

CALL THE HANDS

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HMAS Darwin Decommissioning

On 8 December 2017 the guided missile frigate HMAS Darwin was decommissioned in a ceremony at Fleet Base East, Garden Island in the presence of former crew and hundreds of family members. During the ceremony the Fleet Commander, Rear Admiral Stuart Mayer delivered an address which incorporated a poem about the 33 years of service by HMAS Darwin. The poem was written by Mr Dean Thiele from the Surface Force Command, Fleet Headquarters. The Federal Member for Solomon, Mr Luke Gosling who was in attendance so impressed that he later read the poem in the House of Representatives. [Hansard of 26 February 2018](#) page 109 refers.

Speech by Rear Admiral Stuart Mayer RAN 8 December 2017

Good morning.....may I warmly welcome you to the Decommissioning Ceremony of the Royal Australian Navy's oldest and one of the most distinguished Fleet Units; and to thank you all for attending this significant event today at Fleet Base East; HMAS Darwin's home port for the last 33 years, since her arrival in Sydney in 1984.

On your behalf can I thank Uncle Chikka for his warm welcome, and I would also like to pay my respect to the Gadigal people, the traditional owners of the land and adjacent waters and to their elders both past and present.

Darwin is the first RAN warship to carry the name, and as such she has forged a new history for the RAN..... She has deployed 61 times including seven deployments to the Middle East, operations in East Timor in 1999 and the Solomon Islands in 2001 and has steamed..... (an old fashioned term I use because *Gas Turbined* just doesn't seem right) over 1.2 MILLION Nm or more than 55 times around the circumference of the globe in the national interest of Australia and her people.

It is said by some that the best two days in a boat owner's life are the day they purchase the boat – and the day they sell it. Perhaps this is said because looking after a boat – or a ship – requires time, commitment and passion and sustaining this over many years is hard work – in Darwin's case I would like to recognise that this hard work has been completed with our partners in the Maritime Sustainment Branch of CASG and the In-Service Contractor Thales who have stood side by side with the Group and the crew of Darwin to maintain the ship in the excellent material condition you see here today.

But whatever the reason for this supposed truism nothing could be less true for a warship in general and Darwin in particular.

The best days of Darwin have happened throughout each day of her service. In the 33 years of commissioned service Darwin, and the 4300 Australian sailors that have served in the ship in that period, have answered the call of their nation in war and in peace. Each of them – and each member of the families that have supported them - will have their own story; each of them are unique, each are important and some of them are even true.

Behind me you see a ship and her crew, but I wonder what it is that you see. While you see a ship, a mariner sees a team of teams – a network of complex capabilities knitted together by the professionalism of a crew.

Inside the hull of *Darwin* is an airfield with all weather air services, a power station, a desalination plant, a headquarters, a restaurant that will prepare a thousand meals a day, a warehouse the rival of any engineering firm, a fire brigade, a metal fabricator, a telecommunications station, a boarding party capable of the most complex forensic searches, a weapon and sensor network capable of controlling the region on, above and under the sea to 100s of miles, a diplomatic mission and a group of sailors – men and women; white, black and every shade between, Australians all; able to conduct all these roles to the highest professional standard – all while 4000 miles from home.

In all these remarkable roles the common thread is the professionalism of the men and women – your husbands and wives, sons and daughters, partners, brothers, sisters and friends - that make 4000 tones of metal into a warship. A warship that has ensured we keep our promise to you - that your Navy will preserve security on the high seas and ensure all Australian's can prosper in a rules based global order.

But in trying to tell the story of Darwin my best efforts were recently put to shame by the team at Surface Force Headquarters when they turned the story of Darwin into a sort of prose and I repeat it here:

*A PHOENIX RISING, WE STARE IN AWE,
A MIGHTY WARSHIP, PREPARED FOR WAR.
DEFEND SHE WILL AND FIGHT SHE MAY,
PREPARED FOR COMBAT, IT'S DARWIN'S WAY.*

*FOR THIRTY YEARS PLUS THREE, SHE'S SERVED,
WITH PRIDE AND HONOUR, NO EFFORT RESERVED.
BUT TIME HAS PASSED AND WAITS FOR NO ONE,
DECOMMISSIONING NEAR, HER TIME IS NOW DONE.*

*'FIRST LADY OF THE FLEET', YOUR CROWN TO PASS,
TO SUCCESS, YOU'VE ACHIEVED, WE RAISE A GLASS.
FOR SERVICE YOU'VE GIVEN WE SAY TO YOU,
A HEARTFELT THANKS AND A BRAVO ZULU.*

*MRS JOAN JOHNSTON DID LAUNCH THE SHIP,
IN EIGHTY-TWO, ON MARCH TWENTY-SIX.
AND 'T WAS JULY TWENTY-ONE IN EIGHTY-FOUR,
COMMISSIONED RAN, AN ORPHAN NO MORE.*

*THE FIRST SHIP DARWIN, WAS SO NAMED,
HER NAMESAKE CITY, HAS PROUDLY CLAIMED.
FREEDOM OF ENTRY AND KEYS TO THE CITY,
A BOND WORTH A BEER AND A GOOD OLE DITTY.*

*A THOUSAND TIMES FOUR, PLUS THREE HUNDRED AND MORE,
THE NUMBER WHO'VE SERVED, WITH ESPRIT DE CORPS.
THE WOMEN AND MEN, BOTH PRESENT AND PAST,
HOLD A RARE FAMILY FEELING, FOR EVER TO LAST.*

*AND NAUTICAL MILES, THERE'S BEEN A FEW,
IN MILLIONS IT'S BEEN, ABOUT ONE POINT TWO.*

*IN PERSPECTIVE, YOU SEE, THE SHIP HAS HURLED,
ABOUT FIFTY TIMES AROUND THE WORLD.*

*AND COUNTRIES VISITED, ALL THIRTY FOUR,
SHOWING THE FLAG, IN THOSE RUNS ASHORE.
DIPLOMATIC CALLS AND SPORTS GAMES WITH BALLS,
GOOD AMBASSADORS YOU'VE BEEN, IN ALL YOUR TRAVELS.*

*YOUR GUNS AND LAUNCHERS, SILENT NOW LAY,
EMITTERS AND SENSORS, NO MORE TO PLAY.
YOUR ENGINES TO REST, A LONG TIME THEY RAN,
THE GALLEY IS QUIET, NO CALLS TO SCRAM.*

*THE CALLS FOR 'IN STORES' CAN NOW BE SHELVED,
THE SOUND OF HELOS WILL NOW BE QUELLED.
NO MORE THE 'GIN PENNANT' AT MAST TO SEE,
BUT CELEBRATE FAREWELL, A PLENTY THERE'LL BE.*

*THIRTY PLUS SEVEN DIFFERENT 'BIRDS' AWAY,
FIFTY PLUS SIX DIFFERENT 'FISH' DID SPRAY.
NINE AND ONE HALF THOUSAND ROUNDS DID FLY,
FROM THE GUN THAT YOU SEE MOUNTED SO HIGH.*

*AND OPERATIONS SERVED FROM THE MIDDLE EAST,
TO SOLOMON ISLANDS AND TIMOR-LESTE.
NARCOTICS AND WEAPONS SEIZED WHILE DEPLOYED.
A SIGNIFICANT HAUL REMOVED AND DESTROYED.*

*AND 'THANK YOU' GOES OUT TO THOSE IN SUPPORT,
OVER ALL OF THE YEARS THAT YOU HAVE BROUGHT.
ON BEHALF OF DARWIN WE CAN'T SAY ENOUGH,
THROUGH ALL OF THE TIMES, GOOD, BAD AND TOUGH.*

*NOVEMBER TWENTY-SEVEN OF TWENTY-SEVENTEEN,
YOUR FINAL HOME BERTH, WITH FANFARE FOR THE TEAM.
AND SHORTLY THEREAFTER ON DECEMBER NINE,
DECOMMISSION, THERE'LL BE SO MANY TO PINE.*

*FAREWELL WE SAY, BUT REMEMBER WE WILL,
THE PHOENIX RISING, RESURGENT STILL.
TO WARSHIP 04 AND ALL OF HER FRIENDS,
THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES, YOUR SHIPMATES SEND.*

To the past and present members of HMAS *Darwin's* Ship's Company, I say this: you have served your country faithfully and with strength; you have met the commitment of your ship's motto, in countless missions and operational environments.

You have left behind a name that will long resonate in the history of the Navy, and enabled a tradition of excellence that *Darwin* (II) will have to work long and hard to match when she commissions in the Royal Australian Navy.

You have done all that we can ask of you. May you always remain, "Resurgent".

Images of HMAS Darwin Decommissioning Ceremony: 8 December 2017



Ship's Company of HMAS Darwin at Sydney's Garden Island during decommissioning ceremony 8 Dec 2017
RAN Image by LSIS Kayla Hayes

ABCIS Samuel Millar and ABCIS Alice Saunders present HMAS Darwin's AWE 8 Dec 2017
RAN Image by ABIS Craig Walton



Ship's company HMAS Darwin march off during decommissioning ceremony at Sydney's Garden Island 8 Dec 2017
RAN Image by ABIS Craig Walton