



Call the Hands



Issue No. 89

February/March 2025

From the President

Welcome to our first of five editions of *Call the Hands* for 2025. You can expect the others in early May, July, September and November. Accompanying this edition are two occasional papers which I trust you will find of interest. Both papers highlight historic and remarkable acquisition and capability development achievements.

For our subscribers, your support is very much appreciated. Perhaps it is time to become a member and receive the full benefits of membership. Application is easy through the Society's [website shop](#).

Included in occasional paper 191 is a short description of the rapid development of the RANs fixed wing carrier capability in the aftermath of WW2. That is, from the commencement of early planning in 1945 through, Naval Board endorsement in 1946, Government approval in May 1947 the RAN Fleet Air Arm was formed in less than two years. This included the acquisition of HMAS *Sydney* and formation of a two-squadron carrier air group. It was an impressive start to the ten year program.

Occasional Paper 190 looks at engineering issues relating to construction of the Captain Cook Graving Dock in Sydney and the works of war artists assigned to record its construction. The 80th anniversary of its official opening will be recognized by Navy with a ceremony on the 24th of March. It is hoped that by marking this anniversary and telling the Docks story more Australians will understand that capability is more than just operational units. That is, it includes many logistics elements including essential infrastructure. Australians also need to understand that the Docks strategic significance remains unchanged from 1938 when construction was approved by the Federal Cabinet after a decade of deteriorating world security.

On the subject of naval art, several artists have contacted the Society since November 2024 when we launched the [naval art website pages](#). This has been most pleasing and we look forward to including their works on the website in the coming months.

As members will know, the Society is an 'all volunteer' not for profit organization based in the Garden Island Defence Precinct. Sydney based volunteers are always needed to manage the wide variety of activities we undertake. As an example, people with a background in Navy, teaching or guiding are sought to work as cruise commentators/presenters. This is important as we expect demand for school history cruises to grow after they commence in April. If you or someone you know can assist, please contact us for more information. Our office in the Boatshed right beside the Harbour is a unique environment.

Finally, don't miss your copy of [HMAS Melbourne - 25 Years and Beyond](#). Details on page 14.

Kind regards,

David Michael



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Harold Charles Gatty (1903-1957), Midshipman to Prince of Navigators

Harold Gatty was born at Campbell Town in Tasmania on 5 February 1903 son of James Gatty a school principal. He attended St Virgil's College, Hobart where in 1916 he won a place at the Royal Australian Naval College. After an inauspicious start to his career as a 14-year-old entry to the Naval College in January 1917, Midshipman Harold Gatty withdrew in May 1920. He then served for three years as an apprenticed ship's officer with the Patrick Steamship Company of Sydney. Post World War I, Gatty continued to serve in the Australian merchant navy, where he became interested in astronomy and the constellations in particular. He became an expert in celestial navigation and served on many ships, some sailing between Australia and California. In 1927 he relocated to California and established a navigation school, teaching marine navigation to yachtsmen.



In 1928, his attention turned to air navigation in which he achieved enormous success. The following are highlights of this subsequent career.

1929 Navigated a Lockheed Vega on a flight from Los Angeles to New York City for Nevada Airlines, in an effort to demonstrate the feasibility of coast-to-coast passenger service.

1930 Prepared a coast-to-coast route and navigation charts for Anne Morrow Lindbergh, who he had taught as a student. Anne Lindbergh served as navigator with husband Charles on a record-setting cross-country flight.

1931 Gatty served as navigator for pilot, Wiley Post on a flight which set the record for aerial circumnavigation of the world. A distance of 15,747 miles (24,903 km) was covered in a Lockheed Vega in 8 days, 15 hours and 51 minutes. In a subsequent book, Gatty gave a detailed account of a method of dead reckoning he invented that revolutionized the ability of navigators to fly safely through cloudy conditions, without drifting off course through cumulative errors.

1932 Gatty was offered American citizenship but declined. Gatty joined the US Army after a change of US legislation to allow non-citizens to be employed in the newly created position of Senior Aerial Navigation Engineer for the US Army Air Corps.

1935 Gatty was hired by Pan Am airlines as its South Pacific Manager based in Auckland. A specific task was the mapping of the San Francisco-China mid-Pacific air route and development of potential island stopovers.

1942-43 Gatty served a Commission in the Royal Australian Air Force with the honorary rank of Group Captain. He worked for the US Army Air Forces (USAAF) in the South Pacific as the director of Air Transport for the Allied forces, based in Australia.

After World War II, Gatty relocated to Fiji with his Dutch-born second wife. There he formed Fiji Airways which later became Air Pacific. He was appointed to the Legislative Council in 1950 as one of two nominated European members and served for two years.

Gatty suffered a stroke and died in August 1957. He is buried in Fiji.

Harold Gatty's legacy includes three important books. The first, co-authored with Wiley Post is an account of their record breaking round the world flight in 1931. The second, 'The Raft Book' was published in 1943 as a guide to navigation without instruments, and without previous experience. It was based on Polynesian navigation techniques and issued to American pilots during WW II. The third book based on a manuscript completed just prior to his death was published in 1958. It deals with natural and primitive navigation techniques and was published as, 'Nature Is Your Guide: How To Find Your Way on Land and Sea by Observing Nature'. It was later republished and re-titled Finding Your Way Without Map or Compass.



In recognition of his services to air navigation Harold Gatty was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross from President Herbert Hoover at the White House on August 18, 1932, an extraordinary honour for a noncitizen. Courtesy: United Press International



Harold Gatty Memorial, Tasmania. Courtesy of Diane Watson

Further Reading

Alan Warden, Harold Charles Gatty, Australian Dictionary of Biography, available at <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gatty-harold-charles-6288>

Wiley Post and Harold Gatty, Around the world in eight days: the flight of the Winnie Mae published by New York: Orion Books, available at, <https://archive.org/details/aroundworldineiq00post/mode/2up>

Harold Gatty, The Raft Book, available at, https://www.surfresearch.com.au/1943_Gatty_Raft_Book.html

Meet The Navigator, published by the Smithsonian Institute, available at, <https://timeandnavigation.si.edu/navigating-air/early-air-navigators/two-men-in-a-hurry/harold-gatty>

The RAN's top clearance diver

William (Bill) Fitzgerald was a legendary clearance diver with the Royal Australian Navy who was charged with demolition of ordnance in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Wearing the heavy and cumbersome equipment of the time, he would dive on the American bombs and Japanese and British mines left behind in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Often, low water visibility meant that he worked at great personal risk, hardly able to see his hand in front of his metal helmet.

In later operations he dived on an Australian atomic test site, despite being told by the bomb's developer that the work would leave him sterile for five years. He also made a high-risk dive to the depth of 79 metres to free the sluice gates of the Eucumbene Dam in the Snowy Mountains.

William Terence Fitzgerald was born at the Cottage Hospital in Chatswood on March 23, 1929, one of three sons and three sisters born to father Sydney William Fitzgerald, who also had a prominent Royal Australian Navy career, and mother Florence (nee Bavistock) who was born in Southsea near Portsmouth. They met when Sydney was stationed overseas, and they would meet under the clock at Southsea railway station.



Sydney Fitzgerald, who was enlisted as chief petty officer's torpedoman mate, was a survivor of the attack on the destroyer HMAS *Nestor* in June 1942 when the ship, part of a convoy taking supplies to Malta, came under air attack from German dive bombers and had to be scuttled the next day. In 1944 he was admitted into care suffering from what was then known as shell shock. Bill entered the RAN on May 30, 1946 keen to follow in his father's footsteps, and when told he was to be a gunner, stood his ground saying: "I'm not going to be a gunner, I'm going to be a torpedo man." He won the day.

Initially he trained as a pump hand for a standard diver, before volunteering for the three-week-long RMS (Render Mines Safe) course held at HMAS Penguin on Middle Head. In September 1947 he posted to HMAS Tarangau, headquarters of the Papua-New Guinea Division of the Royal Australian Navy.

Interviewed about his service at the age of 90, he said: "I was pulling bombs out from under wharves and God knows what else. World War Two was supposed to be finished, and it wasn't. "[On one occasion] I donned a modified diving set, went down and pulled the bombs out [and] they were 500-pound armour-piercing Japanese bombs. Jap navy bombs have got rivets on them, Jap army bombs are three-inch skinned. They are all tail-fused. Took the fuses out, pulled the bombs up, took them away and blew them up."

He spent 12 months in New Guinea extending his knowledge from WWII bomb disposal experts while working on the demolition of ordnance left behind in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. In September 1948 he returned from New Guinea to Australia and met his wife, Madge, at a dance at Luna Park. He had gone to her aid after the 16-year-old fainted, having inhaled from her first cigarette.

During the Korean War in 1952 he served on the Bay-class frigate HMAS *Murchison*, and was trapped in the Han River when the ship "with a few holes in it" came under continuous machine gun fire, 180 metres from the shore. "I did all the sounding in that river to get the ship into a position to bombard – 8000 soundings we did, by lead and line," he said.

Fitzgerald joined HMAS *Hawkesbury* in 1952, where he was involved in the recovery of items

from the Monte Bello Islands atomic test site in Western Australia. The British test involved detonation of a 25-kiloton nuclear fission bomb to gauge impact on foodstuffs, shipping and defensive structures.

He recalled he was informed on deck by the bomb's developer, Sir William Penney, about the inherent risks of the job: "He said that with the work you have to do here, you will be sterile for five years. We still did the job. We were ordered to do it, and we did it. "I had two sons before the Monte Bello and didn't have a daughter until five years after, who was born on Anzac Day." He had two sons and then two daughters.

In 1955, there was a requirement for the first clearance divers to be called up into the navy. Fitzgerald was considered worthy to be accepted, even though he was considered overage at 25. He successfully passed and became one of the first clearance divers for the RAN in the rank of petty officer.



With his navy colleagues. Fitzgerald wears a white jumper and sits in the second row next to a diver.

He said the requirement for a good clearance diver was "to be above average intelligence, young, healthy [and] have a can-do attitude. The impossible sometimes takes a bit longer and so long as you remember that, and you keep your mouth shut, you will make a good clearance diver."

Following the course, he went on to become a diving instructor at Rushcutters Bay. His exploits included diving on the wreck of the destroyer USS *Peary* in Darwin, sunk at anchor in 1942 by Japanese aircraft, to remove weaponry before she was cut up. The dives on *Peary* could only last one hour a day at slack water at low or high tide because of 25 knot currents. In almost nil visibility, the dive involved rendering safe the numerous torpedo warheads.

The Eastern Area Mobile Clearance Diving Team was formed in 1956-57. Fitzgerald became its Chief before eventually becoming Clearance Diving Team One, which it remains today. In the late 1950s the team had only 12 people, but today it is 60 members strong.

In 1962, Fitzgerald was one of the team involved in a project at the Eucumbene Dam to free the sluice gates at a depth of around 79 metres – a job that took nearly six months to complete. After 12 minutes breathing air on the initial dive, he was suffering “pretty bad” narcosis, a reversible change in consciousness as gases at high pressure cause an anaesthetic effect. He surfaced feeling terrible, believing he was going to get the staggers (decompression sickness), but after being laid down and given pure oxygen he was considered by the underwater medical specialist to be OK.

In 1963 he dived on the British submarine HMS *Tabard*, which was involved in a navy exercise with HMAS *Melbourne*. The submarine had developed technical problems and was unable to dive. He found that a main inlet valve was blocked by sand and effected the repair, underwater and alone, with the aid of a seven-pound hammer.



On a lighter note, Fitzgerald tells of playing rugby for the navy diving team up against their main rivals, a team from the HMAS Watson training school at South Head. The divers used to train in overalls in the water and in bare feet.

In a clash at Rushcutters Bay Park, the Watson team was leading 15-0 at half-time. He said: “We went behind the dressing shed, had a whiff of oxygen and half a glass of rum, took our boots off and beat them 30-15.”

He also coached the water polo team, which trained in overalls with three-pound lead weights in the pockets so that when they actually played a game, “they were walking on water”. Fitzgerald finished his full-time service as a chief instructor for all courses at HMAS Rushcutter and transitioned from the permanent service in 1966. But he continued to serve as a reservist until 1984 – totalling 37 years, 138 days of total service.

His love of and interest in diving carried over into civilian life. He became a private diving

instructor and helped to develop and establish the hyperbaric unit at Prince Henry Hospital in Sydney, delivering over 1,500 therapies over four years. He was then asked to join the CSIRO to train and supervise their marine biologists in diving for a further five years.

In the Queen’s Birthday Honours List of 1999, Fitzgerald received an OAM for “service to diving, and to the development and training in the use of life support breathing apparatus” – a unique citation for a unique person with a unique skill set.

Speaking at the nursing home in Warriewood, he said: “If I had my time over again, I would do it exactly the same.”

Sources:

- [Obituary: RAN’s top clearance diver | The Australian Naval Institute](#)
- [Chief Petty Officer Clearance Diver William Terence Fitzgerald](#)

Arafura Class Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) Update

In January 2025 the Department of Defence took delivery of the first of six Arafura-class offshore patrol vessels, NUSHIP *Arafura*. It is scheduled for further testing and evaluation ahead of acceptance by the Royal Australian Navy. It will relocate to HMAS Stirling in WA in the coming weeks. The Arafura class will replace the current Armidale Class and Cape Class Patrol Boats. Twelve boats were originally planned under Project SEA 1180 Phase 1.

Built by Luerksen Australia at the Osborne Naval Shipyard in South Australia and launched in December 2021 it has taken more than three years to fit out. The remaining acceptance tests and trials are estimated to continue for another 37 weeks before initial operational capability (IOC) is achieved with commissioning as HMAS *Arafura* (OPV 203) expected later this year.

The Arafura OPVs are 80 meters in length and displace around 1,700 tonnes. Two 4,250 KW diesel engines provide a maximum speed of 20knots and they have a range of 4,000nautical miles. Their design includes two changeable, containerized mission systems, supporting secondary roles such as mine hunting, unmanned aerial system missions, and hydrographic surveying. They have a crew of 40 personnel.



The first Arafura class Offshore Patrol Vessel, NUSHIP Arafura, conducting Sea Trials in August 2024 at the Osborne Naval Shipyard. Image provided by Luerksen Australia.

Photo of the Month



The de Havilland Sea Venom 53 was a British designed and built two-seat fighter all weather (FAW) in service with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) from 1956 to 1966; replacing the piston engine Hawker Sea Fury. The RAN purchased 39 of these aircraft.

The Sea Venom was the naval version of the Venom NF.2 two-seat night fighter. The necessary modifications for use on board aircraft carriers included folding wings, a tail-hook and a modified and strengthened undercarriage. The 808 Squadron, reformed in the United Kingdom (UK) on 23 August 1955, was the first RAN Squadron to be equipped with Sea Venoms which were formally accepted into RAN service on 27 February 1956. The squadron embarked in HMAS *Melbourne*, which had recently commissioned and arrived in Australia in April 1956.

Sea Venoms were also operated by 805 and 816 Squadrons embarked in *Melbourne* during exercises in Southeast Asia, while serving as part of the Far East Strategic Reserve. They also conducted escort duties for the fast troop transport HMAS *Sydney* to Vung Tau Harbour, Vietnam during 1965 and 1966. The aircraft's main role was to provide 24-hour fighter protection for the fleet from enemy aircraft while on operations.

Flying the Sea Venom required significant skill and ability. Two 808 Squadron aircrew were killed in the UK on a training flight in January 1956. A total of 11 of the 39 Sea Venoms crashed or were damaged beyond repair with nine aircrew killed. Most of the crashes were at Nowra but two occurred at sea from *Melbourne* due to equipment failure. A Sea Venom was lost, with both aircrew killed, on 8 August 1956 when the catapult failed to effectively launch the aircraft. Nearly ten years later (on 28 April 1966) a Sea Venom crashed into the Philippine Sea, with the observer killed, when the tail hook failed on landing and the aircraft lost power; being lost over the side of the carrier. Another was lost off the east coast in May 1959 while on a photo reconnaissance training flight and another crashed into Sydney Harbour, on 5 July 1963, following a collision with another Sea Venom during a flypast.

The Sea Venoms phasing out of RAN service began in mid-1966. It was replaced by the US McDonnell Douglas A4 Skyhawk, although 724 Squadron operated four as target towing aircraft up until June 1973.

News

HMAS *Choules* (Top photo at right) near Fort Denison in Sydney Harbour as part of the 26 January 2025 Australia Day celebrations. Photo courtesy George Hicks.

At the close of Indo-Pacific Endeavour 2024 HMAS *Adelaide* berthed in Townsville, Queensland on 10 December.

HMAS *Brisbane* (2nd photo at right) returned to Sydney on 6 January 2025, after her extended deployment (see below) to the US West coast. *Brisbane* sailed over 17,000 nautical miles (32,000 km) during this time, and included operations with US Naval maintenance processes, warfare training and valuable knowledge exchange in advanced technologies shared by the two nations. HMA Ships *Brisbane* and *Hobart* were simultaneously welcomed home and farewelled by Commander, Australian Fleet, Rear Admiral Chris Smith, AM, CSM, RAN. *Hobart* sailed for the RAN's first Regional Presence Deployment of 2025. The ship called into Darwin and departed from the Kuru wharf at HMAS *Coonawarra* on 17 January.

The Pacific support vessel, ADV *Reliant* departed Gladstone on 21 December 2024 on her first deployment for 2025. *Reliant* was expected to spend three months visiting Pacific Island countries to deliver stores and equipment, and assist with maritime surveillance during the high-risk weather season. In this view (3rd photo at right) *Reliant* loads a donated fire truck aboard in Gladstone.

On 7 December the helicopter frigate HMAS *Stuart* returned home to Fleet Base West, Western Australia after her three-month Regional Presence Deployment.

HMAS *Gascoyne*, decommissioned on 5 December, following 23 years of faithful service. In this view (4th photo at right), the ship's Australian White Ensign is folded during the ceremony. The minehunter made her final entry into Sydney Harbour on 6 November 2024.

First RAN Tomahawk long-range anti-surface missile was fired from HMAS *Brisbane*, off San Diego (Bottom photo at right) on 3 December 2024.



The Navy in Cyclone Tracy 1974

Zoom Presentation February 2025

The February Zoom presentation by Dr Tom Lewis on the Defence response to Cyclone Tracy is now available on the Society's [YouTube channel](#).

Cyclone Tracy devastated Darwin during the early hours of Christmas Day 1974. During the following month, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) embarked upon its largest peacetime disaster relief operation, involving 13 ships, 11 aircraft and some 3000 personnel.

A twelve-minute video on this operation is also available on [YouTube](#).



RAN Wessex helicopter over Darwin with HMAS *Melbourne* in background

Occasional Papers

Occasional papers available to members published with this edition of Call the Hands include;

- Occasional Paper 190_ Captain Cook Graving Dock 80th Anniversary: Engineering and Art and
- Occasional Paper 191_ Aviation in the Royal Australian Navy, the first 65 Years, 1917 to 1982

This Month in History - February

February 1859	Boats from HMVS VICTORIA rescued the crew of the sailing vessel B. NORRIS, which caught fire and sank in Port Phillip.
February 1909	The Fisher Government in Australia adopted the 24-destroyer plan. Without consulting British Admiralty, the Australian Government ordered three River class torpedo boat destroyers, later named HMAS PARRAMATTA, YARRA, and WARREGO, to be built forthwith in the United Kingdom.
February 1917	On 12 February 1917 HMAS AFRIC was sunk in the English Channel after being torpedoed by the German submarine SM UC-66, whilst sailing outbound between Liverpool and Plymouth, 12 miles (19 km) south south-west of the Eddystone Lighthouse, there were 145 survivors, but 22 people lost their lives. The wreck lies at the position (49°59'N 04°18'W) at a depth of around 70 metres (229.7 feet), and has been filmed by divers.
February 1924	HMA Submarines J1, J2, J4, and J5, were sold to the Melbourne Salvage Syndicate for breaking up. The hulks of J1 and J2 were scuttled off Barwon Heads, J3 off Swan Island, J4 sank at Williamstown, and J5 and J7 were scuttled off Queenscliff.
February 1930	The annual cost of training the 45 Cadet Midshipmen at the RAN College was £60,000.
February 1941	Australian troop convoy US 9 departed Sydney with troopships AQUITANIA (44,786grt), MAURETANIA (35,739grt), NIEUW AMSTERDAM (36,287grt) and QUEEN MARY (81,235grt) escorted by HMAS HOBART until 6/2/41.
February 1942	HMAS YARRA took off 1,304 troops from the burning troop transport EMPRESS OF ASIA near Sultan Reef, Singapore. The rescue was effected under heavy air attack. LCDR W H Harrington, RAN, captain of YARRA recorded: "I was becoming a little dubious of the stability of HMAS YARRA and on getting clear gave orders for all hands to sit". YARRA shot down one aircraft confirmed and was credited with two probables.
February 1949	HMAS SHOALHAVEN relieved HMAS WARRAMUNGA of occupation duties in the Far East. The handover took place at Shanghai, China. She then proceeded to Kure, Japan to operate with the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, but later returned to Shanghai on 24 March.
February 1952	Union action meant that no tugs arrived to pull HMAS SYDNEY out of Fremantle Harbour on her departure. In response, the ship initiated an action known as Operation PINWHEEL. The Sea furies of 805 and 808 Squadrons simply started the engines of the aircraft sitting on Sydney's flightdeck to pull herself clear. SYDNEY had arrived in Fremantle on 22/2/1952 on her return from Korea in the middle of industrial unrest on the waterfront.
February 1961	HMAS VENDETTA took off 12 passengers from the Shaw Savill freighter RUNIC, aground on Middleton Reef, QLD.
February 1967	RAN Clearance Diving Teams commenced operations in Vietnam. The first contingent of Clearance Diving Team 3 (CDT 3) personnel departed Sydney by air on 5 February 1967, arriving in Saigon the following day. Members included, LEUT M. T. F. Shotter, RAN, POCD B.V. Clark, LSCD P. Boettcher, ABCD P.C. Kember, ABCD G.D. Lassau and ABCD P.A. Magnuson.
February 1975	Grumman S2E Tracker 853 ditched after night flying when doing a Bolter (missed wire and going around again) from HMAS Melbourne. The 4 crew were all rescued unhurt. This was the only RAN Tracker lost during flying operations.
February 1980	HMAS DIAMANTINA, the last World War II ship in commission in the RAN, was paid off for disposal at Garden Island, Sydney. She had steamed 615,755 miles since first commissioning. She left Garden Island on 1 October 1980 after being donated to the Queensland Maritime Museum Association. DIAMANTINA is now on permanent display in Brisbane and restored to her World War II outfit of weapons.
February 1988	HMAS JERVIS BAY rescued 12 Korean fishermen from a raft in Cook Strait, New Zealand. Their vessel, the DONG CHANG with a crew of 15 sank in heavy seas after its engine had failed. A search for the remaining three crewmen over the next 24 hours was unsuccessful.
February 1992	HMAS OXLEY, the first Oberon class submarine built for the RAN, paid off at HMAS STIRLING, WA. The stripped hull was sold for scrap.
February 2003	The main body of Clearance Diving Team 3 arrived in Bahrain for service in the Persian Gulf/Iraq, as part of the Australian commitment to Operation Falconer, (the war in Iraq).
February 2008	The Armidale class patrol boat HMAS GLENELG was commissioned at Port Adelaide, South Australia.

This Month in History - March

March 1859	The Australia Station was established as a separate command. The Station was defined in a minute from the Admiralty: "Australia Station: - Bounded on the North by the Parallel of 10 degrees of South Latitude, on the East by the Meridian of 170th degree of West Longitude, on the South by the Antarctic Circle, and on the West by the Meridian of 75th degree of East Longitude". Ships from the Australia Station were involved in operations from Malaya to the west coast of America and the Pacific islands.
March 1901	An order directing that all Australian armed forces should be transferred from the jurisdiction of the State Governments to the Federal Government, which under the Federal Constitution, would be the sole Australian Defence authority was gazetted. The Commonwealth Naval Force came into existence. Its war equipment consisted of a motley collection of largely obsolete warships, including, HMC Ships CERBERUS and PROTECTOR, torpedo boats CHILDERS, COUNTESS OF HOPETOWN, LONSDALE, NEPEAN, and MOSQUITO, gunboats GAYUNDAH and PALUMA, and a number of small naval auxiliaries. Naval personnel strength was 240 permanent members, and 1,348 members of the Naval Brigade.
March 1915	HMAS AUSTRALIA took part in her first operation, a patrol across the North Sea with the Grand Fleet and light forces, from Harwich, England.
March 1918	A Sopwith Strutter aircraft was successfully launched from the battle-cruiser HMAS AUSTRALIA.
March 1925	The cruiser HMS CONCORD, (CAPT A. R. W. Woods, RN), joined the Australian Squadron for an exchange deployment. She was met by HMAS SYDNEY at Broome Bay, WA. CONCORD's place in the Royal Navy was taken by HMAS ADELAIDE which joined the 1st Cruiser Squadron at Gibraltar.
March 1936	HMAS SYDNEY joined HMAS AUSTRALIA in ADML Sir Max Horton's 1st Cruiser Squadron at Malta.
March 1940	HMS RAMILLIES was refitted at Garden Island Naval Dockyard, Sydney. Mr A. G. Cameron was appointed to the post of Australian Minister for the Navy.
March 1941	HMAS STUART was attacked seven times by German bombers while on passage to Piraeus. In the last attack she was near-missed by a large bomb. CAPT H. Waller wrote: "The last aircraft seemed to be out for my blood and nursed his second bomb until I remained on a steady course. The bombs being so large, however, they could be followed all the way down and the requisite alteration could be made".
March 1953	The first rescue operation by a helicopter of the RAN was affected when an injured lighthouse keeper was rescued from Point Perpendicular Lighthouse, NSW.
March 1961	RAN clearance divers cleared underground ducts in tunnels of the Snowy Mountains Authority's project at Lake Eucumbene, NSW. The team worked in depths of 80 metres in freezing conditions to clear a 23 km tunnel system leading to the Tumut River.
March 1975	First Sea King delivered to RAN Fleet Air Arm.
March 1982	HMAS TOBRUK transported 10 Iroquios helicopters to the Middle East as part of a multi-national force of observers enforcing the cease-fire agreement between Egypt and Israel. RAN aircrew and maintainers operated the helicopters which were based in El Gorah in Northern Sinai. They were withdrawn in 1986.
March 1990	A RAN Seahawk helicopter rescued a 14 year old boy from rocks at Currawong NSW.
March 2000	TU 645.1.1, (LCH Task Group consisting of HMA Ships BALIKPAPAN, BRUNEI, LABUAN, and TARAKAN) was awarded the Australian Meritorious Unit Citation for service in East Timor.
March 2007	The Armidale class patrol boat HMAS BUNDABERG was commissioned at Bundaberg, Queensland.
March 2020	WO Agnes 'Lennie' Maiden, the first woman to be promoted to the highest rank as a senior sailor passed away aged 82. WO Maiden served in the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) for nearly 29 years, from 1956 until 1984

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

Readers Forum

The Society recently received the following from Janet Greer Marando concerning [Occasional Paper 131](#) entitled, 'Destroyer doomed from the start – the rewritten story of USS *Peary*'s final combat action in Darwin 1942' published in February 2022.

'As we are approaching the 83rd Anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin Harbour (tomorrow 19th Feb) I have discovered an error online about the last survivor of the USS *Peary* that was sunk by the Japanese in Darwin Harbour February 19th 1942.

My father Ben Mac Greer was a US Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class on board the USS *Peary* at the time of the bombing / sinking in Darwin Harbour in 1942. He was one of the few lucky survivors on that day. For reference purposes his interview / recount was in a previous WWII exhibit at the National Maritime Museum in Sydney. Your article states that Dallas Earl Widdick who passed away in 2008 was the last survivor of the USS *Peary* which is incorrect.

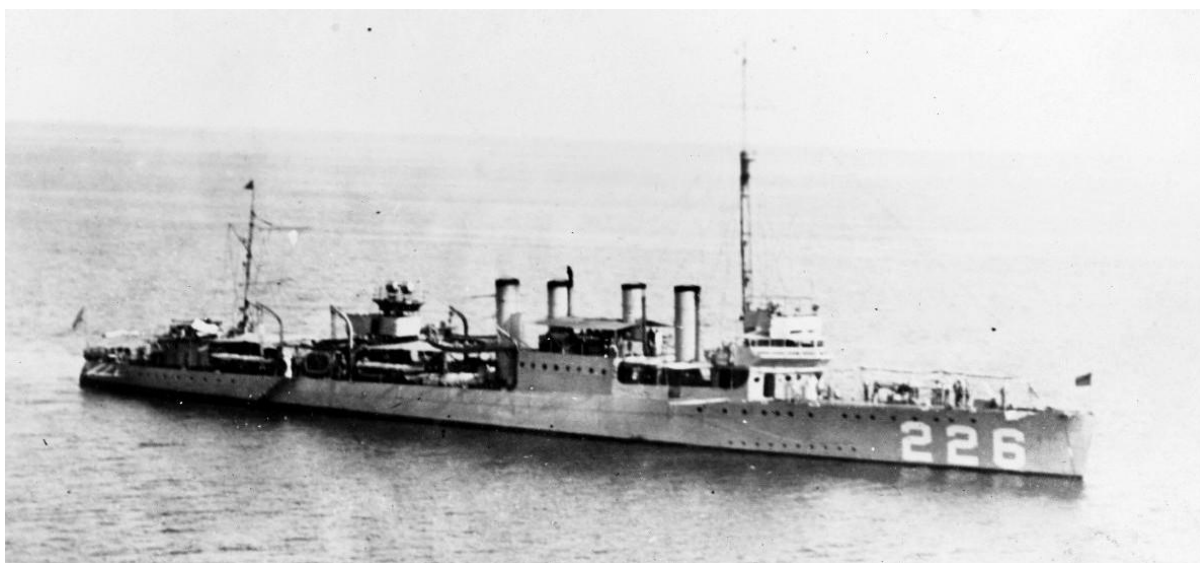
My father Ben Mac Greer born in 1919 and died 2009 aged 90 which would make him the last remaining survivor of the USS *Peary* (not Dallas Earl Widdick). Just for the record I would like this to be acknowledged and changed in the history books (as I have all the proof of identification). Could you please arrange for it to be changed.

Many thanks

Janet Greer Marando (daughter of Ben Mac Greer)'

By editor

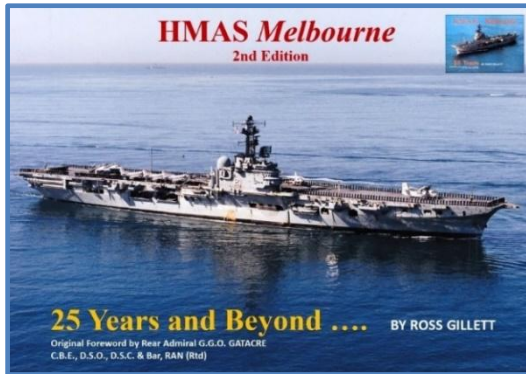
As it is the Society's intention to report history as accurately as possible the request was reviewed by the author, Dr Tom Lewis. With his agreement the paper has been changed.



USS Peary (DD-226) circa early 1920s. US Naval History and Heritage Command image

HMAS *Melbourne* - 25 Years and Beyond

Pre-Publishing Purchase Opportunity



The long and distinguished history of the Royal Australian Navy's aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne* is about to be published. This 202-page book from the Naval Historical Society of Australia will be in soft cover, A4 landscape format. It includes more than 400 photographs and other illustrations.

To order your copy for delivery before mid-May,
visit the naval Historical Society website shop.

<https://navyhistory.au/product-category/books/> or scan QR code.

Price, including postage to an Australian Address

\$65



This book illustrates the history of the Royal Australian Navy Flagship HMAS *Melbourne*, her deployments and missions, her aircraft and equipment, and the crews who operated this versatile naval asset. In depth, it describes the origin of the light fleet carrier, the changes made to the ship for her entry into RAN service, and the updates given to the vessel to allow her to operate up to decommissioning in June 1982. But the story of *Melbourne* continued after that, with many proposals to retain the ship in a non-military role, the political arguments to save or dispose of the 'flat-top', her time in reserve, the farewells by aircraft and personnel, the final voyage to the scrapyard, and then, being retained for an extended period of 17-18 years in a Chinese port.

During her active years, *Melbourne* operated with most other RAN units, exercised with countless Allied navies and supported Australia's people, when and where required. Of course, her most significant role in an Australian port was the time spent in Darwin following Cyclone Tracy to help get the city and its people 'up and running again.' The ship sailed to the United Kingdom and the United States of America, visited dozens of ports in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and flew the Australian White Ensign in every major Australian city/port.

HMAS *Melbourne* - 25 Years and Beyond demonstrates very clearly that with her leading the Australian Fleet, the RAN possessed a powerful attack and anti-submarine capability, only available with such a warship and her embarked squadrons. As such, the ship regularly operated with much larger Royal Navy and USN aircraft carriers in many of the world's oceans and seas. And when required, *Melbourne* would support smaller warships in her company, with both fuel and provisions, as well as escorting other important naval task groups on various missions.

The author, Ross Gillett has addressed the numerous aspects of the ship and her crews and even highlighted her failures, and the other problems that beset all major fleet units. Through 400 illustrations, the Flagship is depicted via both colour and monotone photographs, cartoons, artwork and technical drawings, excerpts from 'Line Books' and Reports of Proceedings, press clippings and official signals, even a record album, television show and movie, all of which describe the many phases of her lengthy career.

Ships Crests for Sale

A number of ships crests remain in stock and available for purchase through [eBay](#).

These crests were donated to the Society. Given the recent suspension of the Garden Island history tours, the additional revenue from this source is important for our financial health.

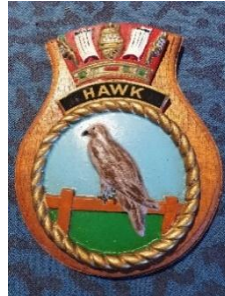
These crests are available at either \$45 or \$75 depending on type. There is only one of each.



HMAS Condamine



HMAS Penguin



HMAS Hawk



HMAS Albatross



HMAS Stuart



HMAS Melbourne



HMAS Stirling



HMAS Culgoa



HMAS Warramunga



HMAS Cerberus (I)

Donations Welcome

Please, if you have surplus ships crests you would like to donate, please consider the Society and email us at office@navyhistory.au. The Society will cover the freight cost.

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