

TATTOOS AND TALES FROM THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY

BY LIEUTENANT COMMANDER WILL SINGER

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‘You must understand the feeling of originating as opposed to imitating.’

Norman ‘Sailor Jerry’ Collins
United States Navy sailor and tattooist

Foreword

Captain Sean Andrews

It gives me great pleasure to provide the forward to this extremely personal and interesting publication by our shipmate Lieutenant Commander Will Singer who illuminates a part of our culture that is rarely spoken about – sailors and their tattoos.

Why tattoos and sailors? Captain James Cook recorded the word *tattow (tatau)*, a Polynesian word for tattoo and introduced this concept to Europe after his first voyage in 1771. Still fascinated, Captain Cook, on his third Pacific (1776 - 1780) voyage observed that *'…The universality of tattooing is a curious subject for speculation…'*

The origins of tattoos are contested, but I will align my thoughts with Captain Cook and our neighbours in the Pacific – the Polynesians. Polynesia comprises a triangle of large and small island states, Hawaii to the north, Easter Island in the East and New Zealand in the south. The Polynesian society is considered ethnically and linguistically homogenous and is structured under a hierarchical socio-political system. Historically, Polynesian culture used tattoos as a distinctive signs to express and demonstrate their identity and personalities. Moreover, tattoos represented their genealogy, sexual maturity, and one's place in within their society. There is evidence that during Cook's voyages most people in Polynesia were tattooed.

Captain Cook's voyages to the Pacific exposed sailors of the Royal Navy to this form of body art. Sailors brought ideas, designs, and indeed tattoos back to other mariners and seaman in in the west. Tattooing became popular with both British to American sailors, and when off watch, sailors doubled as mess deck tattooists. Estimates suggest by the late 18th century, 30 per cent of Anglo-American sailors had been tattooed.

The ideas and behind the earliest tattoos were crosses, hearts and flowers – these were considered good luck charms -- to ward evil spirits. Tattooing reflected the garlanding of a ship with flowers, a nod to pleasing the gods -- like Poseidon. Today ships visiting to Hawaii still receive a garland of flowers over their bows -- culture is important to those with an affinity to the sea.

In 2022, Australian sailors are adorned with tattoos reflecting a mix of ancient mariners, mythical beasts from the sea, ships from sail, to steam and diesel, geography and gestures to life's journey. Most interestingly, some tattoos still reflect that the sea remains a primordial killer of mariners and these tattoos are sombre memorials to Australian and international shipmates. Lastly, these tattoo highlight the fierce pride and patriotism of Australian sailors.

I applaud Lieutenant Commander Singer and the photographers of the Royal Australian Navy for this photographic essay. They have done an excellent job. On behalf of the Sea power Centre, I commend this work to you.

Acknowledgements

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I dedicate this work to my Navy colleagues who have endured the buzzing sound and pricking sensation of a tattoo gun for the sake of art, reflection and remembrance.

This publication acknowledges that the Australian Defence Force has a strict policy regarding personal appearance and the acceptability of tattoos are assessed on a case by case basis by Defence Force Recruiting.



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Introduction

Lieutenant Commander Will Singer

We didn't have bikies or underworld gangs in our neighbourhood. My parents didn't have tattoos and neither did any of their friends. We thought tattoos were donned by criminals and rock stars. I am neither, despite my surname, but have chalked up a small art collection on my arms and shoulders. My first recollection of a tattoo was in a cartoon – an anchor on Popeye's forearm in a Christmas annual.

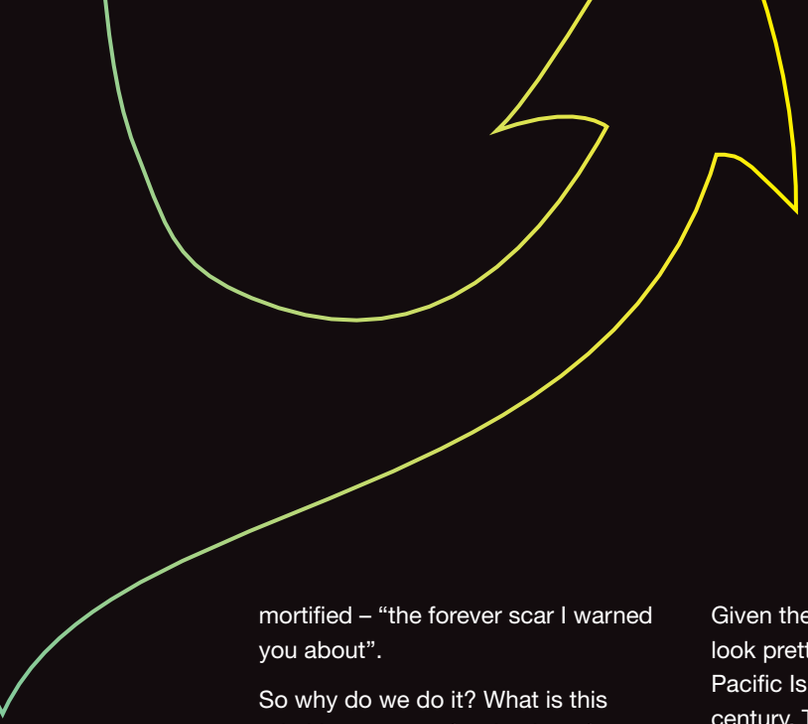
Tattoos are everywhere. On athletes, movie stars and elected officials like the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau. The stigma against tattoos in the workplace is slowly fading with broadening acceptance of the Stone Age art form now seen in upmarket art galleries and museum exhibitions. Today, tattoo studios have a long waiting list and 'walk-in' appointments are rare. Where tattoos were once seen as the sign of a sailor or a rebel, they are now widely socially accepted and tell a unique tale.

On the other hand, in China tattoos are banned on television, and they are banned at some pools and spas in the land of the Rising Sun. In the United Arab Emirates, if you want to join the military then you have to have your tattoos removed. Japanese convicts were branded on the arms and face until penal embellishments were covered by decorative tattooing towards the end of the 17th century. Inmates pricked themselves using makeshift materials like guitar strings and soot. Perhaps such aspects of their history is why tattoos were considered 'hard-core' while growing up in a conservative South Africa.

The military and navy have been known for body embellishments; however, looking back through old photographs of my time in the South African Infantry I don't recall seeing many tattoos, if any. Was it just a navy or a rebel thing? Original sailors' tattoo imagery consisted of initials, nautical themes and patriotic symbols. Hearts, swallows and anchors are still the most popular tattoos today. I recall seeing 'Carnies' at the local Rand Easter Show as well as circus side-show entertainers with full-body tattoo suits who, unintentionally, may have helped to spread the art of colourful tattoos during that era. Like other art forms, tattoos have gone through peaks and troughs. The 1970s saw women embrace tattoos as a sign of self-empowerment. The visibility of tattoos exploded in the early 1980s with the launch of MTV with Axle Rose from Guns and Roses unveiling his tapestry of tattoos while wailing 'Welcome to the Jungle'.

Tattoo parlours in Johannesburg were dreary looking, located in graffiti-splatted locations – almost clandestine, and only seemed open while we were walking back from the local clubs and pubs. You had to look for them. I recall peeping through the window and admiring the beautiful sketches of anchors, roses, dragons, eagles, daggers and naked women displayed on vertically designed flash-sheets that hung on their walls. The shop windows would have a sign 'Strictly 18, ID required'. The images portrayed travel, adventure and danger. Forbidden and desirable. Location-wise, not much has changed. However, I had a tattoo inscribed on my arm in a studio in Las Vegas that resembled a classy high-end clinic or an uptown music bar. It wasn't a cheap investment. I tried to hide the wincing when the buzzing commenced. My pals chickened out and watched on while sipping on their drinks from the Chesterfield sofa.

My first tattoo was an image of Hermes, the messenger of the gods according to Greek mythology – to mark my 10th completion of a 90-kilometre ultra-marathon called the Comrades Marathon. My Mum spotted the cling-wrap around my right shoulder that served as a temporary barrier after my inking. She was



mortified – “the forever scar I warned you about”.

So why do we do it? What is this primitive, strange fascination of puncturing the skin, bleeding, taping, scabbing and changing the body’s skin for life? Studies have shown that getting a tattoo can boost self-esteem and self-image. Tattoos are great markers for expressing a message. Tattoos are more than just beautiful designs, they’re reminders of the unique stories that can be told on human canvas. Tattoos simply aren’t objects that can be put in a glass and wooden frame – they spring to life on your skin.

Scribing on the skin is as old as time and one of humans’ most ancient art forms and methods of self-expression. The tattoo has been practised in some parts of the world in some form since the Stone Age.

Researchers have identified 61 tattoos on Ötzi, a 5,300 year-old mummy. Given the passage of time, they still look pretty good. The ‘Tatau’ in the Pacific Islands dates back to the 18th century. The Samoans created bone needles to embed ink deep into the skin. Eighteenth-century sailors were the first to come into contact with this culture, and popularised it.

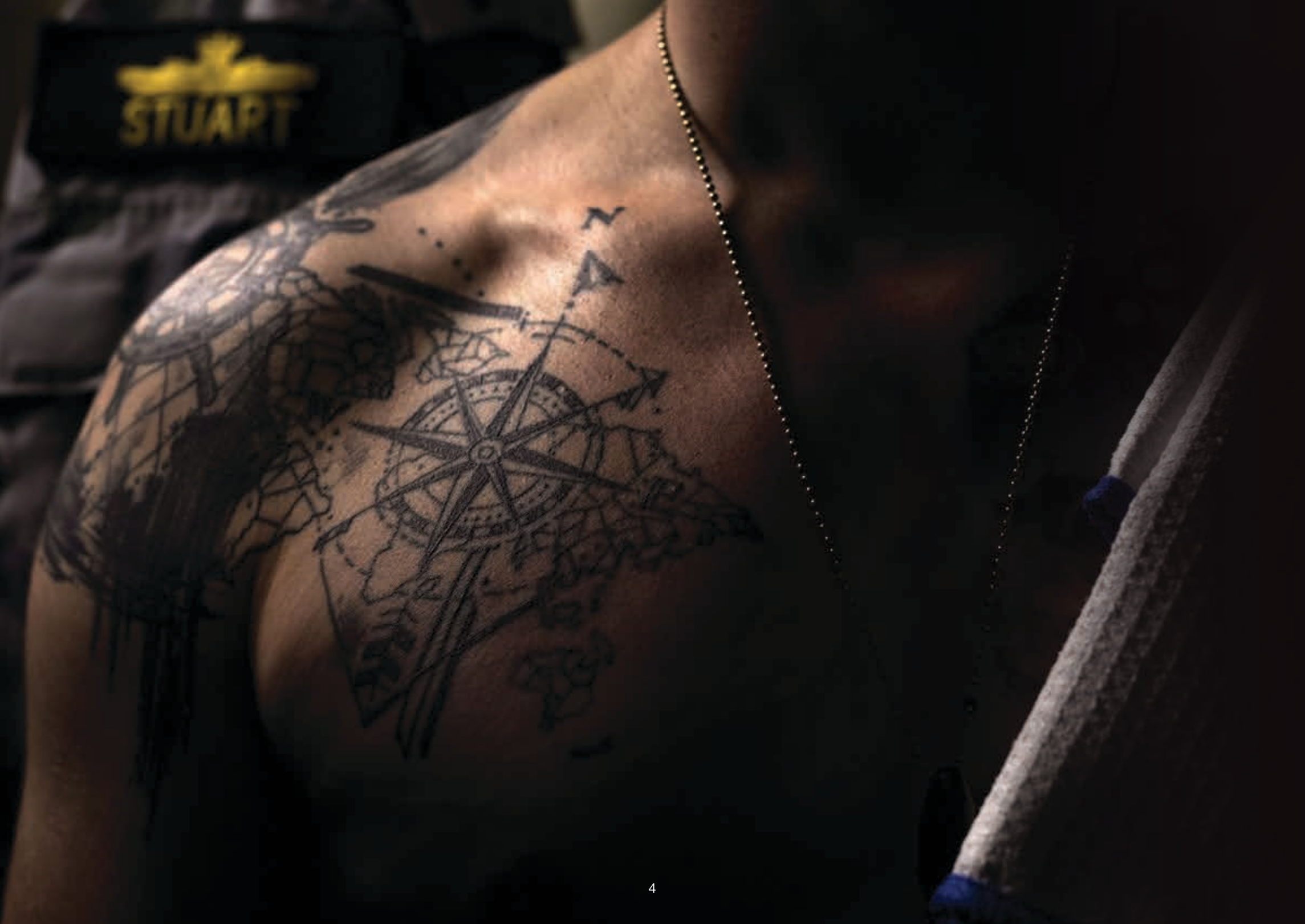
Once a subject of taboo, this alternative culture has become more mainstream and tattooing is increasingly regulated, creative and popular. Tattoos appear in many guises, bravery in battle, coming of age, nationality belonging to a group, and a pledge of love. Social media platforms like Instagram increase the appetite for tattoos too.

Popular culture or art? In my view, if the tattooist and tattoo receiver see it as art, then so be it. Pigments on the skin instead of paper are arguably the purest art form: they are authentic, tough to replicate and don’t have a secondary market where they can be traded or sold. They follow you around for life – the wearer becomes a walking piece of art.

Yes, there are restrictions now in place regarding hand and neck tattoos, but, love them or hate them, the traditional skin art is part of the fabric of our maritime culture. Every year, thousands of Navy recruits are needed, not only to go to war, but to keep the peace, and help in catastrophes like bushfires, cyclones and pandemics. We draw our Navy recruits from communities that have become accustomed to seeing younger men and women with full-sleeve tattoos, and more mature ones too with ‘old-school’ anchors on their skin.

From Cadet to Commodore, this book demonstrates the reasons for being tattooed are as varied as Navy’s men and women themselves. Being in the Navy isn’t just a job, it’s a blockbuster chapter in life that fosters a story in ink. For many officers and sailors, nautical-themed tattoos are a tradition that provides a sense of identity, belonging and a form of remembrance. Inscribed on their skin is the overcoming of adversity, the bonds of family and friends and the many experiences had while serving in the Navy.

This is book illustrates and shares the personal stories from our workforce, their body art and our Navy’s culture. Or, simply put, the inside of me portrayed outside.


STUART





Operations Officer of HMAS *Ballarat*, Lieutenant Commander Kane Stuart's tattoos are a tribute to his family history and a reminder of his challenges and successes in the service.

Photographer: LSIS Shane Cameron

Lieutenant Commander Kane Stuart

Compass for career direction

Kane has Popeye tattooed on the inside of his left bicep. He said that the cartoon sailor and a collection of other tattoos were his tribute to a family history in the Navy.

"My uncle was in the Royal Navy when I lived in the United Kingdom years ago, and whenever I stayed at my great grandma's house, he would show me his new tattoos when he was around. When he showed me his Popeye tattoo I told him that if I joined the Navy one day I would get the same, and that is exactly what I did .The Popeye tattoo reminds me of my family's connection to the Navy and makes me feel closer to family back in the UK," Kane said.

A compass over a world map and the helm of a ship is tattooed on his right shoulder. The artwork marks his successful completion of the Principal Warfare Officer course, one of the most challenging courses in the Navy.

"I was looking for direction in life and had decided that focusing on my career was what I wanted. The ship's wheel and compass represent the search across the world," he added.

Principal Warfare Officers are employed at sea as the officer in charge of a ship's operations room where they control and direct all weapons and associated equipment, as well as personnel, to fight the battle.



Lieutenant Lachlan Sommerville of HMAS *Ballarat* has a traditional Timor-Leste crocodile tattooed on his right calf. This was done in honour of his three-year posting to the island as the Maritime Training Adviser.

Photographer: LSIS Shane Cameron

2



Lieutenant Lachlan Sommerville

Lafaek honours island life

Lachlan served as the Maritime Training Adviser in Timor-Leste for three years. In honour of his time on the small island nation, he has tattooed ‘Lafaek’ on his right calf, which means crocodile and is taken from the Timorese creation story of Lafaek, a crocodile that formed the island in a mythical time.

“Having spent many years in Darwin, I already had a healthy respect for crocodiles and, as my posting drew to an end, it seemed fitting to commemorate my time in Timor-Leste with a tattoo. Lafaek was the obvious choice and this was endorsed by my Timorese comrades,” Lachie said.



Able Seaman Combat Systems Operator – Underwater – Matthew Hicks of HMAS *Ballarat* has a medley of tattoos on both legs.

Photographer: LSIS Shane Cameron

3

Able Seaman Matthew Hicks

Kraken the path from danger

Working in Ballarat's operations room, Matthew boasts a medley of tattoos on both legs, including a tall ship, lighthouse, map, compass and Kraken – a legendary sea monster in Scandinavian folklore.

"The lighthouse shines a light on my path and ensures my journey is clear of danger, while the map and compass are there to guide me on my journey. The ship is there because I love the look of the old-style tall ships; their elegance and style is something truly unique," Matthew said.

"The Kraken symbolises strength, adaptability and wit," he added.

Coincidentally, like his ship's namesake, Matthew got all of his tattoos in his hometown of Ballarat in Victoria.





4

Lieutenant Shaun Logan

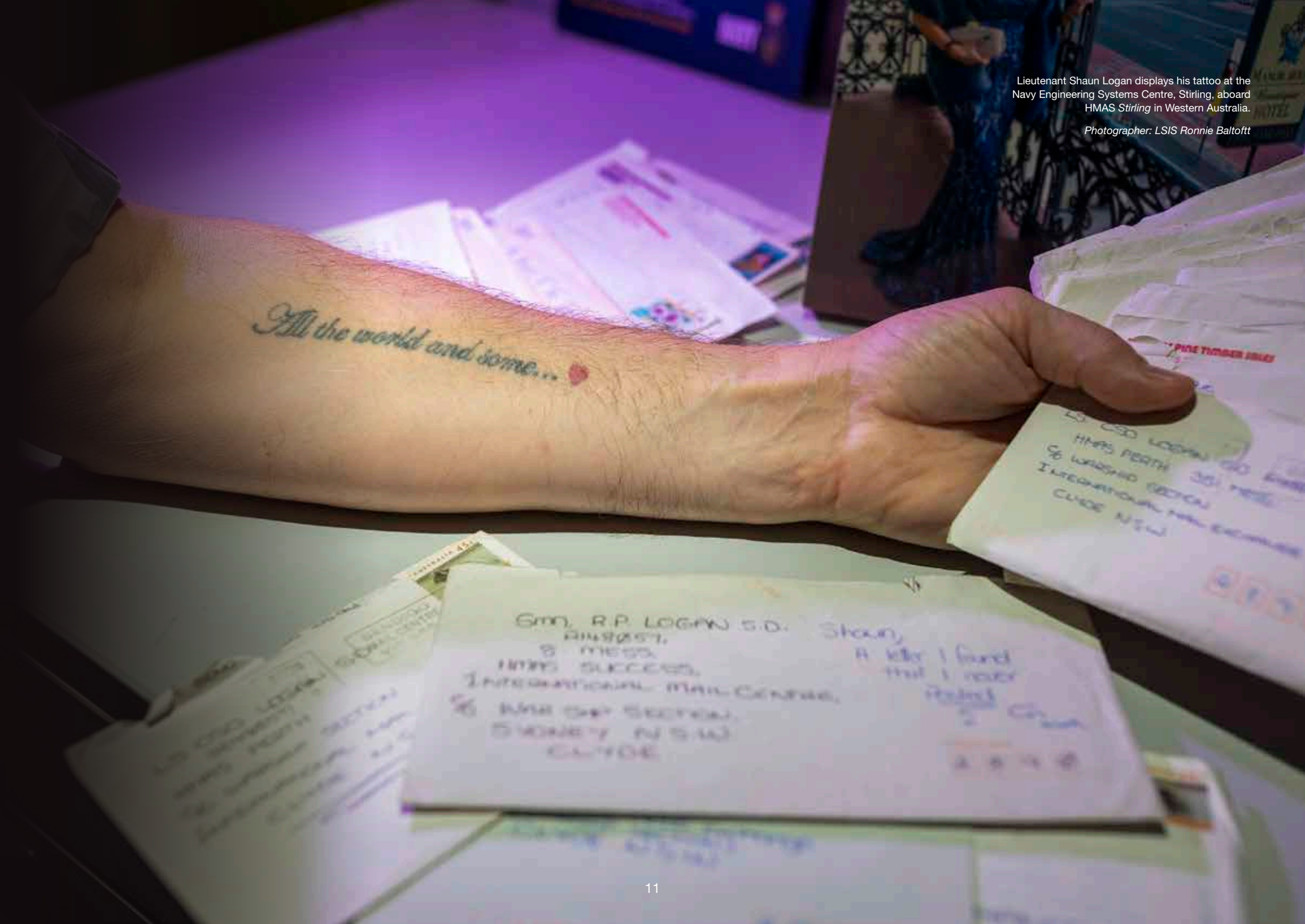
All the world and some

With 28 years of service notched-up, Shaun joined the Royal Australian Navy when the internet, mobile phones or phone cards were non-existent. He said that letters were written by hand and sometimes, while at sea, you wouldn't receive mail for weeks.

He met his future wife Cindy only months before he joined the Navy as a 17-year-old Radar Plotter. The pressure of living away from loved ones became real to him from an early age. "We wrote letters, poems and shared our thoughts and dreams for the future – which we are living to this day. My wife always signed off on her letters with ATWAS ('All the world and some'). We still have these letters in a box today as we both kept every one ever sent," Shaun said.

When Shaun was deployed to do a rotation in the Middle East, his wife was somewhat concerned and said upon his departure, "When you get home we are getting a tattoo to mark the occasion."

It seemed fitting to him that these words that helped forge their lives together should be immortalised upon them – and so they were.



Lieutenant Shaun Logan displays his tattoo at the Navy Engineering Systems Centre, Stirling, aboard HMAS *Stirling* in Western Australia.

Photographer: LSIS Ronnie Baltoftt



5

Lieutenant Commander Richard Mingramm

Vegvisir guides the loyal Viking

Richard joined the Royal Australian Navy in 1980, took a 30-year break, re-joined in 2017, and is currently posted to HMAS *Sirius* serving as the oiler's Maritime Logistics Officer.

Richard has a Viking ship with a White Ensign sail tattooed on his right calf, a Nordic compass (Vegvisir – believed to guide someone who may lose their way) on his left inner forearm and a Nordic Helm of Awe and Terror (Aegishjalm – representing no fear in battle) on his right inner forearm. His family originates from Hamburg, Germany, and his grandfather, father, uncle and son are all proud mariners.

Lieutenant Commander Richard Mingramm displays his tattoos at Fleet Logistics Support Element, Submarines, aboard HMAS *Stirling* in Western Australia.

Photographer: LSIS Richard Cordell



"My father served in the RAN in the 1930s–40s as a cook, before deserting – he finished the war in the Army. Some research unveiled that we had Viking blood from both grandparents (German and Scottish)," Richard said. As a mark of respect to their service, he married the ancient with the new and marked himself with a truly symbolic tattoo. Each male in their family has the family coat-of-arms embellished on a different location on their body.

"My tattoos tell a story of my life journey and a quick look now and then reminds me to remember the past, learn, focus on today, and be proud of who I am and the journey I have had," he said.



Leading Seaman Electronic Technician Nicholas Evans displays his tattoo in the Fleet Support Unit, West, at HMAS *Stirling*, Western Australia.

Photographer: LSIS Ernesto Sanchez

6

Leading Seaman Nicholas Evans

Jacquie & Jerry make the mark

As an Electronics Technician sailor, Nick operates, monitors and maintains equipment in a wide and diverse range of platforms, both on the ship and onshore. Identifying faults and taking corrective action is his bread and butter. Deciding on a suitable tattoo was another matter.

“My wife Jacquie was a Maritime Technician in the Navy until 2020, and I had always wanted a tattoo but had no idea what to get. I was inspired by the Sailor Jerry style tattoos, so I chose my design. I added a few touches to sneakily make it look a little like Jacquie, who has red hair and the tree of life tattooed on her leg,” said Nick.

Norman Keith Collins, known popularly as Sailor Jerry, was a prominent American tattoo artist in Hawaii who was well known for his sailor tattoos. The sea was always a part of Norman Collins’ life and while holding Captain’s papers in the 1950s he skippered a tour ship at the Pearl Harbor memorial. Like Nick, Sailor Jerry also had a passion for electronics.

Sailor Jerry died on 12 June 1973, and is buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii.





Royal Australian Navy officer Sub Lieutenant Samantha Brandstater, a Maritime Warfare Officer serving in HMAS *Arunta*, displays her naval inspired tattoo.

Photographer: POIS Yuri Ramsey

7



Lieutenant Samantha Brandstater

Wisdom & direction lead home

Officer of the Watch, Sub Lieutenant Samantha Brandstater is responsible for the control, navigation, systems and maritime safety of HMAS *Arunta* – assuming responsibility for the ship during each watch she keeps. To remind her of keeping her naval career pointed in the right direction, Samantha has a Barn Owl, compass and anchor surrounded by Australian flora embellished on her right upper arm and shoulder.

"I designed my tattoo with the meaning 'wisdom and direction in my career', and the border of Australian flora adds a piece of home. Owls are a symbol of wisdom, but they are also beautiful and powerful birds of prey. Compasses are for finding your way, be that forward to new challenges or the way back home (mine points west for home, Western Australia)," Samatha said.

"And of course the anchor is for a career in the maritime industry. The floral border has a Banksia, which is my mother's favourite flower, and golden wattle, my father's favourite flower. Together my tattoo is a summary of my direction to be strong and knowledgeable within my chosen career with support from home," she said.



8

Petty Officer Michael Crole

Dolphin crosses the line

Michael works in the Submarine Escape and Rescue Centre – a state-of-the-art facility that provides submariners with the skills to abandon, escape or be rescued safely from a disabled submarine. The submariner has a Golden Shellback with crossed anchors adorned in Bali in 2019 and is located on his left calf muscle. The Golden Shellback was the traditional tattoo that sailors got if they crossed the equator at the exact point that it crosses the 180th meridian.

“This was not the first time that I had crossed the equator while serving on a submarine; however, it was the first time that we had been able to surface and conduct a crossing the line ceremony,” Michael recalls.

HMAS *Rankin* crossed the equator at the 180th meridian while on her way over to Pearl Harbor to participate in Exercise Rim of the Pacific 2018 (RIMPAC) – a major United States Pacific Fleet biennial combined exercise.



Petty Officer Communication and Information Systems Submarines Michael Crole displays his tattoo at the Submarine Escape and Rescue Centre aboard HMAS *Stirling*, Western Australia.

Photographer: LSIS Ronnie Baltoft



Chief Petty Officer Maritime Logistics, Supply Chain, Louisa Seyde displays her tattoos at the Command Building onboard HMAS *Stirling* in Western Australia.

Photographer: LSIS Richard Cordell

Chief Petty Officer Louisa Seyde

Swallow heralds Navy service

Louisa has been in the Navy for 18 years and supports HMAS *Stirling's* Logistics department, analysing and advising Command on resource sustainability in meeting the capability and readiness of the shore establishment in Fleet Base West. A maritime-themed tattoo, a swallow with a dagger, is located on the back of the left upper arm and was inscribed in 2020 at a tattoo parlour in Perth, Western Australia.

There's strong underlying symbolism related to the swallow tattoo design. Much like Louisa, swallows tend to return to their nesting site and colony, year after year, travelling long distances in difficult conditions. Often seen paired with a dagger within the tattoo designs, it is thought that sailors would get one swallow tattoo to commemorate their departure and would get the other upon their return home. Louisa said that her traditional swallow, with a dagger through it, represents a fallen sailor.



9

“My uncle was a sailor back in the ’70s and ’80s. He served 20 years full time and a further 10 years reserve duty. He completed his basic training and was sent off to the Vietnam War at the age of 17. He sadly passed away in October 2020 after a long fight with mouth and throat cancer and I felt it was fitting to remember his service and what he says were the best days of his life,” said Louisa.

Having one or more swallows was seen as a reflection of sailor’s calibre, where each piece was earned depending on the distances the sailor had travelled. Not only was a swallow tattoo seen as a representation of success at sea, but the myth was also told that if a sailor was to drown on their journey, the bird would lift their soul to heaven.



10

Able Seaman Peter Cooper

Tall ship talking points

Peter Cooper has collected a collage of tattoos during his 12 years in the ‘Silent Service’. Based in HMAS *Stirling*, the Acoustic Warfare Analyst Submariner operates, supervises and manages all passive and active sonars and acoustic sensors onboard Collins-class submarines. A full left arm sleeve and full right leg sleeve follows a nautical theme including a skull and crossbones, sea creatures, sea sirens, anchors and tall ships.

“My tattoos remind me of being at sea, the units I’ve been on and places I’ve been. It’s artwork that I can look at and appreciate. The tattoos are always a conversation starter. When people see them they will always comment – most of the time good but now and then you get the occasional negative comment. People ask where they were done, or if they hurt, especially in the more juicy parts of the body like the backs of the knees,” Peter said.



Able Seaman Acoustic Warfare Analyst Submarines, Peter Cooper, displays his tattoo in front of HMAS *Waller* on Diamantina Pier at Fleet Base West in Western Australia.

Photographer: LSIS Ronnie Baltoft



Petty Officer Aircraft Technician Avionics Matthew Cace in the Helicopter Support Facility at HMAS *Stirling*, Western Australia.

Photographer: POIS Yuri Ramsey

11

Petty Officer Matthew Cace

Lost sailors anchor free spirits

Matthew's role in the Navy is to maintain the communication, navigation, safety and weapon systems of advanced Navy helicopters. He is presently posted to Defence Force Recruitment in Perth, Western Australia, and during his 20-year career in the Navy gained two tattoos, life and death at sea, inscribed on his left upper bicep in Wagga Wagga and Thailand.

An anchor tattoo usually means stability, peace, strength, determination and passion. Matthew said that for him the anchor represents the Royal Australian Navy, and the octopus represent the elements.

"The skulls on the sea bed represent sailors lost and the sea birds their spirit living on – it is still a work in progress," Matthew said.





12

Chief Petty Officer Andrew Edwards

Collins' sea god

Andrew has collected a tapestry of tattoos during his 17-year submarine career as HMAS *Collins'* Deputy Marine Engineering Officer who is responsible for the operation, maintenance and repair of equipment that keep Collins-class submarines running. His tattoo collection includes the submarine qualification badge 'dolphins', Collins-class submarine, pin-up girl on the torpedo, target ship through periscope view, Njord (Norse God of the Sea), and the Jolly Roger located on his left bicep and shoulder. The tattoos are designed around a submarine theme.

"The dolphins represent the award of my submarine qualification. The Collins-class submarine is the one class of submarine I serve on. The Jolly Roger flag is traditionally flown by submariners on completion of a successful patrol. My depiction of Njord is there representing my ancestry," Andrew said.



Deputy Marine Engineering Officer HMAS *Collins*, Chief Petty Officer Marine Technician Submarines Andrew Edwards, displays his tattoos on the aft casing of HMAS *Collins* at Fleet Base West, Western Australia.

Photographer: LSIS Ronnie Baltoft



Able Seaman Boatswain's Mate Dean Frazer onboard HMAS *Pirie*, Darwin, Northern Territory.

Note: No Personal protective equipment is required as the image was captured under safe and controlled conditions.

Photographer: LSIS Shane Cameron

13

Able Seaman Dean Frazer

Boatbuilding bosun

Rope-work, knot tying and maintaining rigging is not new to Dean, who hails from a family of boat-builders. As a Boatswain's Mate, Dean has served three years in his seagoing career that honed his skills including seamanship, small boat handling and navigation.

"My father built and raced boats, my brothers built boats and worked on superyachts and barges and my grandfather built boats. Before my father passed away my brothers, my sister and I all worked for him building boats on the Gold Coast. I promised him that I would join the Navy and a few years later I was accepted into the Royal Australian Navy," said Dean.

It's no surprise that his tattoos, which were done in the Gold Coast, represent a family history of working at sea and he has a Tall Ship tattoo that represents the family trade of boatbuilding and generations of family working on boats and living at sea.

"The compass is there to lead the way home no matter where I am in the world. The fouled anchor reminds me that no matter how hard life may be, I must stay true and grounded, while the map and navigation tools represent the completion of my navigation yeoman's course. The hourglass represents the limited amount of time we have in this world and to not waste the precious time we have," he added.

The birthdate and name on his hands are those of his 8-year-old son – a reminder of how strong he is dealing with a life of his father being away, which he did not choose but is proud of anyway.





Able Seaman Elliot Dearman

The three-headed dog heads home

Sikorsky MH-60R Seahawk ‘Romeo’ naval combat helicopters require the skills of sailors like Elliot Dearman who are responsible for the maintenance, repair and overhaul of aircraft systems and components in 725 Squadron. Elliot had a Balinese Batik-style Cerberus inscribed on his left calf in January 2019 by an artist in Adelaide.

“HMAS *Cerberus* was a Victorian naval ship built in the 1850s to serve the Victorian colonial Navy, then the Royal Australian Navy,” said Elliot.

Cerberus was scuttled off Half Moon bay near Black Rock in Melbourne as a breakwater for the yacht club. “I used to go there in summer, jump off the jetty and swim to the wreck. Having lived around the bayside area through most of my 20s, I have fond memories climbing around the rusted old deck of HMAS *Cerberus* and decided to get a tattoo of the creature it was named after, the three-headed dog with serpents for tails who guards the gates of Hell. A pretty metal creature too, I reckon,” he said.

“I knew a tattoo artist in Adelaide I’d been looking to work with on a design. The artist applied his Balinese-inspired art to the Cerberus idea and we did it in a day over the Australia Day long weekend in 2019. To me, it represents not only my experiences in the Navy but is a tribute to some of the pleasures and memories of home, swimming in Port Phillip Bay in the summer to climb over rusted-out warships, and that I got it done in Adelaide where I grew up gives an extra bit of significance.”



14

Able Seaman Aviation Technician Aircraft, Elliot Dearman, displays his tattoo at 725 Squadron at HMAS *Albatross* in Nowra, New South Wales.

Photographer: CPOIS Cameron Martin


TAIPANS

Able Seaman Aviation Technician Aircraft, Naomi Hill, an Aircrew trainee, displays her tattoos as she prepares for a flight.

Photographer: CPOIS Cameron Martin

15

Leading Seaman Naomi Hill

Birdie is proudly Navy

Naomi Hill has served in 723 Squadron – Australian Defence Force's helicopter training squadron, located in HMAS Albatross, and has been in the Navy for just over four years. Naomi's forearm showcases a World map with a ship's wheel, rope, compass and anchor – inscribed by a local Nowra artist.

"The tattoo signifies how proud I am to be serving in the Royal Australian Navy," said Naomi.



Chief Petty Officer Boatswain Wayne Fredericks displays his Quarter Master Gunner and Weapons Mechanic tattoos at 816 Squadron at HMAS *Albatross* in Nowra, New South Wales.

Photographer: CPOIS Cameron Martin

16

Chief Petty Officer Wayne Fredericks

Guns-out career

Navy journeyman Wayne Fredericks has three rates from his 48-year naval career inscribed on the back of both of his hands. The crossed 4.5 barrels (gun turret) with three rates being Weapons Mechanic (WM) Quarter Master Gunner (QMG) and Boatswain/ Bosun (B) were tattooed in 2012 in Kings Cross, Sydney.

"The tattoos remind me of the four sections/departments that I have experienced on various ships including my time in HMAS *Cerberus*, being Gunnery Seamanship Parade Ceremonial, Recruit School Instructor and Parade Commander. Thanks to the Defence Force (Navy) for looking after me and my family after all these years and it's been an outstanding ride and venture – I'd do it all again," Wayne said.





17

Leading Seaman Leanne Wallis

Guidance, stability & security

Leanne Wallis from 816 Squadron is is a Naval Police Coxswain responsible for 'policing the Force' in HMAS *Albatross*, Nowra. Leanne accumulated an anchor, scroll, clocks, flowers and Southern Cross located on her left thigh at different tattoo parlours during the last few years.

"This piece is a tribute to my Navy service as well as my children," said Leanne.

To her, the anchor specifically signifies stability and security while the scroll reads "We'll be here to guide you, but never hold you down."



Leading Seaman Naval Police Coxswain Leanne Wallis displays her tattoo in the gymnasium at HMAS *Albatross* in Nowra, New South Wales.

Photographer: CPOIS Cameron Martin



18

Seaman Hunter Gambuzza

Sink or swim

In 2019, Hunter Gambuzza had a female sailor tattooed on the right side of his chest. The Avionics Technician is responsible for the maintenance and repair of helicopter systems in HMAS *Albatross*.

“The tattoo reflects on the superstition that women weren’t allowed on ships but many tall ships had a mantle of a woman on the front for protection. She provides protection and calms the sea, and provides fighting words underneath. The words ‘sink or swim’ are positioned at the bottom, just to remind me to persevere through the adversities I face in work and life. It reminds me of the many strong female role models in my life and those I’ve met while serving my country ,” said Hunter.



Seaman Aviation Technician Aircraft Hunter Gambuzza displays his chest tattoo in the Helicopter Underwater Escape Training pool at HMAS *Albatross* in Nowra, New South Wales.

Photographer: CPOIS Cameron Martin



19

Petty Officer James Walker
Father Like Son

Physical Training Instructors like James Walker play an integral role in developing the strength and fitness of personnel to enable Navy members to build physical and mental resilience by raising and maintaining their level of fitness. James works in HMAS *Albatross* which is the largest operational naval establishment and the Navy's only Air Station where he mentally and physically prepares the five squadrons to fight and win at sea.

During his 11 years of service, James has collected a collage of tattoos on his arms while in Sydney and Western Australia. He says that his tattoos portray different meanings signifying different times in his naval career. The Sailor Jerry style gypsy girl on his inner left arm was inked when he returned from his first Gulf deployment in 2011. "She's meant to bring good luck for sailors," said James.

He received the 'Father Like Son' scroll, dagger and rose tattoo upon completion of his PTI course in 2013.

"Traditionally the dagger is tattooed on the non-master hand, and in days of sail, if a sailor had been entangled in rope, they can cut themselves free with their knife. The 'Father Like Son' comes from the fact that my Dad was also a PTI. The rose is blue to represent the Navy," he added.



Petty Officer Physical Training Instructor James Walker displays his tattoos in the gymnasium at HMAS *Albatross* in Nowra, New South Wales.

Photographer: CPOIS Cameron Martin


longbow

Royal Australian Navy Leading Seaman Imagery Specialist, Shane Cameron, from Navy Imagery Unit – North, displays his 'longbow' tattoo at HMAS *Coonawarra*, Northern Territory.

Photographer: CPL Rodrigo Villablanca

20

Leading Seaman Shane Cameron
Action Longbow!

One of the more recently inscribed Navy tattoos in this publication is of an early 1900s photographic camera with the word 'Longbow' written in front of it, located on the right forearm of Shane Cameron, a Navy Imagery Specialist based in the Northern Territory. He had the tattoo done in December 2020 in Perth following a deployment to the North Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean in the Australian frigate, HMAS *Ballarat*.

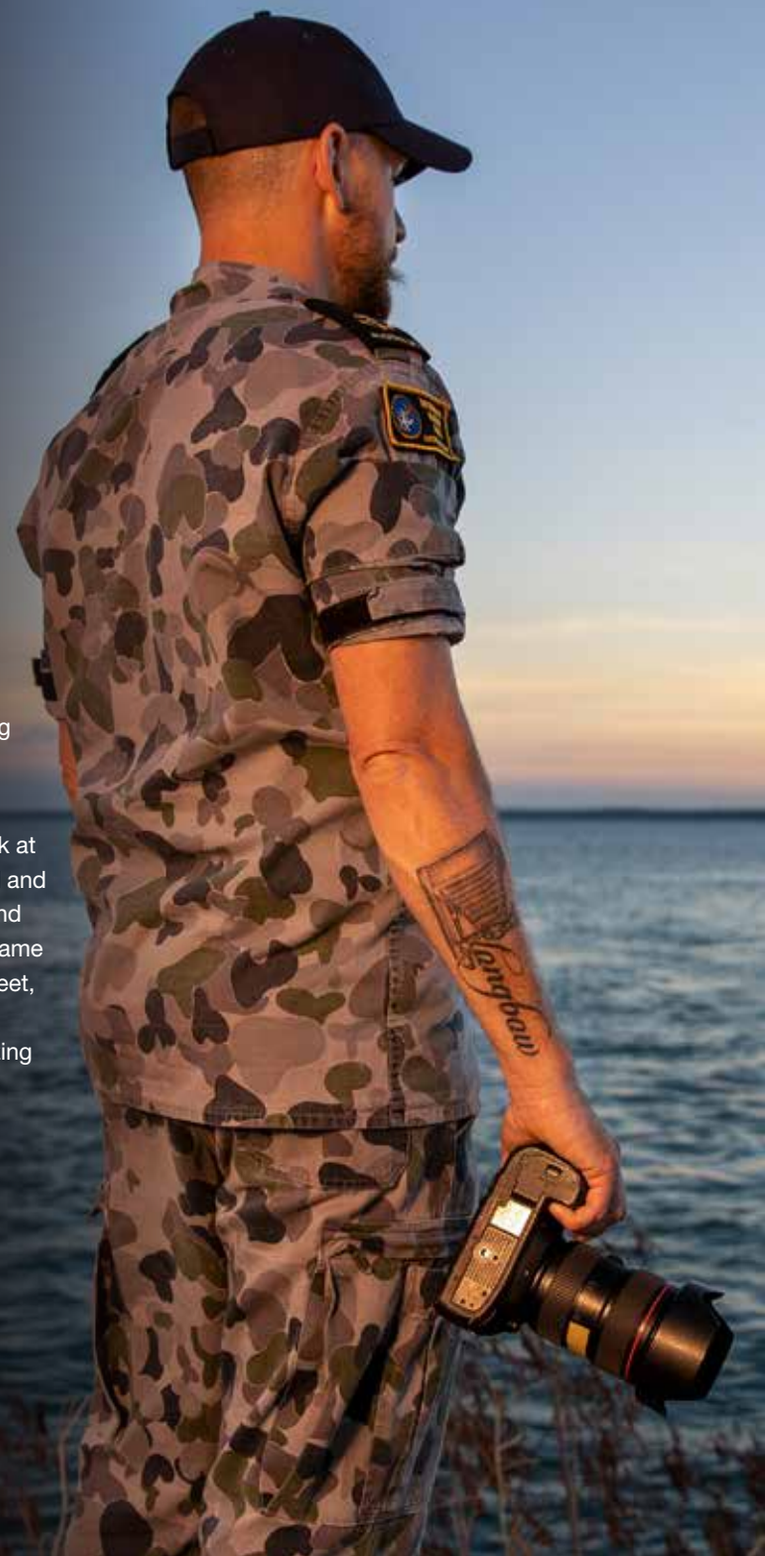
During his time spent in *Ballarat*, the crew decided to generate a call sign for him, which is uncommon for a photographer but common in Navy, often heard as 'Action Helicopter (insert call sign)' or 'Action Fast Boat (insert call sign)'.

"Mine was coined 'Action Longbow.' This was my call to get to the bridge of the ship as quickly as possible and it came about as I would use a long lens on the upper decks looking for targets at long range, much like an archer would shoot a longbow at a target at long range, hence longbow. Eventually, my work colleague in the office would joke 'Hey, it's longbow' as I entered the room and this led to just always calling me longbow.

"HMAS *Ballarat* was my first deployment as a photographer and it was fast-paced and stressful in the peak of COVID-19, but overall I enjoyed my interaction with all the crew aboard and it is something very memorable. I had a strong interest in all things archery as a kid and, as a third-generation photographer, having a tattoo of a camera was always something I had considered and now as a full-time professional photographer even more so," said Shane.

For Shane, it was a 'no-brainer' to incorporate the word longbow with a camera considering all the relating circumstances.

"I think the most significant and memorable thing for me when I look at the tattoo is family, as both my dad and my grandad were photographers and my middle name is my grandad's name whom I never had the chance to meet, and secondly for the time spent on HMAS *Ballarat* with a crew of amazing people," added Shane.




SULLIVAN

21

Lieutenant Nathan Sullivan
Guidance & sacrifice

Enoggera-based Nathan Sullivan had his tattoo, an anchor surrounded by a compass, rose and ship's wheel, done at Sydney tattoo expo in 2018.

"I have many other tattoos that I got from overseas and my wife wanted to get her first tattoo. My wife had sacrificed so much with me being in the Navy, as well as our kids, so we decided to get something themed Navy," Nathan said.

Nathan and his wife found a set of two tattoos of a ship's wheel with the words 'Be the one to guide me' and an anchor with 'But don't hold me down'.

"We could never decide who would get the wheel and who would get the anchor, but then we came across a design that incorporates both. When I look at it, it reminds me of our relationship and the sacrifices my family has made so that I could get to where I am today," he said.



Lieutenant Nathan Sullivan and his wife Caroline display their matching tattoos on the wharf at HMAS *Moreton* in Brisbane, Queensland.

Photographer: LSIS Steve Thomson


18-Feb-85
Survivor
strength

Warrant Officer Naval Police Coxswain Karen Dennis displays her tattoos on Parks Wharf at HMAS *Stirling* in Western Australia.

Photographer: LSIS Ronnie Baltoft

22

Warrant Officer Karen Dennis
Fight, serve & nurture

Cancer survivor Karen Dennis has served 36 years in the Royal Australian Navy. In 2019, she committed to having an 'infinity pink ribbon' and 'anchor with coxswain wheel and flowers' inked on her forearms in Rockingham, Western Australia.

"The pink infinity ribbon reminds me of the strength of character I had to fight and beat breast cancer in 2017 to return to my naval career. The anchor symbolises strength and hope," Karen said.

She added that her tattoo was a constant reminder of the security that the Navy has provided her financially, career-wise and being her second family.

"I have another tattoo on my left arm – a Chinese dragon with my children's names and birthstones, representing motherhood and that I will always nurture, protect, love and honour my children and grandchildren. I chose the Chinese dragon because I was born the year of the dragon, " she said.



Leading Seaman Aviation Technician Aircraft, Daniel Harrison, a maintainer from 822X squadron, displays his tattoo while holding a ScanEagle Unmanned Aerial Vehicle.

Photographer: CPOIS Cameron Martin

23

Leading Seaman Daniel Harrison

Dutch replica honours grandad

As a foundation to the modern Navy, a traditional tall-ship sailing vessel sits high on the right arm of Daniel Harrison. The 822X Squadron Avionics Technician ensures that the Navy's most up-to-date technology, like the ScanEagle – Navy's maritime tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicle – operates safely and efficiently. His tattoo is a replica of his grandfather's tattoo captured from a very old photograph.

"My grandfather, an Australian, served in the Dutch Merchant Navy at the tail-end of WWII operating between Australia and South East Asia," said Daniel.

"I was proud to follow in his footsteps and enter the life of a sailor, eventually getting the replica tattoo with RAN added once again. I couldn't bring myself to remove the MN initials. Looking at it always reminds me of the way his old, tired face lit up like he was 18 again when I mentioned my first gunfire breakfast," he said.





Petty Officer Aviation Support Michael Wenzel displays his tattoo in the hangar used for training Aviation Support sailors at HMAS *Albatross*, Nowra, New South Wales.

Photographer: CPOIS Cameron Martin

24

Petty Officer Michael Wenzel

Hula nose-art welcomes sailor home

Michael Wenzel's nautical star, Sailor Jerry inspired pin-up girls and a lighthouse branded on his left upper bicep and lower left leg were inspired by his fondness for old nose-art found on WWII aircraft.

"I was trying to look for a particular pin-up with a Navy theme on the outside of my leg. My wife had a shirt that had this picture on it, so I took the picture to the tattooist and asked if it could be done with a change to the headdress so that it had a Royal Australian Navy lid. I did this to not only show my service but also the service of my wife. The rope around the anchor represents my time as a Boatswain's Mate – according to tradition.

"The other pin-up Sailor Jerry styled tattoo shows the theme of Hawaii. I have been lucky enough to have participated in four RIMPAC [the Rim of the Pacific Exercise is the world's largest international maritime warfare exercise] deployments, so when I found this particular design I immediately said that I had to have this. The nautical star traditionally represents that a sailor could always find their way home, along with the lighthouse tattoo on the back of the leg. For me, having done most of my career at sea, it shows that my family are back home and that they will always be there to welcome me," Michael said.



A nautical themed tattoo on the arm of Lieutenant Charles Nuttall-Smith.

Photographer: LSIS Leo Baumgartner

25

Lieutenant Charles Nuttall-Smith

Two Thumb tempest

A trip to Singapore was an ideal opportunity for Charles Nuttall-Smith to endure a branding of a tall ship in a storm at the Johnny Two Thumb Tattoo Studio, Singapore. The Maritime Warfare Officer got the tattoo to celebrate the award of a Platform Endorsement to his Bridge Watchkeeping Certificate.

“This was the final step in becoming a fully qualified Maritime Warfare Officer. It concluded almost three years of training and completed a journey that had started more than five years prior when I first looked into joining the Navy. I had heard about Johnny Two Thumb and had been tempted on prior port visits to Singapore in 2015. I decided to hold off though until I had ‘earned it’ by qualifying and joining the trained force. The tattoo reminds me of why I joined; all the Maritime Warfare Officer training, that South East Asia Deployment and all my mates through it all. I still love it,” he said.





26

Warrant Officer Lex Davison

Steel shields patriotic salty

During his 33 years of service, Combat Systems Manager Lex Davison has had his share of challenges in his action-packed role of protecting Australia in warfare environments. The left side of his torso boldly displays torn flesh revealing parted metal over the Australian White Ensign (AWE).

“The tattoo was designed to show that below the torn flesh I am as tough as the deck-plates of a warship, but that underneath all of the flesh and steel, I am Royal Australian Navy to the core.The sensation and pain associated with getting tattooed over your ribs is something you have to experience to fully appreciate,” said Lex.



Warrant Officer Lex Davison displays his Royal Australian Navy inspired tattoo at Fleet Base East in Sydney, New South Wales.

Photographer: LSIS Sittichai Sakonpoonpol



Commander Surface Force, Commodore Dave Mann, CSC, RAN, displays his tattoo on the wharf at Garden Island Defence Precinct in Sydney, New South Wales.

Photographer: LSIS Nadav Harel

27

Commodore David Mann
Kailua-Kona marked with an M-Dot

In 1977 US Navy Commander John Collins suggested that a debate on which athletes were fitter – swimmers, runners or cyclists – should be settled through a race combining all three disciplines. The Ironman Triathlon was born and is still widely considered one of the most difficult one-day sporting events in the world. Dave participated in the gruelling event while posted in Hawaii and embarked on the 3.86 km swim, 180.25 km bicycle ride and marathon 42.20 km run.

He tattooed his left calf with a customised 'M-Dot' as a reminder of the legendary course that takes athletes through the barren lava fields that the Island of Hawaii provides as the setting for the ultimate test of strength, grit and heart.

"The M-Dot with sunrise at Mokulua Islets were done in 2018 at Tattoolicious Tattoo Waikiki. The tattoo is my enduring reminder of the brilliant experiences I had with my family living at the beach in Kailua, Hawaii, during my posting with the United States Navy. The Ironman M-Dot symbolises a year of commitment to swim–bike–run, proof you can teach an old dog new tricks," Dave said.





28

Leading Seaman Christopher Pearce

Stability and strength

Christopher has served eight years in the Royal Australian Navy and is currently based in HMAS *Kuttabul* within the Command Ceremonial unit. The anchor and sailor tattoo etched on his upper right shoulder was his first tattoo.

"I said to myself that if I returned home in one piece from my Middle East deployment, I would get a tattoo that meant something to my time there. The anchor represents stability, strength, determination, honouring a relationship with a loved one, family or friends and anchoring one's spirit to the earth. The sailor image represents a sailor who has just returned home from a long voyage as he watches his ship continue out to sea (much like when a sailor's post is up on a ship). The sailor also has a swallow representing 5,000 nautical miles which was a lot back in the day of sail. We sailed over 10,000 nautical miles on our gulf trip," said Christopher.

Christopher had the tall ship done after completing his minimum four years period of service.

"The tall ship with guns represents naval service and sailing to Africa. The sails represent luck – the more sails you have the luckier you are. The north star and compass guide your way back home while the hibiscus means you have sailed somewhere tropical. I got the eagle tattoo done while visiting Melbourne and it represents power, strength, wisdom and courage.

"The snake tattoo located on my left forearm was done after my relationship fell apart and my partner and I separated. It represents a brand new life or a restart in life. It is also biblical and can represent temptation, sin, evil, fertility, rebirth, transformation and healing," he said.



Leading Seaman Boatswain's Mate Christopher Pearce on the bridge onboard HMAS *Supply*.

Photographer: LSIS David Cox

29

Chaplain Grant Ludlow

Holy knight salutes to service

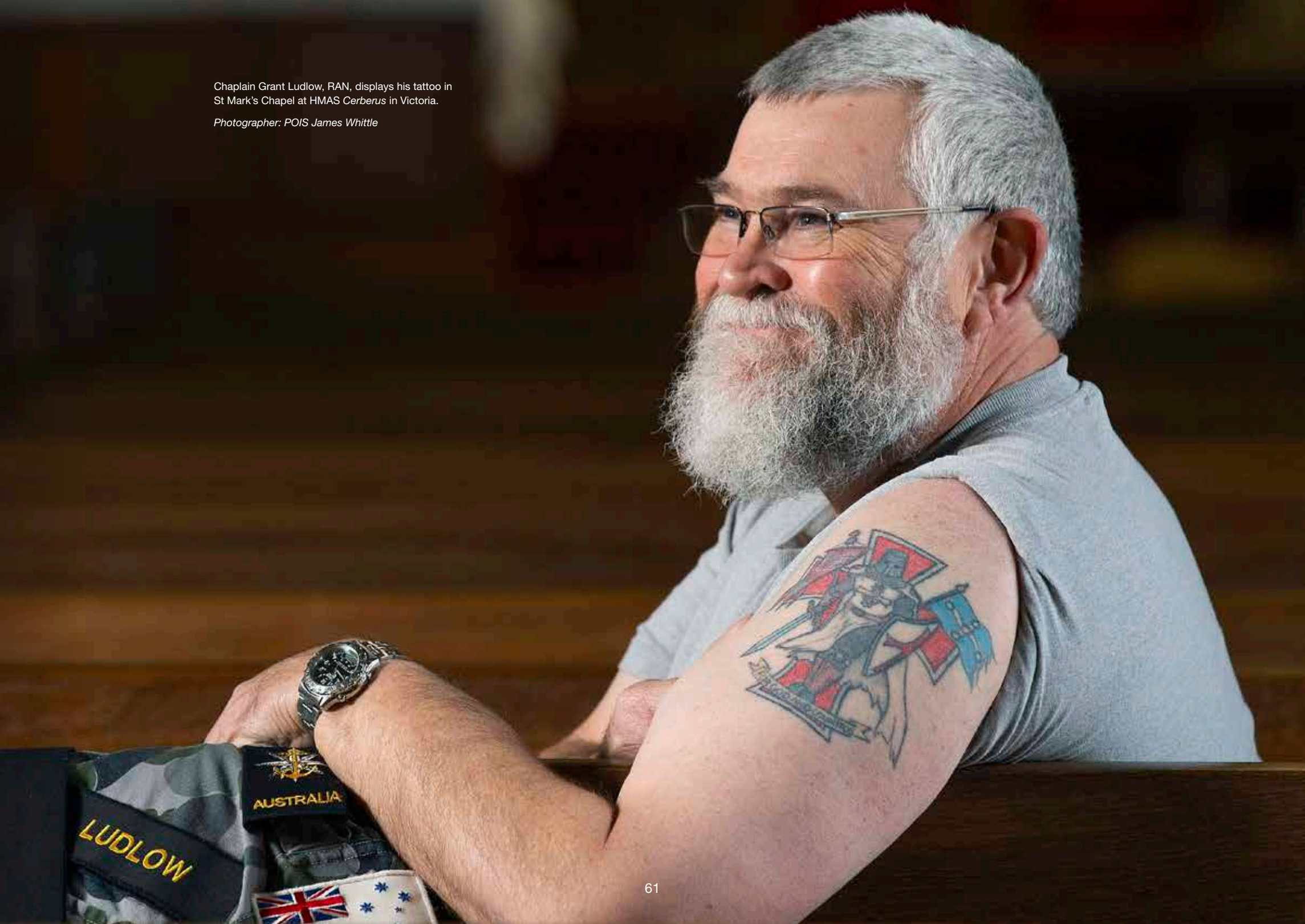
Chaplain Grant Ludlow is based in HMAS *Cerberus* which serves as the primary training establishment for the Royal Australian Navy personnel. Grant has served 15 years in the RAN and had his tattoo done in 2014 at the renowned Johnny Two Thumb in Singapore.

“My tattoo was a 50th birthday present to commemorate my naval service and the privilege of providing chaplaincy to the ships in which I have completed operational deployments.

The elements of the tattoo are the cross, insignia and motto representing Chaplaincy.

“The knight is for HMAS *Newcastle* for Operation Slipper – for fun, the style of knight chosen was deliberately reminiscent of Monty Python and the Holy Grail. The tartan banner is for HMAS *Stuart* for Operation Resolute and the Eureka Stockade flag is for HMAS *Ballarat* for Operation Resolute too. Together these form a meaningful tribute to my naval service,” he said.





Chaplain Grant Ludlow, RAN, displays his tattoo in St Mark's Chapel at HMAS *Cerberus* in Victoria.

Photographer: POIS James Whittle



30

Seaman Communications and Information Systems Sahra Lake shows her tattoos during a workout at the HMAS *Cerberus* gymnasium.

Photographer: LSIS James McDougall

Seaman Sahra Lake

Bound to the seas

Navy Communicator Sahra Lake had a tall ship and Admiralty anchor with the quote ‘Feels like I’ll forever be bound to the bottom of these seas’ tattooed on her thighs.

“The quote comes from The Amity Affliction song ‘Anchors’. The quote is a reminder I can achieve anything, no matter who or what tries to hinder me in getting what I want. Everything is attainable and achievable if you fight hard enough for it,” Sahra said.





Chief Petty Officer Noel Christoffel

Battles honoured, sacrifices remembered

Noel Christoffel has tattoos to commemorate his charity work and his battle with cancer collected over 33 years served in the Navy. A nautical star signifies his heading in the right direction and a Camp Quality logo on his wrist signifies his charity work since 2017.

“The anchor and rope ribbon tattoo was done in Canberra in 2017 – the anchor represents my naval service and the rope ribbon represents my battle with kidney cancer. A faceless sailor standing in a bed of poppies surrounded by a White Ensign represents all sailors and their sacrifices,” said Noel.

“My tattoos have a significant personal meaning because they represent things that I hold dear to me: my naval service of which I am extremely proud; my link to the sea which I have had all my life; my kidney cancer battle ; and my work with Camp Quality,” he added.

31



Chief Petty Officer Naval Police Coxswain Noel Christoffel displays his tattoos in the decommissioned cell block at HMAS *Cerberus*, Victoria.

Photographer: LSIS James McDougall



32

Chief Petty Officer Lennie Marshall

Honouring family & shipmates

Lennie has recently rolled into his 36th year of naval service during which time his tattoos were done in memory of his father who served in the Navy as a Quartermaster on both HMAS *Melbourne* and *Sydney* aircraft carriers at the time. 'The Man of War' sailing ship was done in honour of his service and to those that served before him and continue to serve. Both of these tattoos were done in Bali in one sitting in July 2018.

"The female with the anchor is in honour of our loved ones that support us as we continue to serve and deploy," Lennie said.



Chief Petty Officer Communication and Information Systems Lennie Marshall shows off his tattoos at HMAS *Cerberus*, Victoria.

Photographer: LSIS James McDougall



Petty Officer Jason Williams

Persevere from koi into a dragon

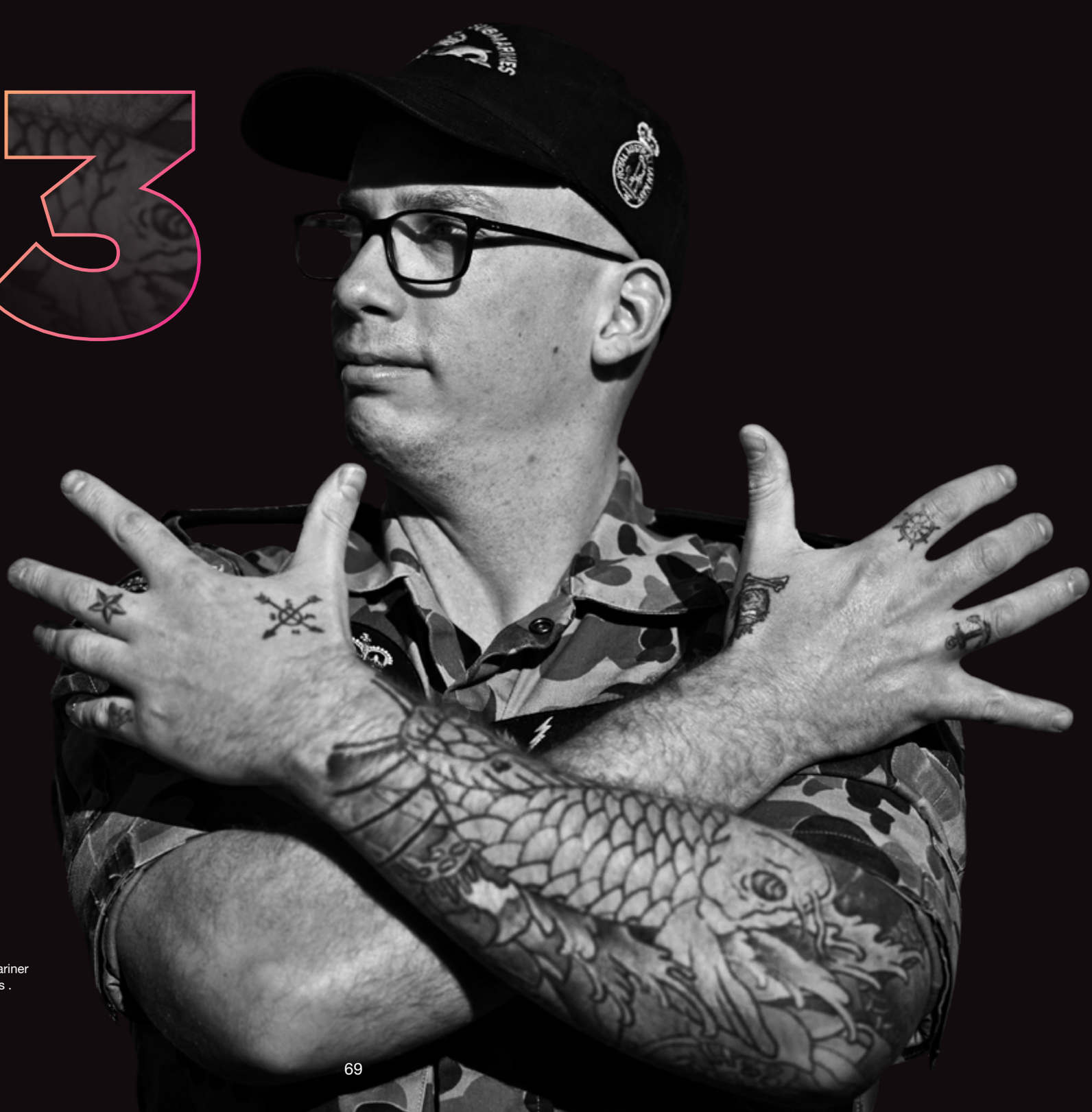
Jason's left arm is an oriental medley of lotus flowers, water, lightning, a koi fish, a dragon and an anchor on the chest. His left hand has an arrow-style compass, nautical star and tall ship, while his right hand shows a cool pineapple, helm and an anchor. Koi are typically linked with masculine characteristics such as strength and bravery, as well as being symbols of determination and the desire to succeed. In mythology, the koi would swim upstream and be rewarded by being turned into a golden dragon.

"The oriental sleeve is a piece about change, growth, perseverance and strength and is a link to my time spent in Asia with the Navy and as a child living in Malaysia. My hand tattoos are reminders of different aspects of my naval career and life whilst serving. The cool pineapple is a reminder of hard times and to keep cool when they occur, while the compass reminds me of travel and adventure," Jason said.

"The knuckle tattoos are associated with my love of the Navy and remind me of elements that help me through hard paths: the anchor to keep me grounded, the nautical star reminds me to find a guiding point, principle or goal, and the helm to steer towards it. The sailing ship reminds me to keep the wind in my sails and push forward – my partner worked on tall ships too."

Jason's sleeve was done over multiple sessions in 2016 and 2017 in Perth and Sydney. The compass was done in 2019 while the knuckle tattoos were done to mark his 15th naval anniversary in 2021.

33



Petty Officer Electronics Technician Submariner Jason Williams displays his nautical tattoos .

Photographer: POIS Bradley Darvill



Chief Petty Officer Simon Butterworth

Forever on patrol

A recent addition to this publication's collection is a crest of the Indonesian Navy Cakra-class submarine, KRI Nanggala 402, displayed on Simon's right calf. Simon marked the tragedy in ink following the disappearance of the submarine after it had submerged to conduct a torpedo practice exercise near Bali, Indonesia.

"Following the tragic loss of 53 of the Indonesian Navy's finest sailors and officers on board the KRI Nanggala 402 on 21 April 2021, I was immediately taken aback by great grief and mourning over the loss of these brave men – our brothers in arms and our dearest neighbour. The tattoo allows me to reflect on their service and to remember the families and loved ones these Indonesian national heroes have left behind. They are forever in our hearts and forever on patrol," said Simon.

Chief Petty Officer Simon Butterworh display's his calf tattoo, the Crest of the KRI Nanggala, Indonesian National Military-Naval Force's submarine, lost with all hands when it sank in the Bali Sea.

Photographer: POIS Bradley Darvill


KRI KANGGALA
402



Commander Greg Swinden, from the Strategic Logistics Branch in Canberra, showcases his tattoos collected during his 36-year career in the RAN.

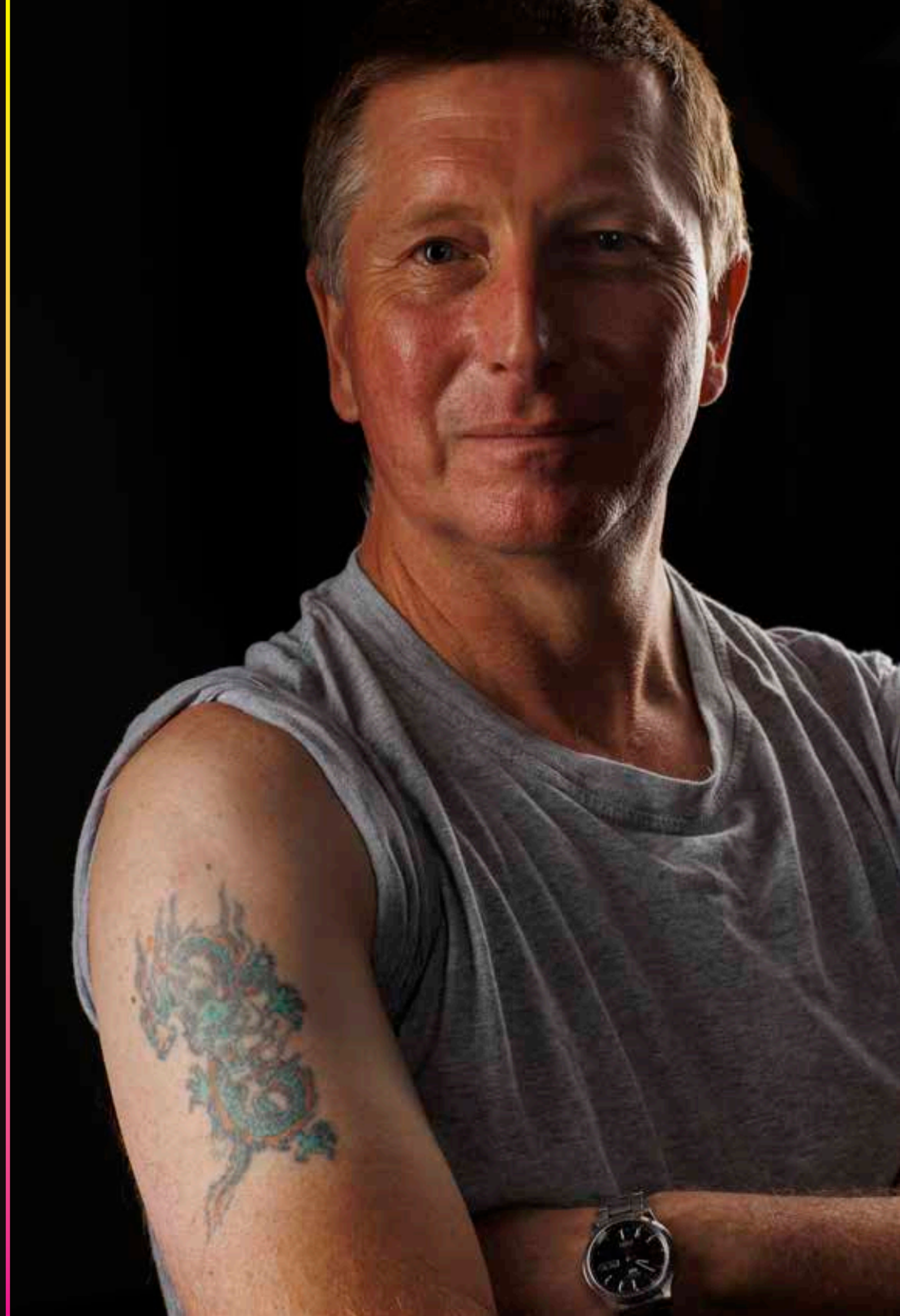
Photographer: Sergeant Cameron Pegg

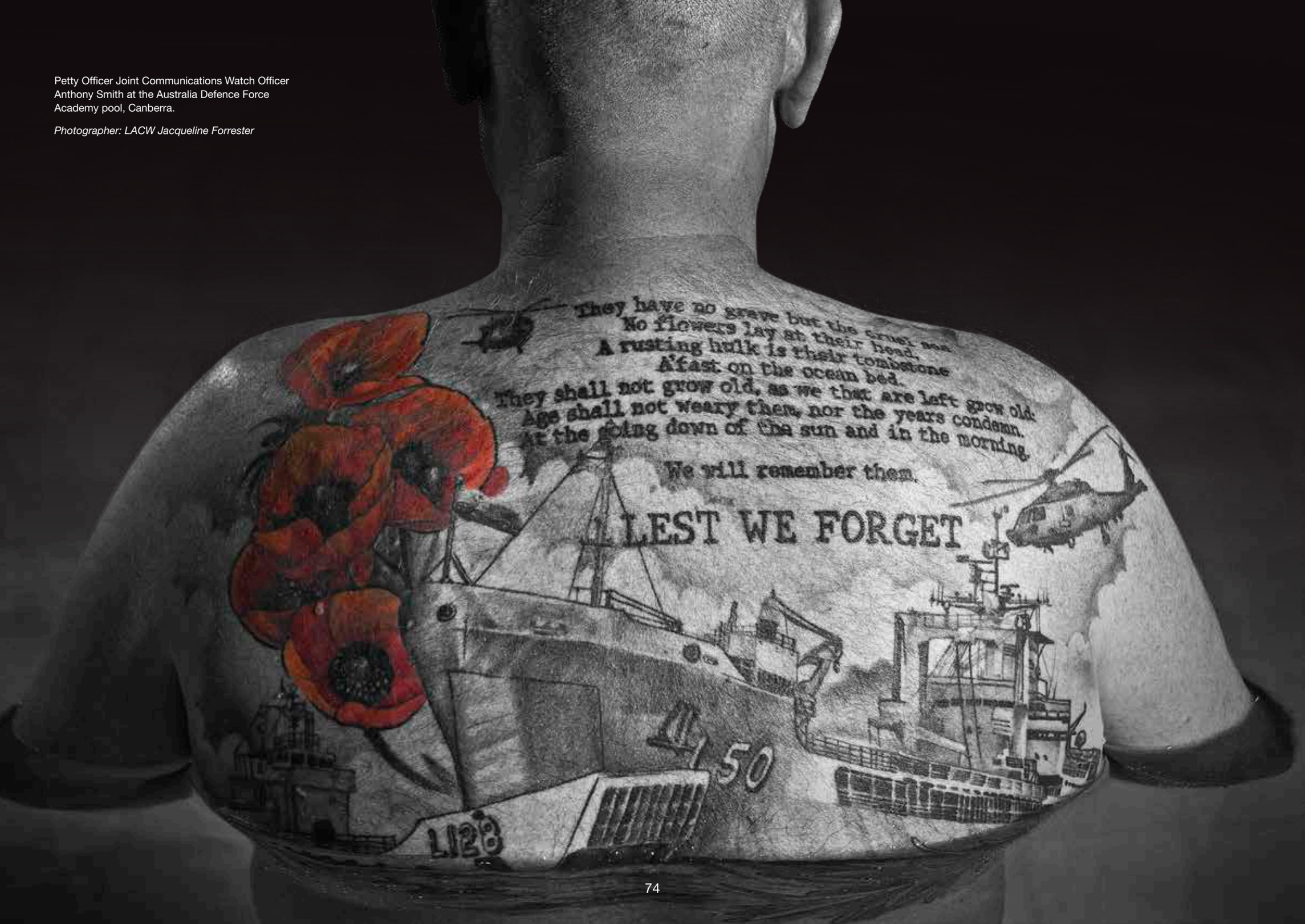
35

Commander Greg Swinden
Grounded strength & wisdom

There are very few world cultures that have not admired, or dreaded, dragons in their mythology or legends. A dragon and an anchor are showcased on Greg's 'guns' and show signs of character from his circa 36 years in the Royal Australian Navy.

"It was for me an outward sign that I was Navy (when not in uniform) and that, as many people including senior officers had tattoos, it cut across rank levels. As a Midshipman it also allowed me to be a bit 'rebellious' and while some senior officers disapproved of officers with tattoos they could not stop you from getting them. The 2018 tattoo was done as my daughters want to get a tattoo but were a bit 'scared' so I went in with them and had mine done first so they could see what the process was," said Greg.





Petty Officer Joint Communications Watch Officer Anthony Smith at the Australia Defence Force Academy pool, Canberra.

Photographer: LACW Jacqueline Forrester

36

Petty officer Anthony Smith

An ode to operations & oceans

Anthony has a tapestry of navy-themed tattoos dedicated to his service and on his back are tattoos of HMA Ships *Tobruk* and *Labuan*, helicopters, the Naval Ode, poppies, rosemary and dolphins.

“I have served on both ships during East Timor operations in 2009 and 2006. Helicopters and dolphins remind me of being at sea,” said Anthony.





Combat Systems Operator, Leading Seaman Holly Bird, of Headquarters Joint Operations Command, displays her nautical tattoos at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Photographer: LACW Jacqueline Forrester

37

Leading Seaman Holly Bexton Bird

Thumbs-up to Newcastle mateship

The Pennant Number 06 of HMAS *Newcastle* and the tactical symbology for Aircraft and Sub Surface are tattooed on each of Holly's thumbs.

"I wanted something that represented my service and my role as Combat Systems Operator. The upwards arrow represents Aircraft and the downwards arrow a Sub Surface contact. 06 is the Pennant Number for HMAS *Newcastle*, the ship I was serving on at the time.

"It's also a constant reminder of why I joined and the mateship I have with all of the people past and present that I have served with," said Holly.





38

Royal Australian Navy Able Seaman Communication Information Systems Sean Perrett shows his tattoos for Anchors on Skin at Russell Offices, Canberra.

Photographer: LSIS Jarrod Mulvihill



Able Seaman Sean Perrett

Superstition, sisters but not seafood

Sean's left arm showcases a sleeve with a wooden sailing ship, a harpooned shark, an octopus Kracken and an anchor which has ropes forming the names of his sisters, all inked in Canberra.

"I have taken the traditional meaning of anchors on sailors – the stability. My sisters were my most secure focus when I was at sea on exercise or deployment. If I was ever exhausted or down, I would look at my anchor and remember I was doing it for them," said Sean.

"I have always been into myths and legends and sailors are very superstitious. The octopus Kraken is a staple myth and is a fantastic, majestic beast that to me represents the 'unknown' and the fear around it – you never know what will happen when you are on deployment. The shark has another traditional meaning, being the things you overcome. A shark on your arm says you're willing to stand your ground and you're not about to become someone else's seafood.

"I was never going to give up: when people told me I wouldn't make it into the military or that I'd fail, I was more determined to make it through. I have a wooden sail ship to represent the heritage of sailors. It also represents a call to adventure, to go across the Seven Seas, but to always have the means to come home," he added.



Commander Katrina Blazey

Unwavering Navy friendship

Katrina grew up with a father in the Navy and followed in his footsteps at the age of 18. Her closest friend to this day is a classmate from Naval College, Sue Draysey, who is an officer of Army cadets at a school based unit in Sydney.

“Two years ago Sue and I got matching small tattoos – nothing amazing – a simple line of a wave on our right wrists – a token to the Navy and a love of the sea – both of which are the basis for our lifelong friendship. The story behind our matching tattoos is the recognition of Navy as the basis of our 36 year friendship. Having joined HMAS *Creswell* in February 1986, we had come from very different backgrounds and life experiences aged only 18. Our friendship was built and cemented during our first posting where we were both posted to HMAS *Harman* and lived onboard,” said Katrina.

“Since then our careers, and our lives, have taken very different paths but the friendship has been the constant; to the extent where although we have rarely lived in the same city, having both left the Permanent Navy many years ago. Throughout those years we have always tried to get together for a weekend every six months and often talked about matching tattoos.

“We agreed that the outline of a wave would not only reflect the Navy and how we met, but also how the Navy was such a defining moment in our lives. The tattoo also reflects our shared love of the ocean. The notion of commitment to service and military values remains part of our lives – I am still working in Navy in Canberra when I can, and Sue is an officer of Army cadets in a school based unit in Sydney.

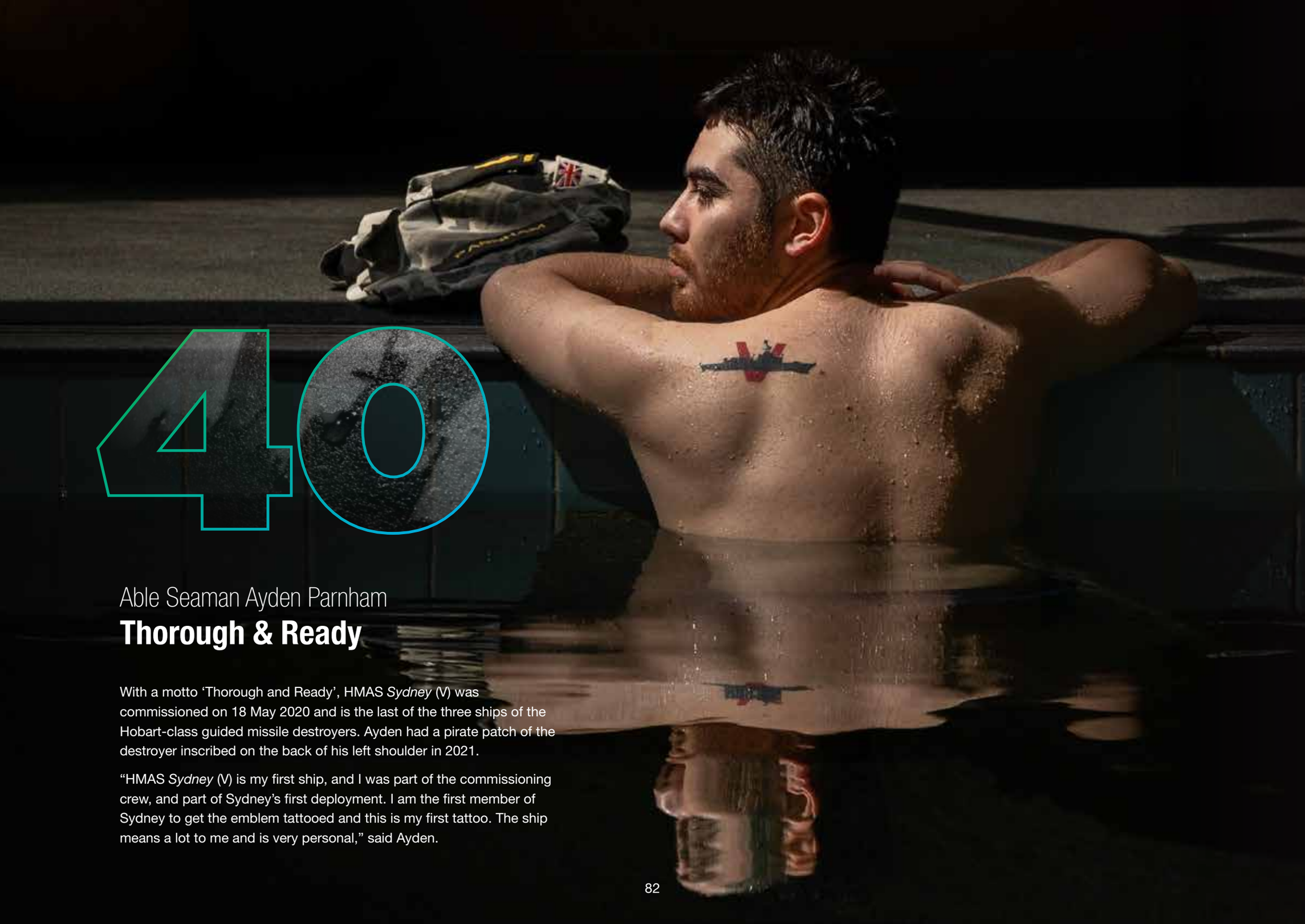
“In short, the tattoos aren’t obvious – they are nothing amazing and a simple line of a wave – a token to the Navy and a love of the sea – both of which are a basis for a lifelong friendship. Some stories are not all about sea time or deployments, but still about the Navy and the people it brings into your life. Ours is one of them,” she added.

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Susan Draysey and Commander Katrina Blazey, RAN, credit their enlistment to HMAS *Creswell* in 1986 as the foundation for their 36 year friendship, memorialised with matching wave tattoos.

Photographer: CPL Olivia Cameron



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Able Seaman Ayden Parnham
Thorough & Ready

With a motto ‘Thorough and Ready’, HMAS *Sydney* (V) was commissioned on 18 May 2020 and is the last of the three ships of the Hobart-class guided missile destroyers. Ayden had a pirate patch of the destroyer inscribed on the back of his left shoulder in 2021.

“HMAS *Sydney* (V) is my first ship, and I was part of the commissioning crew, and part of Sydney’s first deployment. I am the first member of Sydney to get the emblem tattooed and this is my first tattoo. The ship means a lot to me and is very personal,” said Ayden.



Able Seaman Maritime Logistics Chef Ayden Parnham in the HMAS *Watson* pool, Sydney.

Photographer: ABIS Jarryd Capper



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Lieutenant Danielle Brodie

Southern Cross anchored at sea

Public Affairs Officer Danielle Brodie had a watercolour-style tattoo with the Southern Cross, located on her inner left bicep, tattooed in Fredericksburg, USA. At sea, the anchor represents stability and the Southern Cross or Crux Australis forms part of the Australian national flag and is considered Australia's oldest symbol.

"My anchor is part of a larger design that incorporates things that are, and have been, important in my life. I have always had an affiliation with the sea, from sailing in school to fishing with my dad on weekends when I was growing up. Joining the Navy was a natural progression of this relationship, and the anchor was something I promised myself once I completed my training and achieved my primary qualification," Danielle said.

"The anchor and the Southern Cross remind me of home, and of how much I enjoy serving at sea. When I look at it I see both my personal and professional accomplishments, and am proud to have found a career that I enjoy. The anchor is part of a half-sleeve design that incorporates elements of my life that are important to me. It is something I have contemplated for a very long time and represents a lot of milestones in my life.

"My career in Navy is represented by the anchor, and on my outer bicep I have a stack of books with titles by my favourite authors that shaped my childhood and teenage years, reflecting my love of sci-fi and fantasy. There are lilies for my eldest child and a fairy princess for my youngest child (which is the meaning of her name). She is sitting on the moon surrounded by the Northern Cross constellation, symbolising her birth in the USA.

"I also have a starscape incorporating *Star Wars* and Discworld themes, both of which have significant personal meaning to me. To cap it all off there is a beautiful baby blue and baby pink swallow to symbolise the loss of my pregnancy, for a baby that was very much wanted and loved," she said.



Public Affairs Officer Lieutenant Danielle Brodie prepares for an interview in the Navy Imagery Unit - East studio, Fleet Base East, New South Wales

Photographer: LSIS David Cox



Leading Seaman Combat Systems Operator (Underwater) James Maybury at the Royal Australian Navy Memorial on Anzac Parade in Canberra.

Photographer: Sergeant Cameron Pegg

Leading Seaman James Maybury

A tradition of love & deployment

James' tattoos typify that being the the navy isn't just a job, it's an grand chapter of life that's deserves permenant artistic credo. One where shipmates can save your life and one decision can determine your fate. This intensity breeds an appetite for ink, for tattoos that commemorate a deployment and that link a man to his ship.

Since 2012, he has a lived-up to his very personal tradition of having a tattoo done with the same tattoo artist at 5 Star Tattoo whenever his ship berths in Fremantle. His old-school tattoos have the Sailor Jerry trademark of a kaleidoscope of colours rooted in interpretation of traditions and symbols that go back thousands of years.
The Gypsy Girl on his right shoulder marks a tumultuous time when James experienced a relationship break up.

"I got this tattoo to signify the closure of that relationship, to remind to learn from my mistakes and hope for a positive future," said James.

A Homeward Bounder, traditional style sail ship, on his left inner forearm was inked the day before he sailed for the Middle East on his first deployment in 2013.

"The ship represents my first operational deployment and being a traditional style 'homeward bounder' sail ship appeals to my taste for bold colourful design with traditional roots. It also reminds me of the adventure of life at sea, the port visits and that no matter how long my shipmates and I are away, we are always going to do our utmost to come home safely to our loved ones.

On the opposite forearm, James had a traditional style hourglass and rose done prior to sailing for the Middle East on his second deployment in 2017.

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“By the time this deployment came around I had been married for less than a year. I was inspired to get an hourglass to represent the time spend at sea and the inevitable count-down until coming home back to my new bride. We had our first wedding anniversary when I was in Dubai and she was on holiday in London. This tattoo reminds me of the special bond between my wife and I. The symbology of the hourglass also represents our own mortality and to live your life in the allocated time to the fullest,” he added.

James had traditional style swallows etched on his outer left and right forearms upon his return from Middle East deployment in 2017.

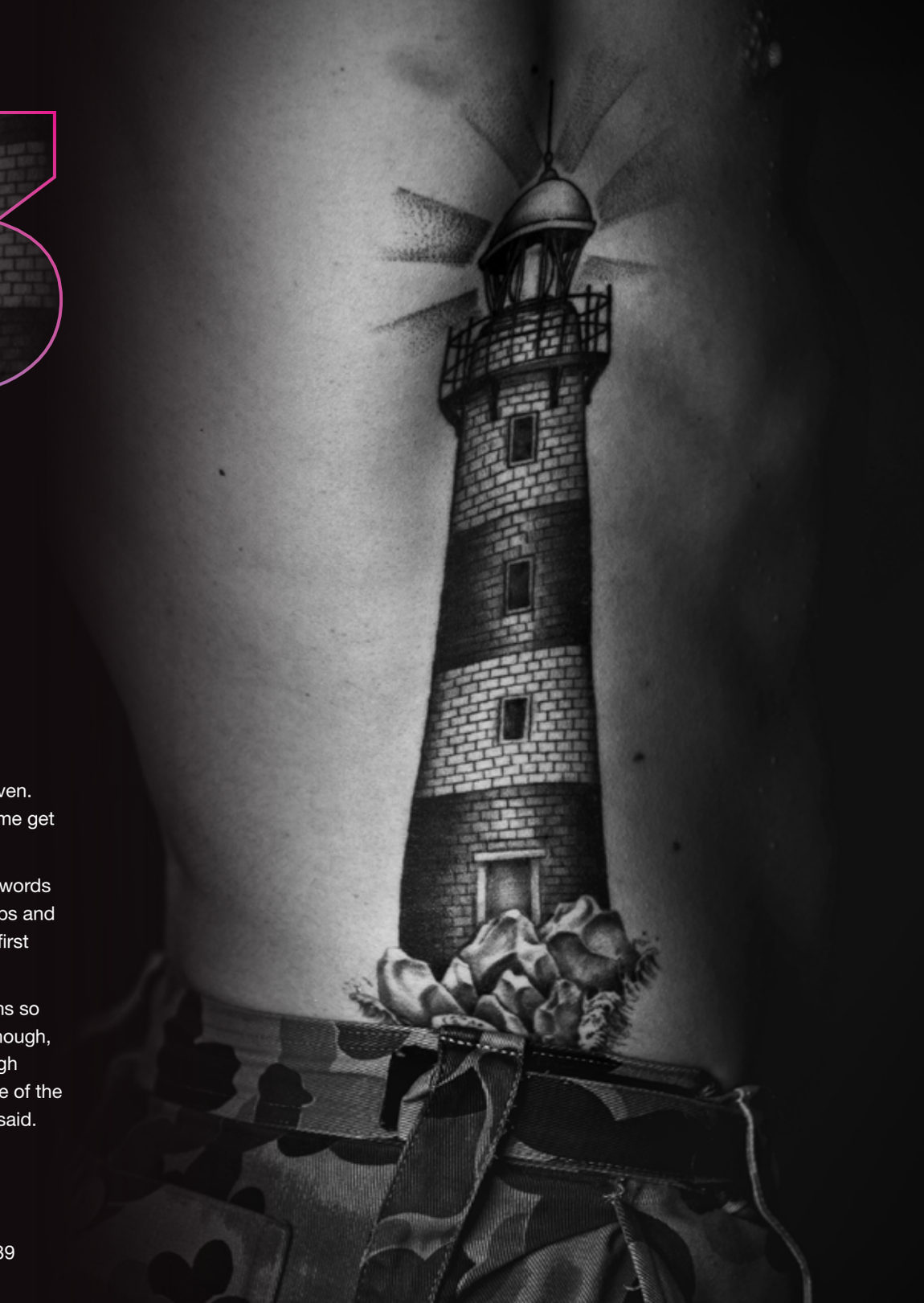
“The swallow traditionally represents sailing experience onboard seagoing vessels. In the old days it was one swallow per 5000NM. For me I got 2 swallows done to represent time spent at sea and in particular one for each operational deployment. Modern ships in comparison now steam tens of thousands of nautical miles, so I’d be covered in swallows otherwise,” he said.



Midshipman Fox Cassidy displays his tattoos during a swim session in the Duntroon pool.

Photographer: Leading Aircraftman Imagery Specialist John Solomon

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Midshipman Fox Cassidy

Chips and gravy

The ribcage is a particularly painful place to get a tattoo because you don't have as much fat, muscle, or skin on your ribs—you will feel the scratching of the needle a lot more.

Fox endured his 'hurt-locker' experience with a large lighthouse emblazoned on the right-side of his ribcage, courtesy of his favourite artist back home in the Gold Coast.

"The purpose of a lighthouse is to help ships get home safely and are a symbol of safety and peace of mind despite how rough conditions are. It essentially represents a safe haven. This lighthouse is there to help me get home safely," said Fox.

On the back of his right are the words 'Chips and Gravy' (slang for ships and navy) which was done after his first experience on HMAS *Adelaide*.

"I'd only been in for a few months so 'Chips and Gravy' was subtle enough, but it makes me, and others laugh when they see it and reminds me of the culture I joined in the Navy," he said.



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Lieutenant Commander Will Singer
Lest We Forget

Will has a colourful World War II nose-cone-art styled female navy sailor and anchor on his left forearm—the anchor is the most secure object in a sailor's life, making it the perfect representation of stability. In Will's case, he has 'Sweetpea' – the nickname for his wife, Cindy, emblazoned at the base of the anchor.

"I love the Sailor Jerry old-school tattoos and I've always had a fascination for American bombers that boasted a colourful image of a girl or animal on the nose cone of their aircraft. The idea was to merge this nose-cone-art style into a brunette female navy sailor resembling my wife," joked Will.

Anchors have become popular within general tattoo culture over the years, but the symbolism is still the same. It's a reminder of what keeps you steady.

"Coincidentally my 'Lest We Forget' tattoo was done in Albany while large-scale evacuations were underway at Hamid Karzai International Airport. Thousands of foreigners and some vulnerable Afghan citizens were evacuated amid the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from the War in Afghanistan and the Taliban offensive in 2021," Will added.

He said that the tattoo is a reminder of those who fought together in the First World War, the Angolan Bush War, and in every battle in which Australians and South Africans have proved themselves – the qualities of self-sacrifice, courage and helping us to live the life we do.



Public Affairs Officer Lieutenant Will Singer displays his tattoos in front of HMAS *Ballarat* on Fleet Base West in Western Australia.

Photographer: LSIS Ronnie Baltoft



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Manu Edwin

Behind the buzz of the barred needle

Tattooist Manu Edwin hails from Timaru, New Zealand, and has been working at Albany Ink Tattoo & Piercing Studio in Western Australia.

“When artists inscribe large pieces, like on a client’s back for example, then you spend hours talking to your clients and getting to know them and they eventually become close friends,” Manu said. He thinks this relationship is probably stronger than that of a doctor–patient relationship.

Contemporary tattoos are inspired by the Polynesian word for inserting indelible ink onto the skin to make permanent markings : ‘tatu’. Manu enjoys all styles of tattooing but in particular the Maori style as he has a connection to this culture.

Tattooists have distinct personalities and tend to be artistic individuals, which means they’re creative, intuitive, sensitive, articulate, and expressive.

“I have been tattooing for 20 years full time. I’ve enjoyed tattooing because of the freedom it gives me to travel, the people I have met who have allowed me to explore and share my creativity,” he said.

Incidentally, Manu has an intimate link to ANZACs. “One piece I created recently while in quarantine, after 10 years in Germany, is an ANZAC memorial piece. It depicts a relative of ours who died in a POW camp in Germany. He is buried alongside his fallen brothers in Berlin,” Manu recalls.



Tattooist Manu Edwin outlines a tattoo in Albany, Western Australia

Photographer: Molly Bunn from Albany Ink Tattoo & Piercing Studio.

Lieutenant Commander Will Singer, RAN

About the author

Will is Naval Officer with highly developed leadership and innovative skills, and with management experience honed over 30 years in private enterprise and the Australian Defence Force.

He is an accredited Certified Management Consultant and an experienced knowledge leader, having worked for multinational companies across Australasia, Europe and Africa.

He served in the South African Mechanised Infantry during the Angolan Bush War and commissioned as an officer in the Royal Australian Navy.

Will has a Masters in Business Administration from the Edinburgh Business School (Heriot-Watt University) and contributes to military newspapers, financial journals, small-business media and business newspapers. He has authored *Profit Factory* and *Grey Shutterbugs*. Will is a Public Affairs Officer with Navy Communications and Media and calls Albany in Western Australia ‘home’.



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