

CN Address at the 118th Navy Birthday

Canberra

1 March 2018

Today is the 117th anniversary of the creation of our, your Navy on 1 March 1901 when the States transferred their naval and military assets, their sailors, officers and public servants to the Federal Government.

By the following year these disparate groups of sailors were being slowly melded into the Navy and the two existing arms of Australia's defence force were officially recognised by the titles Commonwealth Naval Forces and Commonwealth Military Forces, later the Australian Military Forces.

And since 1901, the Royal Australian Navy has continued to demonstrate, that when called upon by the nation to ensure Australia's growth, prosperity, and security — whether at war or in times of peace — it is in all respects ready to take up the challenge.

Today, we give thanks to all who have served in our Navy — especially those who have given their last full measure of devotion or live with the scars of their service.

And I believe there is no better way to do this than to briefly share with you the story of Able Seaman David William Manning who passed away, just two weeks ago on 19 February this year.

Mr Manning was one of the HMAS *Perth* World War Two veterans, and his is a story which embodies the fighting spirit and tenacity of this generation.

They were ordinary men and women who faced the greatest perils and rose to the challenge epitomising the virtues which today's sailors should aspire.

Born in Kew, VIC on 12 August 1923 he joined the RAN College (then located at HMAS *Cerberus*) as a 13 year old cadet midshipman in January 1937. He was withdrawn from the college, by his parents, at the end of his first year.

On 21 August 1941, soon after turning 18 and with the war in Europe in full swing, he enlisted in the RAN Reserve, at Port Melbourne, as an Ordinary Seaman.

On completion of training at HMAS *Cerberus* he joined the light cruiser HMAS *Perth* on 12 December 1941 and became a member of the ship's gunnery crews.

In February 1942, *Perth*, under Command of Captain Hec Waller, was dispatched from Australia to the Netherlands East Indies to help stem the tide of Japanese invasion. On 27 February 1942 *Perth* took part in the Battle of the Java Sea and was one of the few Allied ships not to be sunk by the superior Japanese force.

On the night of 28 February / 1 March 1942, exactly 76 years ago today, *Perth*, and the heavy cruiser USS *Houston*, attempted to escape southwards via the Sunda Strait.

In what is now known as the Battle of the Sunda Strait, the two Cruisers encountered a large Japanese invasion fleet near Bantem Bay and in the confused and desperate night fighting both Allied ships were sunk.

At the age of 18 and a half, David Manning was blown off the ship by one of the four Japanese torpedoes that struck and eventually sunk *Perth*.

He was in the water for 10 hours before making it ashore on to the west coast of Java.

He was naked and covered in fuel oil but once ashore was given a piece of cloth to wear by an elderly Javanese lady.

David was one of 328 survivors of *Perth's* ships company of 681 men.

David and several other *Perth* survivors began to walk south but were captured by Japanese troops. As such, he 'celebrated' his 19th birthday in a prisoner of war camp at Serang, Java.

In late 1942 the *Perth* survivors, David amongst them, were transported to Singapore and sent to work on the infamous Thai-Burma Railway. He endured the brutal treatment from his captors and lack of food and medical support.

When the war ended he was in a POW Camp in Rangoon, Burma and was flown back to Australia in late October 1945 to recover.

Able Seaman David Manning was demobilised from the Navy on 13 March 1946 after three months of training, three months at sea and three years in a POW camp.

Since his service, David was closely involved in the creation of the Prisoner of War Memorial at Ballarat and remained a proud Navy man.

He assisted establish the naval cadet Training Ship *Tyalgu* on the Gold Coast, and fostered strong relations with the USS *Houston* Association and with HMA Ships *Perth* (II) and *Perth* (III).

In recent years he and his wife Audrey have been regular and revered attendees at the Recruit School passing out parades at HMAS *Cerberus*.

David Manning and the other survivors of HMAS *Perth* demonstrated their dedication to duty, resolve in the face of danger, a willingness to learn and adapt, and most importantly a true commitment to each other in the toughest possible conditions which lived on long after the war was over.

These qualities run deep through our 117 year history and today we seek to emulate the example of veterans like David Manning by embodying the Navy values of honour, honesty, courage, integrity and loyalty.

It is these values which we need to continue to demonstrate as we continue our transition to the future Navy.

A Navy that is more capable, lethal, agile and able to fulfil the tasks required of it now and into the future.

A Navy that has the ability to deliver targeted and decisive lethality if government so requires.

A Navy that can adapt to the ever changing strategic environment — whether it be the shifting of old alliances; the rapid rise in global terrorist networks in South East Asia or the increased activities of international criminal syndicates.

A Navy that harnesses the skills and abilities of an integrated, diverse, resilient and innovative workforce that has the skills and competencies to deliver Navy's warfighting effects.

A Navy that is part of a truly national enterprise where every sector of the nation from industry, education, research and development, finance, government and the broader community to work together.

By doing this we will have a naval enterprise that creates a force that deters attacks by having available, sustainable and affordable lethality.

Today as we reflect on the Navy's achievements and thank those like David Manning who gave so much of themselves for our country, we can look to an exciting future.

I am confident that in the years to come our Navy will be 'in all respects ready' to advance Australia's interests and safeguard our nation's freedoms, security and prosperity.

Thank you to all who have served and continue to serve in our proud Navy.