

Chapter 8

Second World War

Others who Served – Royal Australian Navy

*O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;*

Here Captain! dear father!

This arm beneath your head!

It is some dream that on the deck,

You've fallen cold and dead.

*My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;*

Exult O shores, and ring O bells!

But I with mournful tread,

Walk the deck my Captain lies,

Fallen cold and dead.

Oh Captain! My Captain

Walt Whitman

After the First World War, Australia was forced to reduce its naval fleet, mainly because of financial constraints caused by the Great Depression in the 1930s. Consequently, when the Second World War erupted, the RAN was smaller than it had been at the start of the First World War. During the Second World War, the RAN operated more than 350 fighting and support ships and a further 600 small civilian vessels were put into service as auxiliary patrol boats.

Even though the RAN was relatively modest at the onset of the war, it was arguably the most combat-ready of the three services. It had two heavy cruisers – *Australia* and *Canberra*, three light cruisers – *Hobart*, *Perth* and *Sydney*, an older cruiser – *Adelaide*, four sloops – *Paramatta*, *Swan*, *Warrego* and *Yarra*, five destroyers and a variety of support and ancillary craft. Following the call up of reserves in 1939 the permanent forces grew from 5,440 to 10,259.

During the war the men and vessels of the RAN served in every theatre of operations, from the tropical Pacific to the frigid Russian convoys. The first deployment was to the Mediterranean for operations against Germany, Italy and Vichy France. When they arrived, they found that the Royal Navy (RN) had withdrawn most of its fleet to the North Sea, leaving the Australian ships open to attack. They fought with success. At Cape Matapan (the southernmost part of Greece), they sank three Italian ships comprising two destroyers and a submarine. They had further successes but lost HMAS *Paramatta* at the cost of 138 men, and 24 survivors.

Perhaps the most famous Australian fleet in the Mediterranean was the ‘Scrap Iron Flotilla.’ It was an Australian destroyer group that operated in the Mediterranean and Pacific during the war. The name was bestowed upon the group by Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels who described the fleet as a "*consignment of junk*" and "*Australia's Scrap-Iron Flotilla*". The flotilla consisted of five vessels; *Scott*-class destroyer HMAS *Stuart*, which acted as flotilla leader, and four *V*-class destroyers; *Vampire*, *Vendetta*, *Voyager*, and *Waterhen*. The ships were all built to fight in the First World War, and were slow and poorly armed compared to newer ships. The five destroyers - the entirety of the RAN's destroyer force - departed Australia in November 1939 destined for Singapore where they carried out anti-submarine exercises. On 13 November 1939, the flotilla left Singapore for the Mediterranean Sea, following a request from the Admiralty for assistance.

The Australian destroyer flotilla took part in multiple actions while in the Mediterranean, including the Allied evacuation following the battle of Greece in April 1941, though the flotilla came to fame in the mission to resupply the besieged city of Tobruk. The resupply route from Alexandria to Mersa Matruh to Tobruk became known as "*Bomb Alley*" and was subject to constant Axis air

attacks. The flotilla, which by this time was in very poor condition, managed to make 138 supply runs to Tobruk, carrying in ammunition and stores and taking out wounded soldiers. In May 1941 *Vampire* became the first of the flotilla to leave the Mediterranean. *Vendetta*, the last to leave, sailed in October 1941.

Of the five destroyers, three were lost during the war; *Waterhen* was sunk in the Mediterranean on 30 June 1941, *Vampire* was sunk by Japanese aircraft during an Indian Ocean raid and *Voyager* ran aground at Betano, during the Timor campaign and was abandoned.

The greatest loss for the RAN occurred on 19 November 1941, when the Australian light cruiser HMAS *Sydney* and the German auxiliary cruiser *Kormoran* engaged each other in the Indian Ocean, off Western Australia. The two ships sank each other: *Sydney* was lost with all 645 hands, while the majority of the *Kormoran's* crew were rescued and became prisoners of war. The location of both wrecks remained a mystery to many and subject to much controversy until March 2008, when both ships were found.

However, this was not Australia's greatest maritime tragedy. One thousand and fifty four Australians died in the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* as described in Chapter 5 under the entry for Private William Jones.

After the Imperial Japanese Navy's attacks on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, the RAN redeployed its larger ships to home waters to protect the Australian mainland from Japanese attack, while several smaller ships remained in the Mediterranean. From 1940 onwards, there was considerable Axis naval activity in Australian waters first from German commerce raiders and submarines and later by the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Initially, RAN ships served as part of the British-Australian component of the American-British-Dutch-Australian Command. It was wound up following the fall of the Netherlands East Indies and was succeeded by the South West Pacific Area (Command) (SWPA). The United States Seventh Fleet was formed at Brisbane on 15 March 1943, for service in the SWPA. Thereafter, RAN ships in the Pacific generally served at part of Seventh Fleet taskforces.

The loss of HMAS *Canberra* at the Battle of Savo Island in August 1942 was the largest single ship loss the RAN experienced during the war. In the early hours of the morning of 9 August

1942, *Canberra* was severely damaged off Guadalcanal (Solomon Islands) in a surprise attack by a powerful Japanese naval force. *Canberra* was hit by 24 shells in less than two minutes, with 84 of her crew killed, including Captain Frank Getting. Following an order to abandon ship, *Canberra* was sunk the next day by a torpedo from a US destroyer, to prevent it being captured.

The loss of *Canberra*, following the losses of *Sydney* and *Perth*, attracted unprecedented international attention and sympathy for the RAN. US President Franklin D. Roosevelt wished to commemorate the loss of *Canberra* and requested that a US heavy cruiser under construction be named *Canberra*. USS *Canberra* was launched on 19 April 1943. The British Government approved the transfer of HMS *Shropshire* to the RAN as a replacement, and the ship was commissioned as HMAS *Shropshire* on 20 April 1943.

By the end of the Second World War, the RAN's combat strength numbered 150 ships with an additional 200 auxiliary craft with the service reaching its peak in June 1945, when its ranks swelled to 39,650 personnel. During the six years of war, the RAN lost three cruisers, four destroyers, two sloops, a corvette, and an auxiliary minesweeper to enemy action. Casualties included 1,740 personnel from the 19 ships sunk, and another 436 personnel killed aboard other ships or at other posts. By most measures, such losses were heavy for such a small service, representing over half its pre-war strength in ships and one-fifth in men. Against this, the RAN destroyed one cruiser, an armed merchant raider, three destroyers or torpedo boats, a minesweeper, many light craft and seven submarines. It also destroyed or captured more than 150,000 tons of Axis merchant shipping and shot down more than a hundred aircraft. Although difficult to quantify the RAN also played a role in numerous other successes.

All the seamen of the CRB survived the war and their stories are provided below. They are listed alphabetically.

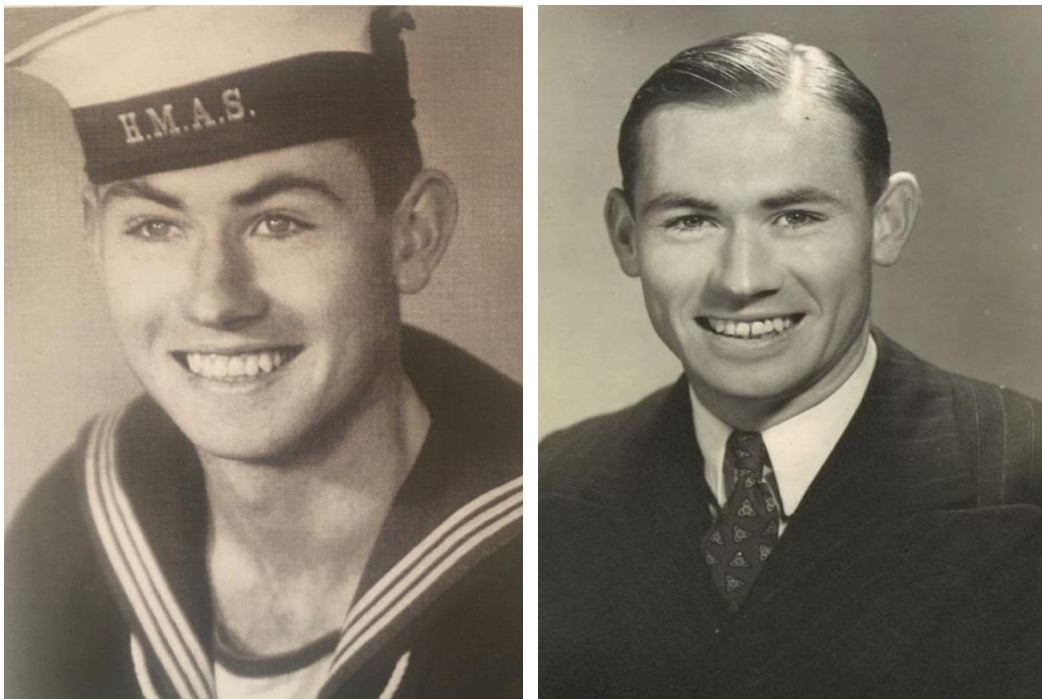
Able Seaman Noel Laurence Allanson, PM7211

Noel was born in Carlton on Christmas Day 1925 – accordingly, he was named Noel after that day. His father was Laurence Allanson. He was a so-called ‘Depression Baby’ and his family lived in a modest house down the hill from the Essendon Football Club ground known as Windy Hill. This was to become a very important location in his life. Noel joined the CRB in 1950. He rose

through the Accountant's Branch and served as Secretary to the Board from 1962 to 1978 and then became a Board Member from 1978 to 1983.

He attended Essendon State School and Essendon High School and his school report said that he was 'Senior prefect – outstanding in cricket, football, tennis, athletics' – with cricket and football underlined in red.

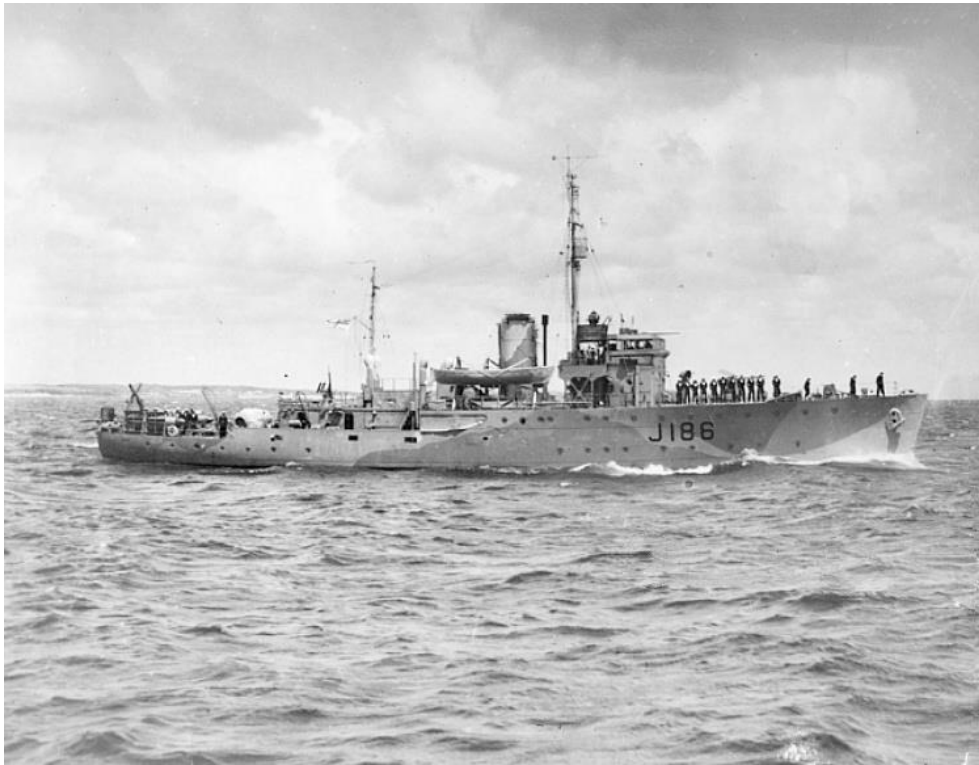
In December 1941, Noel joined the City of Melbourne, Abattoirs and Cattle Markets Department as a Junior Clerk. He enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) ten days after his 18th birthday in January 1944, and served as an able seaman (AB). An AB is a member of the deck department of a ship who may work as a watch-stander (or lookout), a day worker, or a combination of these roles.



18 year-old Able Seaman Noel Allanson – and after the war – circa late 1940s.

He joined HMAS *Ipswich*, which was one of sixty Australian escort/minesweepers (commonly known as Corvettes) built during the Second World War in Australian shipyards. Twenty (including *Ipswich*) were built on British Admiralty order but manned and commissioned by the RAN.

Ipswich was only 60 m long and 10 m wide and had a range of 4,300 miles at 10 knots. It had a crew of 80. This was to be Noel's home until July 1946.



HMAS Ipswich.

Noel recalled the story of his first trip to Fremantle across the Great Australian Bight in some of the roughest weather anyone could remember - shuddering up and then pile driving down the huge swells. He said he was as sick as a dog with carbuncles on the back of his neck – but apparently this was the only time he was ever sea sick.

The *Ipswich* served in the eastern Indian and western Pacific Oceans. Noel was an able seaman and gunner, he visited Colombo in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Manus Island and other atoll bases. It was on the remote coral island of Enewetak Atoll in the Marshall Islands that Noel received his only war wound – playing a football match. He split his eye brow which was promptly stapled up by a US doctor at the base in five seconds flat. He always had a bit of a droopy eyelid from it.

But his most memorable recollection of the war was being in Tokyo Bay at the time of the signing of the Japanese surrender, September 2nd 1945, with *Ipswich* anchored near the USS *Missouri* on which the truce was signed – a truly historic occasion.

In July 1946, at 20 years of age, Noel was discharged from the Navy and he returned to the City of Melbourne, Abattoirs and Cattle Markets Department. At the urging of his mother, he studied accountancy at night school with the Federal Institute of Accountants. In 1949, he attended a 21st birthday party for Betty Wilson and Noel was so smitten he is alleged to have asked her, “Would I be standing on anyone’s corns if I asked you out?” They were engaged in 1950 and married in March 1951.



Noel and Betty on their wedding day – 13th March 1951.

In 1950, Noel applied for a position as ledger keeper at the Country Roads Board. He was given a glowing reference by his boss at the City of Melbourne who stated that. *“In all branches of his work, he displays a marked ability and a very keen interest in his work.”* He also said that, *“Mr Allanson has an outstanding record as an athlete and is at present a playing member with the Essendon Club in both District Cricket and League Football.”*

So, it is indisputable that Noel was an excellent sportsman excelling in Australian Rules Football and cricket. Despite serving two years in the prime of his youth with the RAN, he played 57 games between 1947 and 1951 for the Essendon Football Club, playing in a losing VFL grand final team (in 1947) and a winning one (in 1950). He was a defender and he only kicked one goal in his career – at Glenferrie Oval against Hawthorn. In the 1947 grand final, when Essendon lost by a point in

the last minute to Carlton, Noel was listed among Essendon's best players. He continued his connection with the club as Vice-President in 1976 and 1977 and Treasurer from 1978 to early 1991. He was inducted into the club's Hall of Fame in 2015.



Essendon Football Team - VFL Premiers 1950.
Noel Allanson is seated at the extreme left in the centre row.

Noel played Pennant Cricket for Essendon and also played one cricket match representing Victoria in 1957. It was against Tasmania and he scored 24 runs. He was captain of the Essendon Cricket Club.



Noel Allanson – Secretary of the CRB, 1970.

Noel was a teetotaler and non-smoker all his life and contrary to what you might think, this was a great advantage in the Navy. On shore leave, his crew mates rationed their spending money before going ashore and gave Noel – ever the accountant - the balance, so that they were not tempted to spend the lot.

Noel was appointed Assistant Secretary of the CRB in December 1956, Deputy Secretary in December 1957 and Secretary in August 1962. He was appointed to the Board in an acting capacity for a period of three months in 1967 and he undertook an overseas study mission later that year. He was appointed as a member of the Board in December 1978, and after the formation of the Road Construction Authority, he became Chief General Manager – Corporate Administration. in July 1983. He was also appointed a member of the State Employees Benefits Board in January 1980.

Noel retired from the CRB in 1983. He always regretted not having done any further formal education – so one of the first things he did was to enrol in the Bachelor of Commerce at the University of Melbourne as a mature student. With a live-in secretary, Bet, to help type up notes and essays, he loved it. He revelled in mixing it with the young students, and challenging the

teachers. He would take interest and great pleasure in the careers of many of his fellow students and friends long after his graduation in 1987.

Of course this study did not get in the way of his post footy and cricket love – golf! He played many rounds at Northern over many years – well into his 90s. He got down to a single figure handicap, although only for a short while.

His children and grandchildren complained that whenever they went to the MCG for a footy or cricket match, it would take forever to get to their seats – because every ten metres or so it seemed someone would stop Noel for a chat. Noel was a modest gentleman, and never big-noted himself.

Noel died in February 2022 at the age of 96. The Essendon Football Club brought the 1950 Premiership Cup to his funeral. He was the last Essendon player to have served in the Second World War to die¹.

Able Seaman Stuart Banks-Smith, PM4086

Stuart was born in Springvale in 1924 and enlisted in the RAN in July 1942. His file in the National Archives is very brief – just two pages. To make matters worse, much of the file is illegible. It seems to be written in pencil and it has faded badly.

From what I can see, he spent most of his service at land-based postings – *Cerberus* (Flinders), *Penguin* (Sydney), *Platypus* (North Sydney) and *Lonsdale* (Melbourne). However I can discern some sea service on *Adelong* (one month), *Corinda* (ten months), *Duntroon* (three months) and *River Clarence* (six months).

Adelong and *Corinda* were cargo ships, *Duntroon* was a troop carrier and *River Clarence* was also a cargo ship. All of them were in the range of eight to ten thousand tons displacement.

¹ During the Boer War, one Essendon Player was killed – Charlie Moore (30 games); during the First World War, 13 were killed – Lewis Blackmore (1), Hughie Callan (71), Dick Clough (2), Chris Fogarty (28), Jimmy Gordon (8), Bill Harvey (9), Herb Hunter (3), Fred McIntosh (39), Charley Morely (3), Les Rogers (3), Gerald Ryan (18), Bruce Sloss (84) and Jack Wood (2). Those who perished in the Second World War were Godfrey Goldin (8), Len Johnson (69), Jack Keddie (1), Ted Regan (11), and Archie Roberts (48). Over both World Wars, there were 232 servicemen who played for Essendon. These figures would be similar for other clubs.



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Allied Cargo Ship MV *Corinda*.

Stuart was demobilised at the end of his service on the *River Clarence* in November 1945.

I can't find any detail of where he worked in the CRB and there is nothing to indicate his previous occupation in the two pages of his archive. But it is known that he joined up from the CRB.

He was a life-long veteran car enthusiast.

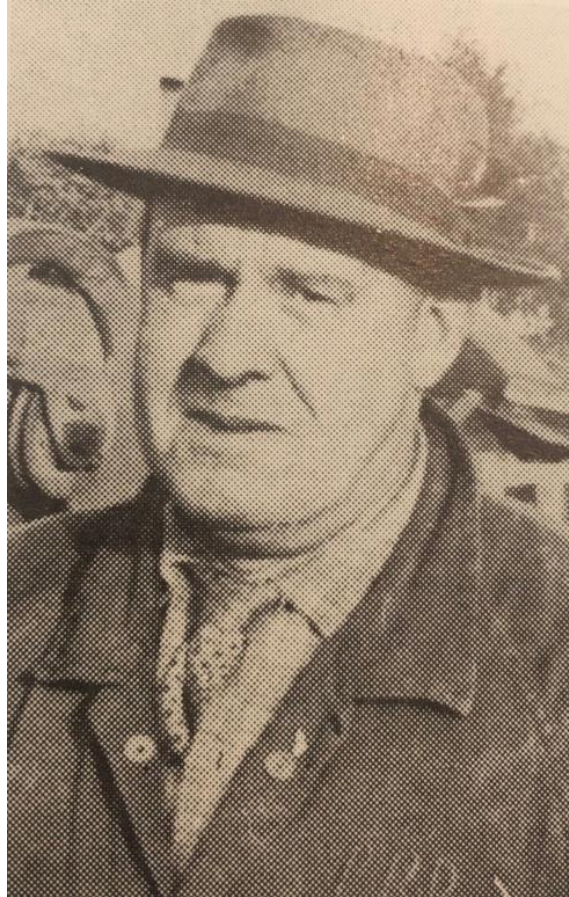
Stuart died in 1995 aged 71.

Leading Seaman Charles (Charlie) Ferrer Butler, 18031

Charlie worked at the CRB's Depot at Syndal.

In the Australian National Archives, there are 65 men and women named Butler listed as serving in the RAN during and since the Second World War, but only one of them has the name 'Charles' in their forenames. The following entry is included in a Roadlines magazine dated 1966.

“Tokyo Rose’, in a smug radio broadcast after the Battle of the Coral Sea, reported the Hobart as having gone down with all hands, but Charlie Butler knows how wrong she was. Charlie, a surviving crew member of the Hobart, was feted at this year’s celebration during Coral Sea Week.’



Charlie Butler – 1966.

Charlie’s file is extremely different to interpret. There are only two pages and many of the entries have been written in fading pencil. Charlie was born in Richmond in November 1909 and enlisted in the Navy in December 1926. He earned Good Conduct Badges in 1932, 1937 and 1942. It is clear, however, that Charlie served on HMAS *Hobart* as a Leading Seaman from August 1942 to March 1943

HMAS *Hobart* was a light cruiser which originally served in the Royal Navy as HMS *Apollo*. She was sold to Australia in 1938. During the war, *Hobart* was involved in the evacuation of British Somalia (1940) and later fought at the Battle of the Coral Sea and the amphibious landings at Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomon Islands (1942). She was torpedoed by a Japanese

submarine in 1943, but returned to service in 1945 and supported the landings at Tarakan, Brunei and Balikpapan (Borneo) and Wewak (New Guinea).



HMAS Hobart.

The Battle of the Coral Sea was fought between 4th and 8th May 1942 between the Imperial Japanese Navy and the naval and air forces of the United States and Australia. Both sides publicly claimed victory after the battle. In terms of ships lost, the Japanese won a tactical victory by sinking about 42,500 tonnes versus 19,000 tonnes sunk by the Allies. The Japanese public was informed of the victory with overstatement of the Allied losses and understatement of their own.

From a strategic perspective, however, the battle was an Allied victory as it averted the seaborne invasion of Port Moresby, lessening the threat to the supply lines between the United States and Australia. The Japanese were forced to abandon the operation that had initiated the Battle of the Coral Sea in the first place. The battle marked the first time that a Japanese invasion force was turned back without achieving its objective, which greatly lifted the morale of the Allies after a series of defeats during the initial six months in the Pacific Theatre. Port Moresby was vital to Allied strategy and its garrison could well have been overwhelmed by the more experienced Japanese invasion troops. The United States Navy also exaggerated the damage it inflicted, which later caused the press to treat its reports of Midway with more caution.

One of Charlie's shipmates on *Hobart*, Stoker Doug Watts, was also destined to work with the CRB after the war. In the entry for Doug below, there is a more detailed description of *Hobart's* participation in the Pacific Theatre.

In December 1943, Charlie joined HMAS *Shropshire* on which he served until December 1945. In December 1943, *Shropshire* took part in the New Britain operations covering the landings at Arawe and Cape Gloucester. In March 1944, with other ships of Task Force 74, she took part in the operations leading to the seizure of the Admiralty Islands and the following month was again in action at the Hollandia/Humboldt Bay operations.

On 12 July 1944 *Shropshire* proceeded to the New Guinea area operating in support of the 6th Army. On 14 July Japanese forces were bombarded in positions east of Aitape after mounting a major attack against the American garrison on the Driniumor River line. On completion of that operation *Shropshire* joined the bombardment group covering the last landing in New Guinea at Cape Sansapor on the Vogelkop Peninsula.

Charlie was discharged from the Navy in November 1946. He joined the Board's work force in January 1953 and transferred to the Syndal Depot in 1963 where he worked until his retirement in November 1974 after 21 years of service.

His wife's name was Alma and he died in May 1977 at Coff's Harbour, NSW.

Able Seaman Peter Norman Fletcher, PM4679

Peter was born in Northcote in October 1920 and he initially enrolled in the Army (Service No. V101772) as a Signaller in 17 AMR in February 1941. I have not been able to find an explanation for this acronym- but I suspect it means Australian Militia Reserve. He was discharged in February 1942 and immediately enlisted in the RAN where he served until February 1946 when he was discharged from HMAS *Lonsdale*.

Peter started work at the CRB as a Workshop Clerk at the South Melbourne Depot in 1936. After his war service. He returned to the CRB to work in the Tax and Leave Section. He held several positions in the Chief Accountant's Branch and completed his career as the Final Ledger Accountant.

His archive comprises only two pages. They contain little information about him – he was a Roman Catholic and of slight build with light brown hair and brown eyes. There is no mention of on-sea service. He was stationed at HMAS *Lonsdale*, at Warrnambool, and HMAS *Penguin*. The archive notes that: “*approval has been given for the Rating to be demobilised earlier than his priority allows ... on occupational grounds approved and request release be given high priority.*”

The photograph below was taken at Peter’s retirement from the Board after 45 years of service - on 30 November 1981.



Back row, left to right: John Bulman, Deputy Chief Accountant; Dick Whitehead, Allocations Officer (ex-2AIF);
and Bob Swift, Plant Allocations Officer (ex-2AIF);

Bottom row, left to right: Mac Wilkinson, Superintending Draftsman Road Design (ex-RAAF), Peter Fletcher,
Final Ledger Accountant (ex-RAN) and Des Chapple, OIC Correspondence Registry (ex-RAAF).

Peter died at Canterbury in July 1998.

Able Seaman Harold Lincoln Gray, PM8691

Harold – who was the CRB’s Horticultural Officer – was a student when he enlisted as an Ordinary Seaman in the Royal Australian Navy in August 1945. He was born in Hampton in 1926. Fortunately, the war finished shortly after and he did not participate in active service.

He was discharged from the Navy in January 1947. He worked as a railway porter for a time and on 13 February 1950, he secured an interview for a draftsman’s job with the CRB’s Deputy Chief Engineer, John Mathieson. He had previously tried for a job at the Board of Works and was unsuccessful and the CRB was his second choice. When he entered Mathieson’s office he was asked, “Are you a good draftsman, Gray?” Harold, who had a reputation for integrity, thought if he said ‘yes’ he may be asked to prove it, and if he said ‘no’ he wouldn’t get the job. So he said nothing. He and Mathieson stared at each other for what seemed an age when, suddenly, Mathieson said, “It makes no difference. Start tomorrow”. Not long after, Harold started his engineering studies at RMIT.



Harold Gray – circa 1950.

When he re-joined the CRB as a professional engineer he started in the Materials Laboratory and later transferred to Bridge Division supervising construction. He worked on the construction of the Swan Street Bridge which Bob Eastick managed. He also undertook road design duties in Plans and Survey Division for six years before being transferred to Dandenong Division. During this

period he studied Landscape Design at RMIT following which, he joined Bob Joyce in the Horticultural section of Works Sub-branch. Bob was considered the originator and doyen of roadside design in the CRB and Harold continued on with this work until his retirement in 1986. His title then was the Horticultural Officer. He was responsible for roadside development such as the planting of trees, shrubs and groundcovers on the roads around the state.

Harold represented VicRoads on a number of external committees including the Natural Resources League and the Keep Victoria Beautiful Council. Harold had a reserved nature but he was a doggedly determined character who stood up for what he believed was the right thing.



Harold Gray on the road – date unknown.

Harold died at age 85 in 2011.

Petty Officer Donald John (Jack) Ross W/1231

Jack was a road design engineer in the Plans and Survey Division.

He was born in Ararat in 1920. Jack left home when he was 16 to commence an apprenticeship as a car and wagon builder with the Victorian Railways at their Newport workshops. In 1938 Jack

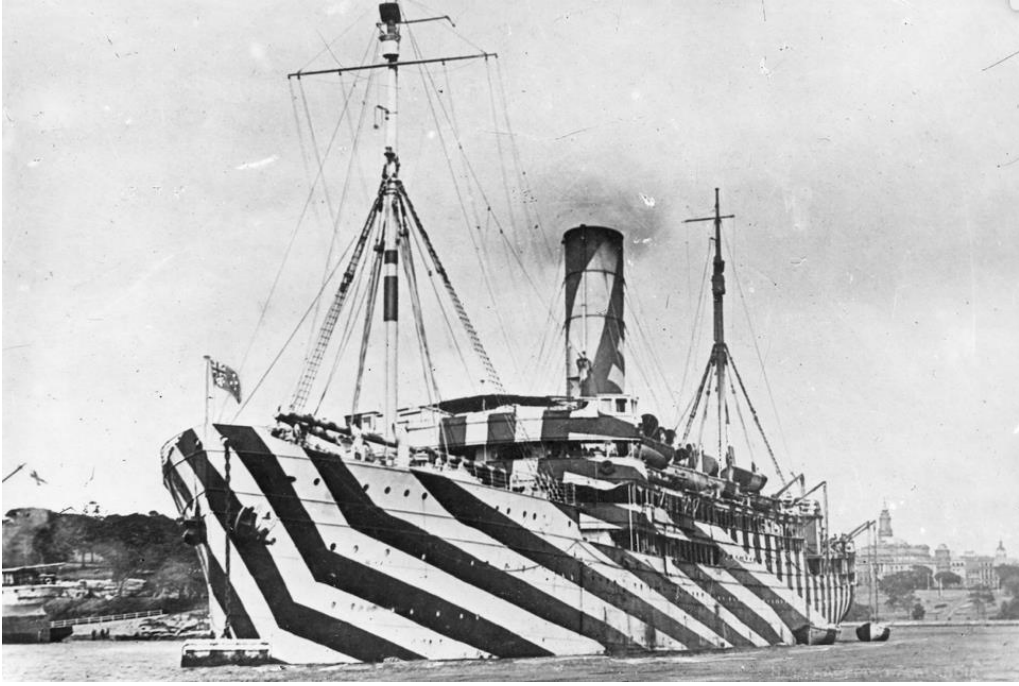
joined the Royal Australian Naval Reserve (RANR) in Williamstown, signing up for a period of three years.

With the onset of war looming the RANR was mobilised and on August 31 1939, Jack aged just 19 years, was based at HMAS *Cerberus III*, the naval training establishment located in Port Melbourne (later recommissioned as HMAS *Lonsdale* in 1940). Originally listed as a 'Writer', with specialised training, this soon changed to 'Joiner'. His rating changed again, in June 1941, to a 'Joiner IV'.



Petty Officer Donald Ross - 1942.

Training on the navy bases was intense and Jack moved between HMAS *Lonsdale* (Port Melbourne) and HMAS *Cerberus* (Flinders) before catching the train to Sydney – in November 1940 - from where he embarked for HMAS *Melville* (Darwin) aboard the SS *Zealandia*. This ship was later sunk in Darwin Harbour in February 1942 during the Japanese air attack.



SS Zealandia painted in wartime colours in her role as a troop carrier.

While back in Melbourne from Darwin in 1942, for a period of training at HMAS *Cerberus*, Jack married Lesley Rolley from Williamstown. Lesley was the sister of one of his crewmates.



The Wedding Party, 25 April 1942: Warrant Officer Edric (Ted) Howlett, Miss Linda Harsley, Jack, Lesley, Mrs Nada Gray, Leading Aircraftsman Ken Rowlands (Jack's cousin).

Jack's connection with his groomsman, Ted Howlett, had its origins in Ararat. The Ross and Howlett families were next door neighbours and the boys had grown up together. Their close friendship lasted for their lifetimes. In the 1960s both built new homes in Box Hill North, just a few blocks apart, both worked at the CRB, and they spent many family holidays together.

It wasn't long before Jack was posted again, this time to HMAS *Assault* (Port Stephens) in August 1942. HMAS *Assault* was a newly established training centre, the Joint Overseas Operational Training School for Australian and American (Navy and Army) under control of the Americans. Jack was amongst the first RANR to arrive here for training. Whilst the base was being constructed the armed cruiser HMAS *Westralia* was used as temporary accommodation for the trainees.

Instruction and training began immediately: for landing craft crews, beach parties (naval commandos) and combined signals teams. Training at *Assault* was intense, covering all aspects of landing operations on hostile shores. Jack, as a trainee, also experienced sea service onboard the HMAS *Westralia* during this time and, upon graduation, he was posted to the newly converted Infantry Landing Ship, HMAS *Manoora* in January 1943. Approval for Jack's transferral to the rating of 'A/Shipwright IV' occurred in April 1944, onboard HMAS *Manoora*.

During the years 1944 and 1945, crews spent months at sea with little respite or leave. At times mail was delayed which dampened spirits as the men longed to hear from loved ones so far away. Supplies were often stretched to the limit and fresh water was rationed. Despite this, the captain always reported that the men were well and praised their endurance.



HMAS *Manoora* – as a Landing Ship Infantry.

The *Manoora* was originally operated as a cruise ship but she was requisitioned by the Royal Australian Navy in 1939, repainted a dark grey and outfitted as an armed merchant cruiser. Her role was related to patrols, convoy and escort duties.

In 1943, HMAS *Manoora* underwent a full conversion to a Landing Ship Infantry (LSI). With a crew of 600, she was capable of carrying 1,200 troops and 25 landing craft vehicles. With her sister ships, HMAS *Kanimbla* and HMAS *Westralia*, the three operated most of the Australian amphibious operations in the south west Pacific. HMAS *Manoora* became part of the American 7th Amphibious Task Force and took part in eight D-day assault landings

In its capacity as a troop carrier the HMAS *Manoora* was not designed for attack and didn't participate in bombardment but was still armed for defence. Attack and bombardment were carried out by the large supporting convoy, comprised of destroyers, frigates and cruisers. But that didn't mean that the crew could be complacent, they remained vigilant and on guard at all times. The convoy would always be on the lookout for enemy submarines and the larger vessels would go on the hunt. Mine sweepers and divers were on constant alert.

It was the signal '*stand by to repel enemy air attack*' that sounded all action stations with every member on every ship alert and in position. As enemy aircraft were sighted all ships would open fire, including the LSI's. The skies would be lit up with intricate patterns of criss-crossing tracers. There was frantic fighting to shoot down the Kamikaze 'suicide' pilots before they could reach their chosen targets. HMAS *Manoora* contributed her first hostile shots in these desperate battles, and although there were a few close calls, she fortunately avoided being hit. The crew did bear witness to some targets being hit and the destruction that was caused.

Jack would later make light of these events saying: '*I stood on the deck shaking my hammer as the planes flew low overhead, so close I could see the whites of the pilot's eyes*'. But the reality must have been so very different. Jack had actually trained and was qualified for 'Damage Control' onboard the ship, so his responsibilities were vital in maintaining the safety of all.

Assault landings were always intense operations. Cruisers, destroyers and rocket ships began a shattering bombardment of the land, clearing the way for the landing barges and the troops. At Balikpapan the *Manoora* lay close by one of the cruisers and she was continually shaken by the detonation of the powerful 6-inch guns. The Battle of Balikpapan in Borneo, the campaign to liberate Japanese-held British and Dutch Borneo took place on 1 July 1945. The Allied invasion

fleet consisted of 156 ships. The landing had been preceded by heavy bombing and shelling by Australian and US air and naval forces.



American manned amphibious vehicles during the landing of Australian troops at Balikpapan, Borneo.



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Lowering a landing barge.



Troops climbing down the nets on HMAS Manoora.

Each landing barge carried 20 to 30 heavily armed troops. When it reached the beach the ramp was dropped and the troops rapidly exited. This procedure was repeated over many hours until all the troops were ashore.

Each of the LSP's had a beach party as part of its component, which included: a boat repair and recovery section under a boatswain: two Petty Officers and 14 seamen as boat crews, two artisan mates, two torpedomen, a sailmaker's mate, four shipwrights and joiners, four motor mechanics and two stokers in the repair section.

Following the landings, injured soldiers were brought back to the ship for medical attention and transport to hospital. Those who died of their wounds were buried at sea. At each burial, the crew of HMAS Manoora stood to attention, paying respect to their fallen comrades.



Burials at sea aboard HMAS *Manoora*.

(Ross family collection)

Balikpapan was the final assault landing for HMAS *Manoora* and after completion, she headed back to Morotai to load up with supplies, the remainder of the 7th AIF division, ambulance and medical units, RAAF men and a company of Army Engineers. Unloading these, she then took onboard injured AIF soldiers and once more turned and sailed back to Morotai. Waiting there in anchorage, rumours began to circulate that the ship was at last to go home.

It had been twelve months since the ship had last been in Sydney and almost eighteen months since the crew had enjoyed a decent period of leave. Jack was enjoying his leave when hostilities ceased. In August 1945 he was transferred to HMAS *Penguin* (Sydney) but he was quickly transferred to HMAS *Lonsdale* (Port Melbourne). He received his final discharge in October 1945 and was at last free to join his family after six long years of war. His service aboard HMAS *Manoora*, from its conversion to an LSI in 1943 to the end of the assault operations in 1945, was certainly a record to be proud of. Jack had started the war as a young 19 year old and was now a man of 25 years with a wife and small child. This was a brand new world and it would certainly take some time to adjust.

Below is an extract from *Buzz Review*, the ship's newsletter, 'A Chaplain's Chatterings' by Chaplain N R Symes RAN, HMAS *Manoora*, July 1945. It records HMAS *Manoora*'s log as a troop carrier.

It can be asked reasonably, breathes there a man in this ship's company with soul so dead that he does not feel proud of this record :-

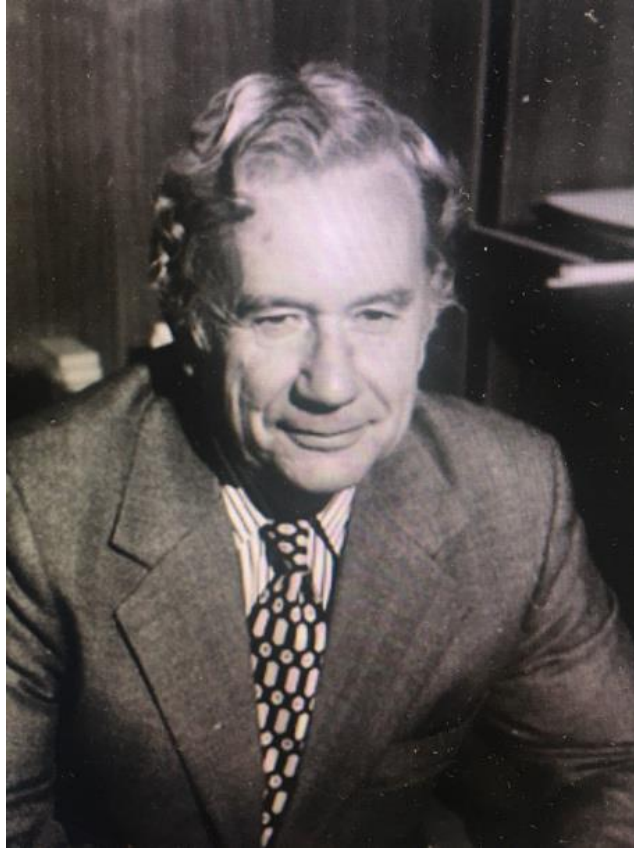
<u>O P E R A T I O N</u>	<u>P L A C E</u>	<u>D A T E</u>
Assault Landing with U.S. troops at	TANAHMERAH BAY, N.G.	22. 4.44.
Reinforcement trip for U.S. Army to	Humboldt Bay, N.G.	7. 5.44.
Assault Landing with U.S. troops at	TOEM, opp. WAKDE ISLAND	17. 5.44.
Reinforcement trip for U.S. Army to	Toem	5. 6.44.
Assault Landing with U.S. troops at	MOROTAI ISLAND	15. 9.44.
Assault Landing with U.S. troops at	LEYTE GULF (PHILIPPINES)	20.10.44.
Reinforcement trip for U.S. Army to	Leyte Gulf	14.11.44.
Assault Landing with U.S. troops at	LINGAYEN GULF	9. 1.45.
Reinforcement trip for U.S. Army to	Lingayen Gulf.	10. 2.45.
Reinforcement trip for U.S. Army to	Manila	25. 3.45.
Reinforcement trip for U.S. Army to	Manila	9. 4.45.
Assault Landing with A.I.F. troops	TARAKAN Is. (BORNEO)	1. 5.45.
Reinforcement trip for A.I.F. to	Tarakan Is.	7. 5.45.
Assault Landing with A.I.F. troops	LABUAN Is. (Straits Set.)	10. 6.45.
Assault Landing with A.I.F. troops	BALIKFAPAN (BORNEO)	1. 7.45.
Reinforcement trip for A.I.F. to	Balikpapan	7. 7.45.
8 Initial Assault Operations		
8 Reinforcement trips.		

I am indebted to Janet Macloy, Jack's daughter, for this thorough summary of Jack's service. She has done Jack proud.

After the war he was presented with his Certificate of Completion by the Victorian Railways for his apprenticeship as a Car and Wagon Builder. The third year of the course was modified due to his mobilisation. However, he decided to take advantage of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, as he met the criteria to qualify because '*he had enlisted before the age of 21*' plus, he was deemed suitable for professional training as he had '*displayed conspicuous ability during his war service*'. Jack committed to full-time engineering study for the next three years. The scheme provided an allowance for travel and covered all tuition fees, books and instruments. As a married man with dependants, Jack received a payment of £6.10s per week which was slightly under the basic wage. He did a number of odd jobs including changing the billboards around Williamstown for the local cinema and working at the Spotswood Sugar Refineries – a job he hated but it paid well.

Near the end of his study – in 1949 - Jack applied for a position as an Engineering Cadet at the Shire of Korong in Wedderburn and was successful. He built a house there with the assistance of a War Service Home Loan. When a delegation from the CRB arrived in town for a routine inspection, the Chairman offered him a job and, in 1956, Jack started in Plans and Survey Division in the 'Old Tin Shed' at the back of the Exhibition Building in Melbourne. During the early 1960s Jack was at the forefront of the development of design using computers and he was involved in many of the major projects of the era Hume Freeway, Tullamarine Freeway and the Eastern

Freeway. Just to add a little variety throughout the late 1960s Jack also returned to study, completing further qualifications as a *Municipal Building Surveyor* and a *Diploma of Civil Engineering*. Throughout the years Jack was also an active member of the RSL and Legacy.



Jack Ross – 1979.

Jack retired from the CRB in 1981 after serving for 24 years. He died in 1988.

Stoker Douglas (Doug) Lawrence Bennett Watts, W2624

Doug worked in the Divisional Depot in Traralgon Division and then transferred to Head Office in Kew to manage the CRB Service Station. Later, he worked at the Mechanical Sub-branch at Syndal in charge of emergency maintenance.

Doug was born in Moonee Ponds in 1924 and enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy at Williamstown in 1944 at the age of 20. His enlistment papers show that he was a process worker. He worked as a stoker in the engine room of the cruiser HMAS *Hobart* during the war in the

Pacific, and was part of the occupation forces in Japan after the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



Doug Watts as a new recruit and marching as a veteran.

HMAS *Hobart* entered the Second World War in the Middle East. She was in Aden when Italy entered the war in June 1940. An Italian air raid on Aden was its first conflict. She then assisted in the evacuation of British troops from Berbera in Somalia and remained in the area on escort and patrol duties before returning to Australian waters in 1941. She returned to duties in the Mediterranean later that year operating out of Alexandria in Egypt. She had difficulty in passing through the Suez Canal. The Germans had laid sea mines at the southern entrance and the *Hobart* and other ships in the fleet came under heavy attack by German bombers.

When Japan entered the war, *Hobart* returned to the Far East becoming part of the American, British, Dutch and Australian forces operating in Southeast Asia. She arrived in Malayan waters in January 1942 and it was during her period in these waters that *Hobart* withstood some of the severest aerial bombing of her career.

On Sunday 1 February 1942 *Hobart* berthed at Keppel Harbour, Singapore. By then the Japanese army had breached the causeway and a desperate rear-guard action was being fought by Allied soldiers. *Hobart* took on ammunition and stores while her crew commandeered anything of value to deny it to the advancing enemy. *Hobart* and HMS *Tenedos* cleared the harbour at 18:00 on 2 February and shaped a course for Tanjong Priok in the Dutch East Indies. Singapore was clearly lost and its surrender on 15 February came as no surprise.



HMAS *Hobart* in 1940 before its camouflage paint scheme.

Hobart took part in the western sector of the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942. One of the covering forces for the United States aircraft carriers, she was the target of an attack by eight Japanese twin engine torpedo bombers and 19 heavy bombers on 7 May. The naval force was without fighter cover but escaped damage by evasive action, shooting down three of the enemy aircraft.

On 7 August 1942 *Hobart* was one of the Cruiser Covering Force for the American landings on Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomon Islands. Again, she was successful in evading fierce attacks by Japanese torpedo and high level bombers and inflicted severe damage on the enemy in both shore bombardments and anti-aircraft fire.

On 20 July 1943, *Hobart* was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine while *en route* to Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu. The torpedo struck aft on the port side causing considerable damage in the vicinity of the wardroom. Thirteen officers and sailors were killed and another seven injured. She made it to Espiritu Santo under her own power the following day where she underwent temporary repairs and was escorted to Sydney by HMA Ships *Warramunga* and *Arunta*. She arrived on 26 August for extensive repairs which kept her out of service until December 1944.

It was during this time, Doug joined her company. On 24 April 1945 *Hobart* was part of the covering force for the landings at Tarakan in Borneo. On 11 May she supported the landings near Wewak of elements of the Australian 6th Division. From 7 to 9 June 1945 she was operating off Brunei, Borneo, where cover was provided for minesweeping and preliminary bombardments carried out for the subsequent landing there. *Hobart* was also in the force which provided cover and bombardment for the landings at Balikpapan early in July. On 31 August she arrived in Tokyo Bay and was among the Australian ships present at the time of the Japanese surrender.



HMAS *Hobart* ship's company in Tokyo Bay, 1945.
Doug is in there somewhere.

The ship was decommissioned in 1947.

Doug was demobilised in October 1946. His file stated that his character was 'Very good' and his efficiency was 'Superior'.

I could find no record of Doug's death.