

***HMAS Sydney* was one of three light cruisers purchased from Britain during the 1930s and only one, *HMAS Hobart*, survived WW2. She commissioned at Portsmouth on 24 September 1935.**

**The men at Swan Hunter Ltd who built *Sydney* got on well with the Australian crew. They recognized the proud heritage of the name and presented *Sydney* with the music for a ships march called “Cocos Island” to carry on the proud tradition of the World War I ship of the same name. That *Sydney* had destroyed the German cruiser *Emden* off the Cocos Islands, 94 years ago last Sunday. *Emden* had sunk or captured twenty seven allied ships in the Indian Ocean. The silver canister containing the original music and the workmen’s plaque rests with *Sydney* at the bottom of the Indian Ocean.**

**Later in 1935 *Sydney* was on her way to Australia when Italy invaded Abyssinia so she was diverted and saw service with the British Mediterranean Fleet and didn’t see her new home until August 1936.**

**At the outbreak of war in September 1939 she operated from Fremantle on patrol duties and escorting Australian troopships to the Middle East. She was then under the Command of Captain John Collins, who was later to become the head of our Navy.**

**In May 1940 *Sydney* returned to the Mediterranean and it was here, in periods of intense action, that she would establish her reputation as the Royal Australian Navy’s most famous ship. Within a month she had been engaged in shore bombardments and the sinking of the Italian destroyer *Espero*, leaving one of her boats at the scene to assist the surviving Italian sailors.**

In early July 1940 she took part in the Battle of Calabria, the first major action between the British and Italian fleets involving battleships and, on 18 July, in company with the destroyer *HMS Havoc*, *Sydney* sailed from Alexandria on what would become her most famous exploit. Her orders were to support four British destroyers engaged in a hunt for enemy submarines off the north coast of Crete. The next day dawned calm and with a light mist and saw *Sydney* and *Havoc* 40 miles off Cape Spada when they received a report from the destroyers that they had sighted two enemy warships. CAPT Collins altered course to intercept at full speed and a few minutes later two Italian cruisers were sighted, some 11 miles away.

At 0830 *Sydney* opened fire, drawing return fire a few minutes later but, *Sydney's* gunfire soon took effect on the leading cruiser, the *Bartolomeo Colleoni*. Ten minutes later the British destroyers were sighted to the South east and the enemy ships attempted to escape. *Sydney* with the destroyers in line abreast and in fairly close order was in full pursuit.

The faster Italian cruisers were slowly drawing away, but *Sydney's* gunfire continued to take effect and an hour after the battle began the *Bartolomeo Colleoni* was finally put out of action. Collins ordered his destroyers to finish her off while the surviving enemy cruiser continued to retire at full speed. The opening range and the hazy conditions made catching her most unlikely especially as there were only 10 rounds of 6" ammunition left for the *Sydney's* forward guns, so Collins called off the chase. *Sydney* had no casualties and had received just one inconsequential hit in her foremost funnel. Many will have seen

the famous photograph of grinning Aussie sailors peering out through the huge hole.

The British destroyers rescued 545 Italian sailors from the *Bartolomeo Colleoni* including the wounded Captain Navarro who, sadly, died. Later, CAPT Collins attended his funeral, held with full Naval honors in Alexandria.

A day later, the triumphant *Sydney* and the destroyers steamed into Alexandria harbour, to the resounding cheers of the Mediterranean Fleet.

*Sydney* was busy in the Mediterranean until January 1941, bombarding land targets, destroying attacking enemy motor torpedo boats, sinking the Italian destroyer *Artigliere*, destroying an enemy convoy and taking part in the famous carrier-borne aircraft attack on the Italian Fleet at Taranto. While in the Med, she came under about 19 intense air attacks without damage and throughout the fleet she became known as "The Stormy Petrel".

Returning to Australia, she received a hero's welcome in Fremantle and on arrival in her nameport Sydney Harbour on 10 February 1941, her crew was feted with a civic reception. School children were given the day off and the street was packed with people who roared their approval as *Sydney's* ships company marched through the City.

In 1941 attacks on shipping by German raiders were serious threats to Australia so *Sydney*, now under the command of CAPT Joseph Burnett was employed on patrol and convoy escort duties off the Australian coast.

On one such task, after escorting the troopship *Zealandia* from Fremantle to the Sunda Straits, *Sydney* turned back for Fremantle on 17 November 1941. Six days later, then three days overdue, she was ordered to break radio silence. There was no reply.

On the afternoon of 19 November *Sydney* had sighted what she took to be a merchant ship but was to fact the disguised German Hilfskreuzer *Kormoran*. As we all know, both ships were lost in the subsequent battle and *Sydney* was lost with all 645 hands including Air Force personnel and two Maltese civilians.

Their tragic sacrifice was not without considerable value for *Kormoran* had already sunk eleven allied merchant ships. *Sydney*, like her predecessor, had removed a major threat to shipping and it was on shipping that the whole allied war effort depended - as it would today.

Her successors, *Sydney* III and IV continued her proud tradition having carried the name with distinction through the Korean, Vietnam and the two Gulf wars. It is useful to reflect that more men were lost in HMAS *Sydney II* than Australia lost in the Korean War, or in the Vietnam War or even on the terrible Kokoda Track.

There are no great fields of crosses to remind us of the sacrifices of our sailors, for they mostly lie in steel coffins at the bottom of the world's oceans. The discovery of the wreck of our most famous warship, whose exploits fired the imagination of our people, is an occasion when memories are stirred. This will be especially so amongst the family and friends of those lost and here today and amongst their few Shipmates, also here today, men who served in that proud ship

and took part in her brave exploits. **Members of a Ship's Company that brought *Sydney* to life.**