

# CALL THE HANDS

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*In January 2018 advice was received from a Society member that a Battle of the Atlantic memorial is to be constructed in Liverpool, as there is no dedicated memorial to the navies and merchant navies engaged in the UK. He considered this was somewhat astonishing, given the crucial part the Battle of the Atlantic played in WW2. He noted that the exhibition in the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool and HMCS Sackville, Canada's Naval Memorial and National Historic Site in Halifax were the closest things to a Battle of the Atlantic memorial.*

*In addition to the BBC article about the new memorial, two previously published accounts of RAN participation in the Battle of the Atlantic are reproduced in this paper. The first by Lieutenant G.R Worledge MID RANVR (Rtd) covers the role Australian Anti-Submarine specialists (graduates of HMAS Rushcutter) played in the battle. Almost 20 % of all anti-submarine officers and men in British ships in the Battle of the Atlantic, and other theatres of war against the U-Boats were Rushcutter graduates. The second story by Lieutenant Commander Mackenzie (Mac) Gregory, R.A.N. Rtd addresses the crucial role of the Western Approaches Command during the Battle of the Atlantic and importance of the city of Liverpool and its people during the Battle.*

## **Battle of the Atlantic: Appeal for £2.5m Memorial**



Artists Impression of the monument

The charity needs to raise £2.5m for the planned monument on the Pier Head

A campaign to build a national memorial to the estimated 100,000 people who died in the Battle of the Atlantic is being launched in Liverpool. Battle of the Atlantic Memorial (BOAM), the charity leading the campaign, needs to raise £2.5m for the 28m (91ft) monument on the Pier Head. It has been designed by sculptor Paul Day, who also created the Battle of Britain monument in London.

The battle, which lasted from 1939-45, centred on protecting supply ships. BOAM chairman Vice Adm Mike Gretton, whose father Vice Adm Sir Peter Gretton served as an Atlantic escort group commander, said the aim was to unveil the monument in 2019 - the 80th anniversary of the start of the battle and the beginning of World War Two.

"Despite the immense significance of the Battle of the Atlantic, it does not have a dedicated national memorial in Britain," he said. The memorial will incorporate the existing statue of U-Boat hunter Johnnie Walker.



Sculptor Paul Day also designed the Battle of Britain monument in London

Vice Adm Gretton said Liverpool was the best site for the memorial as it was the city where many of the Royal Navy and merchant ships were built, and where many of the sailors came from.

He said the memorial would also reflect the campaign's international nature, recognising the efforts of the United States, Canada, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Poland, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand and Russia.

Mr Day said it was a huge honour to design the monument, adding: "Liverpool remains a breath-taking city and one of the greatest waterfront skylines in Europe. This sculpture must be able to complement a varied architectural landscape."

**Story and images from BBC News** <https://www.bbc.com/news/amp/uk-england-merseyside-42558598>

**Donations to the Appeal can be made online** <https://battleoftheatlantic.org/>

## HMAS Rushcutter Graduates in the Battle of the Atlantic

By Lieutenant G.R Worledge MID RANVR (Rtd)

At an Imperial Conference held in London in 1937, the various categories of Naval training required to provide manpower for the outbreak of a major war were analysed and the Dominions agreed to provide trained Reserve personnel, both officers and sailors, for anti-submarine (A/S) operations, including Harbour Defence.

The RAN Reserve Depot at Rushcutters Bay was selected as the site for building a specialised school and South Head, an army establishment, was chosen as the site for a control station for underwater harbour defence equipment. In addition to normal classrooms, the two-storey building was designed to replicate the fitting steady stream of Asdic equipment in ships. This required the installation of dome lowering equipment on the upper floor, as fitted within the hull of a ship, and a hole was cut through the upper floor so that the dome could be raised and lowered as in a ship.

Lieutenant Commander H. M. Newcomb RN, from the staff of the A/S School in England, was appointed to supervise the fitting out of the Australian School, and to conduct training. In November 1938, Acting Commander Newcomb arrived in Sydney to take over control of the school building which had largely been completed in October. He was assisted by three Petty Officer Submarine Detector Instructors (PO SDI), three Leading Seamen Higher Submarine Detectors (LS HSD) on loan from the RN, and six RAN Able Seamen Submarine Detectors (AB SD).

HMA Anti-Submarine School was commissioned on 13 February, 1939, under the command of Commander Newcomb RN, and was a separate element within the RAN Reserve Depot, which was under separate command. There was no residential accommodation for officers or sailors within the Depot. This remained a continuing challenge for them all for most of the War. The School was protected by non-Naval security guards. And soon the first of what was to be a steady stream of officers and men soon set off for the United Kingdom.

The Cold War ended with the German invasion of Norway. The eight large trawlers of the grandly named 15th and 16th Anti-Submarine Striking Forces, each with an Australian A/SCO, were soon in action in Norwegian waters, operating close to enemy-held airfields. Given the intensity of the air attacks, it was remarkable that only three of the trawlers were lost. All eight Australians survived, winning between them a DSO, a DSC and two Mentions in Despatches.

The conquest of France, Belgium and Holland brought Germany to the sea and confrontation with the old foe. A second struggle with U-boats began, and the transfer to the UK of qualified Australian officers was stepped up. At first, the officers went to trawlers and the new corvettes, while sailors were usually allocated to destroyers. By the War's end, twenty percent of the specialist officers and sailors in the Battle of the Atlantic had been trained in HMAS *Rushcutter*.

One Australian who went straight to a command was Lieutenant Commander Arthur Callaway RANVR, who took the trawler *Lady Shirley* and was able to secure Lieutenant Ian Boucaut, another *Rushcutter* graduate, as his First Lieutenant. Patrolling south of Teneriffe on the morning of 4 October, 1941, a lookout sighted a distant object, which promptly disappeared. Considering it a possible submarine, Callaway closed at top speed. Contact was gained and a pattern of depth charges dropped, using a stopwatch to replace a faulty Asdic recorder. A U-boat promptly came to the surface, and a spirited close range gun action followed, both trawler and U-boat taking hits and casualties. The U-boat soon sank, and *Lady Shirley* rescued 45 survivors, only eight, including the Captain, being lost. After the action, *Lady Shirley's* remaining crew of 38 could muster only six unwounded seamen to guard the prisoners on the four-day run to Gibraltar and a hero's welcome. Callaway received an immediate DSO and Boucaut a DSC, while awards to the rest of the crew included six DSMs, another DSC, and a CGM.

## Loss of Lady Shirley

There was to be a tragic sequel only weeks later. On the night of 11 December 1941, *Lady Shirley* was one of four trawlers carrying out a sweep in the Straits of Gibraltar. Another trawler, *Saint Nectan*, was not far away when a rain squall cut visibility for half an hour. When visibility returned, *Lady Shirley* had vanished. Despite an intensive search, no trace of her was ever found. German sources suggest that she may have been torpedoed by *U-374*, which was transiting the Straits en route to La Spezia, arriving there on 14 December. Normally, a voyage report would have been made, but *U-374* was urgently needed in the central Mediterranean, and sailed again after only four days in port, to be in turn sunk by the British submarine *Unbeaten* off Cape Spartivenito on 12 January. There the story stops, in spite of this writer's best efforts, and the generous help from Horst Bredow of the U-boat Archive.

Back in Australia, Arthur Callaway had left a tiny son. The infant was too young to have any memory of his father, but it may have been the name he bore that inspired him to join the RAN, and reach the rank of Commodore.

Another pre-war Reservist who took A/S training was Lieutenant Commander Stanley Darling, who on arrival in Britain in October 1940 was given command of the trawler *Loch Oskaig*, followed by another trawler, the Admiralty Class *Inchmarnock*, doing months of hard seetime from Gibraltar to the Faeroes. Then in the autumn of 1942, Darling went to North America to command *Clarkia*, one of the early corvettes, in which work in the Caribbean gave a welcome change of climate. Next, in the autumn of 1943, came appointment to command of the new frigate *Loch Killin*, which was being fitted with Squid and state-of-the-art electronics, some experimental and all much appreciated by Darling, who was an audio engineer by profession. The final stroke of luck came when *Loch Killin* was attached to the Second Escort Group under Captain 'Johnny' Walker, which was guarding the western flank of the Normandy invasion.

Darling's first kill was *U-333* on 31 July 1944, when the Asdic recorder took charge of both the ship's course and the aiming of the two triple-barrelled mortars, as well as setting the fuses to the proper firing depth and firing the mortars. After the attack, the U-boat was found to be lying on its side, and might not have been mortally wounded, so a second attack was made, which apparently counter-mined a torpedo, bringing up much evidence of a kill.

## Squid attack

Only a few days later, on 6 August, *Loch Killin* detected another U-boat, and again carried out a Squid attack, with full reliance on instruments. This time the frigate ran over the bow section of the submarine, which became entangled with *Loch Killin's* port A-bracket. The surviving 19 members of *U-736* were able to climb aboard the frigate without getting their feet wet, while by good fortune *Loch Killin* remained fit for sea.

With the war in Europe drawing to a close, Darling accounted for his third U-boat in the Channel off Start Point on 15 April 1945. A surfaced submarine was overtaken from behind. The submarine's wake made range finding by Asdic difficult, necessitating three Squid attacks for a kill. *Loch Killin* picked up 17 survivors from *U-1063*.

Stanley Darling continued in the RAN Reserve after the War, retiring as a Captain, with an OBE to add to his three DSCs.

After winning a DSC in the Norwegian campaign, Sub Lieutenant F.M. Osborne was appointed First Lieutenant of *Gentian*, one of the first corvettes, in which he was to remain for two and a half years. In 1941, the Captain of *Gentian* was promoted out of the ship. His replacement was landed ill after two voyages and Osborne, just promoted to Lieutenant, assumed command on a temporary basis. It

lasted until he left *Gentian* in 1943. His first trip in command of *Gentian* saw the ship in the ill-fated convoy HG73, which lost more than a third of its ships homeward bound from Gibraltar. The disaster prompted a special inquiry, but Osborne's performance must have been judged satisfactory, as he was confirmed in command.

In the summer of 1942, *Gentian* did a long refit in the Mersey. Offered another command, Osborne chose to keep *Gentian* and fill in the time with courses in Navigation and Gunnery, a short spell in a destroyer in the Channel, and a course at the Western Approaches Tactical Unit (WATU). The last was to have a sequel. A pre-war solicitor, Osborne had a keen, analytical brain and a gift for lucid expression, which must have impressed the redoubtable Captain Gilbert Roberts.

### Teaching appointment

*Gentian* was re-commissioned in July, 1942, and after working up at Tobermory joined Commander Macintyre's crack B2 Escort Group for a hard stint in the North Atlantic. But in February 1943 Osborne was taken out of *Gentian* and put on the teaching staff of WATU under Captain Roberts. It was not an appointment he welcomed, but he would have given it his very competent best. His pleas to return to sea were ultimately granted when he was given command of the old V&W destroyer *Vanquisher*, which had been converted to a long-range escort with the latest Asdic gear and electronics. However, North Atlantic weather soon showed up the ship's age, and she was transferred to duties based on Gibraltar. In April 1944, *Vanquisher* was recalled to Britain for exercises in preparation for the coming invasion, which was only the overture for months of intensive work in the Western Channel in support of the campaign ashore.

### Joint sinking

On the night of 11 March, 1945, *Vanquisher* overtook a U-boat engaged in following an inbound convoy 300 miles west of Ushant. *Vanquisher's* Hedgehog being unserviceable, *Tintagel Castle*, a corvette fitted with Squid, made the attack using bearing, distance and depth supplied by *Vanquisher*, thanks to a new experimental depth-finding Asdic set. The U-boat was despatched with the first Squid pattern, and the sinking of *U-878* was credited jointly to the two ships, giving Osborne a Bar to his DSC.

His next command was the modern sloop *Peacock*, in which he sailed on 9 August, 1945, to join the British Pacific Fleet. But the end of the war found the ship in the Mediterranean, enabling Osborne to make his way back to Sydney, followed by his British bride, the former Second Officer Elizabeth Drake, WRNS. Later, he served as a Cabinet Minister in the Australian Parliament, retiring as The Hon. F.M. Osborne, CMG, DSC and Bar, VRD.

Two *Rushcutter* graduates made major contributions to the Battle of the Atlantic in midget submarines. Sub-Lieutenant M.H. Shean began in the usual way as A/SCO in the corvette *Bluebell*, but responded to a call for volunteers for hazardous service. An engineering student, Shean soon showed his talents by analysing the task of cutting anti-submarine nets for the passage of X-Craft, after all the divers had difficulty, one being drowned. The method Shean devised was successful, though never easy.

### Loss of X-9

Shean's first operation saw him in the role of diver in *X9*, one of six X-Craft assembled to attack *Tirpitz* in Alten Fiord in September, 1943. The operational crew took passage in the towing submarine, *Sirtis*. On the way, the towline parted and *X9* was never seen again. The towline had tangled around *Sirtis'* port screw, and only a competent swim by Shean saved *Sirtis* from a nasty predicament. Shean was now promoted to command his own midget, and after a brief spell in *X22*, was given *X24* for a solo incursion into Bergen Harbour, the target being a floating dock in which the damaged *Tirpitz* might be repaired. Shean was delighted that the towing submarine was *Sceptre*, commanded by Lieutenant Ian McIntosh, an Australian with whom he had formed an excellent rapport. Thanks to Shean's training and competence, it was a textbook attack, after which Shean made his rendezvous

with *Sceptre* as arranged. A great effort, but on return to base, Shean was told he had sunk a ship instead. It transpired that Shean had been supplied with an outdated chart, but he was awarded the DSO, nevertheless.

Shean's last exploit, just before the war ended, was closer to home. He was sent in *XE4* to cut submarine cables off the mouth of the Mekong River, to oblige the Japanese to resort to wireless communication, which could be decoded. In most difficult conditions, the divers, Sub Lieutenants Bergius and Briggs (another Australian) located and cut the Singapore/Saigon and Saigon/Hong Kong cables, bringing back lengths of cable as proof. Shean was awarded a Bar to his DSO and the United States Bronze Star Medal.

The second *Rushcutter* graduate to achieve great distinction in X-Craft was Sub-Lieutenant Hudspeth. Like Shean, Hudspeth began his Atlantic service as A/SCO of the corvette *Anemone* before volunteering for hazardous service. He was CO of *X10* in the first attack on *Tirpitz*, closing to within four miles before mechanical defects obliged withdrawal. He rejoined his towing submarine, but on the way home, in bad weather, *X10* was scuttled under orders from the Admiralty. Hudspeth was awarded the DSC, and went to stand-by the building of *X20*.

### **X-Craft survey beaches**

By this time preparations for the invasion were gaining momentum. It was decided to experiment with X-Craft for surveys of target beaches. In mid-December 1943, *X20* was taken by rail to Portsmouth for modifications, which included an anchor, taut wire measuring gear, an echo sounder and a gyro repeater on deck. The first operation, from 17 to 21 January, 1944, surpassed expectations, the survey experts making periscope observations by day and landing on the beaches by night. Hudspeth expected to repeat the operation, but the authorities decided not to take further risk of disclosure, awarding Hudspeth his second DSC.

The final contribution to the invasion came with D-Day. On 2 June, *X10* set sail to fix an exact position and act as a navigation marker for the first assault. All went smoothly, except that the 24-hour postponement required those on board to spend a second tiresome day submerged before surfacing to anchor for the important task, using a light, a radar beacon and a crude mechanical hammer for the benefit of those with Asdic. Then it was home to *Dolphin* for a hot shower and dinner, as the real war developed just over the water. This earned Hudspeth his third DSC.

Volunteers came from all over the world to serve in the Battle of the Atlantic, some with great distinction. Because Australian ships were employed in other theatres, history has tended to overlook the Australian contribution to that crucial battle. Australians served in ships of the Royal Navy and all the Allied navies, often as Group A/S officers, whilst many had staff and instructional duties ashore. Outstanding in the last category was Lieutenant L.M. Hinchliffe, DCS, RAN, who was on the instructional staff at Tobermory, where A/S ships did their final sea training. It could be argued that due to their high standard of training, the Australian contribution was even more valuable than their number would suggest.

Australians are intensely proud of that record, but are the first to acknowledge that the initial credit must be given to the (then) Commander Harvey Mansfield Newcomb, Royal Navy, and his hand-picked experts from HMS *Osprey*, who set top standards in 1938 and maintained them throughout the war.

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## The Battle of the Atlantic – Western Approaches Command

By Lieutenant Commander Mackenzie (Mac) Gregory, R.A.N. Rtd

One of the crucial decisions made during the Battle of the Atlantic was to relocate the Western Approaches Command on the 7th of February, 1941 from Plymouth to Liverpool. Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-Nasmith had previously been in control at Plymouth whilst the main convoy route to and from North America was sent around the south of Ireland. He now became C in C at Plymouth, and the convoy route was moved to the north of Ireland, and Liverpool became the logical choice to locate the Western Approaches Command structure.

Admiral Sir Percy Noble was given the onerous task of C in C Western Approaches, his Headquarters set up beneath Derby House, deep below street level, in a bomb-proof area, with a large Operations Room linked to the Admiralty, and duplicating the London Trade Plot. The huge wall chart carried the plot showing the position of all Allied Convoys, their Escorts, and the estimated or known position of all German U-Boats currently at sea. This new HQ gained information from the Operational Intelligence Centre, the Submarine Tracking Room, and the Air Ministry in London.

Control of Number 15 Coastal Command under the leadership of Air Vice Marshal J.M. Robb also moved from Plymouth to Liverpool. It was essential that co-operation between both the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force was of the highest order if maximum toll was to be taken against the U-Boats. Towards this objective the complete operational control of RAF Coastal Command was passed to the Admiralty on the 11th of April 1941.

Admiral Sir Percy Noble worked assiduously in his Western Approaches Command to keep open Britain's sea lifeline from North America, and probably he was not given the kudos that should have accrued to him for the result he attained here.



**The U-Boat menace – Battle of the Atlantic 1939-44**

To win the Battle of the Atlantic was paramount for Britain to survive. It carried far more significance than winning the Battle of Britain in the air.

The invasion of Europe in 1944, spelling out, the beginning of the end for Germany, could not have been mounted if the German U-Boats had been the victors of the Battle of the Atlantic.

Admiral Sir Max Horton, in November 1941 assumed command at Western Approaches HQ. He remained in this position until the war ended, an ex submariner, his dynamic leadership played a vital role in the final defeat of the U-boat menace.

It is May of 1943 that is usually accepted as the month that marked victory for Allied Naval forces over the German U-Boat arm in the Atlantic.

Fifty years later it was decided to commemorate this famous victory at Liverpool in May of 1993.

### **Why choose Liverpool as the venue for Battle of the Atlantic 93 (BA 93)?**

Throughout the years of WW II, Liverpool was Britain's main convoy port, the vital lifeline was maintained with the United States and Canada, it was crucial both for Britain's survival and the ultimate Allied victory. During WW II, over 1,000 convoys arrived in the Mersey, on average 3 or 4 per week.

As already noted, Western Approaches Command was based in Liverpool from 1941 to the end of the war. Warships and Merchant ships were repaired and built on Merseyside, and thousands of Liverpool people were involved here in the war effort. Liverpool chose itself as the venue for the Battle of the Atlantic 93 celebrations, no other site came close to this famous port.

### **HMAS *Australia***

As a Midshipman in HMAS *Australia*, during 1940/1941, I had been involved on convoy duties working out of Liverpool.

As part of these 50th anniversary celebrations, Her Majesty the Queen had reopened Western Command Headquarters after extensive rebuilding that cost about a million pounds sterling. Thus, in May of 1993, I was delighted to return to Liverpool, and be able to visit this site, again set up as it had operated during those dark days, when Britain's survival depended on the skill of the sailors manning the Naval escorts, and the courage of the merchant crews, as they fought against the unrelenting waters of the North Atlantic, and the dedicated and determined U-Boat crews. Prior to actually entering the Ops Room, there is a list of all the ships involved that played a part in the Battle of the Atlantic, I was pleased to note that my first ship HMAS *Australia* was acknowledged as one of the participants in this battle against U-Boat supremacy.

I stood and gazed up at the huge plotting wall where no doubt the name of HMAS *Australia* was shown whenever we took part in a convoy operation somewhere in the Atlantic ocean, so long ago. I was pleased that I had been able to visit this area that had played such an important role during WW II.

### **Western Approaches Tactical Unit**

This unit was housed at Derby House. A large plotting table could take 24 players, and the Directing staff could simulate a convoy escorted at sea, and its defence when both threatened and then attacked by U-Boats.

The Director, Captain Gilbert Roberts, Royal Navy, and his staff, devised tactics codenamed *Raspberry, Pineapple, Beta Search, Step Aside, etc*, all designated to combat and outwit specific German submarine tactics and moves.



Roberts would sum up a session, saying *“It is the war of the little ships, and the lonely aircraft, long patient, and unpublicised, our two great enemies... the U-Boats and the Cruel Sea.”*

Nicholas Monsarrat, as a young Lieutenant, did not forget this summing up, he recalled his tactical course, and wrote about it in his now classic book, *The Cruel Sea*.

Escort Commanders and Coastal Command Staff all came together here for WATU courses.  
Liverpool Docks

During my wartime spells in Liverpool amidst its miles of docks, it was a vital, vibrant port. By 1993, container ships had taken over, and the docks of Liverpool were silent, I walked some miles along the Dock Road, empty and showing signs of a great deal of decay. The overhead railway that I had used and remembered, used to span much of this area, gone, now totally dismantled. Liverpool, 50 or more years on, but a shadow of its former glory.

I preferred to recall the Liverpool I knew so long ago, standing up to the full fury of the German Blitz, its proud people, bloodied, embattled, but never to know the meaning of “giving up, or surrender.” I had been back, and I had remembered.

*“I salute you Liverpool! Without your victory in the Battle of Atlantic, total victory would not have been possible.”*

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