

**Lieutenant Thomas Garton Brown**  
**HMAS Sydney, Royal Australian Navy**  
**who died aged 21**  
**on**  
**Monday, 20 November 1941**  
**when HMAS Sydney was sunk off the coast of Western Australia**  
**by the German Raider Kormoran**

Thomas Garton Brown was 13 years old when he left Church of England Grammar School in Brisbane in 1933 after attending for that one year. In January 1934 he entered the Royal Australian Naval College HMAS Cerberus at Jervis Bay New South Wales and passed out on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1938 with the rank of Midshipman. His first sea posting was to HMAS Canberra, a County class heavy Cruiser, built in the United Kingdom at Clydebank and commissioned in 1928. Brown served in her until 30<sup>th</sup> May 1938 during which time she was engaged in routine cruising operations of a peace time navy. A posting on loan to the Royal Navy for service and training followed. Brown was initially attached to London Depot until 29<sup>th</sup> June after which he joined HMS Malaya, a Queen Elizabeth class Battleship on station in the Mediterranean Sea operating out of naval bases at Gibraltar and Malta. A month later he transferred to HMS Hood, an Admiral class Battleship commissioned in 1920 for the Royal Navy and then the largest warship afloat. Hood was also operating in the Mediterranean and during this period of service which continued until the 7<sup>th</sup> February 1939, Hood was involved in the rescue of the crew of the British Steamship Lake Lugarno after it was bombed and sunk at Palamos on the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1938 during the Spanish Civil War, the carriage of refugees and convoy escort duties. From the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 until 10<sup>th</sup> January 1939 HMS Hood was at Malta for docking and repairs and from 18<sup>th</sup> January 1939 after steaming to England she underwent a major refit at the Portsmouth Naval Base. On the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1941 HMS Hood was sunk in the North Atlantic by the German Battleship Bismarck. Only three of her complement of one thousand four hundred officers and men survived.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1939 Thomas Brown joined the crew of HMS Ramillies, a Revenge class Battleship commissioned on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1917. He was serving in her when Britain declared war on Germany on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939. Ramillies was part of the

British Home Fleet based at Scapa Flow, one of Britain's most historic stretches of water located within the Orkney Islands off the North East Coast of Scotland, sweeping the waters between Iceland, Norway and Scotland to intercept German merchant ships hurrying to get back to Germany before war broke out.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> September Brown was ordered to the shore base HMS Victory at Portsmouth to continue his training. After completing courses at Victory and at the Torpedo and Mine School at HMS Vernon and the Gunnery School at HMS Excellent, both bases at Portsmouth, Brown was posted back the Royal Australian Navy and to HMAS Sydney, joining her on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1940. Sydney had begun her life as HMS Phaeton but was purchased in 1934 by the Australian Government before launching. A modified Leander class Light Cruiser, Sydney was commissioned in September 1935 and after service on the Mediterranean station arrived in Australia in August 1936. She remained engaged in local patrol duties in home waters until the outbreak of war. In April 1940 HMAS Sydney, with Lieutenant Thomas Garton Brown as a member of the crew, sailed from Fremantle as an escort for a large Middle East convoy rejoining the British Mediterranean Fleet on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1940. Shortly afterwards hilst deployed in the Mediterranean she took part in the bombardment of Bardia with British and French warships. In an action a week later Sydney, in company with ships of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron, was to finish off the Italian Destroyer Espero and rescue forty-seven Italian survivors. In July she was part of a covering force for Malta convoys and subsequently the focus of severe air attacks without suffering any serious damage. On the 9<sup>th</sup> July 1940, in company with three Battleships, three Cruisers an Aircraft Carrier and attendant destroyers of the Royal Navy, Sydney took part in the Battle of Calabria which was the first full scale action against the Italian Fleet, a superior force comprising two Battleships, ten Cruisers and twenty-four Destroyers. Sydney was again the subject of enemy air attacks but sustained no damage. On the 19<sup>th</sup> July, HMAS Sydney engaged two Italian Cruisers off Cape Spada, Crete. One, the Bartolomeo Colleoni was put out of action by well directed gunfire from Sydney which found the enemy's engine room. Bartolomeo Colleoni was sunk later by the torpedos of accompanying destroyers. During the engagement Sydney sustained only light damage to her funnel.

Brown saw further action in Sydney in August and September when she was involved in the second bombardment of Bardia, a sweep of the Adriatic and the protection of convoys to Greece. In November, HMAS Sydney supported an attack by the British Mediterranean Fleet on the Italian Fleet in Taranto by patrolling the Straits of Otranto. In November she undertook further convoy work to Greece and Malta and was part of an operation in the Adriatic and the Straits of Otranto again as part of the Mediterranean Fleet. In January 1941, after a refit in Malta, Sydney sailed for Australia arriving in Fremantle on the 5<sup>th</sup> February 1941.

Ordered to Sydney and after a refit at Garden Island she took up patrol and escort duties off the coast of Australia and after brief visits to Singapore, Noumea, Auckland and Suva as convoy escort returned to Western Australian waters. On the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1941 Sydney sailed from Fremantle to the Sunda Strait escorting the troopship Zealandia until met by HMS Durban the escort for the remainder of the voyage to Singapore.

Sydney began the return journey and on the 19<sup>th</sup> November steaming down the coast of Western Australia, Sydney sighted what she presumed to be a merchant vessel. The ship was the German raider HSK Kormoran disguised as the Dutch merchantman Straat Malakka. With the advantage of surprise Kormoran hoisted the German Naval Ensign and opened fire. In the ensuing short but brutal battle Sydney was crippled and set on fire. Kormoran lay dead in the water as Sydney disappeared from the view of the German survivors. Kormoran was abandoned and scuttled and the fate and location of Kormoran, HMAS Sydney and its crew of forty-two officers and six hundred and three ratings, Lieutenant Thomas Garton Brown among them, remained a mystery until the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2008 when found just 12.2 nautical miles from the sunken wreck of the Kormoran discovered just four days earlier on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

#### Promotions

Cadet Midshipman	1.1. 1934
Midshipman	1.1. 1938
Acting Sub Lieutenant	1.1 1940
Sub Lieutenant	16.4. 1940
Lieutenant	1.6. 1941

#### Service

HMAS Cerberus (RAN College)	30.1.1934-26.1.1938
HMAS Canberra	27.1.1938-30.5.1938
London Depot	31.5.1938-29.6.1938
HMS Malaya	30.6.1938-18.7.1938
HMS Hood	19.7.1938-7.2.1939
HMS Ramillies	8.2.1939-30.9.1939
HMS Victory	1.10.1939-31.12.1939
HMS Vernon	1.1.1940-10.2.1940
HMS Excellent	11.2.1940-14.4.1940
MMAS Sydney	15.4.1940-20.11.1941

Thomas Garton Brown son of Charles Garton Brown and Muriel Mary Brown of Sandringham, Victoria, born Mosman, New South Wales, 22 January 1920 killed in action 20 November 1941.

Remembered with Honour: Plymouth Naval Memorial and Anglican Church Grammar School Memorial, Oaklands Parade, East Brisbane, Queensland.

**“ Soaring forever on the Wings of an Eagle”**

## **Sources**

**National Archives Australia**  
**Australian War Museum**  
**Commonwealth War Graves Commission**  
**HMA Ship Histories (Sea Power Centre-Australia)**  
**Ships History Royal Navy**  
**HMS Hood Association**

**DJR Park**  
**9/4/2008**  
**E&OE**

85 Gellibrand Street

Clayfield. 4011

HMAS Sydney

Virtual Memorial

PO Box 614

Yandina. 4561

20<sup>th</sup> July 2011

To whom it may concern.

Dear Sir,

Please find enclosed a completed HMAS Sydney 11 Memorial Content Form and a short history in relation to Thomas Garton Brown that you may find of interest. It was prepared (E&OE) for use at the ANZAC Day Memorial Service on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 2008 after the HMAS Sydney was found. The service is held annually at the Anglican Church Grammar School East Brisbane (formerly Church of England Grammar School) at which time the names of the "Churchie Fallen" are read over. Thomas Brown's name appears on the Memorial in the school grounds and the Roll of Honour and the Memorial can be viewed at [www.churchieoldboys.com.au](http://www.churchieoldboys.com.au)

In addition 2528 Signalman James Lloyd Hudson attended and was educated at the Church of England Grammar School in 1935 and 1936 but At present a history has not been completed.

If you need verification you can contact the school's archivist, James Mason, on 3896 2200.

Sincerely,



David Park