



## AUSTRALIAN NAVAL ANNIVERSARIES 2022

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At various points during 2022 the Royal Australian Navy will pause to commemorate a number of significant anniversaries. 2022 marks 80 years since the dark days of 1942, a year which saw more Royal Australian Navy warships lost than any other. With WWII raging, Royal Australian Navy ships and personnel were engaged in theatres throughout the globe. We pause to acknowledge the supreme sacrifice made by those who would put the safety of others over their own, and who, when the night was darkest, shone a light that all Australians can aspire to. Lest we forget.

We also pause to recognise other significant events, which contributed to the rich history of the Royal Australian Navy and laid the foundations for her people today.

### 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries

**8 February 1992** - History was made when Commander Carolyn Brand RAN, became the first female officer to assume command of a commissioned shore establishment - HMAS *Waterhen*. Commander Brand, a mine warfare specialist, was also appointed the Commander Australian Mine Warfare Forces.



Commander Carolyn Brand assumes command of HMAS *Waterhen* from Commander Ken Green.

**23 July 1992** - The Fleet Air Arm's 816 Squadron officially re-commissioned in the unique situation of having embarked flights aboard HMA Ships *Canberra* and *Darwin* in the Middle East at the time of its commissioning, and having already served in the first Gulf War in the guise of the Seahawk Introduction and Transition Unit. The squadron's Seahawks continued to deploy to the Middle East since its re-commissioning and assisted with firefighting efforts in New South Wales and Victoria in 1994, 1998 and 2003.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/history/squadron-histories/816-squadron-history>

### 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries

**30 June 1982** - The modified *Majestic* class aircraft carrier, HMAS *Melbourne* (II) decommissioned in Sydney. The flagship served for 27 years and steamed some 868,893 nautical miles.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-melbourne-ii>

### 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries

**7 April 1952** - No. 723 Squadron, RAN Fleet Air Arm was commissioned at Naval Air Station (NAS) Nowra, NSW. The squadron has a proud history in the RAN having served in Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East and East Timor.

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<https://www.navy.gov.au/about/organisation/fleet-air-arm/723-squadron>

## 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries

**13 September 1947** - The *Bathurst* class corvette, HMAS *Warrnambool* (I) struck a mine whilst conducting post-war minesweeping operations in the Great Barrier Reef. *Warrnambool* was sunk during the incident and four sailors were killed; Stoker R.J. Garrett, Ordinary Seaman J.H. Hyland, Able Seaman D.B. Sigg and Signalman N.L. Lott.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-warrnambool-i>

## 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries

**20 January 1942** - The *Bathurst* class corvette, HMAS *Deloraine* (assisted by HMA ships, *Katoomba* and *Lithgow*, attacked and sunk the Japanese submarine *I-124* north of Darwin. *I-124* was the first enemy submarine sunk in Australian waters and one of just four minelaying submarines in the Japanese Navy. HMAS *Deloraine*'s Commanding Officer Lieutenant Commander D.A. Menlove RAN, was awarded the DSO for his part in the action.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-deloraine>

**6 February 1942** - A shell splintered Carley float (life raft) containing the corpse of an unidentified Australian sailor was sighted in Flying Fish Cove, Christmas Island. The float was recovered and the sailor was buried in the Old European Cemetery overlooking the sea. It has since been determined that the float and body came from HMAS *Sydney* (II) which sank following a fierce engagement with the German surface raider HSK *Kormoran*. All of *Sydney*'s 645 crew perished. In 2006 the remains of the unknown sailor were exhumed by a specialist ADF team. The remains were carefully examined and biometric data and DNA samples were recorded before the sailor was reinterred, with full Naval Honours, in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery in Geraldton, Western Australia - the closest war cemetery to where *Sydney* was lost. In the years since 2006 a committed team of researchers continued working hard to identify the unknown sailor, and in 2021 DNA testing was to reveal his identity beyond doubt. On 19 November 2021, at a special ceremony held at the Australian War Memorial marking the 80th anniversary of *Sydney*'s sinking, it was announced that the unknown sailor is Able Seaman Thomas Welsby Clark.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/biography/able-seaman-thomas-welsby-clark>



The identity of the 'Unknown Sailor' from HMAS *Sydney* (II) was revealed to be Thomas Welsby Clark, a Queenslander aged 21.

**19 February 1942** - Japanese bombers carried out the first of some 64 air raids launched throughout northern Australia. Eight ships were sunk, two were beached and later re-floated and many of the other 35 ships in the harbour were damaged by bomb or machine gun fire. Darwin town and the RAAF aerodrome were also heavily damaged by the raid.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/media-room/publications/semaphore-04-17>

**28 February 1942** - HMAS *Perth* (I) under the command of Captain H.M.L. Waller, DSO, RAN steamed into a fierce night action against superior Japanese naval forces in what became known as the Battle of Sunda Strait and was eventually sunk. At the time of her loss *Perth*'s ship's company totalled 681, comprising 671 naval personnel, six RAAF personnel and four civilian canteen staff. Three hundred and fifty crewmen including Captain Waller and three civilians did not survive the sinking. Those who did survive numbered 328



(324 naval, three RAAF and one civilian). Four naval personnel died ashore without having been taken prisoner. A further 106 men died in captivity (105 naval, one RAAF). Four sailors were recovered from captivity in September 1944 when they were among prisoners of war rescued after the sinking of a Japanese transport. After the end of hostilities 214 men (211 naval, two RAAF and one civilian) were repatriated to Australia.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-perth-i>



HMAS *Perth* (I) 'In Sunda Straits she fought her fight, gainst hopeless odds that fateful night, brave men gave all, so great their worth, and glorified the 'Fightin Perth' – Bandsman George Vanselow RAN

**4 March 1942** – HMAS *Yarra* (II) was sunk by a Japanese cruiser squadron while defending a convoy bound for Australia in the Indian Ocean. The danger posed by the imperious Japanese Navy was well known to the men of *Yarra*, with numerous Allied ships having been sunk while attempting to reach Australia around this time. The decision to turn *Yarra* towards overwhelming enemy forces and give the other ships in the convoy vital time to escape is one of remarkable bravery, and grants the men of *Yarra* a special place in RAN history. Of *Yarra*'s complement of 151, 138, including her captain and all officers, were killed in the action or died subsequently in life rafts.

[https://www.navy.gov.au/media-room/publications/semaphore-03-17#cite\\_note-1](https://www.navy.gov.au/media-room/publications/semaphore-03-17#cite_note-1)

**9 April 1942** - HMAS *Vampire* (I) was sunk by Japanese carrier borne aircraft in waters off Ceylon while operating as part of the British Eastern Fleet.

The ship's Commanding Officer; CMDR W.T.A. Moran RAN, and eight ratings died as a result of the action which also claimed the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS *Hermes*.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-vampire-i>

**4 May 1942** - The Battle of the Coral Sea. Over four days Japanese and Allied naval forces wrestled for sea control of the hotly contested Coral Sea in a fleet action fought between opposing carrier-borne aircraft. HMA Ships *Australia* and *Hobart* formed part of the Allied escort force playing an important role in preventing a Japanese landing force from transiting the Jomard Passage and landing at Port Moresby. The battle proved a strategic victory for the Allies and a major reversal for the Japanese.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/battle-coral-sea>

**31 May 1942** - Three Japanese Type A midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour after being transported to Australian waters by ocean-going "mother" submarines; *I-22*, *I-24* and *I-27*. The ensuing attack resulted in the loss of HMAS *Kuttabul* and 21 of her crew when a torpedo, intended for the American cruiser USS *Chicago*, struck the seabed beneath *Kuttabul* and exploded. All three Japanese midget submarines and their crews were lost in the attack.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/japanese-midget-submarine-attack-sydney-harbour>

**15 June 1942** - The N class destroyer, HMAS *Nestor*, was part of the covering force for a large convoy in the Mediterranean when she was straddled by two heavy bombs and crippled. The convoy was about 100 miles north of Tobruk and heading for Alexandria when it came under air attack. One bomb fell about 50 feet off *Nestor*'s starboard side and the other two or three feet off her port side amidships where she was holed. No. 1 Boiler Room was flooded with the loss of all inside; Stoker Petty Officer J.B. Bulmer, RAN, Leading Stoker C.B. Hill, RAN, Leading Stoker M. Burns, RN, and Stoker L.J. Blight, RAN. The ship's medical officer, Surgeon Lieutenant S.A.C. Watson, RANR, 'displayed outstanding bravery in immediately entering No. 1 Boiler Room in order to rescue the crew who he knew must be either killed or seriously injured.' Watson recovered the bodies of all four men and was recognised with a DSC. *Nestor* was taken in tow by HMS *Javelin* whilst still under attack by German





bombers, however, with only 80 miles covered over the ensuing ten hours, and with German submarines sighted in the morning of 16 June, the decision was made to remove *Nestor's* company to *Javelin* and scuttle the Australian destroyer.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-nestor>



HMAS *Nestor* was one of five N Class destroyers transferred to the Royal Australian Navy from the Royal Navy.

**1 July 1942** - The Japanese transport, *Montevideo Maru*, was torpedoed and sunk by the submarine, USS *Sturgeon*, whilst transporting Allied prisoners of war and civilian internees from Rabaul to Japan. A nominal list transferred from the government of Japan to Australia in 2012 details 1053 Australians lost in the attack. Two RAN members were known to be aboard *Montevideo Maru* when she was lost. Sub-lieutenant E.H.F. Mitchell, RANVR, was a coastwatcher at Gasmata on the south coast of New Britain when his position was overrun by Japanese forces on 9 February 1942 and his two civilian companions were captured. Mitchell reported this to Australian authorities by radio and he was instructed to head north to another coastwatching station at Talasea on New Britain's north coast, but he too was subsequently captured. His two companions, Messrs J.E. Daymond and R.T. Squires, were amongst those aboard *Montevideo Maru* who did not survive. Chief Yeoman of Signals S. Lamont, RANR, had been a coastwatcher on Anir Island, east of New Ireland. He was in Rabaul on his way for leave when Rabaul fell to the Japanese. He too was killed in the attack.

**9 August 1942** - The Australian heavy cruiser, HMAS *Canberra* (I) was sunk in the Battle of Savo Island. *Canberra* had formed part of the screening force for the Allied landings at Guadalcanal on 7 August. She was on night patrol near Savo Island north of Guadalcanal when, in the early hours of 9

August, she encountered a Japanese fleet consisting of five heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and a destroyer. The Japanese opened fire on *Canberra* and she was hit by at least 24 shells within the space of two minutes, and put out of action. Of her crew of 819, 84 were killed or died later of their injuries, including the ship's Commanding Officer Captain F.E. Getting. *Canberra* was not the only Allied ship to come under attack that morning. Three American cruisers were sunk and many other vessels damaged. In addition to those lost in *Canberra*, 939 American sailors were lost, and another 654 wounded.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-canberra-i>

**29 August 1942** - The Tribal class destroyer, HMAS *Arunta* (I) destroyed the Japanese submarine RO-33 off Port Moresby using depth charges. *Arunta* had only been in commission for five months and it was her first encounter with an enemy vessel in World War II.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-arunta-i>

**1 December 1942** - The *Bathurst* class corvette, HMAS *Armidale* (I) was attacked and sunk by Japanese aircraft. In addition to her crew of 83, *Armidale* carried three AIF soldiers, two Dutch officers and 61 Indonesian troops of the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) Army. 40 RAN personnel, the two Dutch officers and 58 NEI soldiers were lost.

<https://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-armidale-i>



HMAS *Armidale* (I) came under attack from Japanese aircraft on 1 December 1942. Personnel from the Royal Australian Navy, the Australian Imperial Force and a number of foreign allies were lost with the ship.