

THOSE THEY LEFT BEHIND - RAN MEMORIALS IN THE LYNNESS NAVAL CEMETERY IN ORKNEY

The atmosphere was always one of monotony and frustration at not being involved in the exciting things that were happening in other spheres of the war. ... We did spend a fair amount of time at sea, usually on a sweep as far as the Norwegian coast, but after four or five days we returned to Scapa, or to Rosyth (which we much preferred).

Andrew C Barrie.¹

Dec 27th 1916. At anchor. I may say here also that one of our two chief stokers died in hospital on the 22nd, and we buried a stoker at the naval cemetery at Kirkwall [sic]. He took bad suddenly on Christmas Eve, and died on Christmas Day. Both chief stoker and stoker were fine fellows and well liked by all.

Stoker Peter Nelson Faust, HMAS *Australia*.²

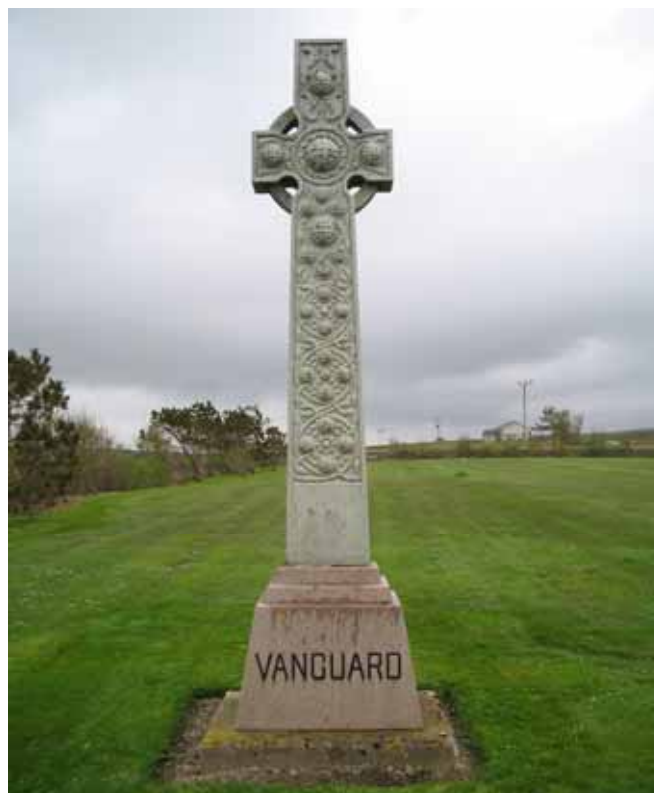
Scapa Flow is a large, natural harbour protected on all sides by the landmasses of the Orkney Islands. It has been used as a base by the Royal Navy since the eighteenth century and during the First World War it was the principal base of the Grand Fleet, the largest and most powerful fleet in the world at the time. It included three of His Majesty's Australian ships; the battle-cruiser *Australia* which served for much of the war as flagship of the Second Battle-Cruiser Squadron and the cruisers *Sydney* and *Melbourne* which formed part of the Second Light Cruiser Squadron between 1916 and 1919.

The Grand Fleet was served by a large shore depot at Lyness on the Island of Hoy, the land-mass on the western side of Scapa Flow (Hoy is the Norse, or Viking, word for 'high' and accurately describes this hilly island. The nearby island of Flotta, which means 'flat', is also accurately described). The base was built up after 1914 to provide fuel, stores and administrative support for the fleet and to act as a base for the boom defence organisation and the large number of drifters that supported the warships when they were in harbour. It continued in use until after the Second World War but was reduced to 'Care and Maintenance' status in July 1946. Most of the accommodation buildings were dismantled in 1957 and, subsequently, eleven of the twelve big oil storage tanks have been emptied and dismantled. The last one has been retained and restored to house large exhibits which, together with the pumping station and its preserved machinery, forms part of a museum which tells the story of the naval presence in Orkney. The base waterfront is still quite recognisable and continues in use for ferries and oil rig support vessels. The boom defence and stores buildings have been refurbished for industrial use.

The Royal Naval Cemetery is situated a few hundred yards to the west of the depot, on a gently sloping hillside that is strikingly silent except for the calls of sea birds. It looks out across the Flow to the east. The small road that leads past it carries on to the empty Port War Signal Station higher up the hillside. The cemetery is beautifully maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves

Commission and contains the graves of sailors from both World Wars. There is a Cross of Sacrifice at the centre, between two shelters, in one of which there is a visitors' book and the site is surrounded by a low wall of local stone. It contains the graves of 445 Commonwealth sailors from the First World War, 109 of which are unidentified. The majority are from the cruiser HMS *Hampshire*, which struck a mine while carrying Lord Kitchener from Scapa to Russia in 1916; the battleship HMS *Vanguard* which blew up at its mooring in 1917; and the destroyers HM Ships *Narbrough* and *Opal* which were wrecked when they ran onto the Pentland Skerries at high speed in fog in 1918. The cemetery also contains the graves of 14 German sailors who died while their fleet was interned in Scapa Flow between 1918 and 1919. Two hundred Second World War burials include 26 men from the battleship HMS *Royal Oak*, which was sunk during a bold raid by *U-47* on 14 October 1939.

Australians were closely involved with the loss of the *Vanguard* which suffered a massive internal explosion on the night of 9 July 1917 caused, it is believed, by faulty cordite charges, incorrectly stowed. HMAS *Sydney* was the nearest ship, anchored about half a mile away; her boats were the first on the scene and rescued the only two men to survive the disaster. Unfortunately two of her own sailors were on board the battleship and were lost.



The Vanguard Memorial in Lyness cemetery is dedicated to all those who died in the disaster, including the two men from HMAS Sydney (D Hobbs)

Both men, Stoker Robert Thomas Houston and Stoker Leslie William Roberts, were unlucky enough to have been sentenced to seven days cells on 3 July, and appear to have been serving their sentence in *Vanguard* as no other cells were available. They would have spent their last week with little or no bedding and daily picking two pounds of oakum, which was weighed when given to them and then again when received back. Like most of the 804 men who were lost in *Vanguard*, they have 'no known grave but the sea'.

Aged 36, Houston was a veteran of the SMS *Emden* action in November 1914. He was the son of William and Annie Houston of Strabane, County Tyrone in Ireland but his mother had later re-married becoming Annie Peebles of Paisley in Scotland. He is commemorated on the Naval War Memorial on Plymouth Hoe in Devon and on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. His service certificate survives in the National Archives of Australia showing that, like many others, he transferred to the RAN from the RN in 1914.

Roberts, aged 31, was born in England, but his family had moved to Australia and at the time of his death, his father, William, lived in Drummoyne, Sydney. Like Houston he is commemorated on the Naval Memorial in Plymouth and at the Australian War Memorial.

When the RAN ships left Scapa Flow to return to Australia in 1919 they left behind the graves of four of their own, who reflect the varied backgrounds of sailors of that time:

- Stoker Rowland Edward Bond is buried in area B just inside the main entrance and to the east of the path. He served in HMAS *Australia* and died on Christmas Day 1916 of acute inflammation of the kidneys, having been transferred to the Hospital Ship *Soudan*. He was the son of Charles and Catherine Bond of Kensington Park, Adelaide, South Australia.
- Able Seaman Arthur Stacey served in HMAS *Melbourne* and is buried in area B. He died of pneumonia on 18 October 1916 aged 38 after being transferred to the Hospital Ship *Plassy*. He had transferred to the RAN from the RN before the war and was the son of James and Eliza Stacey of Shepton Mallet, Somerset.
- Stoker William George Henry McCarthy is buried in area F near the Cross of Sacrifice. He served in HMAS *Sydney* and died of heart failure on 30 August 1918, aged 44, while the ship was engaged in operations in the North Sea. He was the son of William and Mary McCarthy and left a wife Laura, who lived in Plymouth, Devon. He was another who had transferred from the RN, joining *Sydney* prior to her initial delivery voyage in 1913.
- The youngest of the four was Boy 1st Class Frank David Tavender who served in HMAS *Sydney* and died in an accident on 26 January 1918 aged just 16. His father, David, lived in Angaston, South Australia. Like two of the others, he is buried in area B.

RAN casualties for World War I, including RN serving with the RAN and RAN serving with the RN amounted to 171, of whom 13 were killed in action; 13 were accidentally killed; 36 were missing presumed dead; 86 died of illness; 4 died as prisoners of war and 19 were drowned. For a war best known for its huge death toll, the RAN figures are relatively small, but each in its own way represents a tragic loss. Moreover, although it might seem that the sea, accidents and influenza were a greater threat than German guns, the Grand Fleet's role remained essential.

The war could not have been won if the Allied countries had not been supplied with adequate quantities of food for their people and raw material for their industries. Credit to pay for these materials needed also to be maintained. Neither could the Allied armies have been sustained in the field without adequate munitions, logistic supplies and regular reinforcements. Everything needed to travel by ship, and it was only the power of the Grand Fleet which prevented German interference with Allied exploitation of the seas.

The spirit of the Grand Fleet and the naval presence is still tangible in Orkney. The island populations were moved by the losses suffered by the ships based in their midst and the present generation continue to care, ninety years on, for the graves of men who never went home and the memorials to men who were lost without trace, among them six Australians. They have the respect of the people they came so far to defend.



Stoker McCarthy's grave at Lyness (D Hobbs)

1. M Brown & P Meehan, *Scapa Flow*, Penguin, London 1968, p. 115.
2. The Diary or Log Book of Peter Nelson Faust, '36 Mess', Stoker, HMAS AUSTRALIA FLAGSHIP, copy held by SPC-A.

