

Reviews of First Edition of HMAS Castlemaine

“This fine publication is an accompaniment to the ship that survives with us today and provides a genuine insight to what it was like on board a World War Two vessel during those critical years.

HMAS Castlemaine may have been a small ship, but she was tenacious in performance. Apart from her combat roles, she also saved lives, rescuing more than 30 commandos from Timor in 1942.

The book has been carefully put together in the same method the ship was constructed, in a coordinated and integrated manner, from the laying of the keel, the installation of her boilers and machinery, to being brought to life by the courage of the crew eager to do their bit. A highly recommended read and handy reference.” Naval Historical Society of Australia

“It was gratifying to read a history of the last Bathurst Class corvette still afloat. This delightful book deals with the birth, service, near death and resurrection of the ship in all its gritty detail.” Ship Visitor

“This book is not only a good read, but a great tribute to the people who built and served in the ship, and those who saved her from the breakers yard and restored her wartime configuration.” Maritime Trust of Australia

“When I saw the ship in Williamstown I didn't know what to expect, but reading the book afterwards inspired me to go again to look more closely at things I missed. The book makes Castlemaine come alive.” Ship Visitor

“The book is very well-illustrated, with numerous photographs and diagrams. It is well-written and edited and there are snippets from crew diaries that add depth and perspective. It includes a bibliography, list of the wartime passages, appendices for the specifications, a list of the fates of all the corvettes, and the officers and crew known to have served on the ship. All-up, I found it a very interesting read.” Amazon Reviewer

HMAS Castlemaine

The Corvette That Came Home

Second Edition

Kerry Hodges

**Edited by
Kate Lance, Robert Pearson and Peter Driver
for The Maritime Trust of Australia**

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We have tried to attribute images to their original photographer or
archive, but over the years many have made their way into
Castlemaine's collection without details. Please contact us if you have
information we can add to future editions.

Cover Images

Front: Kirsty McLaren/Alamy Stock Photo
Rear: top, Trevor McGarvey, lower images, Roy Dunstan – Argus.

To all those who built, served on, and
supported the corvettes over the years



THE MARITIME TRUST OF AUSTRALIA INC.

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INTRODUCTION

The story of the corvettes is one of courage over adversity, of Australian ingenuity, and of the incredible efforts of the home front to build sixty Australian-designed ships in dockyards around the country.

The result was a ship designed by Australians who had never designed warships before, built by Australians who had never built ships before and manned by Australians most of whom had never been to sea before.

Corvettes served in every theatre of war. They escorted convoys, sank submarines, shot at – and sometimes shot down – planes, swept mines, ferried troops, bombarded enemy shore guns, surveyed uncharted waters, towed damaged ships to safety, and even landed spies.

By mid 1942, there were twenty-four corvettes convoying merchant ships around the Australian coast, in daily peril from enemy planes and submarines. Into early 1943, corvettes escorted convoys taking vast quantities of military stores and equipment to the front line troops fighting in New Guinea.

The corvettes steamed a total of 11 million kilometres, nearly all of it in dangerous waters and often behind enemy lines. But through all of their extensive service, only four were lost: two by collisions at sea, one by a mine, and only one, HMAS *Armidale*, was sunk by enemy action.

Adapted from a talk by Commander Rebecca Jeffcoat, RAN, Sydney, 07 Sept 2016. See www.navyhistory.org.au/tag/corvette/

The Beginning

In the mid 1930s, with world tensions growing due to the actions of Germany in Europe and Japan in China, Australia looked to enlarge its navy.

Part of this program in 1938 called for a Local Defence Vessel (LDV) that could be built in Australian shipyards. They were to be easy to construct and operate, and capable of both anti-submarine and minesweeping duties.

The RAN Directorate of Naval Engineering, under Rear Admiral P.E. McNeil, designed a number of WWII ships that would become the Bathurst Class corvettes, River Class frigates and Tribal Class destroyers.

In early 1939 the Directorate produced drawings for a small LDV that displaced 680 tons, with a speed of 15.5 knots (28.7 km/h), and a range of 2,850 nautical miles (5,280 km).

Although this vessel was never built the specifications were easily adapted. When war broke out in September 1939 the British Admiralty authorised the building of ten LDVs in Australian shipyards. They were called *corvettes*, originally a French word for a class of small and handy warship.

The first, *Bathurst*, was laid down on 10 February 1940 at Cockatoo Island Dockyard, Sydney, NSW, and gave her name to her sister ships, Bathurst-Class Australian Minesweepers.

In all, sixty corvettes were built: 36 for the Royal Australian Navy, 20 for the Royal Navy (commissioned as HMAS vessels with Australian crews), and four for the Royal Indian Navy.

Those sixty corvettes were built in eight Australian yards, in the largest single shipbuilding program in the country's history. On average, one new corvette was commissioned *every twenty-six days*. During the war about 15,000 Australians served on these ships, and afterwards thousands of others gained experience or studied aboard the training corvettes.

They returned the boilers, engines, officers' quarters, wireless room and chart room to their original states, and have created a fascinating maritime museum in the large former mess deck area.

In November 2020, HMAS *Castlemaine* received the accolade of acceptance onto the Victorian Heritage Register. It states that she is the only known intact WWII naval ship in Victoria, and one of only two WWII warships left in Australia.

Castlemaine is also socially significant for her links to corvette servicemen, offering a first-hand insight into their experiences, and playing an important role in the education of future generations. The ship commemorates all those who built, served on, and supported the corvettes over the years.

This book records the still-unfinished story of HMAS *Castlemaine*, the last Australian corvette afloat. Today she is berthed at Gem Pier in Williamstown, Victoria, close to her birthplace, the shipyard that constructed her in 1941-2.

Alan Dower, a lieutenant with the 2/4th Commandos who was rescued from Timor in 1942 by HMAS *Castlemaine*, wrote:

They were hammered and welded together fast in war to sweep the mines, secure the seas and keep beleaguered soldier fed. They were stout little ships that plugged so many weary and perilous miles and deserve the tribute 'Toilers of the Sea.' Here is the last of her line, the last of the tiny but tough Corvettes that Australia strung around her coast when the oceanic blitzkrieg was at full force and the Japanese invasion threat was at its height.

CASTLEMAINE was this small ship's name. Her flag once crackled from the Sunda Strait to the Coral Sea. She ran the gauntlet of the submarines and the angry bombers that sunk her sister ARMIDALE. She saved sick soldiers and brought them home. And she risked her life among uncharted waters which already had claimed the first Australian destroyer VOYAGER. As ships go, she is tired and old, she is at the end of her race, but she will not die.



Castlemaine at Gem Pier, Williamstown

This Book

Since the history of HMAS *Castlemaine* was written for the 50th Anniversary of Commissioning, June 1992, further information has come to hand from official records, so I decided to rewrite the ship's history for a revised edition.

Information came from the Commanding Officer's Monthly Report of Proceedings (Australian War Memorial), ship records held by the Maritime Trust and the Australian Archives at Melbourne, letters and newsletters of the HMAS *Castlemaine* Association (now disbanded), and newspaper cuttings.

With regard to the crew lists, officers' names were taken from the Navy Lists 1942-1946, crew names were taken from records held on board, but the majority have come from letters of ex-crew members, information from their families, the *Castlemaine* Association members' lists, and information supplied by Bill Trezise and the Corvette Association.

There may be errors in the spelling of names after so long. Some names could still be missing, so any additional information on the ship or crew lists is always welcome.

Photos are from the *Castlemaine* Association photo album, and we also acknowledge J. Deeble for his photos, Roy Dunstan from *The Argus*, the purchased Age collection, and images from unknown crew members and war correspondents.

Kerry Hodges, September 2014

First Edition

After the completion of the 2014 revision, the manuscript remained unpublished until the committee decided in 2020 to seek grant money to assist in publishing.

The Maritime Trust of Australia would like to gratefully acknowledge the receipt of a grant from Hobsons Bay City Council. This is particularly appropriate, as the home of *Castlemaine*, Williamstown, is part of the city of Hobsons Bay.

The book was proofread by Gillian Clarke, and edited and prepared for publication by Dr Kate Lance of Seabooks Press, to whom we also express our thanks for advice and support.

Robert Pearson, January 2021

Second Edition

Since the first edition of this book, the Trust has received two detailed diaries from the families of crew members. The full diaries, from Bruce Dyker and Trevor McGarvey, are available on our website at <https://hmascastlemaine.org.au/diaries.php>. We are extremely grateful for these contributions to the ship's history, as they provide an invaluable insight into life aboard *Castlemaine*. This second edition includes extracts from the diaries throughout the book.

Kate Lance, Robert Pearson, December 2024

1. BIRTH OF A SHIP (Aug 1941-Jun 1942)

After the outbreak of war in September 1939, an order was placed with the Melbourne Harbor Trust Commissioners Dockyard in Williamstown, Victoria, for two corvettes, LDV 4 and 11, one for the Royal Navy and one for the Royal Australian Navy, at an estimated cost of £145,000 each (A\$290,000).

On 29 August 1940 approval was given for seventeen more corvettes to be built for the RAN, with orders placed on 24 September 1940 with the Melbourne Harbor Trust Dockyard in Williamstown for LDVs 36 and 37.

LDV 36 was laid down on building berth No. 1 Lower on 17 February 1941, and was known simply as Yard No. 23, the third naval vessel of its type to be built at the dockyard. Work progressed steadily until it was ready for launching.

At 2.30 pm on Thursday, 7 August 1941, a fine, mild winter's day, Rev. J.H. Raverty gave a brief service dedicated to 'those who go down to the sea in ships.'

Then Yard No. 23 was named *Castlemaine*, after the Victorian country town, by Mrs R.G. (later Dame Pattie) Menzies (right), wife of the then Prime Minister of Australia.



Mrs Menzies broke a bottle of champagne tied in red, white and blue ribbons across the ship's bows, and said:

I congratulate the workmen who have so faithfully and skillfully constructed this vessel. May she prove a valuable addition to the Royal Australian Navy, and may God protect and care for all who voyage in her.

To the cheers of the workmen and guests, the ship started to slide down the slipway, but due to the cold weather the tallow grease had frozen, and she became stuck. After some twenty minutes of urging and prodding by workmen around her bows, the ship had only managed to progress a few yards.

The assistance of the attending tug *Keera* was enlisted, and with a tow line attached, smoke pouring from her funnel, propeller thrashing the water, the little tug pulled.

Finally *Castlemaine*, her dignity unruffled, glided smoothly down into the water. Shortly after floating the ship was towed to the fitting-out berth to be completed.

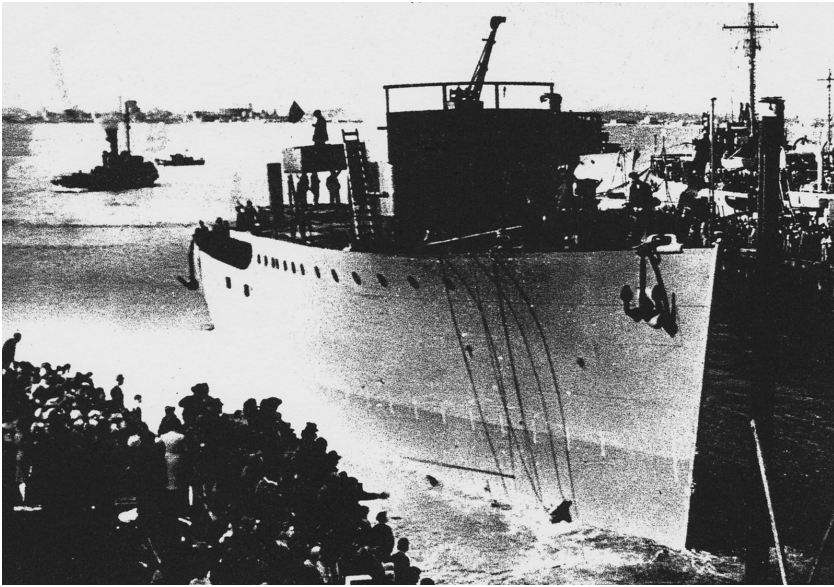
At the afternoon tea for the official guests following the launching, Vice-Admiral Sir Guy Royle, First Naval Member, proposed a toast to the builders, and said:

The vessel was of a type urgently needed in all theatres of war. That was why the Navy was grateful to the Harbor Trust for building these ships. It had already built two, and it was going to build more. He had visited one of these vessels, and had found that Officers and Men were enthusiastic about it.

In addition to Mr. A.D. Mackenzie, chairman, of the Harbor Trust Commissioners, Mr W.S. Hampson, one of the Trust's employees, replied to the toast, saying:

They could build ships as good as, if not better than, those constructed in any other part of the world.

The following month the ship was towed from Williamstown up the Yarra River to No. 17 North Wharf for the lifting inboard of the two Yarrow Admiralty 3 Drum Boilers, which had been made at Cockatoo Dock and Engineering Co., Sydney.



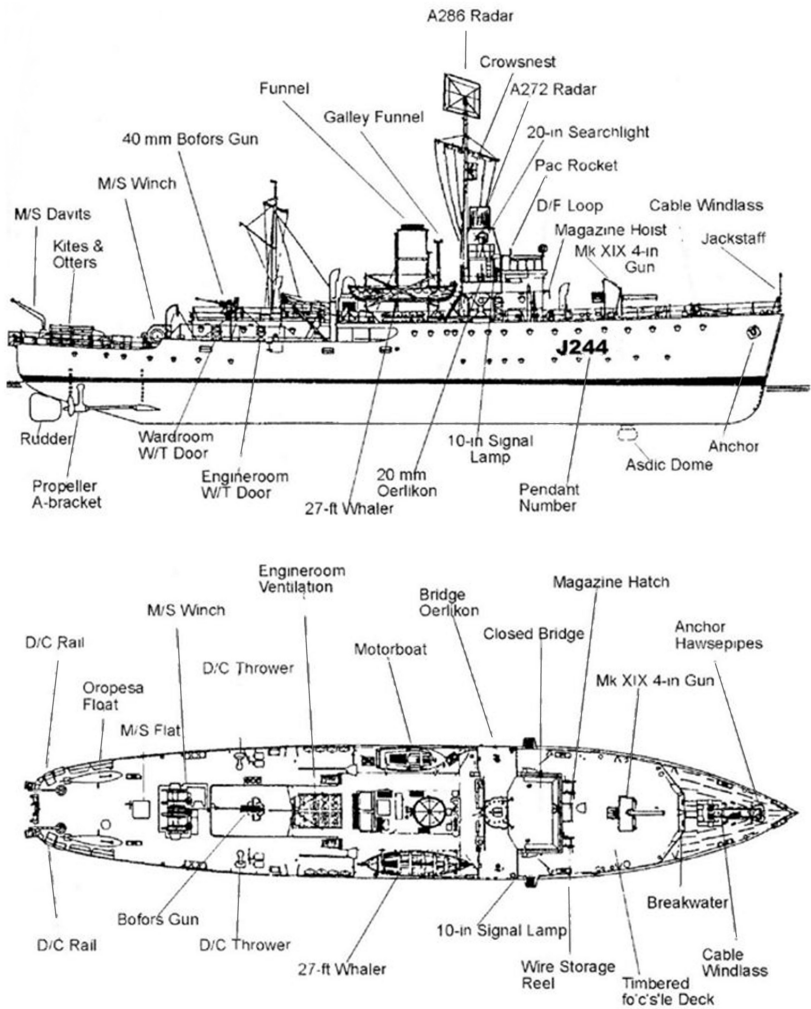
Launch of Castlemaine, 7 August 1941, with tug Keera in background

They were lifted inboard by the steam crane at North Wharf on 29 September 1941. *Castlemaine* was then towed back to the fitting out berth at Williamstown.

During this time other machinery was arriving from various engineering yards to be fitted. Some of these companies were Kelly & Lewis, Toowoomba Foundry, Peacock & Smith, Perry Engineering & Co., W.A. Government Railways, Walkers Ltd and Thompson Engineering & Pipe Co.

On 7 March 1942 the ship was again towed up river to No. 17 North Wharf for the lifting inboard by the steam crane of the main engines built, appropriately, by Thompsons Engineering & Pipe Co., Castlemaine, Victoria.

The ship was towed back to Williamstown for final fitting out, while the first of her crew were appointed. On 13 and 14 April 1942, Temp. Lt R.W. Booth RANR(S) and Temp. Lt Cdr P. Sullivan RANR(S) were directed by the Navy Board to HMAS *Lonsdale*, additional for *Castlemaine* on Commissioning.



Castlemaine layout

More crew arrived as the ship neared completion. The majority of young men came straight from basic training at Flinders Naval Base without ever having been at sea before.

Some had never even set eyes on the ocean, but all were full of courage and, like so many in the war, could not wait to do

their bit.

Backed by a few seasoned officers and sailors, the majority of men had come from South Australia, with an average age of 22 years. The training they'd received was soon to be tested, as on a small ship everyone had to be versatile and ready to lend a hand in an emergency, no matter what.



A meal in the Mess Deck, 1944 (Roy Dunstan - Argus)

The Commanding Officer had a cabin below the bridge. The Engineering Officer and First Lieutenant had their own cabins, and two junior officers shared a third, aft of the engine room on the lower deck near an officers' pantry and the wardroom.

The Chiefs, Engine Room Artificers and Petty Officers had their own crew mess on the lower deck above the magazine, while Signalmen and Telegraphists berthed forward on the lower deck above the ASDIC compartment.

The crew were broken into Red, White and Blue watches, and berthed in the main mess on the upper deck level. This large compartment was divided down the centre by the kit lockers, where the seaman could stow their gear.

Along the side of the ship in this space were the mess tables,

where the crew would eat, write, read and mend clothes.

They slept in hammocks suspended above the tables. When not in use the hammocks were rolled up and placed in bins along each side of the ship.



Sleeping in the Mess Deck, 1944 (Roy Dunstan - Argus)

Castlemaine was dry-docked in April 1942 for bottom cleaning, fitting of the ASDIC and inspection of underwater fittings. On the afternoon of 25 May 1942, she was floated out of the dry dock for final inspections before trials began.

Friday 12 June found *Castlemaine* in Port Phillip, performing equipment and gunnery trials and next day, the builder's full engine trials.

MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894.
Certificate of Survey.

Name of Ship "CASTLEMAINE"		Port of intended registry Williamstown Vic.		Official number, if there are two, and last intended registry 1942	
Whether British or foreign built	Whether a sailing, steam or motor ship, or steam or motor ship being propelled	Where built Williamstown Vic.		Name and address of builders Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners, Williamstown, Vic.	
British	Steam Screw				
Number of decks	Two	Length from foremast part of stem to the aft end of the head of the stern post		Feet	Tenths
Number of masts	Two			173	5
Rigged	Not	Mean breadth to outside of plank		31	1
Stem	Raked	Depth in hold from tonnage deck to ceiling amidships		14	5
Stern	Cruiser	Depth in hold from upper deck to ceiling amidships, at the sides of three decks and upwards			
Build	In and Out Strakes	Depth from top of deck at side amidships to bottom of keel		15	7
Framework and description of Number of bulkheads	Tronycroft Steel Naval Auxiliary Seven.	Round of beam		6	0
		Length of engine room (if any)		26	0

REGISTRY
FORM No. 1,
AND
Surveys 59,
PASSED BY
THE
COMMISSIONERS
OF CUSTOMS
AND EXCISE.



WITH THE
CONSENT OF THE
BOARD OF TRADE
(Revised
1st January,
1937.)

PARTICULARS OF TONNAGE.

GROSS TONNAGE.	CUBIC FEET.	DEDUCTIONS ALLOWED.	CUBIC FEET.
Under tonnage deck	508.50	On account of space required for propelling power	245.45
Space or spaces between decks	-	On account of space occupied by masts or apparatus and appropriated to their use, and kept free from goods or stores of every kind, not being the personal property of the crew	173.56
Turret or trunk	-	These spaces are the following, viz.:-	
Foremast Deck	31.26	Above and below deck	
Bridge space	-	(Number of masts or apparatus for whom accommodation is certified)	
Peep or break	-		
Side houses	-		
Deck house	29.55		
Chart house	-		
Space for machinery and light and air, under sec. 71 (2) of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1894	17.43	Deductions under sec. 71 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1894, and sec. 14 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1906, as follows:-	
Excess of ballastways	-	Commanding Officer's Office	9.32
		W/T Space	9.01
		Chart Space	4.12
		Galley	3.50
		W.C. Space	2.60
		Head Space	2.60
		Chain Locker	2.90
		Water Ballast	14.81
		B'wain's Store	10.00
		Total	66.90
Gross tonnage	686.74		
Deductions as per statute	485.91		
Regular tonnage	200.83		
	568.35		

NOTE 1—The tonnage of the engine room spaces below the upper deck is 101.23 tons, and the tonnage of the total spaces
framed up above the upper deck for propelling machinery and for light and air is 17.43 tons.

NOTE 2—The undermentioned spaces above the upper deck are not included in the cubical contents forming the ship's
register tonnage:-

Galley 12.00 tons, Machinery Space in Forecastle Deck 4.82 tons, Machinery
Space in Round House 2.81 tons, Crew's W.C. 4.00 tons, Officers' W.C.
0.79 tons.

I, the undersigned Surveyor appointed by the Board of Trade having surveyed the above-named
ship, hereby certify that the above particulars are true, and that her name is marked on each of her
gunwales, and the port of registry, are properly marked on a conspicuous part of her stern,
and a scale of feet marked on each side of her stem and of her stern post, in manner directed by the
Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

Dated at Melbourne
this 3rd day of June, 1942. 1942

W. H. H. H.
Surveyor.

CERTIFIED EXTRACT OF PARTICULARS SUPPLIED BY BUILDERS, OWNERS OR ENGINE MAKERS.

No. of set of engine	Description of engine	Whether British or foreign built	Year made	Name and address of maker	Indicating machine No. and number of plates	Length of stroke	Rate of stroke in ft. per min.	Power in H.P. or Knots
2	Reciprocating	British	1941	Thompson Eng. & Cable Works, Vic.	3	21"	141	2000
2	Reciprocating	British	1941	Cockatoo Dock & Eng. Co. Ltd, Cockatoo Island	24"	21"	172	15.8 knots
Number of water ballast tanks and their capacity in tons					Two	44.25 tons.		
Dated at <u>Melbourne</u> , <u>3rd</u> June, <u>1942</u> .								

W. H. H. H.
Surveyor.

Castlemaine's Certificate of Survey, 3 June 1942

2. COMMISSION AND COLLISION (Jun-Oct 1942)

The commissioning ceremony took place on Wednesday 17 June 1942, a bitterly cold winter's day. HMAS *Castlemaine* was placed under the command of Lieutenant-Commander P. J. Sullivan RANR(S), a former Coastal Passenger Ship Master and (after the war) a Torres Strait Pilot. The crew called him 'Spike'.

There were 79 crew, comprising —

5 Officers: 2 Lieutenant Commanders, 1 Sub Lieutenant A/S, 1 Sub Lt Gunner, 1 Lieutenant (E).

45 Executive Branch: 1 Petty Officer [PO] Coxswain, 1 PO Seaman, 3 Leading Seaman, 30 Seaman, 1 Leading Telegraphist, 2 Telegraphists, 1 Ordinary Telegraphist, 1 Leading Signalman, 2 Signalman, 1 Ordinary Signalman and 2 Coders.

21 Engine Room Branch: 1 Chief Engine Room Artificer [ERA], 3 ERAs, 1 Chief Stoker, 3 Stoker POs, 3 Leading Stokers, 10 Stokers.

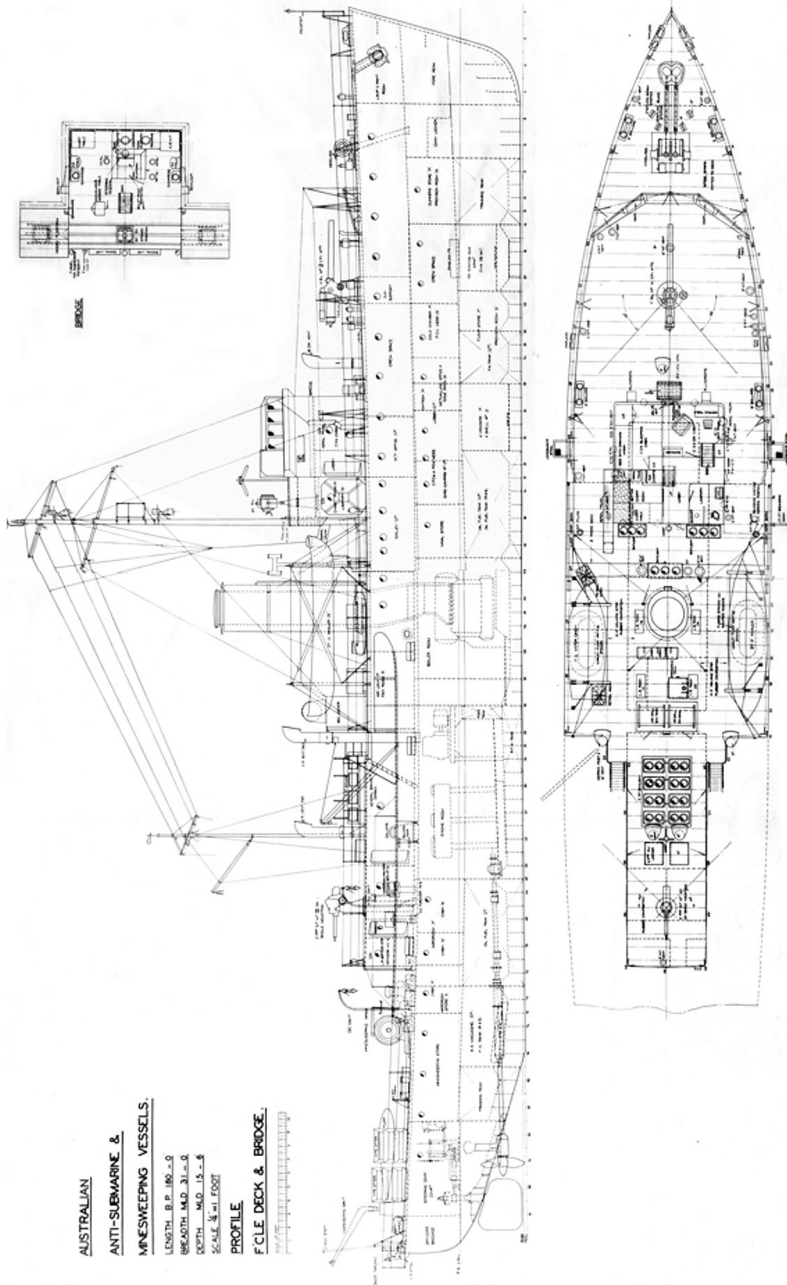
7 Supply Branch: 1 Leading Supply Assistant, 1 Supply Assistant, 1 Leading Cook (S), 1 Cook (S), 1 Leading Steward, 1 Steward, 1 Cook (O).

1 Medical Branch: Sick Berth Attendant.

By the end of the war, this total had been increased to 89 men because of the additional equipment added during various refits.

Castlemaine's pennant number was J244, and the 'J' classed the ship as a minesweeper. Following commissioning, she took on fuel, stores and ammunition.

Over the following days minesweeping and anti-submarine trials were held in the bay, where the crew exercised ship's company quarters and stations.



Bathurst Class B Corvette

Castlemaine was fitted with the LL Sweep and the two bridge Oerlikon guns, which had been removed in Melbourne after the gun trials. Working-up exercises followed, comprising three days in Broken Bay to mould the inexperienced young crew into an efficient team, before the ship was to begin escort duties with convoys from Sydney to Melbourne.

Collision

On the night of 11-12 August 1942, at a speed of 3 knots and showing dimmed navigation lights, *Castlemaine* was inbound along the Eastern Channel of Sydney Harbour, between the Boom Gate Vessel and the Eastern Channel Green Pile Light.

The lights of another vessel were seen on the port side at 8 minutes past midnight. *Castlemaine* immediately went astern, but could not avoid colliding with the Manly ferry *Bellubera*.

The point of impact was about nine feet forward of the bridge on the port side at the after end of the mess deck. The hole was approximately 6 feet by 10 feet, with damage to frames down to the waterline.

As the ships scraped alongside, the hull of *Castlemaine*'s port motor boat was crushed, and the boat davits bent and twisted. *Castlemaine* then proceeded down Sydney Harbour and berthed alongside HMAS *Townsville* at 0100 hrs.

Next morning's paper said: MANLY FERRY COLLISION

A Manly-bound ferry collided with another vessel on the Harbour last night. No extensive damage was done to either vessel, and nobody was injured.

Miss Ethel Duke, Pacific Flats, Ocean Beach, Manly said: "The ferry left Circular Quay at 11.45, crowded with theatre-goers and others." She was due at Manly at 12.20. "When we were out about 15 minutes we were thrown out of our seats by a severe impact. Everybody was excited. I was on the top deck, and with the rest of the passengers, rushed for a window view of the happening.

We could see a vessel's outlines, but could get no idea of her size. We had been hit on the starboard side. A lot of bad language was exchanged by both crews. I had never heard anything like it. It was wonderful how cool all the ferry passengers kept. Many of the women dived into their handbags for cigarettes, but none showed the slightest sign of panic. The ferry continued on its way, but a few minutes later we hit something else. I cannot say what it was we hit, but we received a pretty decent bump."

An Official of the Port Jackson Steamship Company said that there would be no steamer from Manly to Circular Quay at 6.30 am today. A ferry will leave Manly at 6 am in place of the damaged ferry, which will be taken to a shipyard for repairs.



View of damage to the port side of Castlemaine

Collision damage repairs were completed by Cockatoo Island and Morts in seven days. Before sailing, a Board of Inquiry into the collision was held on *Castlemaine* on 26 August 1942.

The Board found that no blame could be attributed to the *Castlemaine*, although the captain of the ferry stated that the corvette was not showing any navigation lights.

Further to this, after examining the findings of the Inquiry, the Naval Board found that Lt Cdr Sullivan was partly to blame for the collision, for not having his navigation lights burning at full brilliancy when entering harbour.



View looking out from the Mess Deck (Ldg Teleg Glanville Boxhall)

Townsville-Port Moresby Convoys

After the inquiry *Castlemaine* departed Sydney for Darwin. The ship stopped at Townsville to replenish supplies where, on Naval Board Authority, it was engaged in operations for the Naval Officer-in-Charge Townsville, escorting convoys between Townsville and Port Moresby for four weeks.

On 2 September 1942, with HMAS *Swan*, *Castlemaine* left Townsville escorting convoy P2, consisting of *Sea Witch*, *Taroona* and convoy Q2 consisting of *Anshun* and *S'Jacob*.

On 4 September the convoy was joined by HMAS *Arunta*, then split up some 180 miles south of Port Moresby. Convoy P2, escorted by *Castlemaine*, proceeded to Port Moresby while convoy Q2 and escorts sailed for Milne Bay.

On 12 September at Port Moresby, No. 2 boiler was being shut down for repairs to the brickwork. While the boiler was cooling down, the following message was received:

To: Castlemaine From: N.O.I.C. P.M.

Weigh immediately and proceed to position approximately 270 degrees 7 miles from Round Head to assistance of two Airmen in yellow rubber boat. A20 will circle boat from 1330 onwards. Aircraft W/T frequency will be signalled as soon as known. 0156z/12

The anchor was raised and, as steam in No. 2 boiler was brought up to pressure, the ship proceeded on a 35 mile punch into a strong S.E. trade wind.

After their plane had crashed into the sea, the two Americans had been adrift for 22 hours in a rubber raft. Both men were picked up at 1530 hrs, 8.5 miles from Round Head. They received medical attention for severe sunburn and other injuries, then *Castlemaine* took them back to Port Moresby.

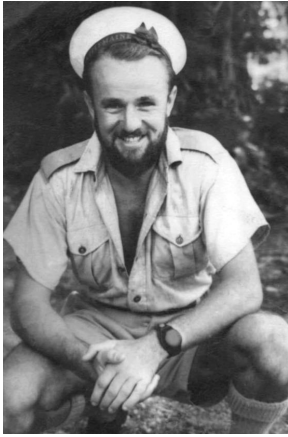


Rescue of US airmen, Sep 1942 (Bruce Dyker)

After the rescue the ship anchored near Monubado Island, where crew carried out the delayed repairs to the No. 2 boiler. The following day, Monday 14 September, found her once again escorting a convoy back to Townsville. There *Castlemaine* was released from her Coral Sea duties.

Through Their Eyes

On the *Castlemaine* website we present some crew member diaries in full – <https://hmascastlemaine.org.au/diaries.php>



Bruce Dyker (left) was a radio operator aboard *Castlemaine* from June 1942 to August 1944. His amusing, thoughtful observations on wartime life cover the dangerous Timor voyages as well as the intense convoy days in Papua New Guinea and around Australia.

Trevor McGarvey (right) joined the ship in May 1945 as an Acting Sub-Lieutenant, and recorded *Castlemaine's* time as a survey vessel and the dramatic events of the voyage to Hong Kong. In the following chapters we quote from Dyker and McGarvey's diaries. They offer an honest picture of life on a corvette, which included everything from boredom, routine work and homesickness, to bombings, minesweeping and rescue missions.



The extracts have been edited to focus on *Castlemaine's* activities, but the full diaries include much more about the sailors' personal experiences and provide fascinating reading. **(Please be aware the diaries contain offensive racial epithets that were common to this period.)**

Bruce Dyker diary (Aug-Sep 1942)

Aug 1942

- 26 Left Sydney – sea calm, warm day – cold night. Goodbye Sydney.
- 27 Sighted two whales – past arch in rock – beautiful sunny day – close into coast – bushfires – nice beach. Just tinge of sunburn on arms.
- 28 Sunburned properly for 1st time this season – saw quite a number of whales and are now no uncommon sight. Sea came up rough in the evening – good percentage of crew sick, myself definitely among 'em.
- 29 Sea fairly calm, bit of wind but still plenty of sun. Passing close to various islands and wishing I was on one of them. Scenery very lovely.
- 30 Passed through Whitsunday passage. Beautiful – like Hawkesbury River. Flying fish and whales provided morning's diversion. Am now like a well-done lobster thru' sunburn. Townsville late at night.
- 31 First glimpse of Townsville. Big flying boat moored near us, town appears to be surrounded by mountains. Sea is bluest have seen up to date. Sun certainly got heat in it in these parts. Stepped ashore for first time in tropical rig and believe me Brucey it's a sensible rig. Castle Hill overlooking town is 999ft, would have thought it could have grown an extra foot.

Sep 1942

- 1 Ashore about 2pm – Dave and I climbed to the top of Castle Hill. Townsville bigger than one realises. Sun very hot. Consumed a few cool jugs after our climb.
- 2 Left in afternoon in convoy en route to Falls River (New Guinea). Here's hoping our luck holds – First night out and its rough and choppy. Quite a few sick but still got my meals. HMAS Swan with us.
- 3 Wind outside bit fresh – so no sunbathing – sea still choppy and unpleasant – water restrictions in force, and only allowed in bathrooms certain hours. What a life!
- 4 Sea showing no signs of calming down – ship rolling even more – sometimes I wonder whether she will turn over. Went to sleep in sun and got legs badly sunburnt – rather sore. Good news – we are not going to Falls River New Guinea. Moresby is bad enough but I think I prefer bombers to cruisers (if I must choose!)
- 5 Arrived Moresby – seems to be all mountains, but as the Japs are just practically over the other side, the higher the mountains the better we like it. Greeted by 20 bombers (ours thank goodness) and 1 fighter. Sea in shallows is same green as water in Olympic baths. Strong winds, sea rough. Leaving for Townsville tonight – whacko for a rough trip.
- 6 Leaping about everywhere – not sick to date. Cripes you earn your hardlayers on these damn things. Left the Taroona about 6pm – turning back to wait for

24 • HMAS Castlemaine

- convoy to take to Moresby again.
- 7 Cruised around at 2 ½ knots all morning. Boys attempted to catch an 8 footer shark but he wouldn't play. Sea still rough and unsettled. Picked up our convoy at 4pm – 7 of 'em (4 Corvettes). Two planes with 'em. So now we are on our way to Moresby once more.
 - 8 Moresby late at night 7th. Pitch black. Ferrying 4am troops from ships to piers. Just heard that day after we left last time 28 bombers (Jap) were over. Wonder how we'll go this time. Can't be worried though. During day ferried 2 full loads Aussies ashore. 25th Battalion. Tough, good, returned blokes. Ferried some hospital cases to hospital ships. War's a bloody curse – when you see those poor blokes with arms and legs off you realise that even more.
 - 9 Anchored outside the Point all day. General clean-up. Lazy day in sun.
 - 11 At anchor outside. Had a lovely swim – water cool, clear and freshening. 3 air raid alerts but no actual bombing thank goodness. About time we migrated to healthier places.
 - 12 In afternoon went out 20 miles to pick up 2 Yank pilots who had been forced down in sea at 5.30pm on 11th. Fortress guided us to their float. Men not much the worse for their experience.
 - 13 Participated as victim of mock air raid. We sent out enemy report and other planes flew to our rescue. Our report picked up by T.I. with result that everybody must think we're machine-gunned. Blunder on part of N.O.I.C Pt Moresby who engineered whole foolish scheme.
 - 14 Left 5.20 am with one ship en route to Townsville. Stores pretty low now – eating mostly tinned stuff. Sea by no means calm darn it.
 - 16 Beautiful calm day – clear skies – hope it lasts. Australia, Hobart, Phoenix, and another 4 Yank destroyers passed in forenoon. Boy, they look formidable. Bring on your Japs. Arrived Townsville about 11pm.
 - 17 Left noon to act as ASDIC screen for Fleet at Palm Island. Incidentally Palm Island simply beautiful place. Drizzling rain.
 - 18 Picked up mail to post for Fleet, also a couple of chaps from Aussie with appendicitis and left about 10am.
 - 20 Beautiful sunny day. In arvo got off for a couple of hours and went for a swim – water very warm, but this is the climate that suits me.
 - 21 Pulled out in arvo headed for Moresby again – swotties (soldiers) in convoy. Sea calm and if it stays this way it will suit me fine.
 - 22 Another sunny calm day – passed out through reef about midday so probably wont see land for few days again.
 - 23 Picked up Swan and 2 others – now in convoy. Beautiful day again.
 - 24 Sub scare this afternoon. Dropped coupla charges but no sub. Ben piped “Repel Aircraft” – trust him. Everybody searching for planes until Ben piped “Belay aircraft. Repel submarine”. Hope he is not as silly when aircraft really

- come. Moresby has had raids last two days. Arrived in Moresby about 6pm. Castlemaine Ferry Service again in operation. Returned swotties loaded. 6th Division men (F.A) – look in peak of condition for fighting, contrast to film star Yankees.
- 26 Windy but warm day – went alongside Liberty ship to oil, escorted ship 8 miles out to sea almost midnight – sea fairly rough.
- 27 Still in this resort for bomb-happy servicemen. Looks as tho' we won't leave for a day or so. Sooner the better for this lad. Run out of books – catastrophe. Worst possible thing that can happen.
- 28 Went out few miles with A/S patrol for convoy – 4 Liberty ships, 2 corvettes Ballarat was pitching and tossing like a cork. Boy it was some sea. Start ferrying 900 Yanks when back inside. Well equipped troops but like a lot of talkative college kids alongside our A.I.F. They'll get all the talk knocked out 'em. Heard bombing again – probably aerodrome. Yanks bit quieter then.
- 29 On our way to Thursday Island. Said goodbye to Moresby. Look out Darwin here we come. Choppy high sea – darn ship rolling badly.
- 30 Still rolling badly, warm with cool strong wind – seems be islands everywhere. Wednesday Island, Goode Island, Thursday Island. T.I. looks very prosperous place. 5 ships in harbour.

On to Darwin

On 25 September 1942 *Castlemaine* continued on her way, sailing via the Great North East Passage and Thursday Island, and arrived at Darwin on 5 October with the Dutch troop transport MV *Van Heutzs*.

At Darwin she came under the control of the Naval Officer-in-Charge, and started on escort duties, minesweeping and occasional anti-submarine patrols of the western approaches to Darwin Harbour. PO James E. Bartlett, who served aboard *Castlemaine* from her commissioning in 1942, wrote:

Darwin was to be her home port for the next nine months. These waters were in the front line war zone, as the islands to the north, Timor in particular, were in the hands of the Japanese and a base for numerous raids by aircraft on the city of Darwin. Castlemaine's duty was escorting merchant shipping across the hostile waters between Darwin & Thursday Island and return.

Bruce Dyker diary (Oct 1942)

Oct 1942

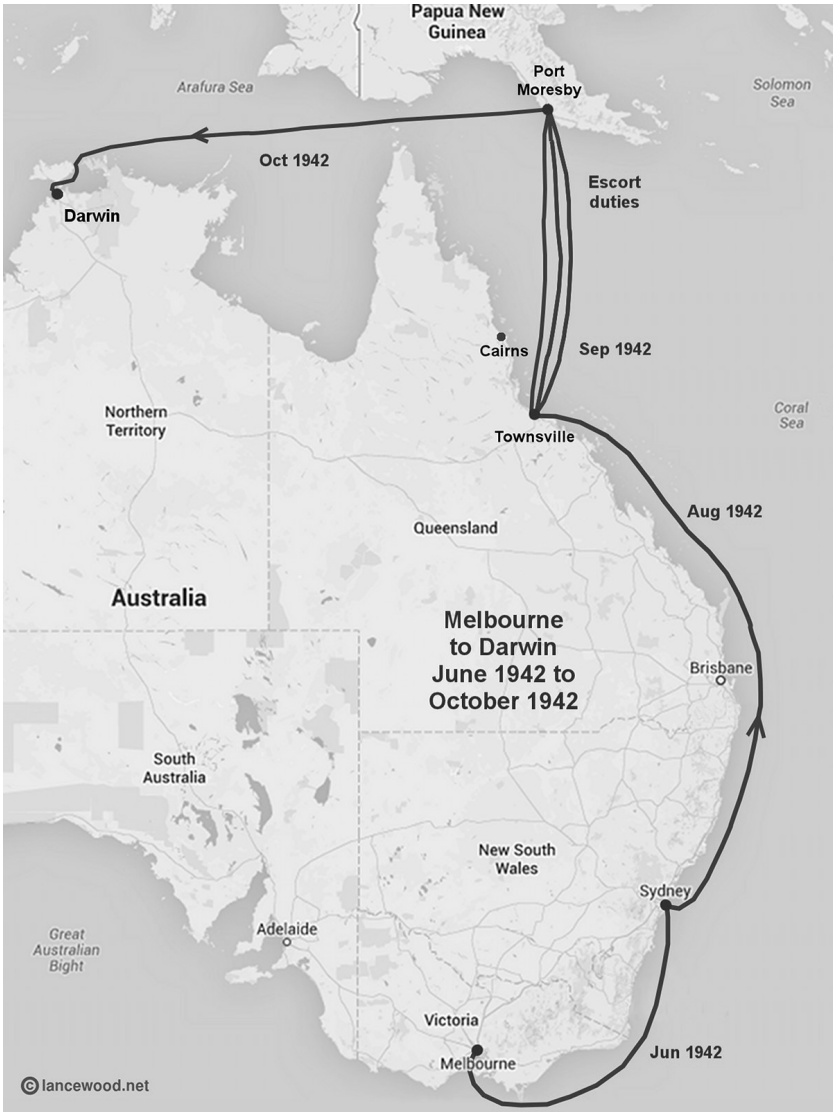
- 1 Went out and secured 'lighter' then tied up alongside wharf. Ashore for 1 hour, then worked First Watch. Quite a few luggers scuttled and sunk by Japs when war first started. Might be 8 or 10 of 'em.
- 2 Recreation from 1.30 pm to 3.30pm. Most of boys went swimming. Ship left about 5.30pm en route to Darwin. So off we go again.
- 3 Perfect weather. Ship just gently rolling enough to make one realise we're on the sea. Halfway across Gulf of Carpentaria.
- 4 Another nice day – sea even calmer. Few porpoises about. One laddie almost resting his tail on our bows and gliding along ahead. Put our clocks back ½ hour. It's still light well after 9 o'clock at night.
- 5 Darwin – first impressions are peculiar looking 'K' boats, gum trees instead of palms, bigger than Moresby or TI and the dead look about the place. Seems fair size – wharves knocked about, one completely damaged. Counted 7 ships sunk in the harbour, 5 plainly visible. Went alongside our one-ship convoy Van Kewtz to oil and water.
- 6 Off to sea at 5am – no provisions taken aboard so here's hoping we're not out for long. Escorting a ship past Cape Don. Calm thru' the morning, but choppy at night. This old sea-tub doing a little pitching.
- 7 Turned back at 2am. Back at Darwin in evening. Alongside Platypus.
- 9 Ashore in arvo. I had good look at town – or remains of it. Boy she's certainly knocked about. Darwin much bigger than I expected.
- 10 Went ashore with recreation party – driver took us 30 miles out to Berry's Spring – ideal swimming pool in centre of tropical growth.
- 11 Great clean-up – Commodore Pope welcomes us. Church on the "Plats" (HMAS Platypus) then divisions at 'home' while Pope cracks a few stale jokes and inspects us. After lunch went swimming again.
- 12 Left Darwin about 6am. One Liberty ship en route for T.I for orders – wonder what that'll be – few tropical showers, very big drops.
- 15 Arrived Thursday Island during forenoon. Recreation leave for 2 ½ hours in afternoon. Left for Darwin about 5.30pm on our own.
- 17 Dummy shoot on 4 inch gun at imaginary sub, then number of us armed with rifles shot imaginary men from deck of imaginary sub with live bullets. Marvellous bit of magic, wonder who won.
- 18 Back in Darwin about 7pm.
- 19 Hot day – cleaned out my battery cupboard and 'topped up' all cells.
- 20 Out again at 10am – this time a mine sweep for three or four days. Calm sea still. Had Forenoon watch, then all Afternoon and First Dog. Dave and I rigged an aerial from funnel to the main-mast for wardroom – filthy from funnel black – quick wash then on Last Dog.

- 21 Sweeps out all day. Kalgoorlie in arvo, working sweep with us.
- 22 Sweeping from 6am to 5pm. Anchored in evening. Cool wind. Lightning and electrical disturbances due to tropical atmospheric conditions. Very noticeable. At times it quite lights up whole sky.
- 23 Arrived Darwin with Kalgoorlie – both oiled and stood out. Hang the Japs. Air raid at 4 am. Lasted over 2 hours. No bombs in harbour, Thank God. Japs were after airfield. Could hear and see ‘muck’ falling.
- 24 Left with ship for T.I. but developed engine trouble had to come back alongside Platypus. Hope it’s fixed soon. Pictures at night.
- 25 Sunday – another air raid at half past 4 am – also lasted two hours. Ashore after dinner for walk. Post Office slit trench certainly copped it first time. Incidentally air raid at 130pm lasted $\frac{3}{4}$ hour. Nothing seen.
- 26 Tojo still on the job. Started at quarter to 4am, lasted $\frac{3}{4}$ hr, came back $\frac{1}{2}$ hour later and finished job. 3 planes flying fairly low. Could see and hear bombs falling on middle of town. None quite on harbour tho’. Could see planes clearly but no ack-ack used. After that, search lights failed to pick ‘em up. Few places in town supposed be destroyed.
- 27 Went ashore to picture. Tojo over early – arrived about 2pm. In evening he came over about quarter past 2am. Could see ack-ack bursts and see plainly the bombs bursting in the town. Communiqué says one bomber down. (Dave and I cleaned ‘donks’ [engines] all day.)
- 28 No air raid but a sub scare for 6 hours from 1 am. Sub supposed to have got inside boom but we saw no sign of it. Onto Neptuna (sunk) along wharf. Bob and I went back and got microphones and insulators.
- 29 Went out in morning met Kalgoorlie and did a sweep. Calm all day.
- 30 Finished sweep – alongside old pier for water and repairs. Took aboard a party of swotties – Ordinance mob – and Military Health Officers.

Nov 1942

- 1 Darwin. Another month nearer Xmas. Rec party ashore at island.
- 3 Out at 9am – Ben piped that we are turning back at midday tomorrow.
- 4 Calm sea – dropped old type depth charge in morning to test firing. Picked by the Darval at midday turned back towards Darwin. Anchored outside at night.

At Darwin the following day, 5 November 1942, life for everyone on *Castlemaine* would change dramatically.



Castlemaine's voyages, June 1942 to October 1942

3. ISLAND OPERATIONS (Oct-Dec 1942)

After Singapore had surrendered on 15 February 1942, five days later the Japanese stormed ashore in Timor and overwhelmed the Dutch and Australian garrison at Koepang. At Dili about 470 men of the 2/2nd Independent Company (commandos) of the AIF and 200 Dutch troops took to the mountains and were written off.

But they did not surrender, they fought on. They were known as Sparrow Force, living off the land and ambushing the enemy, then disappearing into the mountains. On the 20th April, amazed listeners in Darwin heard that Sparrow Force was still intact, but needed supplies and ammunition to survive.

At the end of May the Navy carried out the first support operation, with supplies and ammunition carried by small ships *Kuru* and *Vigilant*. Over the next six months HMAS *Kuru* made eight trips on the 'Timor Ferry Service.' By September 1942 the Navy decided to start relieving Sparrow Force, and land the fresh troops of the 2/4th Independent Company.

HMAS *Voyager* was dispatched to Timor, but during landing operations on 23 September, she started drifting. The engines could not be used because too many landing boats were close to the propellers. *Voyager* went aground.

The sailors did everything they could, but the tide was dropping and soon she was completely stranded. The word was that *Voyager* would have to be destroyed.

After midnight the 2/4th Independent Company moved away from the beach, then from a distance heard demolition charges exploding to destroy *Voyager*.

The crew were rescued by the corvette *Warrnambool*, while the 2/4th joined the 2/2nd in guerrilla operations against the Japanese, with essential support from the Timorese people.



HMAS Voyager aground at Betano (AWM 043828)

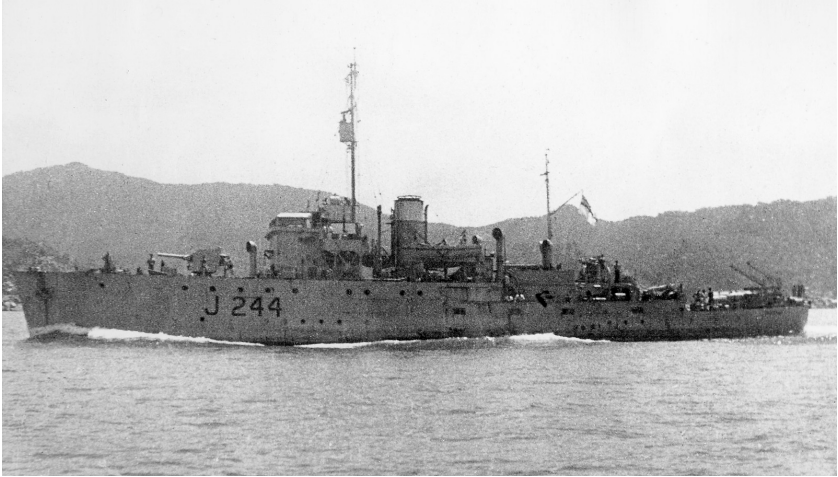
At Darwin on 5 November 1942, *Castlemaine* received orders to take part in the task of supporting Sparrow Force.

The ship loaded military mail and stores, and embarked a Dutch military officer and four war correspondents, including the famous Australian photographer, Damien Parer.

PO James Bartlett wrote:

Early in November '42 she embarked on the first of her hazardous island operations. At that time the 2/2nd Company were operating as an Army commando force on the island of Timor, harassing the enemy as best they could with their meagre supplies and weaponry. The 'Castlemaine' left Darwin on the 6th Nov '42 with a Dutch officer & four war correspondents and proceeded to Betano Bay on the south-east coast of the island, arriving during the dark, to disembark passengers and supplies, and to embark soldiers (some wounded) and refugees.

Castlemaine sailed for Betano in East Timor, arriving at 2000 hrs on the evening of 7 November.



HMAS Castlemaine in late 1942 in New Guinea waters

Alan Dower, a Lieutenant with the 2/4th Independent Company, wrote the following account of his evacuation from East Timor.

CASTLEMAINE saved my life - and those of more than 30 other Commandos - one foul, black night off Timor when the surf ran high, when submarines prowled the iron bound coast, and those decks heaved from the beat of engines as she forged through the Timor and Arafura Seas to be out of bomber sight or range before the dawn.

Although the world did not know it at the time, perhaps the peak of CASTLEMAINE's fighting glory came in 1942-3 when the 2/2nd and 2/4th Australian Commando Squadrons were still waging desperate guerrilla warfare in Portuguese Timor.

The Navy was doing an impressive job with a thin blue supply line that staved off complete starvation and annihilation. Those ridiculously tiny ships, KURU and VIGILANT, were defying the Japanese blockade with luck and scorn.

The destroyer VOYAGER had died on an uncharted reef off the mysterious Betano Beach at the very moment the 2/4th Commandos were landing from her.

Near the end of 1942 the extraordinary campaign was drawing to an end. The enemy had swamped the island in overwhelming force, and CASTLEMAINE was ordered to save some thirty sick and wounded soldiers and refugees grouped on Betano Beach.

When CASTLEMAINE's little boats could not beach even the sickest soldiers thrashed out towards them almost violently. Above the pounding of the surf rose the cries of the young native criados who realised the white tuans they loved were going home. No moon. No lights shone. Not even a cigarette glow from the invisible corvettes deck. It seemed hopeless. But ropes were flung and strong seamen's hands were groping everywhere.

Not a life was lost. Some of us crashed heavily when we hurled from the railing in the blackness, but soon the ship was under way. There was piping hot pea soup and tea and bread – most wonderful of foods! – as the ship struck out for safety behind the Darwin boom.

I declined an officer's wardroom bunk that night and chose to rest on deck. It was a hard, throbbing deck – but no harder than the mountain rocks we'd known as mattresses.

Castlemaine departed at 2218 hrs for the return passage to Darwin. Among the grateful refugees was Mr Santos, a Portuguese District Officer, and his wife and daughter. He was wanted by the Japanese for his part in arranging for the use of the Azores Islands in the Atlantic for Allied aircraft.

The ship secured at Darwin at 1021 hrs on 9 November, and the next four days were spent alongside HMAS Platypus, the Darwin mother ship for the many small naval vessels, cleaning the boiler. Castlemaine then returned to escorting vessels to and from Darwin, and manoeuvring during the frequent Japanese air raids.

At this time she received a nickname, ‘The Timor Terror,’ but she was more usually called the Fourex by the crew, after the beer Castlemaine XXXX and its mascot, Mr Fourex.

Bruce Dyker diary (5-23 Nov 1942)

Nov 1942

- 5 Got into Darwin about 3pm. Took aboard oil and stores. Also three or four War Correspondents and an official photographer. (His name is Damian Parer and he took those extra Milne Bay photos). Bill Parmentier also, bloke who wrote most of article about Timor. Appears Kuru damaged her screws preparatory to leaving on special run to Timor (occupied by Japanese then). So – hah hah – we are going. My cripes if we sink and I lose my new number 1 suit, I’ll join the bloomin’ commandos. Anchored just outside Boom.
- 6 On our way [to East Timor] at 4am – cool breeze and some rain. Sea a bit choppy but not unpleasant. Unpleasant weather tho’.
- 7 Fine warm day – sea smooth but big swell. Action Stations piped three times but planes turned out to be ours. Sea in early afternoon prettiest blue I’ve yet seen it. Timor sighted about 3 pm. In and anchored about 7pm quite light still. Long beach and palms and undergrowth along shore. Huge table top mountain inland with clouds ‘hanging’ on it. Unloaded stores, money, mail, fuel, etc in three boats. Swell causing heavy surf, difficulty in landing on beach – also in loading stores alongside ship. Men (swotties, boongs, quite a lot of horses too) appeared from bush to unload and disperse stores. President of Island, wife and daughter, couple military officers, two swotties and a boong servant taken aboard in darkness. Our photographer put ashore. We were only few hundred yards from old Voyager stuck ashore. Still upright, stern has hole in it. Left about 10pm doing 14 knots.
- 8 “Bolting” still at 13.5 knots. Calmed down about midday. President, wife and daughter about and doing well. Two swotties going to sinking stations with us (2/40th). One Alert (ours).
- 9 In Monday morning – passengers happy be in Aussie (appears President refused leave Timor before but forced to now because such a high price on his head). Tied up at buoy in evening.
- 11 Very warm. Went alongside Platypus. Fooled around with batteries and trailing equipment all day.
- 14 Worked on mess in morning. Wish we were at sea again.
- 15 Wish must have been heard. Went out about 9am with one ship to take half way to Thursday Island. Got settled to sleep on foc’sl and it started to rain. Marvellous how quick the boys moved below decks.
- 16 Cool morning – sea still choppy. Been married 6 months today. Wish I were home with my wife. Glad I’m married anyway. There’s nobody like my Marg.

- 17 Turned back at 4am. Ship got nice little roll up. Cool day again.
- 18 Back in Darwin about 8pm.
- 19 Oiled alongside. Painted in mess all day. Packed full number one kit plus few extras to send home. Poured rain in evening, but cleared up about 10.30 pm. Swept foc'sl dry and was able to sleep there OK.
- 20 Painted fittings in mess. My bad luck too, having the middle watch and even tho we are not sailing we are not sailing to 3.30am, I've gotta set watch at 1.30am. Ah me.
- 21 Melbourne Cup Day. Skipper advised that mess deck wireless not to be used at sea but got the race on our receiver. Had my usual luck in the sweeps. Fine day. One ship in tow.
- 22 Foo made some Home Brew (sugar, yeast, ginger, methylated spirits, currants and raisins etc) Boy-o-boy. It was a beaut. Kicked something like the one Horace and I made at Cockatoo Dock.
- 23 Dropped our ship about 5am and turned back towards Darwin. Very hot day. Picked up Darval about 6pm. Saw green Vereys light about 8pm but couldn't see what it was. Circled round our ship for a while. Full moon. Wonder if Darwin boys copped it tonight.

Betano Mission

In late November 1942, the Navy decided to carry out a major withdrawal of soldiers and refugees from East Timor, using the corvettes HMAS *Castlemaine*, HMAS *Armidale* and the tender HMAS *Kuru*.

The plan was to run into Betano Bay on the night of the 30 November, land 50 fresh Dutch troops and withdraw 190 troops and 150 Portuguese refugees, then return on the night of 4 December for the 2/2nd Independent Company.

HMAS *Kuru* sailed from Darwin on 28 November at 2230 hrs and was scheduled to arrive two hours ahead of *Castlemaine* and *Armidale*.

Kuru was to land stores and embark refugees for transfer to *Castlemaine* when she arrived, then tranship and land the troops from *Armidale*.

After this, *Kuru* was to pick up sick and wounded Dutch troops and take them out to *Armidale* before returning to embark her own passengers for the return trip to Darwin.

Kuru met rain and overcast weather all the way to Timor and finally reached Betano at 2345 hrs on 30 November, three hours overdue.

The other two ships were not there, so *Kuru*'s CO Lt. Grant decided to wait, not knowing what had happened to them. But by 0200 hrs on 1 December, after *Kuru* had loaded 71 refugees and one AIF stretcher case, it had to depart for Darwin.



HMAS Kuru in Darwin (navy.gov.au/hmas-kuru)

Meanwhile *Castlemaine* (Senior Officer) and HMAS *Armidale*, with two Dutch officers, 61 troops and 3 AIF men, had left Darwin at 2133 hrs on 29 November, flying the yellow air raid warning flag, and proceeded in line ahead. Gunner Bruce (Garry) Tannock described their experience:

We sailed from Darwin to supply Timor Troops with ammunition and goods. Castlemaine had been over there before with Kuru and Vigilant. Armidale had Dutch troops aboard to help the Australian commandos. On the previous trip we had Damien Parer and journalists over to film and write the story of Timor, and took Portuguese and Timor officials back with us. Also took over with supplies a big bag of Australian two shillings to help pay the Timorese who were helping the commandos. We left with Armidale for Timor on 29th November, her with the Dutch troops and us with barges to ferry them ashore, we left at 1100.

As the commandos on Timor were harassing and killing the Japanese, they wanted to stop the Navy from supplying things to the troops as they were doing such a good job.

At dusk on the evening of 29 November the two ships assumed line abreast until 0800 hrs on 30th, when line ahead was resumed. At 0915 hrs a single enemy plane was picked up on the radar at Green 90 distance 4 miles.

The ships resumed line abreast and started to zigzag at about 10 cables apart. They commenced firing when the aircraft came into range. The first stick of bombs dropped between them, then the plane circled away.

Bruce (Garry) Tannock wrote:

So they sent their bombers out after the two corvettes. On 30th November we were attacked by 5 bombers - 1.30, 2pm 5 bombers and 6 fighters, 2.35 4 bombers, 3pm one fighter machine-gunned us twice. The three Oerlikons had a go at him, I fired through the struts of the after mast from the stern Oerlikon. I don't think we got him, but one of the young blokes came down after and said did you see the lights? it was the Japanese bullets that were the lights. No one was hurt, one chap was creased across the shoulder but no skin torn. Dec 1st at 10am, more bombing. A big bomber came low down the stern, I could see the tracers going in to him as he was only 100 to 150 yards away. I often wonder if he got back - I doubt it, as a tropical storm set in just as he looked like he was dropping nuts and bolts from the engine into the water.

Castlemaine alerted Darwin with the following signals:
[Messages are in GMT. Local time in brackets, 10.5 hrs ahead.]

Castlemaine to Coonawarra W/T.

One aircraft Bearing UN height 5000ft. My position box K 383. 315 z/29 (0945/30)

Castlemaine to Coonawarra W/T.

Attack still in progress. My position course and speed 10 deg 22's, 127 deg 26'e course 305 speed 10.5 knots. 2328 z/29 (0958/30)

During further attacks the plane concentrated on HMAS *Armidale* before finally heading off towards Timor.

Castlemaine to NOIC Darwin

Attack ceased. 2359 z/29 (1029/30)



Lt Downey, Signallers Murphy and Turnbull. (Roy Dunstan - Argus)

Concerned that this sighting might disrupt the mission, Lt Cdr Sullivan steered an evasive course and contacted Darwin. He was aware the Japanese would know there was nowhere other than Timor they could be going, and there were at least ten hours of daylight between them and their destination.

Castlemaine to NOIC Darwin (R) *Armidale*
10 deg. 30's, 127 deg 48'e, course 180 deg.
speed 12 knots. Consider prospects operation
doubtful. Request orders. 0020 z/30 (1050/30)

NOIC Darwin replied to *Castlemaine*:

Steer evasive course to North East for one hour.
Beaufighters about 0230 z. Your 0020 z
acknowledged. Risk must be accepted.
0102 z/30 (1132/30)

On receiving these orders, speed was increased, and *Armidale* and *Castlemaine* pressed on for Betano, interrupted only by zigzagging during bombing and machine-gun attacks.

At 1343 hrs four enemy aircraft resumed attacks, which continued until 1445 hrs. *Castlemaine* requested fighter cover for the remaining daylight hours. A second flight of RAAF Beaufighters forced the enemy planes to jettison their bombs and retreat, before they also had to return to base.

Throughout the day the sky was overcast and observations were unobtainable, except at 1630 hrs when the murky sun broke through.

At 1831 hrs once again the ships came under attack, with nine planes in V formation coming in at 5000 ft. The planes dropped at least 45 bombs, some of which landed 150 ft from the vessel, but caused no damage.

O/Steward Bill Trezise said:

I was 20 years old at the time, and for action stations my job was in the magazine room. I was petrified when those bombs exploded, the noise was unbelievable.

Landfall was made westward of Betano at 0200 hrs on 1 December. Both vessels stood off and followed the contour of the bay, until the wreck of the HMAS *Voyager* was observed at 0330 hrs. But there was no reply to the challenge sent and no sign of beach fires or HMAS *Kuru*.

Castlemaine and *Armidale* patrolled the beach for an hour. Finally, due to the late time, the ships left on the return passage, signalling NOIC Darwin to this effect. *Armidale* and *Castlemaine* steamed on a southerly course and spotted HMAS *Kuru* some 70 miles south of Betano, closing soon after dawn.

With *Armidale* cruising in support, the refugees were transferred to *Castlemaine* by 0800 hrs. Lt Grant of *Kuru* advised Lt Cdr Sullivan that he had orders to go back to Betano that night to complete the operation.

Suddenly at 0930 hrs the three ships were attacked by Japanese aircraft. While *Castlemaine* and *Armidale* engaged them, *Kuru* ran for cover in nearby rain squalls.

Having been spotted by the enemy, Lt Cdr Sullivan was faced with a difficult decision.



HMAS Armidale in Port Moresby (navy.gov.au/hmas-armidale-i)

Kuru had orders to return to Betano, *Armidale* had troops on board to be landed there, and, to further complicate matters, a signal had been received to search for two downed airmen from a Beaufighter some 150 miles to the south-east.

Sullivan wanted to exchange passengers with *Armidale* and escort *Kuru* back to Timor, but the enemy aircraft ruled this out. He decided *Armidale* should return with *Kuru* to Betano Beach, and Darwin approved the decision.

Castlemaine went south in a fruitless search for the downed airmen and arrived back at Darwin at 0939 hrs on 2 December.

Bruce Dyker diary (25 Nov-2 Dec 1942)

Nov 1942

- 25 Armidale joined us in convoy. Picked up Red air raid warning from Darwin and then Coonawarra at 10.20am – we took other passage in and got out of narrow channel for safety. “Green” came over at noon. We got into Darwin about 2 o’clock, oiled. Then tied up at our buoy.
- 1 bomber with 9 Japs in it shot down night before last – bloomin’ Japs over at 4am to 5am. 2 planes visible but too high for the ack-ack barrage to reach. Could see flashes where bombs landed before. Cripes Tojo is inconsiderate at the time he comes over.
- 26 Topped up batteries. Alarm just after lunch. Nothing seen. Ashore at 3pm. Alarm sounded just as we reached jetty so we went along to tunnels. Devil of a lot of blokes in tunnel all the time. We sat on edge of gutter and watched all the time. Saw “recon” plane first, then 4 bombers. Ack-ack after them and later our planes. But evidently Tojo too high for them. Started to walk up town after about an hour. Planes flew over again then short while later “all clear” sounded. Good ol’ Tojo over again about 5am for an hour. Only in bed half hour when Toj back again for about half hour. Back to bed about 6.30am.
- 27 Topped up other batteries. Helped tighten aerials. Hadn’t finished when “Red” shown. Sculled about near boom. The Platypus even got underway – rousing cheers and gasps from the multitudes.
- 29 Off out at 11am with Armidale. “Ship is proceeding to Timor to pick up women and children and wounded.” Kuru left at 10pm last night, Artie Ainsworth [Bruce’s close friend from training days] still aboard her. Just outside boom when YELLOW sounded and ack-ack bursts over Darwin. Sea lumpy. Sky dark like rain. Very pretty sunset, impossible to describe.
- 30 Japs started on us about 9am this morning. Armidale copped 4 bombs at her at first but by God we made up for it the rest of the day. What a bloomin’ day. We got our 1st taste of action and then some. Over practically all day until about 7 or 8 o’clock.
- Spike [Captain] decided to keep going – good for him. He is as game as they make ’em. We all praying (lost track of time) that Darwin sends us a strong fighter escort tomorrow or we will be in a bad way. Not like the useless force they sent us this afternoon.
- Got Marg’s photo with me – my lucky charm, can’t go wrong. Into Timor about 2am but could see nothing after 2 hours. Bombs dropped in this order Kuru 4 4 2 3. Ourselves 1 3 1 3 5 1 9 (about 23 planes about 45-50 or 60 bombs).

Dec 1942

- 1 Picked up Kuru about 7.30 am, took 74 refugees off, 2 wounded swotties [soldiers], couple of men, rest women and children. Left Armidale and Kuru about 9am. Artie tells me they’ve had no trouble yesterday. Just away when

heavy bomber/fighter had a go at us. Bombs dropped astern then black clouds came over and it poured rain, so we're safe under clouds.

Report from Armidale and Kuru, the same 9 bombers and 4 fighters attacking. Poor old Artie. Darwin says risks must be accepted. Bloody well alright for them but what about Armidale? Airforce again too late and leave too early. 2 [underlined] planes sent.

God, signal tonight that 2 enemy cruisers just between us and Armidale. Everything cancelled, heading home. Hope Armidale and Kuru can slip past 'em tonight. Cripes cruisers steering 100 degrees – that's towards our position. Whacko might be more fun.

- 2 In about 11am – unloaded at Boom jetty – got rid of the mob – wonder what the poor devils are going to do. Air raid alarm. Saw nothing. Surely we are going to get a spell from them. Oiled and watered then alongside Platypus. First job was scrubbing out mess decks.

No news from Armidale or Kuru – “buzz” says Kuru slightly damaged, has to limp in at 5 knots. Minor casualties. Hope Artie is OK. What ships to send on a run like that. Damn 'em anyway we won't squib it.

Loss of *Armidale*

While *Castlemaine* was returning to Darwin, *Kuru* and *Armidale*, sailing separately, were subjected to repeated air attacks.

Kuru was bombed by 44 planes twenty-three times, with some 200 bombs directed at her. After receiving shrapnel and engine damage she abandoned the operation, arriving Darwin under cover of rain squalls at 1726 hrs on 3 December.

Armidale was not to be so fortunate. At 1515 hrs on 1



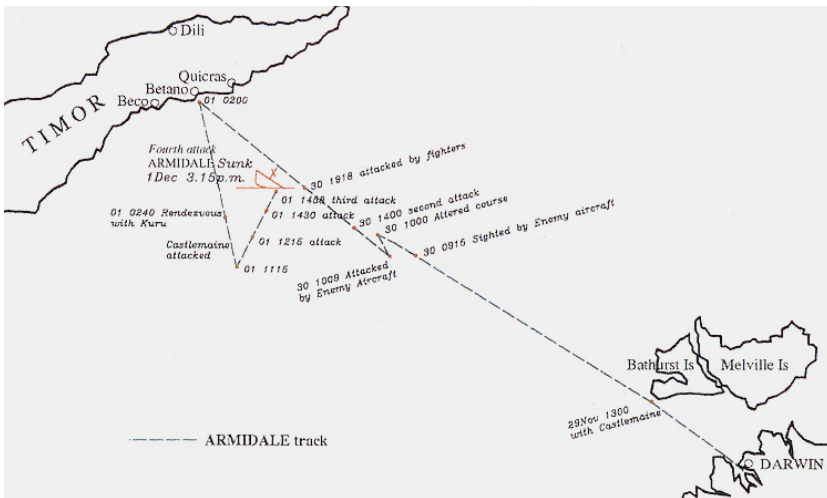
December 1942, she was attacked by nine bombers, three fighters and a float plane, coming in from four directions, and her gunners were overwhelmed.

The ship was struck by two torpedoes and a bomb that blew a hole in her side. She started sinking. The CO gave the order to abandon ship, but one man stayed – 18-year-old Ordinary Seaman Edward (Teddy) Sheean.

Teddy Sheean (lynnesfamilies.wordpress.com/sheean/edward-teddy-sheean)

After freeing a life raft, Sheean struggled back to the aft Oerlikon gun, strapped himself in and fired at the planes which were strafing men in the water. He hit one plane and sent it cartwheeling into the sea, then hit another and it flew off trailing smoke. Despite Sheean's wounds he continued firing, but *Armidale* was sinking fast and, even as the deck disappeared below the surface, survivors swimming in the water reported they could still see tracers rising from the gun.

In August 2020, after many years of pressure, the Federal government announced that Teddy Sheean would be awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for Australia, 'for the most conspicuous gallantry and a pre-eminent act of valour in the presence of the enemy in HMAS *Armidale* during a Japanese aerial attack in the Timor Sea on 1 December 1942.'



Path of HMAS *Armidale* (www.navy.gov.au/hmas-armidale-i)

Of the 149 personnel on *Armidale*, ten crew and 37 soldiers died in the initial attack and machine-gunning. 102 men went in the water, and of those, 52 left on two separate missions to seek help in the ship's motor-boat and a patched-up whaler.

On 3 December air searches began. On 5 December at 1015 hrs a plane spotted a boatload of survivors WNW of Darwin. This was the motor-boat, which had travelled some 150 miles from where *Armidale* went down. *Kalgoorlie* began searching early on 6 December, and that afternoon was attacked by enemy planes. At 2200 hrs a red Very flare was seen, and at 2300 hrs *Kalgoorlie* picked up twenty men from the motor-boat. She returned to Darwin on 7 December.



Last known sighting of Armidale survivors on a raft (AWM 300191)

That afternoon an aircraft sighted three rafts with 25 to 30 men, some 280 miles NW by W of Darwin. Attempts by a Catalina to pick up these survivors next day failed due to rough seas, but it dropped food and water.

On the return flight the plane spotted the whaler, some 150 miles NW of Darwin. *Kalgoorlie* was dispatched to the whaler on 9 December and picked up another twenty-nine survivors within an hour.

Tragically, of the men on the rafts, nothing more was ever seen. Only 48 of the 149 personnel on HMAS *Armidale* survived.

On 19 November, *Castlemaine*'s crew had enjoyed playing sport with sailors from sister corvettes *Armidale* and *Kalgoorlie*. On 7 December, they watched *Kalgoorlie* bring the few survivors of *Armidale*'s sinking back to port: it must have been painful.

Bruce Dyker diary (3-7 Dec 1942)

Dec 1942

- 3 Alarm at 10am. One Zero, probably “recon” – hope he doesn’t bring his oppos back at 4am – rather he left it till we have had a good sleep. Worked all day on Hailing equipment.

HOORAY – 6pm – Kuru just coming in – Good on her. Every one of our boys topside watching her. Must try and see how Arti is after. Arti alongside us about 9pm. He certainly had more tales to tell than us. They had a much worse spin. Great bloke Arti. Armidale not in yet.

- 4 Over on Vigilant and Kuru this morning nattering and looking up a couple of code groups. Roy, Artie and I had a good yarn. S’posed to go out at 11am but cancelled till 4am tomorrow. Just my luck – I’ve got the Morning Watch. Went ashore for a swim.

Armidale not in even yet but think she is OK. I hope so anyway – poor cows. Alarm bell sounded after supper – everybody scattered like lightning but joke on us because our new Sig (who replaced Arthur, now in hospital – nerves gone) thought we saw the yellow signal but it wasn’t.

- 5 On watch at 4am – hang it. Taking Tulagi out past Cape Don – doing 10-12 knots. Quiet day. Turned about during the First.

- 6 Turned back. Keeping watch in harbour. Kalgoorlie evidently now picked up one boatload of survivors. That should have been our perks.

- 7 Kalgoorlie on her way in. Wonder how many she found. Bloody fool Pope [NOIC Darwin] should have had us looking for poor cows days ago. We anchored just inside Boom all day – during A/S watch. Kuru outside – looks more like “Jankers” [punishment].

Kalgoorlie in at 1pm – we cheered ship. Armidale’s motor boat picked up 22 in it, 2 died in boat so were ditched. 17 sailors, 3 swotties out of 210 men. Quite a lot more got off on rafts but Japs killed most by insistent machine gunning, sharks got rest. (First night a bomb came thru forward hatch putting W/T out of commission, reducing speed to five knots. Men rigged rafts all night. Next day she was hit from funnel aft by bombs then 2 “fish” hit her and she split in two).

God what a time they must have had – and it could quite easily have been us. (And yet all the time squibs back home are “whinging” about overtime etc. When blokes like Armidale boys go thru a time like that).

4. TOP END DUTIES (Dec 1942-Jul 1943)

On reaching port the 'Castlemaine' disembarked her weary and shaken passengers and after a short period of rest, resumed escort duty on the Darwin to Thursday Island 'run'. (PO James Bartlett)

Castlemaine fuelled, provisioned, and left again on 5 December, escorting the SS *Tulagi* towards Thursday Island via Clarence and Dundas Straits. This stretch was known as 'Bomb Alley' because of the constant presence of Japanese aircraft.

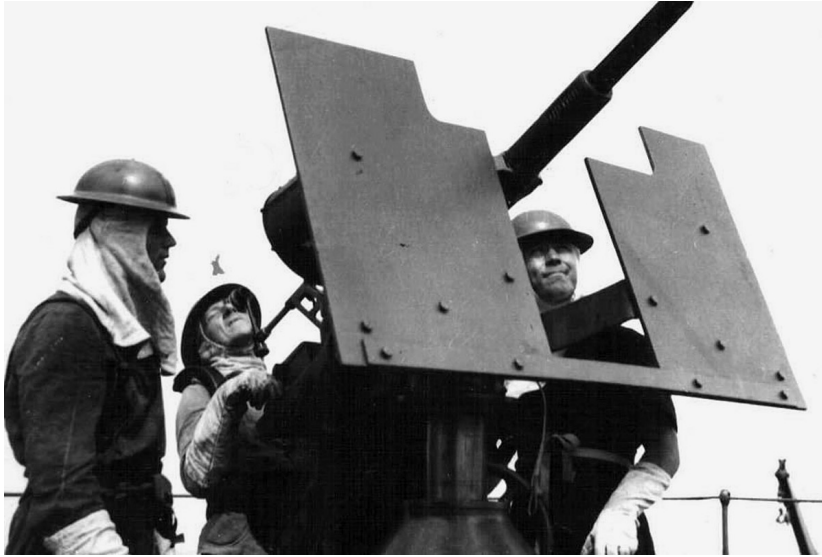
Ships departing Darwin to the east were usually escorted by corvettes of the 24th Minesweeping Flotilla – at this time comprised of *Castlemaine*, *Latrobe*, *Inverell* and *Kalgoorlie*.

Castlemaine returned to Darwin on 7 December for fuelling, then started anti-submarine patrols of the entrance to Darwin Harbour. The following day, escorting once again, she departed Darwin with the SS *Alagna* towards Thursday Island and returning from Cape Wessel.

While outward bound and off Cape Don, three horned mines were successfully sunk by small arms fire. On 10 December, when 10 miles north of Cape Wessel, the ship was attacked by a Japanese float plane. Leading Cook L. Grunwald recounted:

We dived for cover as Jap bombs crashed down on Castlemaine and machine gun fire splattered the ship. After what seemed hours I crawled out. My mate was grinning from ear to ear and said, "I was wondering what would have happened if any of that fire had so much as touched our shelter!" I looked around and nearly fainted, for we had taken cover under a rack of High Explosive depth charges.

Refuelling at Darwin on 12 December, *Castlemaine* immediately left to escort SS *Islander* towards Thursday Island, overtaking HMAS *Terka* in Dundas Straits, and keeping her company until Cape Croker.



One of the three 20mm Oerlikon guns

Islander and *Castlemaine* parted company at 1145 hrs on 15 December, and *Castlemaine* resumed the course west to Darwin, intercepting and escorting the SS *Period* and SS *James Cook*.

At 1249 hrs the convoy was attacked by a Japanese float plane, which dropped a bomb on the *Period* at the forward port corner of No. 1 hold. It wrecked the sailor's forecastle accommodation, killing four members of the crew and injuring six others. The plane came in for a second attack and *Castlemaine* engaged with 4-inch and Oerlikon guns.

The attack was broken off at 1255hrs, but at 1402 hrs another enemy plane approached, and was again repulsed by 4-inch gun and anti-aircraft fire. *Castlemaine* went alongside *Period* and Lt Cdr Sullivan shouted through the megaphone:

‘Captain, what can I do to help and what is your maximum speed?’

The reply was, ‘A Bible and a bottle of whisky. My speed is between 2 and 5 knots depending on coal.’

While alongside, five of the wounded crew were taken off *Period* for medical attention, completed by 1530 hrs while both ships were steaming at 5 knots.

The dead were buried at sea, and the following morning at 1048 hrs the convoy was again attacked by a single plane. *Castlemaine* manoeuvred to give cover to *Period*.

The plane made several attacks on *James Cook* and *Castlemaine* without any damage, and dropped a couple of bombs close to *Period* before making off.

Late in the evening of 18 December the convoy arrived off Darwin and, as the captain of *Period* was making his first call there, *Castlemaine*’s First Lieutenant (Lt Cdr Williams RANR) was put on board to assist the Master.

Castlemaine showed a dim stern light and led the convoy up to and through the boom gate at 2400 hrs, and then on to their respective anchorages.

From 19-22 December a boiler clean was carried out in Darwin Harbour, and ratings were landed for recuperation leave at Adelaide River. They had hoped to spend their time swimming, fishing, hiking and relaxing, but sadly it rained a great deal.

After the boiler clean, it was back to escorting the SS *James Cook* to Thursday Island, returning to Darwin on 27 December: *Castlemaine* had spent her first Christmas at sea.

At short notice on the 28th December, *Castlemaine* left Darwin for Merauke (Dutch New Guinea) and met the SS *Van Heemskirk* 15 miles from the port. *Castlemaine* escorted her to Thursday Island, then went on to Port Moresby via the North East Passage. This was *Castlemaine*’s second trip to New Guinea.



Officers, Christmas 1943 (from left): Lt Downey, Lt Robertson, (CO) Lt Cdr Sullivan, Eng Lt Wilson, (1st Lt) Lt Cdr Williams, all RANR

Bruce Dyker diary (8-31 Dec 1942)

Dec 1942

- 8 Left with Alagna at 2am, Thursday Island-ward bound. Doing 6 knots. Sighted floated mine about 4.30pm just off starboard bow. Shot at it with rifles, machine guns, and Oerlikons until it sunk. Wouldn't like to run into one out here. Report destroyer attacked by planes southward from Darwin, perhaps Nonpareil. Vigilant out looking for survivors from Armidale. Think aircraft might have sighted some rafts.
- 9 Dull day. 3pm: Just received a signal advising that "several Japanese submarines operating in Arafura Sea". Whacko. Maybe more fun. "No peace for the wicked." Heard that 29 more Armidale blokes picked up in a boat. Vigilant out after 17 more sighted on a raft by planes. Hope they get the poor devils. It's a week since they went down.

- 10 Jap float-plane bomber over about 2pm. Flew round and had a good look at us but dropped no eggs. Fired one round at him with the 4 inch. Beaufort bomber over 40 minutes later. Slow in identifying himself so fired two shells at him which woke him up. Says he can't find the two ships we are waiting for since the Alagna left. Wonder where that sea plane came from. We are just in Gulf of Carp, so seems too far for him to come from an airfield. Maybe from a sub mother-ship.

Nonpareil (now Tjerk-Hiddes) evidently struck trouble last night. Darwin reports they are sending planes to her assistance. These Japs are starting to play the game "too fair dinkum" for my liking. It's getting past a joke these days. Called out for Action Stations at 1.30am – lookout sighted a green flare. Secured at twenty past 2 – gosh I'm tired. Just my luck to go on watch at 4am. "Darn Action Stations" at 6am to 7am but nothing sighted.

- 11 Nothing sighted but schools of fish. Reports say Dutch and British destroyer near Darwin. (Buzz wrong, only Dutchman there). Goodoh – except where there's destroyers there's usually dangerous work.
- 12 Sub reported supposedly in straights near Cape Don. We stopped and did a ASDIC sweep all day, but no sign of sub. Action Stations sounded twice but planes friendly. My heart stopped first time, I thought it was a sub on the surface. Darwin about 7pm. Storm on.

At buoy next to Tjerk-Hiddes, Tribal or Z class destroyer in harbour, manned by Dutch. She is the one we thought was Nonpareil. She's already made one Timor trip, took her 36 hours and she bought back 300 swotties and refugees. What a difference to when corvettes go. Kalgoolie brought in the 26 Armidale blokes and hope to get to others on a raft.

- 13 Out again at 11am with the Islander. Are to pick up Terka during Last Dog. Warm day. Picked up Terka and she can only do 5 knots. Strewth we will never get to Wessels Islands at this speed. Lightning almost continuous after dark, rain and wind storm about 1.30am. Had Morning Watch and couldn't hear a note for rain on aerals. (Heard today that when those 5 bombers over us on 30th November there were 5 zeros above clouds protecting them. They followed one of our Beaufighters and forced him into the sea.)
- 14 Left Terka behind – she couldn't keep up. Dull, raining.
- 15 Left Islander (7 knot convoy) and picked up Period and James Cook, about midday at Wessel Isles. Jap float plane over about 2 o'clock. Dived-bombed Period. First 2 just missed and next hit her on port-side forward, killing 5 and injuring 6. We opened up but unable to reach her with 4 inch, so Jap able to fly low and make a sure hit. Our escort, a Hudson light bomber turned tail and flew away without attempting to stop the Jap.

We went alongside Period and took off wounded (5 of them – 3 dead). Poor blighters. Badly burned and knocked about. My most vivid impression was the blood running down the mess deck when wounds were being dressed. Jap over again twice but dropped no more eggs.

- 16 Dawn Action Stations but nothing seen. Merv (name for float plane) started again about 1030 am on us. Our Oerlikons put him off aim this time and eggs dropped just away from Period. Spray over her decks, but no damage done. Kitties [Kittyhawks] supposed to be coming out to aid us. 2Pm, pouring rain. Merv apparently finished with us today.
- 17 Dawn Action Stations for nothing. Actions stations couple of times but plane friendly. Thank goodness Merv not about because it's a beautiful clear day. James Cook having trouble with her engines after we passed Cape Don but managed to struggle on. (Passed by Period, her bomb hole is a beaut, right in crew's bathrooms. Bloke who was bathing was cut in half poor blighter. It must have been instantaneous death fortunately.) Midnight: Working Middle. Thru' Boom about 0030.
- 18 Cleaned up ship. Raid alarm about 9pm lasted approx. half hour.
- 19 Woken at 6am told to be ready to go to Adelaide River at 7.30 am. 20 of us going – rained nearly all the way so as we were in open truck we got wet. Arrived 11am. Put in hut, concrete deck – no paliasses. Didn't expect us so scran [food] scratchy. Went looking for place to swim and ran foul of a Colonel. Trust Spike's sailors – five of us practically told him where to go. Great blue over it. Evening, walked 1 1/2 miles to a picture show and it poured rain. Never got so wet in all my life walking back.
- 20 Slept in till 8am – got sort of breakfast. Crashed till lunchtime – about 4pm we walked round to a swotties camp and had swim. After tea we started off to walk to pictures but none on. Mosquitoes very bad again and it rained again.
- 21 Up at 8am – cleaned up hut and left about 11am. 20 more of our blokes arrived just as we left. Back at shop at 2pm. (I'd go to Adelaide River again later but most of blokes haven't stopped moaning. Trouble was, no organisation for entertainment, not even a light in hut.)
- 22 Topped up batteries in morning – pictures in evening. Buzz is that we are going to Middle Arm to spend Xmas day. Alright if true. Rained.
- 23 Talking to Artie on Kuru in morning, helped him fit his charging board. Air raid alarm for ¾ hour. Middle Arm buzz no good 'cos we are about 2pm on way to T.I. with James Cook. Xmas at sea now.
- 24 Rained most of day. Anchored last night from 9pm til 6am so we will pass Wessels Islands in dark hours on Xmas day in case our friend the float plane is about. Decided to have Xmas beano on Sunday – should be in the clear then.
- 25 XMAS DAY – Raining in morning, cool in afternoon – poured during Dogs, drizzled at night – great weather. Officers shouted each man a drink each which was the only Xmas-y touch. Cracked Les's brew too. Past Wessels after dark. Aircraft sighted yesterday but too far away to be identified. Sea very rough and choppy. Ship got a huge roll on.
- 26 Raining most of the day. 2 “panics” but both planes ours. Heard that Colac being attacked near Buna, only corvette besides Armidale and ourselves to

- be directly attacked. Past Kalgoorlie and two ships.
- 27 Kalgoorlie met up with our friend the float plane. Said plane attacking convoy but 4 minutes later she sent 'Attack Ceased' so she didn't get much attention. Arrived in about 430pm at T.I. High wooded hills and islands pleasant sight from barren Darwin. Decorated mess deck with flags and had Xmas dinner at 7pm. Cakes, chocolates etc on table. Our plum duff wonderful success. Supper of coffee and cake to finish off.
 - 28 Poured rain. Put up new receiver aerial. It was a job and a half working on the upper yard arm in that rain. Got into togs (swimming) and sou'wester. At one time Dave had nothing on at all. Ashore in arvo and walked over hill to cemetery and saw Jap graves, also Europeans and Islanders. Couple of diver's graves had diver's boots beside the headstone. Recalled to ship about 5pm. Under weigh at 6.30pm to intercept Van Heemskirk which is leaving Merauke (Dutch New Guinea) about 7am tomorrow and bring her to Thursday Island. Must expect trouble or something, otherwise they wouldn't send us as we are short of fuel and can't get any here. Sea bumpy and ship pitching.
 - 29 Rough trip. Picked up Heemskirk about midday. Been hit by bomb by Jap float plane – on foc'sl. Forward hold and fore-mast damaged slightly. Decks crammed with swotties. We are to take her to Moresby. We are low on fuel now and should refill from Islander.
 - 30 Arrived in T.I. about 8am waited about ½ hour then on way to Moresby. Islander not in when we left. Set watch on Belconnen and reception terrible – belts your ears off trying to hear. Calm-ish day.
 - 31 Fine day. Sun quite warm – Beauforts over us all day. Had my head down practically all day so am ball of muscle tonight. Ben piped "The Ships Bell is not to be utilised to ring in the New Year". No fun then for the poor sailors.

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