

**Chief of Navy Address at the Presentation of Group Commendation
to the crews of HMA Ships *Air Sprite* and *Air Nymph***

10 April 2017

HMAS *Creswell*

The collision on the night of 10 February 1964 between HMA Ships *Voyager* and *Melbourne* has left an indelible mark on our nation, our Navy, our people, our families, the survivors—and on those who formed part of the vital search and rescue effort.

We are here today to formally recognise the crew members of the Search and Rescue vessels HMA Ships *Air Sprite* and *Air Nymph* for actions during that night.

At the time, *Air Sprite* and *Air Nymph* were based at HMAS *Creswell*, where they served under the command of two junior officers—Lieutenant Kerry Stephen and Sub Lieutenant Tony Vodic.

Following notification of the collision between *Voyager* and *Melbourne*, late that night *Air Nymph* and *Air Sprite* were the first specially designed search and rescue vessels to arrive on the scene and commence assisting in the Search and Rescue task. The vessel crews worked tirelessly through the night to search for survivors and missing personnel, pulling men directly from the water as well as from life rafts.

The now Commander Kerry Stephen has worked hard in recent years to ensure that both crews were duly recognised for their remarkable efforts that night.

While a number of the original crewmembers are no longer with us, I felt it was important that Commander Stephen be here today to accept this award on behalf of both crews. We are also fortunate to have here today Mrs Vidoc – the wife of the late Lieutenant Commander Tony Vodoc. Thank you for being here.

While we will never forget the tragedy of the collision between Voyager and Melbourne that night, it is important to recognise the overwhelmingly positive contributions that the crew members of *Air Sprite* and *Air Nymph* made—in what would have been horrific circumstances.

And so it is my privilege today to be able to award this Group Commendation to the crews of Search and Rescue Vessels *Air Nymph* and *Air Sprite*:

I commend the crew members of the Search and Rescue vessels HMA Ships *Air Sprite* and *Air Nymph* for their courage, selflessness and dedication to duty during the night of 10 February 1964, following the collision of HMAS *Voyager* and HMAS *Melbourne*.

The crews acted promptly, efficiently and with courage in an extremely challenging and traumatic situation to rescue 70 survivors from the sea and from life rafts following the collision. On a number of occasions, crew members courageously leapt from the Search and Rescue vessels into the oil-covered water to pull survivors from amongst the debris. The exemplary efforts of both crews undoubtedly prevented further loss of life.

The outstanding professionalism and courage of the crews of HMA Ships *Air Sprite* and *Air Nymph* are of the highest order and in the finest traditions of the Royal Australian Navy.

Congratulations.