

2015 – THE ANZAC CENTENARY

Twenty five marks the centenary of Australia's involvement in the ill-fated Dardanelles campaign and in particular the Australian Imperial Force's (AIF) baptism of fire at Gallipoli. It also marks a number of other important anniversaries, not associated with World War I, in which the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) has prominently featured.

The purpose of this *Semaphore* is to highlight the role of the RAN in connection with the Anzac centenary and to reflect on its involvement in other significant anniversaries that will be commemorated throughout the year.

World War I

In April, many Australians will converge on Anzac Cove in Turkey to commemorate those soldiers who fought and died on the rugged Gallipoli peninsula so many years ago. Far fewer will make the pilgrimage to commemorate those men of the RAN who participated in the Dardanelles campaign, both at sea and ashore.

In April 1915, the Australian submarine *AE2*, (Lieutenant Commander H Stoker), acted as the vanguard of the Allied assault on Gallipoli when in the early hours of 25 April she transited the hitherto impenetrable Dardanelles Strait. Following a difficult passage through minefields and navigationally constrained waters, all the while under the threat of Turkish gun batteries and patrolling warships, *AE2*'s crew became the first Allied seamen to successfully force their way into the Sea of Marmora.



The Australian submarine AE2

AE2's presence in enemy waters, patrolling the inland sea, had immediate implications for Turkish internal lines of communication and, arguably, an even more profound effect on the military campaign then unfolding ashore.

Stoker and his crew remained at large for almost a week before their luck ran out during a brisk engagement with a Turkish gunboat.

www.navy.gov.au/hmas-ae2



Ratings of the 1st RANBT at Domain Camp, Melbourne, 1915, prior to embarking for overseas service

Also at Gallipoli was the 1st Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train (1st RANBT), formed under the command of Lieutenant Commander LS Bracegirdle, RN, as a mobile naval engineering unit equipped to build pontoons and bridges in support of the military. The initial concept was that it would serve on the battlefields of the Western Front in much the same manner as the engineering elements of the Royal Navy Division. The term 'train', was a direct reference to the horse-drawn wagons that would, in theory, form and move 'in train' to carry the unit's heavy lumber, building supplies and equipment. Many of the ratings serving in the 1st RANBT were designated 'drivers' and again this refers to wagon drivers.

Landing at Suvla Bay early in the morning of 7 August 1915, the khaki-clad sailors were quickly put to work constructing piers and performing myriad other engineering tasks in support of British naval and military forces. There they quickly earned a reputation for resilience and resourcefulness with their activities taking place under frequent enemy artillery fire and occasional air raids.

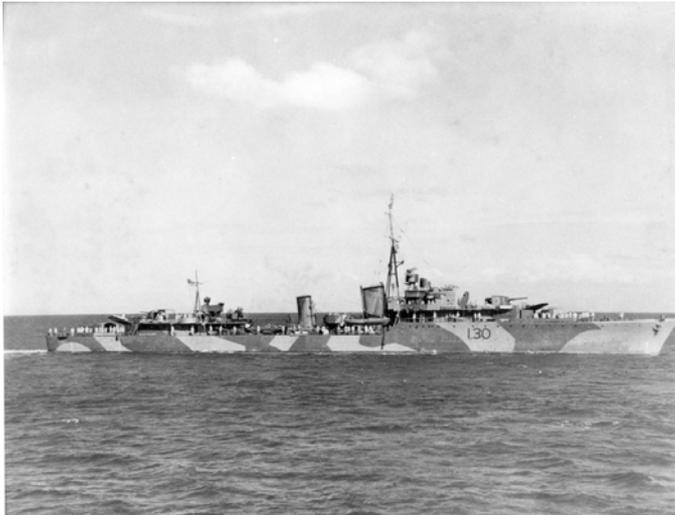
Fifty men of the 1st RANBT were responsible for maintaining the wharf from which the British rearguard was evacuated and they thus became the last Australians to leave the Gallipoli peninsula at 0430hrs on 20 December 1915. The RANBT became the most highly decorated RAN unit to serve during World War I, receiving 20 awards for bravery or good service.

www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/1st-royal-australian-naval-bridging-train

World War II

The number of surviving RAN World War II veterans reduces each year and as the 70th anniversary of the end of that great conflict draws near it is timely to reflect on their contribution to victory in 1945.

On 2 January 1945 thousands of RAN personnel found themselves part of an Allied armada of some 850 ships that departed Leyte in The Philippines for the invasion of the island of Luzon at Lingayen Gulf. HMA Ships *Australia* (II), *Shropshire*, *Arunta* (I) and *Warramunga* (I) formed part of the bombardment group, HMA Ships *Manoora* (I), *Kanimbla* (I) and *Westralia* landed troops, and HMA Ships *Warrego* (II) and *Gascoyne* (I) formed part of the minesweeping and hydrographic group.



The Tribal class destroyer HMAS Arunta wearing her disruptive pattern wartime camouflage paint scheme

On 5 January, *Australia* and *Arunta* were both subjected to intense Japanese *Kamikaze* attacks. *Australia* bore the brunt of the damage, receiving direct hits on 6, 8 and 9 January and losing 3 officers and 41 sailors killed, and 1 officer and 68 sailors wounded. Two of *Arunta's* crew were also killed in action.

On 1 May 1945 the little known RAN Beach Commandos first saw action during Operation OBOE I as part of the assault on Tarakan Island off Borneo. During the ensuing fighting ashore several of this unique unit's men were killed in action.

www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/ran-beach-commandos

In support of operations in New Guinea, HMA ships *Swan* (II) and *Dubbo* (I) provided naval gun fire support during the Wewak amphibious landings on 11 May 1945. The preliminary bombardment effectively silenced Japanese opposition destroying much of the prepared defences enabling the Allied force to land virtually unopposed.

The small ships of the RAN were also active throughout New Guinea and the Netherlands East Indies with a number of Fairmile motor launches and Harbour Defence Motor Launches providing valuable service in coastal waters, rivers and estuaries.

On 7 June 1945, the River class frigate, HMAS *Lachlan*, began sounding and buoying the channel approaches to Brunei Bay in preparation for the impending Allied assault - Operation OBOE VI. The following day she entered Brunei Bay and laid more buoys. Her boat party and a United States Beach Scout Team carried out close inshore reconnaissance, laying markers for the assault forces within thirty yards of the beach. Following the landings on 10 June 1945, she carried out more detailed surveys of the area. On her departure from Borneo, Rear Admiral Royal, USN, Commander Task Force 78.1, US Seventh Fleet, signalled 'I give you the highest naval praise. Well done.'

As World War II slowly ground to its conclusion, ten Allied operatives of the clandestine Operation RIMAU, were executed by the Japanese in Singapore on 7 July 1945. The aim of RIMAU, launched in late-1944, was to covertly attack Japanese shipping in Singapore in one-man submersible canoes. The plan had been devised as a sequel to Operation JAYWICK in which Japanese shipping in Singapore Harbour had been successfully attacked in 1943. RIMAU, however, ended in disaster for the Allied operatives. Of the 23 Australian and British sailors, soldiers and marines who took part in the raid, twelve had already been killed in action and one died in captivity.

www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/operation-rimau-tragic-sequel-jaywick

July 1945 also saw the River class frigate *Gascoyne* (I) carry out the last naval bombardments in the Balikpapan area. On 26 July, in support of a military force designated BUCKFORCE, *Gascoyne* proceeded up the Balikpapan River, engaging three separate Japanese held targets as well as landing a military patrol to inspect the village of Mentawir. This action proved to be *Gascoyne's* last in the war against Japan.



HMAS Gascoyne was one of numerous RAN ships to fight in the Pacific theatre

On 15 August 1945, the military forces of Japan surrendered unconditionally. At 0627hrs, the acting First Naval Member, Rear Admiral GD Moore, CBE, RAN, sent a signal which stated; 'Japan has surrendered. Cease offensive action. Take all wartime precautions for self defence.' A further signal that afternoon read in part:

Sea power assisted by air power stemmed the Japanese advance which in 1942 threatened Australia.



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The relentlessness of sea power has been largely responsible for destroying the enemy's power of aggression and desire to carry on the war, thus causing him to surrender.

During the six years of war, more than 2170 Australian sailors had made the ultimate sacrifice.

In Tokyo Bay on 2 September 1945, the Japanese Foreign Minister, Mamoru Shigemitsu, signed the Instrument of Surrender aboard USS *Missouri* officially ending World War II. Among the 258 Allied warships riding at anchor for the ceremony were: HMA Ships *Hobart* (I), *Shropshire*, *Bataan*, *Warramunga* (I), *Napier*, *Nizam*, *Ballarat* (I), *Cessnock* (I), *Ipswich* (I) and *Pirie*. For the men serving in those ships it was a fitting end to the hard-fought Pacific campaign and an occasion never to be forgotten.

Notwithstanding the official surrender, the work of the RAN had not ended. On 8 September HMA Ships *Cootamundra*, *Glenelg* (I), *Junee* (I) and *Latrobe* steamed to Ambon, Indonesia, to embark Australian, American and Dutch prisoners of war for passage to Morotai. The repatriation of Australian and other Allied personnel was a task that kept numerous RAN vessels occupied for many months after the cessation of hostilities, as did survey work and minesweeping duties. One of the last official Japanese surrenders took place onboard HMAS *Diamantina* (I) at Ocean Island on 1 October 1945 and, in other instances, the surrender of small, far-flung Japanese garrisons took place on the decks of the ubiquitous Fairmile motor launches.

Post-World War II

With peace foremost in the minds of most who had survived the war it was with a sense of foreboding that those serving in the post-war RAN found themselves again on the front line. Less than five years after the surrender ceremony, on 25 June 1950 the 'forgotten war' broke out on the Korean peninsula. Within days HMA Ships *Shoalhaven* and *Bataan* were placed at the disposal of the United Nations commander, the US Army General Douglas MacArthur. After three bitter years of fighting an armistice was signed on 27 July 1953 by which time nine RAN warships and some 4500 personnel had served in the operational area.

www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/korean-war

On 1 April 1955, in a bid to strengthen security throughout Southeast Asia, Australia increased its military assistance to the region by contributing assets to the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. Hence, 2015 marks the 60th anniversary of the formation of the Far East Strategic Reserve in which thousands of RAN sailors contributed to maintaining regional and maritime security over a period of two decades.

www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/ran-strategic-reserve-and-malayan-emergency

Ten years later, in 1965, the Australian Navy began incrementally increasing its contribution to the war in South Vietnam and by 1972, at which time the bulk of Australian forces withdrew, some 13,500 members of the RAN has seen active service at sea, ashore and in the air.

Not only does 2015 mark the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam commitment but also the 25th anniversary of the RAN commitment to the Gulf War (1990-91) and the liberation of Kuwait under the auspices of Operation DAMASK 1.



HMA Ships Brisbane, Adelaide, Success, Darwin and Sydney rendezvous for a handover in the Gulf of Oman during Operation DAMASK 1, December 1990.

Other naval events that will be remembered include the arrival of RAN Clearance Diving Team 2 in Hobart on 6 January 1975 to begin the unenviable task of searching the Derwent River in the wake of the Tasman Bridge disaster. The previous day a bulk carrier, MV *Lake Illawarra*, had collided with one of the bridge's pylons, sinking the ship and killing seven of her crew. Two pylons and 127 metres of bridge decking collapsed into water 110 feet deep. Four motor vehicles also plunged into the river killing five occupants.

www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/disaster-relief-cyclone-tracy-and-tasman-bridge

Underscoring the inherent risks of service in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) will be the anniversaries of two tragedies that continue to reverberate throughout the RAN. Thirty years ago, on 22 October 1985, a gas leak aboard the flagship, HMAS *Stalwart* (II) claimed the lives of three sailors and necessitated 60 others receiving medical treatment. On 2 April 2005 the Sea King helicopter *Shark 02* crashed on the island of Nias, Indonesia, while participating in an ADF humanitarian aid operation, SUMATRA ASSIST II. The accident resulted in the deaths of nine ADF members and serious injuries to two others.

While the centenary of Anzac will be the focus of many commemorative events held this year it is equally important to reflect on the service and sacrifice of those who have served since World War I and of those who continue to serve in the RAN today.

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