

# SEMAPHORE

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## THE LONG MEMORY: RAN HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) is justly proud of its history, particularly the notable individuals, actions and ships that are well known to most: Glossop and HMAS *Sydney* (I) and the *Emden*, Stoker and HMAS *AE2* in the Dardanelles, Waller and HMAS *Perth* (I) in the Sunda Strait, and Teddy Sheehan's courage protecting his shipmates in HMAS *Armidale* (I). These names echo through time, however, heritage is more than significant individuals, events and developments. The cook in *Sydney*, a torpedo rating in *AE2*, the writer in *Perth*, and the stoker in *Armidale*, also have their stories, which are just as important to the heritage of the RAN. The RAN's heritage represents a physical link with what it has meant, and what it does mean to serve in the RAN.

In over a century of service, the RAN has collected a large range of artefacts, relics and items that speak of duty, service and a unique lifestyle as well as battles and wars. Through the medium of collected artefacts and the stories associated with them the RAN's heritage is nurtured, protected and preserved for future generations.

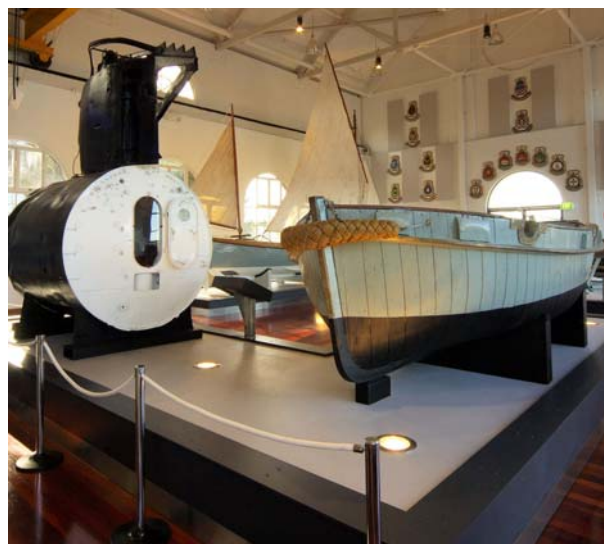
The Naval Heritage Collection (NHC) has existed in one form or another since the late 1970s. Previously the RAN's artefacts were managed more as obsolete store items. In the period from the end of World War I up to the 1970s, the RAN looked to others to preserve its heritage. In the 1930s and 1950s ownership of large numbers of RAN artefacts were transferred to institutions such as the Australian War Memorial. Many significant artefacts were also lost, destroyed, stolen or simply deteriorated due to the effects of time and lack of preservation.

The initial aim of the NHC was to manage the heritage artefacts still held by the RAN and to provide a storage location at Spectacle Island, Sydney Harbour in which to concentrate the Collection as a protective measure. A lack of resources and curatorial expertise posed significant problems in the early years of the NHC. That NHC was only responsible for Spectacle Island artefacts while artefacts held by ships and establishments elsewhere were the responsibility of individual commanding officers, proved to be a further structural weakness for management of the Collection.

By the late 1990s it was apparent that the rationale for and the way in which heritage management occurred in the RAN was ineffective by almost any heritage industry measure. By then the NHC had even been excised from the RAN, having been transferred to the Corporate Support and Infrastructure Group under the 1997 Defence Reform Program. In 2001, the Chief of Navy (CN) directed that a review examine all aspects of RAN heritage management and make recommendations for the Collection's long-term future.

A driving factor for the review was proposed amendments to the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986* and the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity*

*Conservation Act 1999* which would require Commonwealth departments and agencies to conserve and exhibit the Australian heritage they hold. Both Acts were amended in 2003 and included heavy financial and criminal penalties for organisations and senior managers should heritage items not be managed appropriately.



*'Battle of Sydney' Display at the RANHC – a midget submarine conning tower and a Sydney Harbour boom boat (RAN)*

In February 2003 CN endorsed the 24 recommendations made by the Naval Heritage Management Study (NHMS). This Study was based on the concept that heritage supported the RAN's goals of internal ethos, recruiting, retention and public reputation, in addition to the RAN's moral and legislated obligation to preserve national heritage. The Study concluded that this heritage supports RAN capability. Significant outcomes included: the RAN 'owning' and being responsible for its heritage; return of the NHC to RAN control within Navy Systems Command; a centrally managed and controlled single Collection; the appointment of a Director NHC at Commander level; retention of Spectacle Island as the NHC HQ and Main Repository; implementation of modern 'best practice' curatorial and museum management processes; and development of a facility to exhibit the Collection - the RAN Heritage Centre (RANHC).

The opening in 2005 of the RANHC at Garden Island, Sydney, is the most significant physical outcome so far of the RAN's rejuvenated heritage management regime.<sup>1</sup> The Centre provides the RAN with a multi-function capability for displaying its heritage to the public; however, it is only used for exhibition and public interaction. It is the NHC's Main Repository at Spectacle Island that is central pillar of the RAN's heritage management process.

Until the advent of the RANHC the only way to view the



Sea Power Centre - Australia  
Department of Defence  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
seapower.centre@defence.gov.au  
<http://www.navy.gov.au/spc/>



Collection was to visit the Main Repository. For that reason the NHC provided a display of artefacts at Spectacle Island in addition to performing its heritage storage functions; this is no longer the case and now Spectacle Island staff focus only on the museum cycle - accessioning, conservation/restoration, storage, exhibition planning and disposal. New collection management policies, operating procedures, storage methods and artefact handling processes have or are being introduced. Additional revenues being generated by the RAN Heritage Centre and allocations from the Navy Systems Command have had a significant and immediate positive effect on NHC conservation outcomes. Irreplaceable Navy artefacts, such as the 'Rabaul Gun' - the first enemy weapon captured by Australian Forces (the RAN Brigade) in WWI - and the Battle Ensign from HMAS *Perth* (I) from the Battle of Matapan in 1941, that were in great danger of total loss have been conserved and restored to exhibition standard.

The ex-munition depot buildings on Spectacle Island provide an ideal environment for Collection storage and, with planned improvements, even finer temperature and humidity control will be introduced, further assisting Collection preservation. Additional environmental controls will also be progressively introduced to the NHC Regional Collections and Exhibitions at HMAS *Cerberus* and HMAS *Creswell*.

Since 2003, major improvements across the NHC have been achieved but significant work remains to meet the approved outcomes of the NHMS. The RAN's inconsistent approach to the management of its movable heritage is over but past neglect does mean the RAN is behind the other two Services and equivalent public institutions in achieving its heritage aims, and meeting its obligations.

The collection management and exhibition gap is, however, closing with the RAN continuing to extend its heritage capabilities. On 1 September 2006, ownership of Australia's Museum of Flight transferred to the RAN and came under the management of the NHC. Renamed the Fleet Air Arm Museum (FAAM), it will provide the RAN with an aviation conservation and exhibition institution of superior quality and, with the RAN Heritage Centre, provide further access for all Australians to view the heritage of their Navy.

Over the coming months and years the exhibition spaces at the FAAM will be 'navalised' and updated with greater emphasis being placed on the history of Australian naval aviation rather than the general aviation exhibition that the RAN inherited from Australia's Museum of Flight. The FAAM collection of 35 aircraft is quite impressive and ranges from a Sea Fury and Firefly to an A4 Skyhawk and Wessex. The collection also includes many artefacts from individuals who have served in the Fleet Air Arm since its inception in 1948.

A future addition to the NHC is planned in 2007. The RAN's intention is to transfer the management and heritage functions of the RAN Historic Flight (RANHF) from Maritime Command to Navy Systems Command. The Maritime Commander and Commander Australian Naval Air Group will retain authority for airworthiness and flying approval whilst the NHC will be responsible for daily management and the conservation/restoration processes. The prospect of flying RANHF aircraft is an attractive

option on many levels not least of which is for Navy public relations. In order to minimise the risks attached to flying heritage aircraft, a full evaluation of the aims, processes, ongoing costs and procedures will be conducted prior to any recommendation to fly aircraft in this Flight.



*Fleet Air Arm Museum (RAN)*

The size and scope of Navy's Collection makes it one of the largest single collections held by any public institution in Australia. Containing some 250,000 items, the Collection includes elements from all periods of the RAN's history and includes all aspects of naval service. Ranging from large weapon and engineering systems to small personal items, some of the artefacts would be considered icons of the RAN whilst others tell poignantly of the experience of individual members during their service. Some of many examples include the diary of Able Seaman Weat, written during *AE2*'s transit of the Dardanelles on 25 April 1915, itself a remarkable story of how an individual can overcome personal fear when facing a common threat as part of a united Ship's Company. Other artefacts with poignant stories to tell include the sword carried by Lieutenant Bond (2IC and later CO of the RAN Bridging Train) during the Gallipoli Campaign; and one of HMAS *Canberra*'s (I) life rings that was recovered from the water after *Canberra*'s loss and presented to Miss Estelle Clancy, whose fiancé was lost with the ship – she never married and kept the life ring for 60 years.

The Collection is never static, acquisitions from decommissioning ships or gifted items from individuals and families occur frequently. Disposals from the Collection also take place. For an acquisition or a disposal certain criteria must be met to ensure that the items received are of historical, cultural or intrinsic value to the RAN, and that items deleted are not. This selective process has been established by the NHC to avoid ongoing storage issues and to allow closer control of the Collection.

The recent and unprecedented developments in heritage management are a result of a changed perception within the RAN towards its heritage. This heritage supports RAN goals and also preserves the 'long memory' of the RAN's role in the history and development of the nation and of the men and women who have served their country in peace and war.

<sup>1</sup> Royal Australian Navy, 'The Royal Australian Navy Heritage Centre,' *Semaphore*, Issue 14, September 2005.

