at 1230 at Peppers in Waymouth St

Queensland

Summer Christmas Luncheon
Wed 07 December 1200 for 1230. Tides Restaurant, Caloundra www.tideswaterfront.com.au
2 course lunch $40pp. Drinks not included. Full bar available.
Organiser: Wal Farquhar
Payment by EFT or cheque/cash on the day

Notices for all Club Members

Changes of contact details: Please tell the Hon Sec in writing or email the moment you change your address, phone number, email address etc.

Payment of Club dues: Members who are not Life Members and pay their dues annually are reminded that dues are payable on or before 1 March each year. Prompt payment supports your Club.

Remittance of funds to the Club: Money for dues, functions or merchandise can be sent to the club by either cheque or EFT. Make the cheque out to “Naval Officers Club” and accompany it with written advice of both the sender and what the funds are for. If using EFT, the account details are on page 2; also tell the Hon Treasurer by email (jwellis2@bigpond.com) the same day.
Captain John Gower RN

Dear Editor,

Phil Hawke’s letter in Your Say in the last newsletter brought back memories of a remarkable Naval Officer, Captain John Ronald Gower, who had a major part in training young officers. Unlike Phil, I was a Dartmouth Entry Cadet and at the age of 13 I had John Ronald Gower as the Drake House Officer for my first two terms in the Navy. Forward four years and there in the training cruiser HMS Devonshire for my two terms is the Executive Officer, John Ronald Gower. That is where I met up with Phil and his Term Mates. Go on another two years and there I am at Greenwich as a Sub-Lieutenant – and all those great Aussies – and who should be Commander of the College but John Ronald Gower.

My favourite memory of him is one Sunday on the quarterdeck of Devonshire somewhere in the West Indies where preparing for church was going slowly. On being told that the Quarterdeck Officer, Lieutenant Dickie Pitt, was out in a boat training some cadet in boat handling (Phil Hawke maybe) John Ronald strode to the stern and in a loud voice said “Mr Pitt, stop f....g about in that boat and come and rig the f....g church”.

My Term had the honour of having John Ronald Gower as our guest of honour at our 1996 50th anniversary Term Reunion Dinner in the Painted Hall at RNC Greenwich.

Peter Poland (Rose Bay NSW)

P.S. Why was he always known as John Ronald Gower? Because whenever a warrant was read in Devonshire – and there were quite a few – he read out what the Captain had written. It started “Whereas it has been represented to me by John Ronald Gower, Commander Royal Navy, Distinguished Service Cross...” I can almost hear it still today!

Ashmore Brothers

My attention was riveted on the photo of Sir Edward where he appeared to be straining to effect a taut smile. My short acquaintance with him, I never saw him smile, but impressed as the driving, humourless type, who had his staff jostling in his wake as he bestrode his bridge in HMS Devonshire. His harried Flags trailed him with notebook in hand, constantly uttering lame excuses that he did not know the answer but would find out. RADM Ashmore (then) was the Commander of the RN Task Group which was making its swing to the far East and Australia in 1969. I was Fleet TAS Officer, sent out to provide (advance liaison) advice regarding the local exercise areas. I had a few interesting days observing this circus and also to catch up with the Staff TASO who had been on Long Course with me at HMS Vernon, UK.

During the conduct of an ASW exercise, while I was lurking in the Ops Room I overheard a report to the effect that HMAS Queenborough was surfacing the submarine, but I was later surprised when I went onto the upper deck, to see that Devonshire was not on the safety course. It transpired that the Command was unaware of the earlier report in the Ops Room and the admiral had a signal drafted complaining to the Submarine Operating Authority regarding the submarine's sudden (and to him, unauthorised) appearance on the surface. I saved him some embarrassment by reporting what I had overheard in the Ops Room, whereupon the signal torn up, and before I was transferred to an escorting CA destroyer for passage to Sydney he thanked me for my input – and almost cracked a smile!

In the destroyer’s wardroom, I came across the dejected figure of Flags, who was also being landed for passage home. His was the head that had to roll for the near embarrassment. I enjoyed my night onboard where the officers were very hospitable and paid no heed to any tradition that restricted drinking while at sea.

Commander Peter Ashmore RN I had come across earlier when he was XO in the converted aircraft carrier and cadet training ship HMS Triumph. His personality was in direct contrast to his brother. He was an amiable type with a long lugubrious countenance, who moped around the
ship with a shambling gait, with his telescope gripped in his left armpit. My very short acquaintance with him during the laughingly called cruise to Northern Scotland and Scandinavia, was as his “doggie” for a day. I trailed around with him ready to run any messages. Dressed in white shirt in lieu of the blue No.8s under a seaman’s jersey, and shoes instead of boots, the doggie traditionally trailed the great man, clasping Seamanship Manual Vol2 under the left arm, which was to be studied while waiting outside meetings or the conduct of daily business generally. I had an enjoyable day with him as he was not demanding, and only committed one blooper when I physically shook him in the morning. His reaction was admonitory but quite mild. I should imagine his brother’s reaction would have been not so mild.

(Ted Keane – new member)

How Colonel Gaddafi ordered a submarine to torpedo the QE2 in retaliation for the shooting down of Libyan passenger plane by Israel

When the British cruise ship Queen Elizabeth 2 set sail for Israel in April 1973, the hundreds of passengers on board were blissfully unaware that Libyan dictator Colonel Gaddafi had ordered a submarine to torpedo Britain’s most famous cruise ship. Blood-thirsty Gaddafi was seeking revenge on Israel after a Libyan passenger plane was shot down by Israeli fighter jets on 21 February 1973, killing 108 people. He had set his target as the QE2, which was packed with Jewish passengers, undertaking a chartered cruise through the Mediterranean to Israel, in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the state’s founding.

Details of the failed QE2 attack are detailed in a new book: The Angel: The Egyptian spay who saved Israel, which tells the story of Ashraf Marwan, a top-level Egyptian official who secretly worked for Israel and managed to thwart a Libyan attack on an Israeli passenger plane.

When Gaddafi first started plotting to exact retribution on Israel it did not matter to him that the shooting down of Libyan Airlines Flight 114 in the Sinai desert on 21 February 1973, was a mistake. The Boeing 727-200 was flying from Benghazi to Cairo when it entered airspace over the Sinai peninsula which was under Israeli’s control. The area had been a no-fly zone for civilian aircraft since 1967. Alarmed Israeli fighter pilots – fearful of a terrorist attack – instructed the passenger plane to land at their air base. But after initially abiding these instructions and following them, the Libyan pilot then turned course back towards the Suez Canal. The Israeli Air Force commander was unaware of the airplane’s communication system had failed when he was granted permission to shoot down the aircraft over the desert. The mistake killed the former foreign minister of Libya, Salah Bousseir, and set Gaddafi and grieving Libyans on a path of revenge.

Furious, Gaddafi first telephoned the President of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, with a plot to bomb the Israeli port of Haifa. Sadat urged Gaddafi to hold back on the attack – he secretly had his own war on Israel planned – so the despot arranged a covert massacre.

On 17 April he ordered the captain of an Egyptian submarine based in Libya to torpedo the QE2. The captain dutifully set off on his mission and was only halted after a full day at sea, when he radioed his Egyptian Navy commander to inform him of his mission. Sadat tried to placate Gaddafi by telling him the submarine was unable to find the QE2 and ordered its return to Alexandria.

QE2, unaware of hostilities, sailed on to her destination in Israel with her prominent and vulnerable passengers onboard.
Anti-Submarine Boom Defences at Darwin in WW2

Between late 1941 and early 1942, Darwin port underwent a significant metamorphosis, rapidly emptying of civilians and becoming an almost solely military town. Yet, with the end of hostilities, the situation just as rapidly reversed and much of the detail of Darwin’s wartime history was soon forgotten. This edited version attempts to highlight the boom defences, complemented by the associated indicator loops, ASDIC stations and the Port War Signal Station at Dudley Point.

In 1937 as nations prepared for war, Britain need suitable harbours for her Eastern Fleet, based on Singapore, and selected Darwin and Cockburn Sound, south of Fremantle WA, as likely bases for supplies of fuel, water and stores. HMAS Moresby surveyed Darwin Harbour, revealing that it could provide a fleet anchorage for up to 28 ships and 17 small craft in the Middle and East arms of the port.

In 1939 the Admiralty announced a requirement for single berth anchorages for one battleship, one aircraft carrier, three cruisers and eight destroyers. Suitable anchorages were also required to accommodate the numerous local defence vessels comprising four Fairmile (MLs) patrol vessels, four smaller HDMLs, three minesweepers, two boom gate vessels (BGV), four boom working vessels (BWV), six channel patrol vessels and one examination vessel (for boarding arriving merchant ships).

Having sent an expert in harbour defences to Australia to advise, the Admiralty undertook to design the anti-submarine defences for Darwin (in conjunction with those for Singapore) while the Australian Naval Board initiated the construction of two BWVs that would be needed to lay the moorings for the boom nets and subsequent maintenance.

The first vessel built was HMAS Kookaburra (which was based on the current RN Net class design. The second vessel, HMAS Koala, was similar to the RN’s Bar class, being 40ft longer (178ft LOA) and displacing an extra 300 tons to the Net class. Both vessels were completed in early 1940, with a third vessel, HMAS Kangaroo arriving in Darwin in January 1941, followed by a fourth, HMAS Karangi a year later.

By 1942 the boom service had also been allocated the five BDVs that were necessary for patrolling the extensive boom net, being requisitioned motor boats and yachts. These vessels were armed and entered service as HMA Ships Kuru, Kiara, Vigilant, Moruya and Larrakia, performing general boom defence and air sea rescue duties. Civilian riggers were trained in net construction and steel wire rope manufacture.

RAN staff visited HM Naval Base Singapore to study and be trained in boom defence measures, returning in April 1940 to ramp up the boom construction and laying moorings. The wire rope used for the nets was manufactured at Newcastle NSW, being high tensile steel about 1 inch in diameter. The top supporting jackstay line of the net was 2 inches in diameter.

Although the netlaying had been scheduled for completion by the end of 1940, the extensive preparation and assembly of the net in the boom yard and the problems caused by strong tidal conditions meant that the laying of the net did not begin until end 1940 and not finished until end
1942. The delay significantly increased costs of the project, doubling to an estimated 1,200,000 pounds, while Admiralty advised extensions and additional vessels expected a rise to 2 million pounds before completion.

Before work on assembling the nets could begin, a large boom shed had to be built in the boom yard next to Fort Hill. In 1940 a branch line from the railway yards was run along the shoreline to transport the heavy components delivered by ship at Stokes Hill Wharf.

By October 1940 work on the book depot was virtually complete with the exception of the railway branch lines required to be laid across the yard. Part of Fort Hill was also demolished to make room for a road and work space at the end of the new concrete jetty being built, although not completed until mid-1941. A concrete net slab on which the nets were to be made was also poured near the jetty, ready for use by September 1940. A further concrete launching trough was needed down to the water to allow nets to be slid into the harbour and then towed out to position by one of the BWVs. The Department of Interior in Darwin poured the concrete slab and the large mooring clumps used for anchoring the mooring trots.

**Mooring Trots**

Trots were an assembly of three cylindrical buoys anchored by 8 or 5 ton concrete mooring clumps on the sea bed. Four clumps were positioned both on the seaward and harbour side of the net. The trot buoys were secured by heavy chain cable. For the anchorage of the trots, 230 tons of chain cable arrived from USA in June 1940. In all, the boom net moorings used 265 clumps.

**The Net**

The manufacture of the 8 ft mesh nets conformed to the UK pattern and the first consignment of buoys arrived by sea on 30 September 1939, followed by 49 A/S nets in May 1940. There was no crane in the yard and these nets had to be manhandled from the rail trucks into the boom shed. The concrete slab was marked out for the net assembly, with floatation buoys spaced approximately every 15 ft along the jackstay. The net was then gathered up to the jackstay and tied at intervals with wire rope stoppers. This was to prevent the bottom of the net dragging along the seabed and becoming snagged on reefs or rocks.

One end of the jackstay faced the launching ramp and a 9 ton diesel locomotive jib crane on the rail line was used to drag the net to the head of the launching trough where it was secured to a line from the BWV, who hauled the net with its flotation buoys into the water and towed it out into position. To secure the section of net between the trots each end of the jackstay was shackled to a ring beneath one of the outer large cylindrical buoys.

When the net was secured between the two trots, a rigger would move along the top of the net and cut the ties which held the net to the jackstay. To work on the mooring chain cable under the buoy, it was necessary for the BWV to lift the buoy out of the water, underside up. A lasso was made from a wire rope a few feet longer than the circumference of the buoy with a soft eye spliced into each end. This was shackled to a soft eye on a wire from the ship’s winch. A rigger, balancing on the buoy, slipped the lasso over each end of the buoy and it was then winched in, lifting it out of the water.

On completion the buoy was lowered into the water, the lasso slackened and the winch wire unshackled. The rigger then swam under the buoy to ease the lasso loose from the chain cable, thus retrieving the lasso.

Later, due to the threat of midget submarine and human torpedo attacks, the Admiralty ordered the size of the mesh to be reduced to 3 ft. Fortunately, no alteration was required to be made in Darwin, as the Admiralty was able to supply 3.48 miles of 3ft net from stores!

Laying the trots

In November 1941, transit markers were erected at an alcove 500 ft north of Dudley Point and at West Point. Kookaburra started laying No.1 trot on the edge of a shelf then laid marker buoys (44 gallon drums) between Dudley Point and West Point to indicate the line for mooring the trots. Once laid and the worst of the wet season had passed, Koala began laying moorings for the trots, which took two months. Trots 1-18 were laid by April 1941, leaving a space for trot 13, left open as a shipping channel.

The rise and fall of the tide could often exceed 20 ft and the strength of the tidal stream caused unforeseen problems. In mid-1941 most of the moorings between trots 5 to 20 had moved and had to be lifted and re-laid. Extreme tides in October caused trots 11-14 to break away from...
the moorings with the net attached, causing stress on the clumps, chain cable wires and shackles so strong that many components had to be replaced, with the clumps being redesigned to take the strain.

(An RAN survey conducted in 2005 revealed the continued existence of the 8 ton concrete mooring clumps and associated fittings, left on the seabed in 1945, although subject to some movement over the last 60 years!)

**Laying the Boom Net**

After the net was first laid, it was discovered that a strip of unprotected water had been left at both ends of the net, which at high

Laying the Boom Net

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water would be deep enough to allow midget submarines and motor torpedo boats to pass through. Consideration was given to building a breakwater at each end of the boom but dismissed in favour of a more practical solution of erecting seven pylons to span the shallows each end. The pylons were 2 ft high with concrete foundations on the reef. An additional net was hung from the top jackstay over the tops of the pylons with the eastern end secured to a concrete block on the cliff at Dudley Point, but not completed until mid-1944. The pylons were eventually demolished in about 1967.

**The Gate and Gate Vessels**

To enable ships to enter and leave harbour, two permanently moored gate vessels operated a gate in the net within the shipping channel. HMA Ships *Kara Kara* and *Koompartoo*, formerly Sydney Harbour ferries, converted for this purpose, including installation of powerful winches on their after decks to enable them to operate the gate. *Kara Kara* arrived in Darwin in November 1941, but while *Koompartoo* was being converted, *Kookaburra* and HMAS *Gunbar* (an auxiliary minesweeper) were employed as gate vessels alternately. *Koompartoo* eventually reached Darwin in February 1943.

**Boom Gate operation**

During the operation of opening the gate, the after decks were cleared of all personnel except the ERA operating the winch. When the tide stream was flowing strongly, there was enormous strain on the recovery wire and occasionally it would part, between the stern and the gate. The ERA would have to duck smartly for shelter behind the large drum of the winch to avoid being cut in half by any loose end of wire.

At first stores and water for the gate operating ships arrived regularly by a towed lighter or by one of the other BWVs. Later a regular service was provided by a supply vessel. *Kara Kara* and *Kookaburra* were placed in the gate in January 1942, which became fully operational on 14 February. A small gate, large enough for patrol boats and luggers to pass through, operated between the starboard side of the eastern gate vessel and a large peg top buoy.

**Japanese air raids on Darwin**

During the first Japanese air raids on Darwin on 19 February 1942, both gate vessels were heavily machine-gunned. *Kara Kara* sustained casualties, with her CO and four crew badly wounded. The injured personal were transferred to the hospital ship *Manunda*, which sailed for Fremantle the following day with 300 other wounded personnel on board. The gate was consequently closed until 13 March 1942. On reopening *Gunbar* was duty western gate vessel,
until Koompartoo arrived, and Kara Kara was directed to be the eastern gate vessel.

**Maintenance of the Boom Net**

The boom working vessels were constantly required to check and replace damaged nets and general maintenance. This work was carried out by Riggers. Their duties were separate from the normal “part of ship” duties carried out by other members of the crew. Riggers was a generic term used to describe the men skilled at working on the boom net and there were normally about 6 in each BWV. The RAN’s equivalent ratings were:

- Charge Man – Chief Petty Officer
- Riggers – POs and Leading Seamen
- Skilled Labourers – able seamen
- Labourers – ordinary seamen.

The riggers were supervised by a Petty Officer and/or Leading Seaman, and received an extra shilling a day as danger money for their hazardous work. They were also entitled to Hard Lying Allowance of one shilling per day in the tropics, which was generally paid to ships’ companies living in exceptionally uncomfortable conditions onboard mall ships which made sleeping in cramped messdecks often unbearable.

The crew wore shorts and heavy boots to protect their feet from barnacles and their hands became calloused. Some wore gloves with the fingers cut off to protect their hands. All submerged boom gear was covered with barnacles, slimy sea lice, seaweed and sponges. A lookout was posted on the ship to keep an eye out for sharks and drifting box jellyfish.

A Naval medical report of 1945 confirms at least four cases of swimmers being stung by box jellyfish – all were treated successfully at the hospital, but none were boom riggers.

Riggers were also continuously employed in the boom yard, splicing wires, constructing nets, chipping rust of equipment such as buoys and repainting them.

**Completion of the A/S Boom Defence**

With the boom net and extensions completed in 1944, Karangi was released to work in other ports, but the remaining ships were constantly at work maintaining the boom and moorings, until the time for dismantling, following the cessation of hostilities in September 1945.

**Indicator Loops**

Numerous methods had been developed prior to WW2 to alert harbour defenders to the presence of enemy submarines. Magnetic sensing was selected for anti-submarine detection at Darwin. This method relied on the production of an induced current in a loop array placed on the sea bed that triggered a signal when a ship (or submarine) passed over the array. The RN had developed the technology in 1915 and the first indicator loops were laid at the fleet anchorage at Scapa Flow, with the destruction of a German U-boat in 1918.

In late 1940 two indicator loops were laid to seaward of the A/S boom, requiring some 276,000 feet of cable, supplied by Cable and Wireless, London. Unfortunately, the turbulent tides and rocky bottom in Darwin resulted in many breakages in the cables. Following an underwater survey by HMA Ships Vigilant, Kiara and Wato, a replacement of of five loops was laid further to seaward and completed in 1943. The observation hut was moved to Nightcliff, providing a more direct location for the shore connexions and became fully operational on 30 June 1943.

Several unsighted crossings were recorded in early 1942. Later that year more unsighted crossings were recorded, very similar to those made by midget submarines attacking Sydney in May 1942.

**Asdic Detection Equipment**

From 1940 onwards the Admiralty and the navy Board discussed the possible uses of fixed ASDIC in Darwin harbour. The suggestion was considered unsuitable because of the nature of the sea bed and the strong tides. Consideration was also given to fitting Type 135 Detector Units, a fixed ASDIC secured to the ship’s side, to the BWVs and gate ships. Eventually only the gate ships were equipped with this in 1943.

**Port War Signal Station**

During time of war, the navy has traditionally established war signal stations on the coastline to communicate with ships coming within visual range; those at harbour entrances were called Port War Signal Stations. During the imposition of radio silence (often) the first communication a ship would have with naval Headquarters was when its bridge tipped the horizon and Morse code challenges were flashed and answered.

Darwin’s PWSS was located half way between Dudley Point and East Point, established
by 10 October 1939. Until 1943 the indicator loop hut was also located at the PWSS, with close liaison with searchlights at Dudley point and the guns at East Point, which were alerted if a crossing was recorded on the loop. Communication with the boom gate ships, about a mile and a half to the west, was by visual signalling. The Port War Signal Station ceased functioning on 12 September 1945.

**Cessation of Hostilities**

At war’s end all Australia’s ports were cleared of their A/S defences, except Darwin and Fremantle, where the nets were dismantled and stored in their respective boom depots. At Darwin the concrete clumps remained on the seabed in case of need for future use. The indicator loop and fixed Asdics were removed and returned to stores. *Karangi* was transferred to Fremantle and, after dismantling the boom, *Koala* and *Kangaroo* sailed for Sydney. *Kookaburra*, *Kara Kara* and *Koompartoo* remained in reserve at Darwin.

**Consideration for Anti-Torpedo defence**

Laying additional anti-torpedo nets to protect the fleet anchorage was discussed in 1939 but as the Pacific war moved away from Australian waters this consideration was abandoned. However, anti-torpedo nets were laid at the Manton Dam about 47 miles SE of Darwin (the town’s main water supply).

(Paton Forster joined the RANR in 1940, serving in Darwin 1941-3 as a signalman, then as a draughtsman in the Boom Defence Office. He was later commissioned and joined HMAS Whyalla as the A/S officer, completing his war service in the Pacific and demobilised as a Lieutenant RANVR in 1945)

(Contributed by Bob Mummery, Safety Bay WA)

*Darwin port today 2016—HMAS Adelaide berthing at Fort Hill Wharf.*
Karl von Clausewitz famously wrote that war is the realm of uncertainly. The lived experience of war at sea bears this out. Ships like people can be the Victims of Circumstances, not of their making. So it is with the story of the RAN’s Heavy cruiser HMAS Canberra.

It can take many decades for the fog of war to be dispersed and the truth to become visible. When the survivors of Canberra arrived back in Sydney the ill informed told them that they should be ashamed because their ship had been shelled and lost without them having fired back. It was claimed that they were not battle ready. In fact nothing could be further from the truth.

Listen to the eye witness account of Midshipman, later Commodore Bruce Loxton, RAN who was seriously wounded on the bridge of Canberra.

He robustly rebutted all claims that Canberra was not ready for action on the night she was lost. He was an eye witness on the bridge and he wrote:

*Ammunition and medical parties were standing by. In the boiler rooms all sprayers had been connected and were responding as the senior engineer opened the throttles. The engines had achieved the revolutions for 26 knots when all steam pressure disappeared.*

*All four 8-inch turrets were fully manned the guns loaded and all control personnel were at their stations. The turrets were moving in unison as they sought their target. Torpedo tube crews and searchlight control parties were standing by. In short before power was lost, Canberra was ready in all respects to go about the business of engaging the enemy. The ship was working up to full speed. All that was lacking was an aiming point before opening fire and a little more time, because, just as power was lost the gunnery director saw the first Japanese cruiser on the port beam.*

As we know at that moment a torpedo slammed into Canberra’s starboard side. Where that torpedo originated from has been extensively written about over many decades and this is not the time or place for such a discussion.

What we do know is that three minutes after Captain Frank Getting took command of his bridge his ship was no longer answering her rudder and was unable to fire or her main armament. She took on a 7 degree list to starboard as her boiler rooms flooded and she lost way.

Simultaneously Japanese float planes dropped brilliant flares which perfectly illuminated all the allied cruisers in what came to be known as Iron Bottom Sound. In just two minutes 28 heavy calibre shells rained down on Canberra like a drumbeat and destroyed her as a fighting ship. Two salvos hit the bridge and killed or wounded the command team. The Executive Officer, Commander Walsh, was summoned to the bridge from his action station in the aft conning position. It was a scene of carnage. Captain Getting was clearly mortally wounded. Before becoming unconscious he acknowledged his XO’s presence and told him to “Carry On” and through the night Commander Walsh led the fight to save the ship.

A tremendous battle to control flooding and to put out fires with buckets and blankets ensued. There was no water main pressure because there was no power.

Fires on the upper deck were controlled but those between decks raged on unchecked. Sailors threw ammunition over the side to ensure that it could not explode. They flooded magazines before fire could reach them. The dead were brought onto the upper deck. The wounded were found and taken to the wardroom which was converted into an operating theatre, lit by paraffin lanterns, where the medical team treated shattered limbs and terrible burns.
Captain Frank Getting, was taken below to be attended to by the medical team. Eye witnesses said that he knew he could not survive his wounds and insisted, when conscious, that Surgeon Captain Downward and his sick bay attendants leave him and work on his injured sailors who could be saved. By dawn it became clear Getting’s life could not be saved and neither could that of his ship. They were both stricken and barely alive. Canberra was beyond repair by the ship’s company and far from dockyard support. She could not take her place in what remained of the fleet defending the Guadalcanal beachhead and the Marines transports.

Canberra’s dead were committed to the deep from the quarterdeck and her wounded and exhausted survivors prepared to be taken off by the destroyer USS Patterson which came alongside and, at the insistence of Canberra’s men, started embarking the stretcher cases first, including the unconscious Frank Getting.

Writing later to Rear Admiral Crutchley, RN, the Commander of the Task Force, Patterson’s Captain, Commander Frank R Walker, USN, chose to pay this tribute to the steadiness of Canberra’s exhausted men:

The Commanding Officer and entire ship’s company of the USS Patterson noted with admiration the calm, cheerful and courageous spirit displayed by officers and men of Canberra.

When Patterson left from alongside because of what was then believed to be an enemy ship close by there were no outcries or entreaties — rather a cheery ‘Carry on Patterson, good luck!’ — and prompt and efficient casting off of lines, bows etc. Not a man stepped out of line. The Patterson feels privileged to have served so gallant a crew.

This remarkable letter was a most gracious gesture from a Commanding Officer who had just lost 10 of his own men killed when his ship was raked by Japanese shells.

The destroyer USS Blue then came alongside and took off 343 survivors including 18 seriously wounded. Patterson returned to Canberra, as her CO Frank Walker promised she would, and took another 398 men to USS Barnett.

Captain Getting was operated on by American surgeons but died of his wounds on board USS Barnett on passage to Noumea. He was buried at sea on 9 August. Of the 819 serving in Canberra, 193 were casualties of whom, 84 were dead.

It took 263 rounds of 5 inch shell and two more torpedoes from US destroyers to sink the still burning, abandoned hulk that was Canberra. This was a traumatic moment in the history of the RAN. This was the third Australian cruiser to be lost in war since December 1941; the light cruisers Sydney and Perth had been destroyed in battle and now the heavy cruiser Canberra was also gone.

In London PM Winston Churchill, on hearing the news of Canberra’s destruction, decided that Australia should be given a Royal Navy cruiser to replace Canberra.

He wrote privately to the First Sea Lord: ‘the Australians have lost their 8 inch cruiser Canberra. It might have a lasting effect on Australian sentiment if we gave freely and outright to the Royal Australian Navy one of our similar ships. Please give your most sympathetic consideration to this project.’

HMS Shropshire, a County class heavy cruiser, a sister ship to Canberra, was chosen as the ship to be transferred. It was intended to change her name to Canberra. But before that announcement was made the USN announced that President Roosevelt had chosen to name the next Baltimore Class heavy cruiser to be launched USS Canberra.

This was the first and only time that an American warship has been named for a foreign warship. It might have a lasting effect on Australian sentiment if we gave freely and outright to the Royal Australian Navy one of our similar ships. Please give your most sympathetic consideration to this project.’

Canberra’s battle scarred survivors came home to Australia to be treated and sent back to war. They were supplemented with new recruits and sent to Chatham dockyard in UK to pick up Shropshire and steam her back to the Pacific. Captain John Collins and the ship’s company were pleased to get to sea as the Chatham dockyard was a target for regular Luftwaffe air raids and Shropshire’s anti-aircraft guns crews engaged the bombers night after night joining the Ack Ack defence of the naval town. Her Gunnery Officer, CMDR Bracegirdle, wrote of Shropshire’s ship’s company: The welding together of Canberra’s veterans and young sailors with keenness and the possibility of retaliation against the King’s enemies in the Pacific, was quite astounding. The ship was happy and efficient from the very first. A fine ship sailed into Sydney Harbour ready for battle and action.

All on board were burning for a chance to hit back and avenge their lost comrades and to show what they could do in battle when they were able to train their turrets and fight. Inside Shropshire’s 8
inch gun turrets the crews stencilled the name CANBERRA so that no one would doubt what the guns crews were fighting for. This was now a very personal war. They got their chance. Shropshire was in the thick of the fight for 18 months in 15 battles starting in the South West Pacific. She provided deadly accurate bombardments destroying Japanese shore batteries for the Australian and American armies.

In the mid Pacific she closed up to action stations to fire off waves of kamikaze suicide attacks and shot down at least eleven aircraft. Twice this lucky ship avoided torpedoes that passed within feet of her bow and stern. Her greatest chance to hit back at the Japanese fleet was at the Battle of Surigao Straits in the Philippines in October 1944. Her target, along with other allied ships, was the powerful Japanese battleship Yamashiro. Shropshire’s gunners fired thirty-two broadsides, closing in to 12,700 yards to do so. They achieved nineteen straddles and sixteen broadside hits – superb shooting by the standards of that era.

Shropshire’s gun crews achieved their thirty two broadsides in fourteen minutes forty seconds - an amazing feat of strength and determination – worthy of highly trained athletes. Yamashiro fired back and straddled Shropshire with massive 14 inch shells any one of which might have destroyed her. The weary but jubilant gunners stopped firing to witness the sinking of the huge Yamashiro by USN ships and aircraft ably assisted by the Australian destroyer HMAS Arunta. The 84 dead from Canberra and Captain Frank Getting were well and truly avenged.

In August 1945 Shropshire steamed into Yokohama Bay and witnessed the surrender of Japan to the Allies on board the USS Missouri. Then she carried home from Japan, sick and emaciated Australian and British Prisoners of War. They were some of the last survivors from Japanese slave mines and included RAN who had survived the sinking of HMAS Perth in Sunda Strait in 1942.

Shropshire’s was chosen to represent Australia and the RAN at Spithead and in the London Victory March in 1946. Among the men marching were Canberra survivors. It was a long way from the Ironbottom Sound. It was very fitting that they should be given this high honour. They were representatives of all those RAN officers and sailors, living and dead, including their 84 lost shipmates, who had made victory a reality. There has not been another RAN seagoing ship named HMAS Shropshire but her name lives on as a Training Ship for Australian Navy Cadets.

It lived on in the memories of men who took her to war and lives still in the annals of the RAN. These young men brought great glory on their ship, on their Navy and on their homeland. Shropshire was manned by many men who had endured horror, fear and what we now call battle shock, yet they came back from death and defeat at Savo Island fighting hard and in doing so earned a very personal Victory in the Pacific.

At this memorial we remember Canberra’s 84 dead every year. We remember that members of the Royal Navy serving in Canberra were among her dead. And we remember all those USN who died defending the Marine Beachhead. When they sank USS Quincy lost 370 men, Astoria lost 219, and Vincennes lost 332. In total the United States Navy lost 1024 killed at Savo Island in cruisers and destroyers.

It learned the hard lessons of this battle. Sun Tzu, the Chinese Military strategist wrote 2000 years ago: Do not presume that the enemy will not come – prepare to meet him. That age-old lesson was re-learned and the USN, RN and RAN went on the offensive and went on to win the Pacific War and destroy the Imperial Japanese Navy just three years after the Battle for Guadalcanal was won.

The USS Canberra went to war in 1944 and was hit by an air torpedo off Formosa. Ten of her sailors were killed. We remember them too.

Next year it will be 75 years since the Battle of Savo Island. The number of veterans of the RAN and USN who were there is now small indeed.

We remember them all today with pride, respect and affection. We remember those who were lost with Canberra, whom we never knew, and those who survived to fight another day in Shropshire returned to Australia to lead their civilian lives.

Many of us gathered here knew those brave men well. I am very aware that some of the veterans gave this memorial address in years gone by. They were our fathers, grandfathers and RAN colleagues and our friends. They were also lifelong members of the naval family and the Canberra-Shropshire Association.

Here at their memorial today the Last Post will sound for them all.

Lest We Forget.
Breaching the Johore Causeway to Singapore 1942

During the disastrous retreat in the face of the Japanese invasion of Malaya in Dec 1941 a naval demolition party was given the task of blowing the causeway entry to Singapore as the last British stragglers limped to safety. Despite little time for preparation this demolition was effected successfully to deny the Japanese Army easy access to the so-called Singapore fortress.

One of the considerations of the British Command during the retreat of its army through Malaya after the Japanese invasion from Thailand in December 1941 was the means to isolate Singapore Island and its garrison, naval base and dockyard, and the RAF airfields from the mainland. Singapore was connected to the mainland at Johore Bahru by a long causeway, carrying a main road and a single track railway across from the northwestern extremity.

The Causeway had been built by piling large boulders (some of them two metres across), with a filling between them of smaller stones. Midway between the mainland and the island were six concrete culverts, or sluices, to allow free tidal stream through the causeway. The tops of these culverts were just covered at Low Water Springs. The top of the causeway was some 70ft wide, over a base on the sea bottom of about 140ft.

Some army engineers had spent a week or more attempting to excavate a hole in the middle of the causeway, but had no underwater equipment, and their efforts also caused considerable congestion to the steady stream of refugee traffic from Malaya into the relative safety of Singapore. In the event, this would probably only have created a large crater in the middle of the road, which the enemy could have filled in almost immediately.

With increasing urgency apparent, a naval demolition party under an experienced LCDR (T) was given the task of severing the causeway at short notice, to deny its use by the Japanese Army. The demolition commander decided to make use of the culverts for placing demolition charges, comprising a quantity of Mk 7 depth charges from the naval armament depot nearby, in the naval base. He used the run of the tide through the chosen culverts to carry a danbuoy float with a light wire attached, from one side to the other. By this mean he was able to haul a series of depth charge canisters at standard intervals through each end of the culverts, across and underneath the middle of the causeway. However, only a small number of charges could be hauled through by the labour available. A similar arrangement was placed in an adjacent culvert and the entire demolition mine assembly was connected through two junction boxes, buoyed alongside the causeway and led to the firing position on the island.

The work of fitting up the depth charges, splicing the wire spans between them, placing the charges and wiring up ready for firing took three days, in probably hectic circumstances. Had time allowed, it was intended to fit up the remaining culverts in a similar manner. When the causeway was finally ordered to be blown up (1st Feb 42) and the remnants of the 8th Division AIF and 2nd Battalion Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders had marched across, the timely demolition caused an explosion resulting in a clear breach of 75 metres in the causeway, thus isolating Singapore from the mainland.

(Richard Francis 2009)
History of the Naval Officers’ Club

The last Newsletter covered the establishment of the Club in 1946 and the period up to 1981, by which time the membership had sunk to 125 mainly Sydney-centric individuals from a peak in the 400s in the post-war years. At that time, Commodore JLW (“Red”) Merson was two years into his seven year term as President, and Lieutenant Commander Peter Churchill RN Retd, had just assumed the role of Honorary Secretary from Lieutenant Aber Courteney RANVR Retd. Red and Peter set about rebuilding the membership and, by 1988, they had some 320 members on the books. Rear Admiral Geoff Loosli AO, RAN Retd had taken over the presidency from Red Merson in 1986, and Red stayed on in the Committee for some further 10 years. As with any organisation, there always needs to be a catalyst for change. In the case of the Club, that catalyst was Peter Churchill, who continued in the Secretary role until 1999. During his tenure and ably assisted by other Committee members, Peter grew the membership numbers towards the 600 mark – an outstanding achievement by any measure.

During this growth period, the main Sydney social event of the year was the Trafalgar Night Dinner, held close to the anniversary date of 21 October, in the wardroom of KUTTABUL, while quarterly members’ lunches were held at the Royal Automobile Club in Macquarie Street. These were interspersed with cocktail parties in WATSON and barbecues in PENGUIN. However, it was during this period that naval messes started to adopt cost recovery models that progressively reduced the viability of holding functions in naval messes. The Trafalgar dinner moved to the Royal Automobile Club and is now held in conjunction with that Club.

Mainly due to the addition of a Victorian Division, as well as some growth in the Sydney/NSW Division, club membership was at the 500 mark when Rear Admiral DF (“Fred”) Lynam, CBE, RAN Retd assumed the presidency in 1992. In the late 80s and 90s, Club membership was essentially NSW and VIC centric with about 10% of members in ACT, WA and QLD. Fred remembers that committee meetings were held in a private room at the Rose Bay Royal Motor Yacht Club with, naturally, a bar service afterwards, while members’ lunches continued at the Royal Automobile Club. Fred pays a tribute to the energy, dedication and initiative of Peter Churchill, as well as the continued service and advice of Red Merson on the committee.

At an Extraordinary General Meeting at the RAC on 31 May, 1990, Life Membership option was adopted. Around this time, Peter started the club’s quarterly newsletter in addition to his continued management of the club’s affairs, functions, administration and the membership. The basic format gestetner-produced Newsletter became a primary means of communication with members and progressively evolved in form, size and content. The printing and despatch methods were manual and time consuming.

Peter handed over the Secretarial reins to Lieutenant Commander Fred Lane PhD, RAN Retd in 2000, after nearly 20 years of unbroken service to the Club. A little earlier, in 1995, Rear Admiral David Holthouse AO, RAN Retd, had succeeded Fred Lynam as president, and went on to become the longest serving president with a 14 year tenure until 2009. The formidable duo of Holthouse and Lane, enthusiastically supported by the new Treasurer John Ellis and the active committee, transferred all club records and business administration to computers. They continued to build and renew the membership as well as introduce other significant changes. Early in his tenure Fred improved the form of the Newsletter and switched to professional printing in the style members currently enjoy. After much hard work the NOC website was established in the early 2000s and continues to evolve to the present day.
With a large member roll numbering in the 300s, the NSW division has set the benchmark for the number and variety of social functions. Despite the reduced access to naval or army messes, the division continues a programme of lunchtime and evening events held in commercial premises that cater for the needs of members. In 2003 committee member Captain RT Derbidge MBE RAN Retd arranged the first of the Christmas luncheons at NSW Parliament House, which has become the NSW signature event in all subsequent years.

While occasional events were held in NSW and other divisions to memorialise wartime events, NSW instituted a Coral Sea Memorial luncheon in conjunction with the Australian National Maritime Museum in 2012 and this event continues with ever-growing support.

Victorian Division

While there were a small number of NOC members in Victoria, there was little drive to grow the membership, largely because the Melbourne Naval & Military Club in the late 1970s and early 1980s was flourishing, with a membership of 3000 and a waiting list of 2 years. This Club provided for the social needs of serving and retired naval officers.

However, by 1989 this was changing and a small group of NOC members met for lunch to strategise expansion of the Naval Officers Club in Victoria. The luncheon group of Dacre Smyth, Peter Freeman, Warren Kemp, Keith Nicol, Greg Keys, Hugh Jarrett and John Redman agreed on a way forward and delegated coordination of functions to John Redman, the youngest member present and a member of the Naval & Military Club.

From this early planning session, under John Redman’s leadership, Victorian membership was progressively built up to the current levels of about 120. The functions programme centred around lunches and dinners, many at the Naval & Military Club, with a number of events being held at CERBERUS and onboard CASTELMAINE. The closure of the N&M Club in 2009 precipitated a move of events to the Hero’s Club in Toorak for lunches and the Melbourne Club for dinners.

ACT Division

With David Holthouse and Peter Churchill at the helm, the Club took a punt and organised a dinner function in the wardroom HMAS HARMAN in the winter of 1997. The event was attended by the then Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Rod Taylor, AO, RAN as Guest of Honour, with his wife Judy. Inspired by this event a small group under the leadership of Commodore David Thomson AM RAN Retd., set to work to form the ACT Division of the Club, the first formal meeting of which was held in October 1999. With access to a Navy Office data list, David was able to compile a list of just over 100 addresses of former officers living in the ACT Region. Invitations were then sent to all on the...
list to attend the inaugural meeting and the election of a Committee.

The initial meeting of the ACT Division decided that the Club would meet on the first Monday of each month, except for the public holidays in January and October. These meetings continue to be informal luncheons at the Southern Cross Club. Other venues are used for variety, such as the Commonwealth Club for the Division’s annual Christmas Brunch and, occasionally, a Battle Honours lunch onboard the MV Southern Cross on Lake Burley Griffen. The ACT Division instituted a “gold coin” collection at each lunch function which is used to defray all overhead costs.

**Queensland Division**

The catalyst for the establishment of the Queensland Division was the move to Brisbane in 2000 by Captain Laurie Watson RAN Rtd. He was instrumental in forming the Queensland chapter. Fred Lane was then Secretary of the NOC and lent his enthusiastic and insightful support. Captain AJ (Wal) Farquhar RAN Retd joined Laurie in researching potential membership and between them they discovered over 100 former Naval Officers living along the strip between Murwillumbah and Noosa. A number of those officers were already members of the NOC, but could only participate in its social activities if they travelled south, so were keen to see a local chapter form. Laurie, Wal, and Merv Russell declared themselves office bearers of a putative Queensland branch and in 2001 initiated a drive to recruit as many new members as possible. About 20 new members were recruited fairly quickly, with some recruitment continuing to trickle in after the initial rush.

The inaugural Trafalgar Night dinner was held at the United Service Club in 2001. Lunches were held periodically, but they were not well attended, and the Trafalgar Night Dinner remained the principal annual function. In 2003, the Navy League of Australia joined with the NOC to make the Trafalgar Night Dinner a joint activity. Other functions initiated in the early days of the division have perpetuated to the current day. They include a popular June boat trip on Pumicestone Passage; an annual pre-Christmas lunch at Mooloolaba; and lunches at the Southport Yacht Club to accommodate Gold Coast members.

**Western Australia Division**

In 1997 David Holthouse contacted CDRE RN (Bob) Trotter RAN Retd, who was then CO of STIRLING and Senior Officer WA, and prevailed upon him to undertake the development of a West Australian division of the NOC. Despite his best efforts, Bob was unable to recruit enough players to make a local division viable.

Ever persistent, in 2006 David Holthouse approached CMDR RB (Bob) Mummery RAN Retd to take up the baton but he was unable to do so because of other commitments. However, in 2009 his situation changed and Bob was able to explore the possibility of establishing the WA Division. An inaugural meeting of the ‘new’ NOC WA was held on the 28 October 2009 in the Wardroom of HMAS STIRLING. At that meeting Bob was elected Chairman and a small committee was put in place.

From 2009 a regular programme of activities has been in place comprising formal meetings bi-monthly and an informal luncheon on alternate months. Apart from the regular meetings the division also manages visits/activities of interest, most of which are well attended.

**South Australia Division**

South Australia has had a long history with the Naval Officers’ Club, having been formed in 1946. According to an Adelaide Newspaper report of October 1947, the membership was “300 or more”. The SA division was particularly active, holding three lunches and dinners each year which attracted 90-100 guests. The division also hosted receptions for visiting ships.

The passing years gradually took their toll and in the late 1980s Commodore Orm Cooper, RAN Retd advised the President that the SA elements of the club had ceased functioning and those re-
remaining members who wished to do so had transferred their membership to the NSW division.

In 2010 the then President VADM IW (Ian) Knox AC RAN Retd invited Commander AG (Alan) Ferris RAN Retd to re-form the South Australian division, thereby completing the national footprint of the club. The limiting factors of small numbers, age diversity, work status and geography were offset by engaging with other organisations for membership and events. The division cooperates routinely with the Naval, Military and Air Force Club of SA, the Naval League of Australia, the Naval Association of Australia and the ex-Adelaide Port Division Officers.

Conclusion

The recording of the history of the Club clearly identifies the level of effort required to establish and maintain an effective association. The contributions of the stalwarts who worked behind the scenes to ensure our service affiliation continues is highly commendable. Despite the changes that have been necessary to maintain the Club’s viability, the underlying objective “to preserve and stimulate the spirit of comradeship, which has been engendered among naval officers during their Service careers by maintaining the links of members with fellow officers and the Service” has been consistently preserved. Our 70th anniversary year saw the introduction and acceptance at the 2016 AGM of the Vision 2018 strategy for the ongoing changes necessary to maintain the Club’s viability.

(Edited by Captain Rick Bayley RAN Retd)

A Running Take-off…

In the FLYCO during our tour of HMAS Canberra, I remembered a flashback to an earlier experience.

I served a happy two years in HMS Hermes 1974 – 76, equipped as either an A/S or Amphibious carrier, around the extreme flanks of NATO, from the Caribbean to Istanbul. One day I was OOW on the bridge when FLYCO called me up for the programmed launch of a Sea King helicopter: “I expect you have not seen this before, OOW…” I looked down on the flight deck to observe the Sea King trundling forward along the deck and watched as it reached the extreme forward end and fell off, then disappeared from sight. A few moments later it came back into view, struggling to gain height from sea level. Little F in FLYCO was quite calm, explaining: “…and that is called a running take-off.”

My heart had stopped (almost), I was stunned and speechless, but when I had recovered my composure I wandered across and requested that he never do that to me again without warning, I had never heard of, nor seen, a helicopter conducting a running take-off before, as the OOW was responsible for sufficient wind over the deck, before giving Bridge clearance for flying ops to commence.

Generally, we had a good relationship with the Air Department and embarked FAA aircrew, and I was ever ready to accept a joy flight at the drop of a hat.

(Richard Francis)
The Australian Naval Institute 2016 event was a tour and briefing on board the fleet flagship HMAS Canberra, held on Tuesday 6 September at Fleet Base East. This gave members an excellent opportunity to see first hand the impressive capabilities of the ship following her deployment to Fiji and participation in Exercise Rimpac 2016 off Hawaii. The event also coincided with the launch of author (and ANI member) Mike Carlton’s book Flagship. The event proved to be popular and was quickly booked out.

As advised by ANI, about sixty members and guests met at the Garden Island Dockyard gate around 1230 and after checking names and ID, were escorted to Fleet Base East where Canberra was berthed. As we approached the ship, the size of the largest ship ever built for the RAN became apparent. Displacing more than 27,500 tonnes of water and stretching 230 metres long and 32 metres wide it is larger than four Olympic-sized swimming pools and could accommodate four of the Navy’s 3600-tonne Anzac class frigates on her deck.

There are four main decks: the Well Dock and Heavy Vehicle Deck for heavy vehicles and/or cargo; Main Accommodation Deck, including the Primary Casualty Reception Facility (PCRF); Hangar and Light Vehicle Deck for light weight vehicles and cargo; and the Flight Deck. We were initially escorted to the Hangar deck where light refreshments were provided before moving to the Flight Deck for the book launch.

Rear Admiral James Goldrick very ably launched the book and introduced Mike Carlton.
As Mike explained, Flagship deals with HMAS Australia II, a ship fast, spacious and modern by the standard of the times. It centres on the ship’s role during World War II in the great battles with Japan. Flagship also deals in detail with HMAS Australia II’s sister ships HMAS Canberra I and Shropshire. The military roles of the three ships were entwined “like strands of stout cable”, as Carlton aptly put it. He noted the book gives an insight into life at sea during the war and his account covers what happened “warts and all” including uncovering some shocking revelations. These include the fact that in 1942 the crew of Australia II witnessed a deeply disturbing murder on board. This resulted from an attack on a crew member who had made allegations of “practices of unnatural vice” that had been occurring on board “unknown to authorities”. Mike emphasized that his book is not a comprehensive history of the war in the Pacific or even of the RAN’s part in this crucial conflict, but provides many insights not generally known.

Following the book launch, members were invited to tour the ship in small groups, escorted by ship’s officers. My group (as did the others) initially went down to the Well Dock and Heavy Vehicle Deck before inspecting the levels above and eventually, nine decks up, the bridge on 05 deck. As our escort noted, having to climb six decks from the accommodation to the bridge meant you ensure you have everything you need before leaving your cabin.

In addition the approximately 350 ship’s company (293 RAN, 62 Army, 3 RAAF) the ship can carry and sustain 1100 fully equipped infantry troops and 110 trucks and armoured vehicles up to and including Abrams main battle tanks. She can house 18 helicopters and up to eight medium lift choppers will be able to operate simultaneously from six landing points on the flight deck.

The medical facilities were most impressive and are of a size and scope of which would rival some regional hospitals equipped with two operating theatres, an eight bed Critical Care Unit, and a variety of low and medium dependency beds. In addition, the medical facility has dedicated areas to accommodate pathology and radiology services, x-ray, pharmacy and dental facilities.

The ship is a floating power station when considering that Canberra produces 35 megawatts combined from two diesel generators and a gas turbine – enough to power a city the size of Darwin and make 150 tonnes of freshwater each day.

Standing on the bridge — some 36 metres from the water line and 14 metres above the massive curved flight deck the physical size and significant capabilities of the ship become apparent and confirm she is of the most capable and sophisticated air-land-sea amphibious deployment systems in the world.

The visit was a memorable one and on behalf of all our thanks to ANI for arranging the visit, which was so well organized. We would also like to thank HMAS Canberra for hosting us so well and providing escorts for the tour of the ship, so we could not only see the ship’s impressive capabilities but observe the obvious pride those serving have in this magnificent ship.

(By Hector Donohue—ACT)
Social events around the Nation 2016

NSW

Lord Nelson Brewery Pub Lunch
16 June 2016

A senior group of NSW members in the bar of the Lord Nelson Brewery Pub in the Rocks on 16 June, wetting their appetite for lunch. Chris Oxenbould, Brian Wilson, John Newman and Max Sulman mustering early at the bar, disregarding the One Yard Rule.

L to R: Ian Pullar, Jim Dennis, Ron Osborn and Alun Evans

Sydney Trafalgar Dinner 21 October at Royal Automobile Club

Held jointly with the RAC a turnout of 120 enjoyed a traditional mess dinner with NOC President Rick Bayley as Mess President.

NOC and RAC committee member makes a thank you presentation to guest speaker Captain Peter Collins RANR Ret’d, former leader of Liberal Party in NSW.

Venerable members Guy Griffiths and Brian Robertson enjoying the company and the fare.
Fish and Ships  Sydney harbour excursion for NSW members, touring the windjammer James Craig and the Historic Ships’ workshop at Rozelle Bay on 30 August 2016. L to R: Kevin & Elaine Rickard, Mark Warren (Jim’s son), Jim Warren, Gordon Ramsay, Barry Spencers, Nigel Stoker and David Blazey, all eagerly looking forward to a fish lunch at ANMM Yots Café.

Northern Territory

NT Members meet in Darwin
Recently the NT NOC membership doubled overnight when the editor arranged to meet Dr Tom Lewis to hand deliver his copy of Newsletter 106 personally. Tom is a well-established military author and his latest book (Teddy Sheean – Honour Denied) is about to be reviewed in the Newsletter.

(Photo: Heidi Francis)

Queensland

QLD NOC Lunch 6 October
Under the auspices of the United Service Club, Brisbane, the Naval Officers Club and the Navy League held a “Naval Luncheon” on 6 October 2016. Our guest was RADM Stuart Meyer CSC* RAN, Commander Australian Fleet, and he spoke on “The Future of the Navy”. Since the significant reduction of the naval presence “on the ground” in SE Queensland, the naval community has become rather fragmented and this was seen as a good opportunity to re-kindle interest in naval affairs. Some 70 enthusiastic starters gathered at the United Service Club and came away much enlightened as to the way ahead for the RAN and confident that we have first class people taking the Service forward. The Fleet Commander was very generous with his time and we hope to make it an annual event.

(Andy Craig – Brisbane QLD)
ACT Division Luncheon at
Southern Cross Club—7 November 2016

Bob Ray, Viv Littlewood, Stephen Youll

Deane Walkington, David Campbell,
Peter Dechaineux

Mike Astbury, Harry Beardsell, Graham Wright

Jan Horne, Richard and Claire Hobbs

Paul Threlfall, Peter Lauder, Lynn Walton
Missiles from rebel-held Yemen fired at USN destroyer & Saudi military base

The destroyer USS Mason came under attack off the coast of Yemen on 9 October 2016, with two missiles fired at her, in the same region where an Emirati-leased vessel was badly damaged by rocket fire the previous week. The Mason was not hit in the attack, said the Pentagon. The incident occurred at about 1900 in international waters. Both missiles splashed down in the sea before reaching the Mason.

It was assessed that the missiles were launched from Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen. The USN remains committed to ensuring freedom of navigation and ensuring the safety of US ships and personnel. In response to a Saudi air strike in Yemen, killing 100 people, the Houthis responded by launching a missile at the King Fahd air base in Saudi Arabia the previous day. The Houthis denied targeting any vessels in the Red Sea.

The Yemeni capital Sanaa has been in rebel hands since September 2014.

The Emirati vessel, a catamaran type commercial vessel, was severely damaged and claimed destroyed in the attack. The USS Mason was on passage in the southern end of the Red Sea, north of Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, when attacked, at least 12 nautical miles offshore. Mason launched countermeasures but it was unclear whether the hostile missiles were shot down or would have missed the ship anyway. Investigations continue.

(Washington Post – 10 Oct 2016)

Russian aircraft carrier steams through English Channel

The Russian Navy’s only aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov steamed through the English Channel in a fleet deployment to the Mediterranean, billowing clouds of black smoke, “marked every step of the way” by HMS Duncan, the UK Defence Secretary said. NATO officials have said that the Russian deployment is the largest of its kind since the Cold War era, and have contributed shadowing warships through the NATO area.

Construction on the Admiral Kuznetsov began in 1982 and she was commissioned in 1990. Since then she has been plagued by technical problems.

The vessel is powered by steam turbines and turbo-pressurised boilers that are so unreliable that she is accompanied by a large ocean-going tug whenever she is deployed, in case of breakdown. She is considered an unlucky ship for her notoriously poor state of repair.

One Royal Navy source said: “All their ships look shiny on the outside, but are pretty horrid on the inside. You only have to look at the smoke she’s belching out to see that not all is well. “We have had people onboard Russian ships in the last ten years or so and it is always a bit of a shock. The conditions inside are pretty manky”. Flaws in the salt water piping system mean it freezes during winter. To prevent pipes bursting, fresh water is turned off to most of the cabins and half the latrines do not work.

“There is nothing more depressing for a captain when he leaves home waters than to be escorted by a tug because even your C-in-C thinks you are going to break down.” In 2009 one sailor was killed in a fire onboard during a visit to Turkey. The ship also spilled hundreds of tonnes of oil in the Irish Sea during a refuelling accident the same year.

Despite the ship’s troubles it may be unwise to write her off. She is a big, fast and impressive ship with capable jet aircraft embarked and she is going to war in Syria. Although she has had a troubled history of reliability issues and she is considered old. It is a limited naval capability compared to a USN carrier, but not to be dismissed. She can provide a limited capability and if they reach the Med they can launch some strikes with these planes.

(Telegraph UK news – 21 Oct 2016)
**USS Zumwalt**

The $6bn futuristic US destroyer that has been compared to the Starship Enterprise has been forced to return to base after developing a leak. **USS Zumwalt** (Captain James Kirk USN) commenced sea trials mid-September 2016 returned to Naval Station Norfolk Virginia after the crew found a leak in the lubrication system for one of the main propeller shafts. The USN said that such incidents are common in first ships of the class. The **Zumwalt** is due to be commissioned at Baltimore next month, then will be based in San Diego, California. The 610ft long ship has extensive automation resulting in a lean ships manning - half the 300 crew of previous destroyers. Her striking design appearance reduces her radar profile considerably. *(Daily Mail UK 24 Sep 16)*

**Former Cadets “Giving Back”**

Starting as the AUSTRALIAN SEA CADET CORPS, transformed to the NAVAL RESERVE CADETS and lastly named the AUSTRALIAN NAVY CADETS, the Cadet organisation is one that most members of the NOC will be aware. Many members of the Cadet organisation went on and joined the Navy through various avenues for entry. Many had brilliant careers as sailors and or officers, and sometimes both, with a very small number even reaching Flag rank.

In 1983 a small group comprising former cadets and parents of former cadets banded together to form a social and supportive organisation with the primary aim of supporting Navy Cadet units in Western Australia. Over time this small organisation evolved as the Naval Cadets Association (NCA) Incorporated in the state of Western Australia. The NCA is proud of its achievements to date which have resulted in well more than $100,000 being donated in cash, kind and support activities to Navy Cadet units across Western Australia.

Time, changing attitudes, and greater support from the Navy and from individual units Parents and Friends committees, have all conspired to reduce calls to the NCA for assistance to cadet units. Concomitantly the members of the NCA have grown older and have not found it easy to attract new members. And so the NCA is to unincorporate and retire to the being of a local social club only. Under the laws of incorporation; an incorporated body wishing to un-incorporate must divest itself of all assets to recognised recipients.

As the NCA’s assets were all in cash, and noting the withdrawal of Whalers and Cutters from the RAN boat inventory and a resurgence of rowing competitions in the wider community youth organisations, the membership agreed to provide pulling or rowing boats to the Cadet organisation. Such an action is hoped to bring strong lessons in; coordination, teamwork and leadership to the many cadets that will use these boats.

In researching the availability of suitable boats within a limited fund range, the NCA discovered the availability of “flat pack” boats and decided on a mix of the St Ayles class and Kernic class boats as ideal for the cadets to use. The St Ayles is a boat of approximately 7 metres in length and the Kernic approximately 6. Two St Ayles will be provided to be shared among the six cadet units positioned in the Perth greater metropolitan and four Kernic class into the regions of Esperance, Albany, Geraldton and Port Hedland. A further Kernic is being considered for Broome, TS BROOME having recently been transferred back from Northern Command to Western Command.

Construction of the boats is being undertaken under the watchful eye of a professional boat builder supported by members of the NCA. NCA members then take on the task of applying various coats of epoxy resin and paint systems to the boats and finishing off with the fitment of accessories such as; thole pins and oars, rudder, fairleads, bollards and cleats. Each boat is provided with a trailer licensed for road use.

One St Ayles class has been delivered and the second is soon to be. Port Hedland and Esperance have each taken delivery of a Kerinc class, Albany and Geraldton to follow and it is hoped that the project will be complete by fourth quarter of 2016. To date the boats have been well received and members of the NCA are proud to be “Giving Back”.

*(Bob Mummery—WA)*
TOBRUK – the lifting of the siege

December 9, 2016 is the 75th anniversary of the lifting of the siege of Tobruk, the port on the north coast of Libya, that proved such a thorn in Rommel’s side during the eight months that the siege lasted. The Australian War Memorial describes it as one of the longest sieges in British military history.

Whenever the siege of Tobruk is remembered the Australian soldiers, who formed the greater part of the garrison for most of the time, are quite rightly afforded pride of place.

However, the maintenance of the siege would not have been possible if it had not been for the Inshore Squadron, that curious fleet of ships and craft that kept the besieged garrison supplied with everything they needed to hold out for all that time. A fleet of ships ranging from former British India small liners, ex China Station gunboats, South African Navy armed whalers, Canadian minesweepers, tank landing craft, water and petrol carriers, bulk traders and even some sailing vessels like the ketch Zingarella and the captured schooner Maria Giovanni, supplemented quite often with fast minelayers, destroyers and frigates when these could be spared from other operations.

Supplies were usually loaded in the Egyptian ports of Alexandria and Mersah Matruh and, because of lack of air cover, many passages in and out of Tobruk had to be done at night which meant that unloading and back-loading had to be done very quickly and this in a port which daily became more cluttered with vessels that had been sunk by enemy air attacks.

Prominent among the warships supplementing the Inshore Squadron was the ‘Scrap Iron Flotilla’, the Royal Australian Navy’s World War 1 destroyers commanded by Captain H. Waller in HMAS Stuart, with HMAS Vampire (Lieutenant Commander J. Walsh) HMAS Vendetta (Lieutenant Commander R. Rhoades) HMAS Voyager (Lieutenant Commander J. Morrow) and HMAS Waterhen (Lieutenant Commander J. Swain). They were also joined by the N Class Destroyers HMAS Napier (Captain S. Arliss, RN) and HMAS Nizam (Lieutenant Commander M. Clark) and the Grimsby Class sloops HMAS Parramatta (Lieutenant Commander J. Walker) and HMAS Yarra (Lieutenant Commander W. Harrington – a future Chief of Naval Staff). The name “Scrap Iron Flotilla” was given to them by the Nazi Propaganda Minister Goebbels because they were so old. The Nazis also described the troops as being “caught like rats in a trap” hence they proudly became The Rats of Tobruk.

Of these ships HMAS Waterhen was sunk on 30 June following being hit by dive bombers and HMAS Parramatta was torpedoed by a U-boat off Tobruk on 27 November. The Australian ships were credited with doing 139 runs into Tobruk. HMAS Vendetta was the last of the Scrap Iron Flotilla to leave in October having done 39 trips, more than any other ship.

The ships usually worked in pairs and a typical run would be as follows:
Day 1 Berth at night alongside at Alexandria, load 40 tons of 3.7 inch ammunition, land mines, 25 pdr ammunition, sacks of potatoes and onions, cases of dry provisions, mail etc all stowed on deck.

Day 1 0700 Embark 100 personnel
0800 Sail for Tobruk Moderate speed until 1500 Increase to 25 knots
2000 (dusk) Increase to 28 knots
2300 Arrive Tobruk, slow in through channel and boom. Anchor or berth on wreck or oiling jetty + Discharge stores and men into lighters, tugs etc

Day 2 0100 Sail – slow out then as fast as slowest ship allowed
0500 Daylight – rendezvous with fighters
0900 Arrive Mersah Matruh – disembark wounded etc p.m. Embark stores

Day 3 1330 Sail for Tobruk – as for Day 1

Day 4 Return to Alexandria arriving about 1400

+ Oil fuel could be supplied from ex-Italian shore tanks, gravity fed at 30-50 tons per hour

On Days 2 and 4 other pairs of destroyers would make the trip and so rotation would go on.
The slower tank landing craft and other small ships were usually sailed to arrive just after dawn. During the day it was tried to hide them using camouflage nets berthed alongside rocks or wrecks in the harbour. They usually remained two nights and, if possible, were back-loaded with damaged tanks or other valuable vehicles for repair.

A difficulty with night off-loading was ensuring the right stores got to the right destination. When, after a request from Lieutenant General Morshead, the Tobruk Fortress Commander, some luxuries began to arrive a careful watch was essential. A bottle of whisky or a case of beer could disappear very quickly!

In early August it was decided to pull the Australian troops out of Tobruk and replace them with Polish and British elements. Again most of this was done by warships and at night. All went well until 25 October when the fast minelayer HMS Latona was bombed and sunk on passage to Tobruk. This meant that the evacuation had to be abandoned and the 2/13th Battalion and some other Australian troops had to remain in Tobruk until the siege was lifted.

The movements in and out of Tobruk during the siege were as follows:

The ships delivered 72 tanks, 92 guns, 33,946 tons of stores, ammunition, food and fresh water and 108 live sheep (food for the Indian troops). 32,667 troops were evacuated and were replaced by 34,113 fresh troops. 7,516 wounded men were transported to base hospitals and 7,097 captured prisoners were taken to the rear.

27 Naval ships were sunk and 27 damaged. 7 Merchant ships were sunk and 6 damaged. The casualties were Naval personnel killed or missing 469, wounded 186 and Merchant Service killed or missing 70, wounded 55.

(Source: C-in-C Med’s signal to Admiralty 760 dated 12/12/41)

A few days after the siege was lifted Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean issued this Special Message.

“Eight months ago the enemy isolated the fortress of Tobruk and laid siege to it. Today Tobruk is no longer besieged and her garrison is pursuing the retreating enemy to the westward. During those fateful eight months the task of maintaining the garrison with all its bodily needs and war supplies has fallen on the Navy and units of the Merchant Navy. Most of the work devolved on destroyers and small ships.

Units from the Royal Navy, the Royal Australian Navy, and Indian Navies and the naval forces of the Union of South Africa all took their part whilst amongst the crews of the merchant ships were officers and men of the Allied Nations. When the tale of the siege of Tobruk comes to be written, the part played by these craft will provide a story worthy of the highest traditions of our naval history.

I have watched with admiration the work of the “little ships”. They have borne the burden of the day but neither fatigue nor the assaults of the enemy have deterred them. Their achievement is one of which they may all be proud.”

ALEXANDRIA

(sgd)
A B CUNNINGHAM
ADMIRAL
19 DECEMBER

SIGNAL SENT BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MEDITERRANEAN ON LIFTING OF SIEGE OF TOBRUK

During siege of TOBRUK between 12th April and 10th December, 1941:

Following were moved by sea:-

Personnel in 32667
Personnel out 34113
Wounded out 7516
Prisoners-of-war out 7097
Stores in 33,946 tons.
Tanks in 72
Guns in 92
Sheep in 108

The following casualties were sustained:-

(a) H.M. ships sunk:

Destroyers 2
Sloops 3
A/S and M/S vessels 7
“A” lighters 6
HMstore-carriers and schooners 7
Gunboats 1
Fast Minelayers 1

Total: 27
(b) H.M. Ships damaged:
- Destroyers: 7
- Sloops: 1
- A/S & M/S ships: 11
- “A”Lighters: 3
- Gunboats: 3
- Schooner and H.M.S. Glenroy: 1
- Total: 27

c) Merchant-ships sunk and 1 schooner: 6

d) Merchant-ships damaged: 6

(e) Naval casualties, killed or missing: 459
- wounded: 186

(f) Merchant Service killed or missing: 70
- wounded: 55

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- **The Navy Day By Day**
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- **Tobruk 1941**
  - Chester Wilmot
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  - Peter Cochrane
- **The Rats Remain**
  - J.S. Cumpston
- **Pedlar Palmer of Tobruk**
  - A.B. Palmer

Written material
- Captain A.L. Poland,
  - Senior Naval Officer, Inshore Squadron 1941

Peter Poland - Rose Bay NSW

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**Wreck of WW1 UB-85 found in Irish Sea**

The wreck of a German U-boat which sank nearly 100 years ago has been discovered off the southwest coast of Scotland by engineers laying underwater power cables on the seabed. Remarkable sonar images show the missing submarine is largely intact off the Galloway coast. Historians believe the vessel could be UB-85, which was claimed sunk by HMS Coreopsis on 30 April 1918, according to official records.

The U-boat was caught on the surface by the anti-submarine sloop HMS Coreopsis, shelled and eventually sunk. The German crew surrendered without resistance. On subsequent interrogation the German commanding Officer, Kapitan-Leutnant Gunther Krech, told a wild tale. He said that his boat was surfaced at night recharging the batteries when a strange beast rose from the water and attacked them. Krech described it with “...large eyes, set in a horny sort of skull... with teeth that could be seen glistening in the moonlight. He said that his crew began firing at the beast until it dropped back into the sea. However, Krech said that the submarine was so damaged in the battle with the monster it could no longer submerge. Innes McCartney, an historian and marine archaeologist who helped identify the wreck, believes the discovery of the submarine could help solve the mystery of its final hours. The Germans lost 178 U-boats in the First World War at sea, and as they are being found now the number of those unaccounted for is dropping rapidly, so every time a site is found it can be reconciled to the records His prognosis does not involve sea monsters. The U-boat was caught on the surface while charging her batteries, spotted the patrol vessel and attempted to crash dive to escape, but the young officer closing the hatch did not manage to do this correctly, so that as the submarine dived seawater began to flood into the hull, and they were forced to make an emergency surfacing, but being unable to dive, had no option except surrender to HMS Coreopsis and were taken prisoner.

*(CBC News files – 19 Oct 2016)*
Some naval history books traverse well worn tracks where many authors have been before and contribute little that is new or engaging. Mike Carlton’s new book Flagship is not such a book. On the contrary, this book has been missing from the literature. It is a timely book that will fill the general void in the public’s understanding of the Royal Australian Navy’s war at sea 1939 – 45 and the Pacific campaign in particular.

It is remarkable how many of our fellow citizens are well versed in the stories of Tobruk, Alamein, the Fall of Singapore and the battles for the Kokoda Track. Whereas the loss of the light cruiser HMAS Sydney with all 645 of her men off WA in 1941 has been exhaustively retold, the lives of the sailors who served in the ships of the RAN, and the Australian merchant navy in the Pacific war remains largely unknown.

The RAN deployed to war in the Pacific in December 1941 to stem the Japanese invasion of South East Asia and Australia’s northern waters. By January 1943 the USN and the RAN with the RAAF had secured the sea lanes from an enemy that had planned to dominate Australia’s links to the world as a part of its plan to maintain Japanese dominance in the South West Pacific.

We are approaching the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea, where the Japanese advance was first halted. The story told in Flagship of how Admiral Jack Crace, originally from Gungahlin near Canberra, took his RAN /USN squadron and blocked the Jomard passage to the Japanese should be better known and its significance more widely understood. Crace and his men, RAN and USN, despite being under air attack fought and survived and in doing so deterred the Japanese High Command from attempting to carry out their plan for a seaborne invasion of virtually defenceless Port Moresby.

Flagship covers the tragic night battle at Savo Island off Guadalcanal, the bombardment of New Guinea beaches as the allies went north and the vast sea battles off the Philippines at Leyte Gulf, Surigao Strait and Lingayen Gulf, when the Japanese surface fleet ceased to exist as a fighting fleet. These events are infrequently recalled and not formally taught to a rising generation.

The few Australians with whom the names of these sea battles may resonate have little or no understanding that cruisers and destroyers of the RAN fought with the USN, and later the powerful British Pacific Fleet, right through the Pacific campaign from 1942 - 1945.

During those years RAN and USN ships sustained the allied armies fighting in jungles. They poured naval gunfire down on Japanese coastal strongpoints and softened up resistance saving thousands of allied soldiers and marines from virtually certain death as they disembarked from landing craft. Flagship brings these engagements vividly back to attention. The RAN paid a very high price in fine ships and young lives for being in the thick of the fight so often and for so long. The repeated and often fatal kamikaze attacks which HMAS Australia’s crew endured in late 1944 and early 1945, while continuing to do their duty, should be the stuff of national inspiration. It is not.

Why is there such a blind spot in the general knowledge of the RAN’s role in the Pacific? What accounts for this national amnesia? It may owe much to the lack, until now, of one good book which is available and easily read by any who wish to learn what happened to Australian sailors at war in the Pacific. Australia’s naval history in World War II is a significant part of the nation’s story and deserves to be formally taught to each generation. Flagship is the book every school could use for this purpose.

Sterling work has been done by generations of naval historians who have explained in ships histories where the RAN was in action. The sacrifices of the men who fought their ships is well documented. But much of that work is long out of print and none of those writers, since the official historian of the RAN in WWII G.H. Gill, have worked on such a wide canvas as Flagship does. This book tells the whole story of the contribution of the heavy cruisers, Australia and Shropshire made in the countless engagements large and small which led inexorably to the Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay.

But this is not a dry account of maritime campaigns only of interest to naval history buffs. Flagship is a rattling good read, full of fascinating detail and grounded in excellent research aided by the professional historians at the Seapower Centre – Australia where the Navy keeps its historical archives. Flagship is also a social history of a very particular, never to be repeated, human experience. It asks, and answers, the question how did young Australian civilians transform and adapt to what the Naval Prayer calls “the dangers of the sea and the violence of the enemy.”

Flagship reaches into the cruisers mess decks and gunrooms and tells through their letters and diaries the stories of the young men who lived there, often for years, while their ship carried them into danger and back out again. Here are the lives of those who lived and returned to Australia, and those who
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*Flagship* reaches into the cruisers mess decks and gunrooms and tells through their letters and diaries the stories of the young men who lived there, often for years, while their ship carried them into danger and back out again. Here are the lives of those who lived and returned to Australia, and those who were killed in action and buried at sea by their grieving shipmates, usually the same day. *Flagship* also deals with the role that the American High Command in Australia and the Australian Naval Board played in the decisions about where and when the RAN went into action. Key allied commanders and their political masters made choices which determined the outcome of the Australian contribution to the war in the Pacific.

The manifest failures that led to disaster at the night battle of Savo Island and the loss of HMAS Canberra are not glossed over and the sad truth that it was a badly aimed, hastily fired, American torpedo which first crippled the Australian cruiser is not shied away from. This fact has been widely accepted and documented since 1994 when it was fully explained by those RAN officers who were there and much later in life gained access to the USN’s archives. It is right that this sad truth should be re-stated with supporting evidence. But also here is the epic account HMAS Canberra’s surviving crew who recovered from the loss of their captain, their ship and shipmates and went to war again in HMAS Shropshire, an RN cruiser freely given by Winston Churchill to the RAN. Her guns crews avenged their eighty four dead Canberra shipmates when they attacked the Japanese battle line at Surigao Strait and earned the high praise of the Americans for the speed and accuracy of their 8 inch salvos.

That is a great Australian example of “never say die” and *Flagship* tells that story, and many others, with the generosity, accuracy and the compassion which the men who lived these quietly heroic lives richly deserve.
Commander James Bond, who has died aged 70, earned his place in maritime history by the discovery and charting of Hydrographers Passage, a new deep-water shipping channel through the Great Barrier Reef.

In 1980 Bond was posted in command of the survey ship HMAS Flinders and over the next three years he conducted surveys off the coasts of Queensland and Papua New Guinea, including a passage through the Great Barrier Reef for the export of coal from Australian mines.

This new route was a 60 mile long passage from hay Point Queensland, one of the largest coal ports in the world, to the open waters of the Coral Sea and on to markets in Asia. At its narrowest, Hydrographers Passage was less than a mile wide, with shoals and shallow water through which 5-knot tides raced and when these met the 30-knot trade winds, the surface of the sea “literally boiled”.

The route that Bond discovered and chartered cut 250 miles off the previous route, saving time and cost in shipping, and reducing risk to the environment. The route has since had a major impact on the economic viability of Australia’s coal export trade, and saved the industry millions of dollars.

Bond acknowledged the contributions of his predecessors that led to his discovery, and, in the tradition of the great navigators before him, he named some of the previously uncharted features after his crew and family (Sharon Shoal and James Reef were named after one of his daughters and his son).

For this achievement in 1985, Bond accepted from the Duke of Kent, honorary president of the Royal Geographical Society, the J B Thomson Foundation Gold Medal, on behalf of the officers and men of HMAS Flinders.

Graham James Bond was born in October 1945 in Adelaide, where only his mother ever called him by his first given name. Inevitably, he was known as “007”, and though normally a modest man he accepted invitations to attend premiers of James Bond movies, and he took quiet enjoyment in announcing himself at check-in desks. He appreciated it when strangers on hearing his name would first laugh, then insist upon photographs and signatures and would buy him drinks.

Bond joined the RAN in 1966 and specialised in hydrography in 1968, an elite branch of all navies, involving lengthy and often lonely deployments in small boats and (before the introduction of modern technology) sounding the waters of the world. Off the Australian northern coasts the surveys were also conducted in oppressive heat.

Bond was OIC RAN School of Hydrography (1973-74), served on exchange duties in the Royal Navy and in the survey ship HMS Beagle, and in 1977 attended the Navy’s highest specialist course for hydrographers at HMS DRAKE before taking command of HMAS Flinders.

He was promoted to commander in 1986 but resigned from the RAN two years later. As a reservist he conducted a number of surveys in MV Cape Pillar in the East Solomon Islands, until in 1993 he joined the Australian Maritime Safety Agency as a civilian.

Bond worked in Navigation Safety, International Relations and Ship Safety section, where he supplied practical and technical advice for the upkeep and operation of ships’ routing systems, and the provision of regular safety instructions to mariners. While setting exacting standards, he was well liked, could explain the art of navigation to non-specialists and always kept his sense of humour. He retired from AMSA in 2013.

Commander James Bond, born 4 October 1945, died 12 April 2016.

(The Telegraph UK 23 May 2016)


During the Malayan Emergency HMA Ships Anzac and Tobruk were patrolling off the SE coast of the state of Johore on 26 August 1957. Both destroyers were tasked to carry out an operational bombardment of suspected Communist guerrilla positions near Jason Bay. Each warship fired 60 rounds of 4.5” HE shells. While the military outcome was inconclusive, naval folklore maintains that a colony of jungle monkeys was traumatised by the unwelcome incident.

Robert Geoffrey Loosli was the XO of HMAS Anzac at the time and rose to become a distinguished senior naval officer. Of Swiss ancestry, Geoff was born in Melbourne in 1926 and later boarded at the Church of England Grammar School and sat for his entrance examination to the RAN College at Flinders ND on the day Australia declared war on Germany in 1939. One of 21 cadet midshipmen, he graduated four years later in September 1943. He was among 14 newly-promoted midshipmen who were sent to Britain for further training and service with the Royal Navy.

Despatched to Scapa Flow, MIDN Loosli and four other Australians reported on board HMS Berwick, a County Class heavy cruiser, in early 1944. During that year Berwick served off the Norwegian coast and participated in several convoys to Russia.

In late December 1944, the young RAN officers were dispersed, with Loosli joining a destroyer, HMS Scourge. Again, he returned to the convoys escorting war material to Russia. In late January 1945 Scourge left Kola Inlet for home. At very slow speed the ship passed through a large group of shipwrecked sailors from torpedoed ships, all floating in the calm waters with heads held upright by their lifejackets, long dead from exposure in the freezing cold sea. Seventy years on, Loosli was proud to be issued with the Arctic Star award for that period of service. On return to Australia in late 1945, Sub Lieutenant Loosli served in HMA Ships Arunta and Kanimbla, before returning to Britain to join HMAS Sydney in 1948.

Back home in 1949, now a lieutenant, Loosli served in GPV 957, and was then involved in Minesweeping work off North Queensland. He was then repuesto back to Britain in 1951 to specialise as a direction officer. After subsequent RN service, it was back to Australia where he joined HMAS Anzac, which deployed to the Far East 1957-58.

In 1951 he married Jocelyn Paton. After a posting to HMAS Melbourne, again deployed to the far East in 1958-9, he then had a brief stint in Navy Office, before assuming his first command, HMAS Gascowye in 1960-62. He then attended joint services staff college in Britain in 1962, followed by exchange service with the RN. On promotion to commander in 1962, he was posted as the executive officer of HMAS CRESWELL.

In 1967, he was appointed in command HMAS Stuart, where he served with the Far East Fleet. That 1967 tour included a brief period escorting HMAS Sydney on her return from Vietnam with the 5th and 6th battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment embarked. In 1968, Loosli was selected to attend the US Naval War College, and, on return, he had a short posting to the Joint Services’ Staff College in Weston Creek, ACT.

In 1971, Captain Loosli was appointed as commanding officer of HMAS Brisbane, the last combat warship to serve on the gun-line off South Vietnam. One of his senior sailors, Chief Communications Yeoman Sam Hughes found him a likeable and competent CO and a thorough gentleman. He was well respected by officers and the ship’s company. In 1972, Loosli was decorated with a CBE. From 1975-79 he served as Australia’s naval attaché in Washington DC. On return to Australia, promoted to rear admiral, Loosli had a final posting to Canberra. Tall and loose-limbed, Loosli was an active sportsman in tennis, sailing, and a keen golfer, playing his last round at Royal Sydney only a week before his death.

(Mike Fogarty – Sydney Morning Herald 17 Oct 2016)
Wounded by a Tin of Peaches
The Tobruk Spud Run—1941

By late CPO CGM Cooper RAN

The three Services, Navy, Army and Air Force were as dissimilar as chalk and cheese, yet we were all bent on one purpose, to beat the enemy. Without the Navy and its physical communications Tobruk would have had a torrid time. The Air Force ran out of planes. Without the Army there would not have been a Tobruk Siege, and who could have forecast where Rommel would have finished up, but in all seriousness, there were funny sides.

HMA Voyager was alongside the wharf for supplies in Alexandria Harbour. On board poured in all sorts of cargo. A destroyer is a warship and the only stowage area is around the upper deck. So came – crates of landmines, gun barrels, ammunition in boxes, medical supplies, crates of spuds, cases of tinned food etc, etc...and last of all troops with all their equipment. The weather was fine as we sailed in early afternoon, a gentle swell gave us slight movement. When we cleared our own defensive minefields as we left Alex and headed in a westerly direction. The troops made themselves at home as well as circumstances allowed, cups of tea were very welcome to those who were not seasick.

I went for a stroll up to the ship’s bridge when we got settled down – to listen in to any new news. The Captain was on the bridge and a fellow in Army officer’s uniform gave a polite nod. The Captain asked me: “Do you know who this is, Chief?”

I said: “No, Sir”.

So he told me: “This is Major-General Moorshead”.

We increased speed as the light faded – by dark we had the old girl’s side pulsing, and the turbines screaming – we were now in enemy territory and hoped that we had not been spotted – we sped on – passed Bardia and on to Tobruk, expecting to arrive about midnight.

We were off the approaches to Tobruk safely and proceeding slowly along the mineswept narrow entrance, towards the harbour, when a voice came out of the sea very close by – “Help!!”

The ship was stopped and a quick torch flash showed a man swimming quickly from a piece of flotsam debris to our ship. He was picked up smartly by a rope over the side and we proceeded on our cautious way. The man was the only survivor of a South African Navy minesweeper, which had struck a mine earlier in the day.

We entered harbour safely after gliding sideways about six inches off a sunken ship, halfway to the jetty. Once alongside a team of workers soon had all the stores cleared off the upper deck. We also opened our very small canteen and it was quickly denuded of all stock. In the faint lights permissible we could see khaki-clad and bandaged fugures making their way onboard – then came the stretchers. The mess tables were lowered and all possible space made available. The upper deck was also filled with figures in khaki.

We slipped berthing lines quickly and felt our way out of harbour in the welcome darkness. Once in the open sea we proceeded east at speed to clear enemy territory before daylight. On the return journey our hospitality did not consist of much – we had very little – but the good old Navy stopgap in a cup of “Kye” (or drinking chocolate) warmed the cockles of many a thankful heart.

Back alongside the wharf in the safety of Alex Harbour we discharged our wounded and war-weary guests, then alongside the tanker to fill up with fuel and a few provisions – then out to a buoy, alongside one of our sister ships, HMAS Vampire. News spread fast – even as we were securing alongside – “Heard about the Waterhen?”

“No, what happened?” “She got sunk this morning going up to Tobruk” (30 June 1941)

“What!? Anybody hurt?”

“They all got rescued, but the Gunner’s Mate, Sid Prowd, is in hospital – the old “Hen” copped a near miss by the engine room and blew a hole in her.”

Well, Waterhen was one of our five Australian destroyers – the Scrap Iron Flotilla – as Lord Haw Haw called us – and Sid Prowd was my cobber and opposite number.

As soon as leave was granted I shot off
ashore, found which hospital he was in and paid him a visit. There he was lying, nice white sheets in a hospital bed, laying back like Lord Muck, with one side of his face all swollen up and bandaged – and looking very sheepish.

After confirming that the face was the only damage, I said:

“Well, what happened to the face, Sid?”

He said: “I’ll go down on record for this, but when the bomb went off close by to me on the upper deck, it nearly lifted the ship out of the water, the deck cargo for Tobruk went up in the air, and I got hit in the face by a tin of canned fruit!”

He grimaced: “Wounded by a tin of peaches!!”

(Previously published in the Rats of Tobruk Association magazine – contributed by John Hordern from NHS archives, and also reprinted in NHSA Review.

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Hot Press and Humour

Royal Navy ‘s new Successor Class submarines
At a ceremonious event at BAE Systems’ yard in Barrow UK, the Defence Secretary Michael Fallon commented that it would have been preferable for BAE to have bought British steel for the hull, but no British company was producing the type of steel needed when bids were taken for the contract.

The Defence Secretary warned the new nuclear submarine programme “cannot be late because the Vanguard Class submarines are coming to the end of their working life”. As he started the machine to cut the first steel for the 17,000 tonne Successor submarines, it was also noted that the Defence Secretary was “throwing down the gauntlet ”to UK industry.

(UK press reports – 7 October 2016)

Test for Insanity
During a shipboard cocktail party, a famous psychiatrist was a guest and was asked by another guest:

“Tell us, Doctor, how do you tell whether a person is really insane?”

“Just ask him a few simple questions.”

“Such as?”

“Well, sometimes we ask him a simple historical question, such as: Captain Cook made three voyages around the world and died on one of them. Which one was it?”

“Oh, come, Doctor – that’s hardly fair. After all, we don’t all remember our naval history…”

(Garden Island Social and Sporting Club journal – June 1985)

Just Bargin’ Along
Between the wars (1930s) when the USN battleship force anchored in the Long Beach, California, area, most of the ships’ boat went inshore to the San Pedro landing jetty. Many complaints were received about the damage done by the wash of the boats speeding. Strict orders were issued for boats to maintain slow speed in the channel.

Subsequently, one boat coxswain was put on report for failure to obey these orders. At the Captain’s Mast (Defaulters) the Captain of the flagship asked his coxswain:

“Did you make full speed up in the San Pedro Channel?”

“No, Sir, “ replied the accused, “but I passed a lot of boats that were…”

(USNI Proceedings – 1990)
More Cloak than Dagger
Molly J Sasson

Book Review by Kevin Rickard

“A nation can survive its fools and even the ambitious, but it cannot survive traitors from within. An enemy at the gates is less formidable but the traitor moves among those within the gates freely. He rots the soul of a nation, he injects the body politic so that it can no longer resist.”

(Marcus Tullius Cicero, 106 – 43 BC)

This is a relevant quote by former spy, Molly Sasson, in her book. She maintains that ASIO was penetrated by the Soviets in the late 1940s, mid 1970s and early 1980s. The Soviets always seemed to be step ahead of us. If we put on an operation, it failed. There must have been a tip off, is her claim. Aside from the problem of Soviet penetration of Australia, other intriguing topics in her autobiography are “heroes, has-beens, bunglers, spies, discrimination at ASIO HQ in Melbourne, the details of M15, Roger Hollis and the founding of ASIO. Hollis himself was under a cloud – was he a British patriot or a Soviet spy?

This autobiography by 92 year old Molly breaks the 46 year silence about her time with ASIO during which clandestine Soviet activity was occurring in Australia. Her career began with the RAF in Air Intelligence. She worked with British Intelligence during WW2, and then with M15 in Britain and The Netherlands at the height of the Cold War. None other than Brigadier Sir Charles Spry CBE DSO offered Ms Sasson a position with ASIO in Canberra. It is her objective assessment of ASIO that command much attention and raises still unanswered questions of national importance. Accordingly, it poses the question why successive governments appear to have persisted with a cover up.

The Verona Project

This was a counter intelligence programme involving secret decryption by US and British signals intelligence agents of Soviet radio messages transmitted by the NKVD, KGB and GRU during the 1940s. All this code-breaking was done by the US Army Signals Intelligence service (USAISIS) in Virginia USA and the UK Government communication HQ (GCHQ) at Bletchley Park. Verona decrypts revealed that Moscow had spies in almost every department of the US Administration, especially the Manhattan Project. Verona also identified top British spies, Donald McLean and Kim Philby. Verona demonstrated beyond doubt that the Soviet Union was conducting major espionage in Australia both during and after WW2. Exchange of sensitive information between Britain, the US and Australia was targeted, most likely with considerable success. Accordingly, he US and Britain were reluctant to share information in the intelligence chain with the weakest link, Australia.

The Soviet agents were lethal. Moreover, there was also an endemic failure at ASIO so that the Soviet spies in Australia were reporting directly to the KGB and GRU. These persons were the same sort of traitors referred to by the Roman philosopher, Cicero, two millennia ago. Their trade was treachery. As
a result Australia became alone and isolated.

**Department of Foreign Affairs**

With respect to Soviet espionage in Australia Department of Foreign Affairs, relevant spies were Wally Clayton, Australian Communist Party member, Dr Ian Milner, a New Zealander and Rhodes scholar. Jim Hill, a Melbourne university graduate, with known communist sympathies, and the academic, Katie Pritchard. Then there was the Department Secretary, from 1947 to 1950, Dr John Burton and Dr Vere “Bert” Evatt. Evatt was a recognised communist sympathiser, former High Court judge and one time Leader of the Labour Party. Evatt declared in a speech to Parliament that he had written to Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov and was “reassured” that there were no Soviet spies in Australia! First there was stunned silence in the House of Representatives, but the derisive laughter.

**Soviets and the Labour Party**

There were Soviet agents of influence in the Labour Party, particularly Dr James Ford and “Jim” Cairns, who also favoured North Vietnam and the Vietcong. There was also Arthur Giezelt AO, a full-time paid member and secret operative of the Communist Party of Australia. Paul Keating described Giezelt as a “black widow spider” who was “seemingly not a menace but poisonous all the same”. At this time, in April 1954, the dramatic defection to Australia of Vladimir Petrov and his wife, Edodka, both officers of the KGB, occurred. Petrov defected when he realised the KGB had learnt of his intentions. His wife was seized by two thuggish Soviet couriers and bundled onto an aircraft but was saved when the plane landed at Darwin to refuel. The Petrovs sought asylum in Australia. Prime Minister Menzies set up a Royal Commission to investigate Petrov’s testimony about Soviet espionage in Australia.

**Heroes, Has-beens, Bunglers and Spies**

The infamous 1973 Murphy raid on ASIO headquarters in St Kilda Road, Melbourne, as an extraordinary story. Labour Attorney general, Li-
Intentionally Blank
Application for Membership of the Naval Officers’ Club

To: Membership Secretary, Naval Officers’ Club  
PO Box 648, Pennant Hills, NSW 1715

I forward this application for membership of the Naval Officers’ Club of Australia. In the event of my being accepted, I hereby undertake to conform to the Constitution of the Club (see NOC website). My naval association is:

.................................................................................................................... in the ...........................................Navy

Personal Details

Last name ........................................ First name(s).................................................................

Orders/decorations .............................. Rank .................................................................

Naval Service. Year joined ..............Year left .................................................................

Postal address .................................................................................................................

.........................................................................................................................Postcode...........................................

Email ................................................................. Telephone .................................

Occupation ..................................................Partner’s name .................................

Membership

Annual Subscription $30 – expires end February each year

Merchandise

Silk Club Tie $45 – Yes/No

Other merchandise as advertised in quarterly Newsletter and on NOC website

Payment

Amount = $......... Scan form and email to Hon Treasurer OR post.

EFT. BSB 032-087, Account 174666, Naval Officers’ Club. Email Hon Treasurer at jwellis2@bigpond.com

OR

Cheque. To Hon Treasurer at PO Box 648, Pennant Hills, NSW 1715

Signature ................................................................. Date ..............................................