

CHIEF OF NAVY SPEECH

LAUNCH OF THE 'PRIDE OF THE NATION' EXHIBITION

8 JULY 2011

Good morning everybody, Member for Melbourne Ports Mr Danby, Senator Ronaldson, The Honorable Georgie Crozier, Member for Ivanhoe Mr Carbines, John Wertheimer Chairman of the Shrine Trustees, veterans and other distinguished guests, former shipmates ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for being here today and thank you Jean for your kind introduction.

This launch today is an especially proud moment for me, and for the Royal Australian Navy, it is an event in a weekend where we are able to celebrate our century of service with the Australian community that we serve. It is appropriate that we kick off the weekends celebrations in the place where the story of the development of the RAN began, here in the organisational birthplace of the Navy – Melbourne.

The Commonwealth Naval Forces were established 01 March 1901 by combining the small colonial naval forces. At the time, it was a small coastal defence force, but by 1909 increasing international tensions and our need to assume full responsibility for our own maritime defence meant a significant program of expansion for our fleet. So successful were these efforts that on 10 July 1911 – one hundred years ago this year – King George V decreed that we should be known as the 'Royal Australian Navy.' The same year he decided that our ships should be called 'His Majesty's Australian Ships,' and for the first time the flag of the Australian Commonwealth was flown at the jackstaff. It was an historic moment, and one that recognised our new growing maturity on the world scene.

Victoria played an enormous role in bringing us to that point and has continued as the 'cradle of the RAN' ever since. The story goes back to the gunboat HMVS *Victoria*, which won the very first of our colonial battle honours when a party of seamen fought ashore during New Zealand's Maori War of 1860. By the time of Federation, Victoria had one of our strongest colonial Naval forces, including the monitor HMVS *Cerberus* and four gunboats; a highly capable Naval dockyard at Williamstown; and facilities for the new Board of Naval

Administration (later the Commonwealth Naval Board), which remained headquartered here until 1958 and on mornings like this morning where it is -5 degrees in Canberra I think it still should be!. It also had a strong tradition of Reserve service which continued, into the 1990s, through HMAS *Lonsdale*, from which many of our Servicemen and women enlisted.

Operationally, Victorians and Victoria have also played a leading role from the Boxer Rebellion to today. The first Australian serviceman killed in World War I was Able Seaman Billy Williams from Northcote, who was shot in the Bitapaka raid in New Britain on 11 Sep 14. Captain Richardson and a party of Victorian Reserves boarded a German steamer off Port Phillip Heads in August 1914, capturing the only copy of the German mercantile code then held by Allied forces, which was cracked by the headmaster of the Royal Australian College in Geelong. The RAN Bridging Train, which was the last unit out of Gallipoli, was originally formed from the Naval Brigade in Melbourne in 1915. Indeed, the very first shots of both World Wars were fired from Fort Nepean in Port Phillip Bay by Midshipman and later Commander Stan Veale.

Still today, Victoria is the 'cradle of the Navy' as the home of our largest training institution at HMAS *Cerberus*, once the Flinders Naval Depot, which celebrates its 90th anniversary this year. In its schools, generations of Navy people have trained.

This exhibition tells their stories, the stories of everyday Australians: their triumphs, their sacrifices and their service for our home and people. In them, we remember the thousands who served but did not return, and who are commemorated forever in this shrine. Among them are the 24 crew of the minesweeper HMAS *Goorangai* who were lost in a night-time collision in 1940 in Port Phillip Bay.

But our story is not only about courage, sacrifice and sorrow. There is also an excitement and sense of fun and adventure that comes with life at sea, and which has drawn many of us to it over the years. That too is part of this exhibition.

Some of the items exhibited are highly significant, even iconic, to the history of the RAN and Australia.

Here are the personal binoculars of Captain Hec Waller, DSO and Bar, RAN - that great son of Benalla who, along with many of his crew, were lost in HMAS *Perth I* at the ferocious Battle of Sunda Strait in 1942. Captain Waller had left the binoculars at home before *Perth's* last voyage. We remember him, and his crew today, in our submarine HMAS *Waller* and HMAS *Perth (III)*

On display too is the battle ensign flown by HMAS *Arunta I* (CAPT Buchanan) at the Battle of Surigao Strait on 23 October 1944 where RAN and USN forces defeated the Imperial Japanese Navy in the last surface battle fought in naval history. During the night battle *Arunta* led three USN destroyers in a torpedo attack on a Japanese battleship with *Arunta* firing from as close as 1500 yards. The US Admiral commanding commented that *Arunta's* attack was the bravest and most aggressive he had ever seen.

The exhibition also includes many of the ordinary personal items, uniforms, medals, mementos that reflect the service of our Australian sailors.

This exhibition and our centenary come at one of the most exciting periods of transition in the history of the Royal Australian Navy. In 10 years the fleet will look very different from today with new amphibious ships, air warfare destroyers, totally new helicopter fleet, new oilers and a class of multi roled offshore combatant vessels entering service.

We cannot create the future force without understanding and valuing our past. It is where we have come from, and the values and courage of those who have gone before inspire us to succeed into the future.

As the Royal Australian Navy passes its centenary, I think the Australian people offer it the same support, the same trust, as it did at our inception and this is not a trust that we tak for granted. We are proud to share with them these fascinating insights into our past. I would like to thank those who have devoted so much time to preparing the displays, especially the Shrine of Remembrance staff; and the staff of the Naval Heritage Collection.

It gives me enormous pleasure to open this exhibition, 'Pride of the Nation: Centenary of the Royal Australian Navy 1911-2011