



Cruiser, the life and loss of HMAS *Perth* and her crew by Mike Carlton - Book Review

By CMDR Max Muller



Tac Talks

© Commonwealth of Australia 2021

This work is copyright. You may download, display, print, and reproduce this material in unaltered form only (retaining this notice and imagery metadata) for your personal, non-commercial use, or use within your organisation. This material cannot be used to imply an endorsement from, or an association with, the Department of Defence. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved.



OUR VALUES

SERVICE

COURAGE

RESPECT

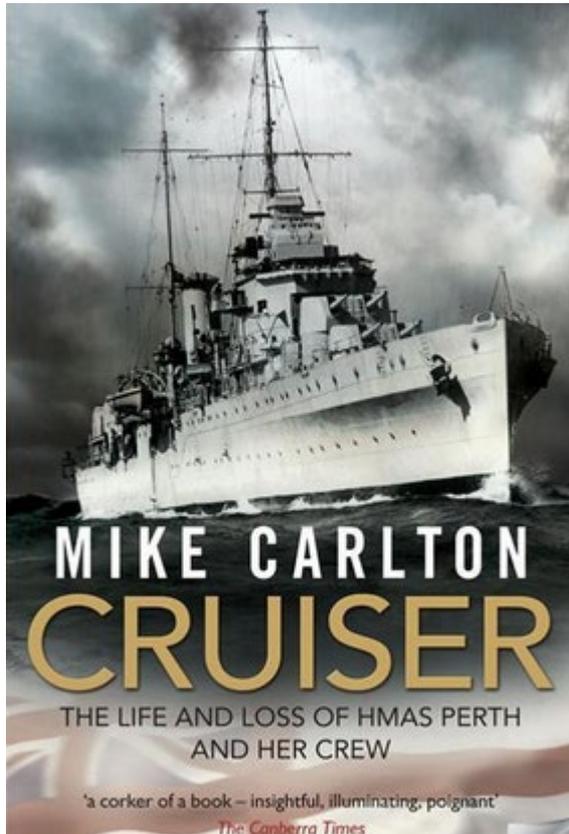
INTEGRITY

EXCELLENCE



Tac Talks

Mike Carlton is one of Australia's most high profile broadcasters and journalists. Over a 40-year career, he was employed as a radio and television news and current affairs reporter, foreign correspondent, radio host and newspaper columnist.



Mike has had a life-long passion for naval history and has written a compelling account of the brave men in HMAS *Perth* (I), who endured so much in the Mediterranean and Pacific theatres during WWII. The mighty Australian cruiser met her demise when sunk by a vastly superior Japanese force off the coast of Java in 1942 with the loss of 357 of her ship's company, including her Captain Hector Waller.

We all intuitively appreciate that life at sea can be tough; particularly whilst on lengthy operational deployments, during poor weather, or when coping with unexpected program changes. Mike Carlton provides a superb depiction of the challenges faced by the ship's company of HMAS *Perth* (I), where her deployment periods were measured in years, the trials under combat were measured in months and the conditions onboard, while not entirely unfamiliar to the modern-day sailor, would no doubt have left much to be desired. Many of our service personnel faced these sorts of severe hardships during WWII, with Australia's collective back to the wall during the particularly tenuous period of early 1942. The endurance of the RAN's officers and sailors was stretched to the limit and Mike Carlton has proven brilliantly adept at bringing this stark reality to life.

As I read this book, I started thinking about the terms **resilience** and **preparation** and how contemporary RAN personnel might respond to HMAS *Perth's* situation, where at the outbreak of WWII she had just commissioned into the RAN, completed a "world cruise" and was deployed in the relative tranquillity of the South Pacific. Within a few short months, she was dispatched to face the wrath of a determined enemy, intent to put the ship and her ship's company to the bottom of Davy Jones' Locker!

Mike Carlton skilfully interweaves the strategic and operational decision making of politicians and senior military personnel of the day that particularly impacted the schedule of HMAS *Perth* (I). He provides a unique, detailed and absorbing insight into the mood and actions of the ship's company during these uncertain and challenging times. This is not simply a chronology of events for HMAS *Perth* (I); rather it is a book that explores the human elements of the RAN officers and sailors under extreme duress in the maritime environment.

His research, obtained through personal journals and interviews with surviving members and relatives of the ship's company, provides a rare account of the prominent combat actions of this great ship, which led to her final battle in the Sunda Strait where she was sunk by a vastly superior Imperial Japanese Naval force. Finally, Mike Carlton describes the overwhelming challenges of those members of the ship's company lucky enough to survive HMAS *Perth's* sinking, only to either perish at sea or suffer the unimaginable hardships as POWs at the hands of the Japanese for the remainder of WWII.

In my view, the hardy sailors that did survive this ordeal and returned to Australia, whilst in some respects lucky, are on the extreme right-hand edge of what it means to be resilient. Of the 328

OUR VALUES

SERVICE

COURAGE

RESPECT

INTEGRITY

EXCELLENCE



Tac Talks

men taken into Japanese captivity, only 218 survived to return home at the war's end. They serve as an inspiration to us all.

I am grateful to Mike Carlton for dedicating his considerable talents to writing this book, which is a most worthy tribute to the gallant men of the RAN and RN who served in this magnificent ship. Both Harold Farncomb and Hec Waller commanded HMAS *Perth* (I) during WWII and both men are celebrated in our contemporary Navy, with two of our Collins Class submarines dedicated to their deeds and memory and to the person whom they led.

I would encourage all members of the maritime warfare community to absorb this excellent book, along with Mike Carlton's two other books, which feature HMAS *Sydney* (I) and HMAS *Australia* (II).

Cruiser is available through all good book stores and as an eBook from the Defence Library via the Overdrive Application.

OUR VALUES

SERVICE

COURAGE

RESPECT

INTEGRITY

EXCELLENCE