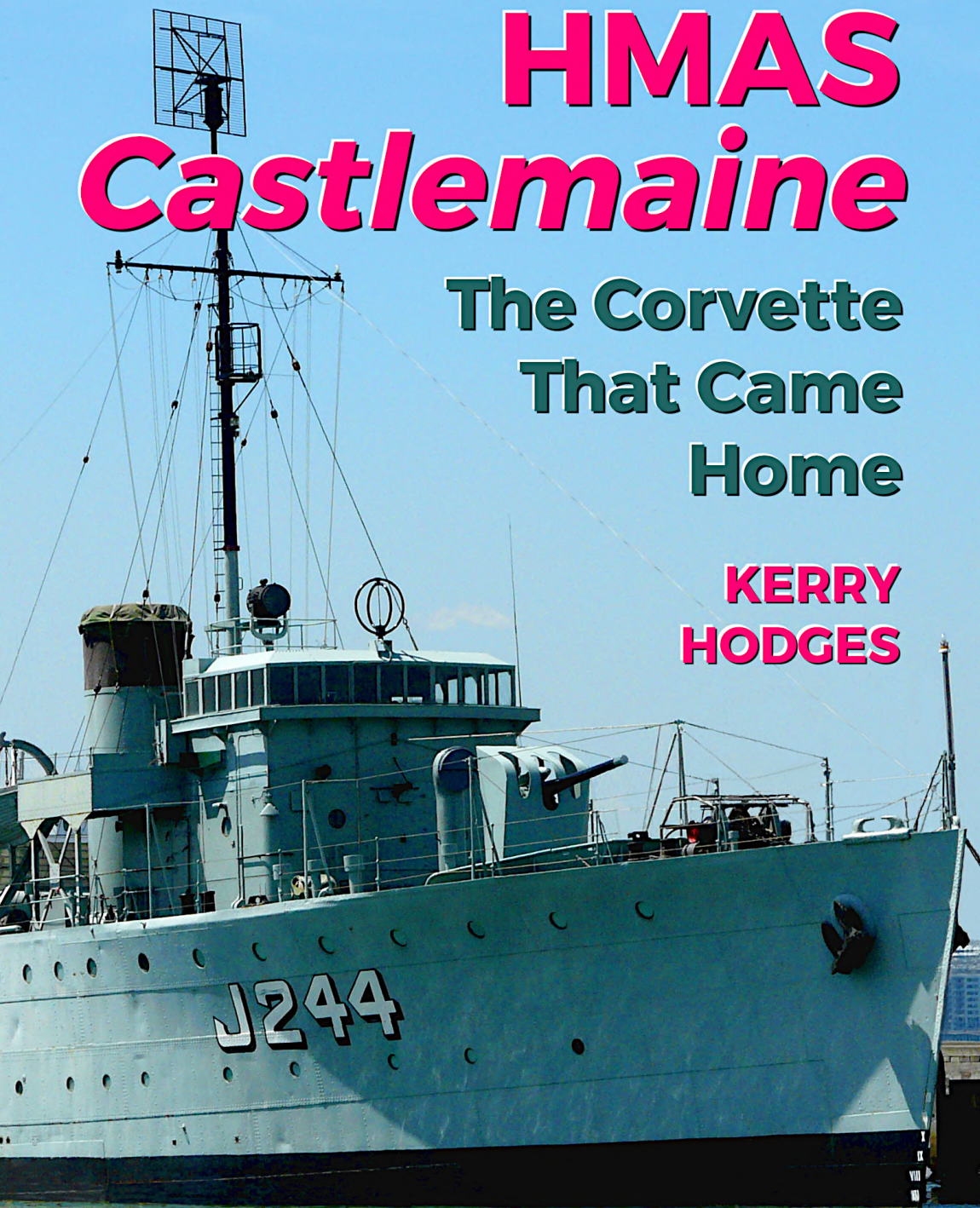


# **HMAS** ***Castlemaine***

**The Corvette  
That Came  
Home**

**KERRY  
HODGES**



**Edited by Robert Pearson,  
Peter Driver and Kate Lance**

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**The Corvette That Came Home**

**Kerry Hodges**

**Edited by**

**Robert Pearson, Peter Driver and Kate Lance**

**for The Maritime Trust of Australia**

**SEA  
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PRESS**   
**seabooks.net**

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Print ISBN 978-0-6489851-1-2

Ebook ISBN 978-0-6489851-2-9

Published by Seabooks Press

[seabooks.net](http://seabooks.net)



A catalogue record for this work is available from the National Library of Australia

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.

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



**THE MARITIME TRUST OF AUSTRALIA INC.**

HMAS Castlemaine  
PO Box 244  
Williamstown VIC 3016  
Australia

[hmascastlemaine.org.au](http://hmascastlemaine.org.au)

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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/](http://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 with local tools 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, and 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, NSW, and gave her name to her sister ships, Bathurst-Class Australian Minesweepers.

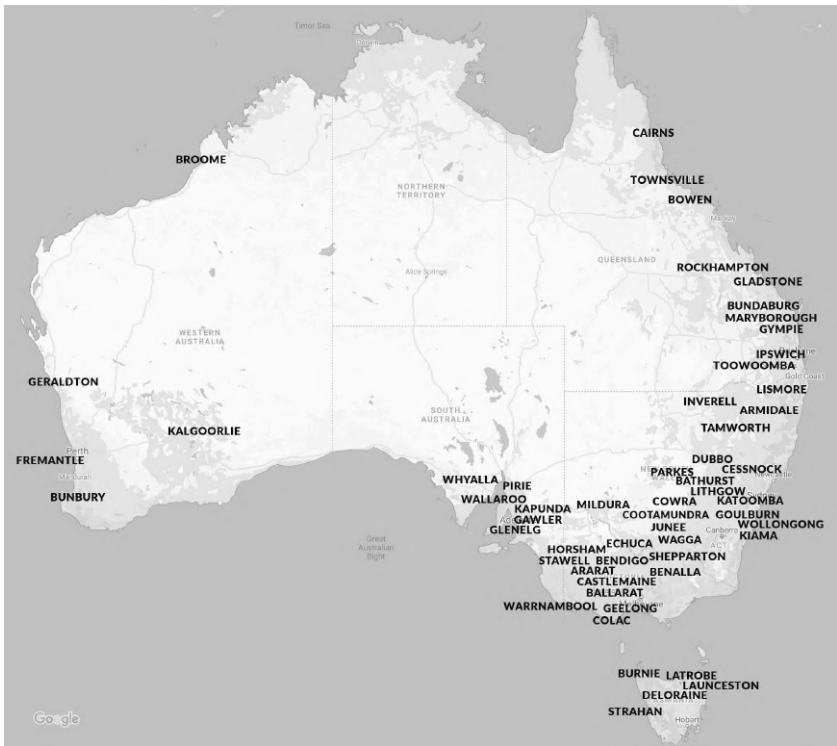
In all, sixty corvettes were built: 36 for the Royal Australian Navy, 20 for the Royal Navy (commissioned as HMAS vessels with Australian crews), and four for the Royal Indian Navy.

These sixty corvettes were constructed in eight Australian yards, in the largest single shipbuilding program in the history of the country. On average, one new corvette was being commissioned *every twenty-six days*.



During the war an estimated 15,000 young Australians served on these ships, and afterwards thousands of others gained naval experience or studied aboard the training corvettes.

Apart for the four for the Royal Indian Navy, all the corvettes were named after Australian regional towns, an ideal connection for a young country seeking its own identity. The namesake towns followed the fortunes of, and helped with fundraising for, 'their' vessels.



*The country towns that gave their names to the corvettes*

## Not Quite the Ending

Today just one example of this once-numerous class of ships remains afloat, surviving only because of the dedication of volunteers from the Maritime Trust of Australia. Over decades, they restored HMAS *Castlemaine*'s bridge and refitted the decks with armaments, minesweeping gear and rigging. They returned boilers, engines, officers' quarters, wireless room and chart room to their original states, and 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 a few WWII warships left in Australia.

*Castlemaine* is also socially significant for her links to corvette servicemen, offering a first-hand insight into their wartime 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 crackedled 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. With this in mind I decided to rewrite the ship's history for a revised edition.

Information was taken from the Commanding Officer's Monthly Report of Proceedings held by the Australian War

## 6 • HMAS *Castlemaine*

Memorial, records of the ship held by the Maritime Trust, records held by 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 some 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*

After the completion of the 2014 revised edition, 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*

## 1. THE BIRTH OF A SHIP

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.

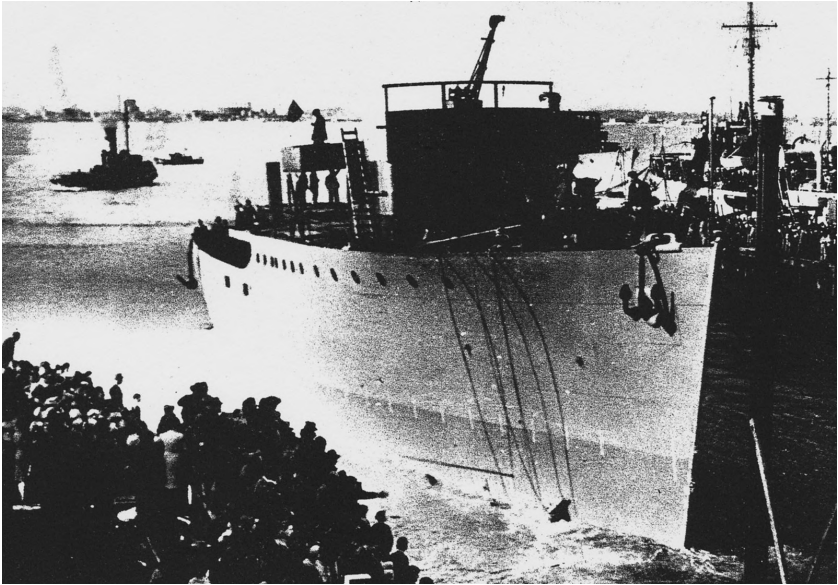
Finally *Castlemaine*, her dignity unruffled, glided smoothly down into the water. Shortly after floating the ship was towed to the fitting-out berth to be completed.

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.*



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

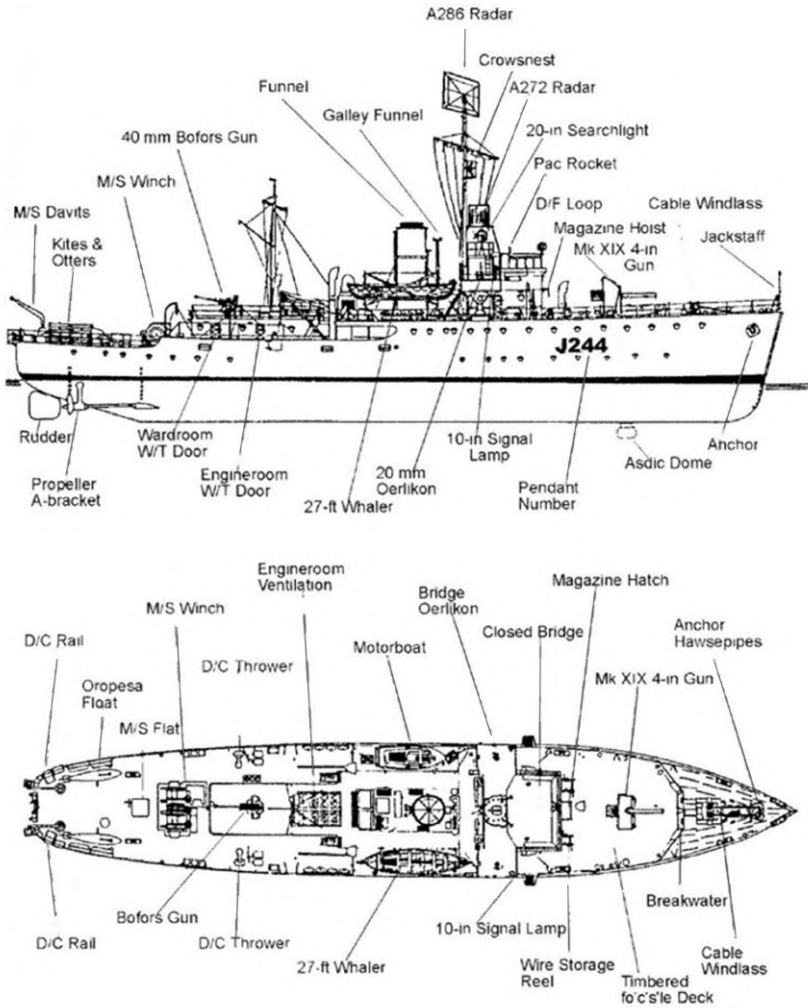
The following month the ship was towed from Williamstown up the Yarra River to No. 17 North Wharf for the lifting inboard of the two Yarrow Admiralty 3 Drum Boilers, which had been made at Cockatoo Dock and Engineering Co., Sydney.

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.

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*Castlemaine layout*

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.



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 crew 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.

## 12 • HMAS *Castlemaine*

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.



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

Along the side of the ship in this space were the mess tables, where the crew would eat, write letters, read and mend their 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.

*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 <b>"CASTLEMAINE"</b>		Part of intended registry <b>Williamstown Vic.</b>		Official number (if there has been any former registry)	
Whether British or foreign built <b>British</b>		Whether a sailing, steam or motor ship, or steam or motor ship, or propelled		Where built <b>Williamstown Vic.</b>	
Whether a sailing, steam or motor ship, or steam or motor ship, or propelled		When built <b>1942</b>		Name and address of builders <b>Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners, Williamstown - Vic.</b>	
Number of decks	<b>TWO</b>	Length from foremost part of stem to the aft side of the head of the stern post	<b>173</b>	Fwt	<b>5</b>
Number of masts	<b>TWO</b>	Main breadth to outside of plank	<b>31</b>	Fwt	<b>1</b>
Rigged	<b>Not</b>	Depth in hold from tonnage deck to ceiling amidships	<b>14</b>	Fwt	<b>5</b>
Stem	<b>Raked</b>	Depth in hold from upper deck to ceiling amidships, in the case of three decks and upwards	<b>15</b>	Fwt	<b>7</b>
Stern	<b>Cruiser</b>	Depth from top of deck at side amidships to bottom of keel	<b>6</b>	Fwt	<b>6</b>
Deck	<b>In and Out Strakes</b>	Round of beam	<b>26</b>	Fwt	<b>0</b>
Frames and covering of vessel	<b>Timber and Steel Naval Auxiliary</b>	Length of angle room (if any)			
Number of bulkheads	<b>Seven.</b>				

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.	No. of tons.	DISCOUNTS ALLOWED.	No. of tons.
Under tonnage deck	208.50	On account of spaces required for propelling power	245.45
Space or spaces between decks		On account of spaces occupied by engines 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	
Turret or trunk		These spaces are the following, viz.:-	
Forecastle Deck	31.26	Above and below deck	173.56
Bridge space		(Number of engines or apparatus for whom accommodations are provided)	
Peep or break		Deductions under sec. 78 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1894, and sec. 34 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1906, as follows:-	
Side houses		Commanding Officer	9.32
Deck houses	29.55	Chart Space	4.12
Chart house		Two Compass Space	2.50
Spaces for machinery and light and air, under sec. 78 (2) of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1894	17.43	Nil Space	3.20
Excess of bulkheads		Chain Locker	14.20
		Water Bilge	10.00
		Bowman's Store	10.00
Gross tonnage	686.74	Total	66.90
Deductions as per schedule	485.91		
Regular tonnage	200.83		

NOTE 1 - The tonnage of the engine room spaces below the upper deck is 181.45 tons, and the tonnage of the total spaces framed in above the upper deck for propelling machinery and for light and air is 17.43 tons.

NOTE 2 - The unmentioned 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 Breecastle Deck 4.82 tons, Machinery Space in Round House 2.83 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 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

*J. H. ...*  
Surveyor.

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

PARTICULARS OF PROPELLING ENGINES, &c. (if any).

No. of sets of engines	Description of engine.	Whether British or foreign built.	When made.	Name and address of makers.	Indicating machine.	Length of stroke.	Rate of revolution in each min.	Estimated power of ship.
2	Reciprocating	British	1941	Compton Eng. & Mfg. Co. Ltd., Melbourne, Vic.	3	21"	14 1/2 HP	2000
2	Reciprocating	British	1941	Cockatoo Dock & Eng. Co. Ltd., Cockatoo Island, N.S.W.	2 1/2	21"	17 1/2 HP	15.8 knots

Number of water ballast tanks and their capacity in tons Two. 44.25 tons.

3rd June, 1942. 1942

*J. H. ...*  
Surveyor.

(1894/1906) WILLIAM'S/1906/1906 MOD 10/19 3722 C-10

Castlemaine's Certificate of Survey, 3 June 1942

## 2. COMMISSIONING AND COLLISION

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. There were 79 crew:

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.

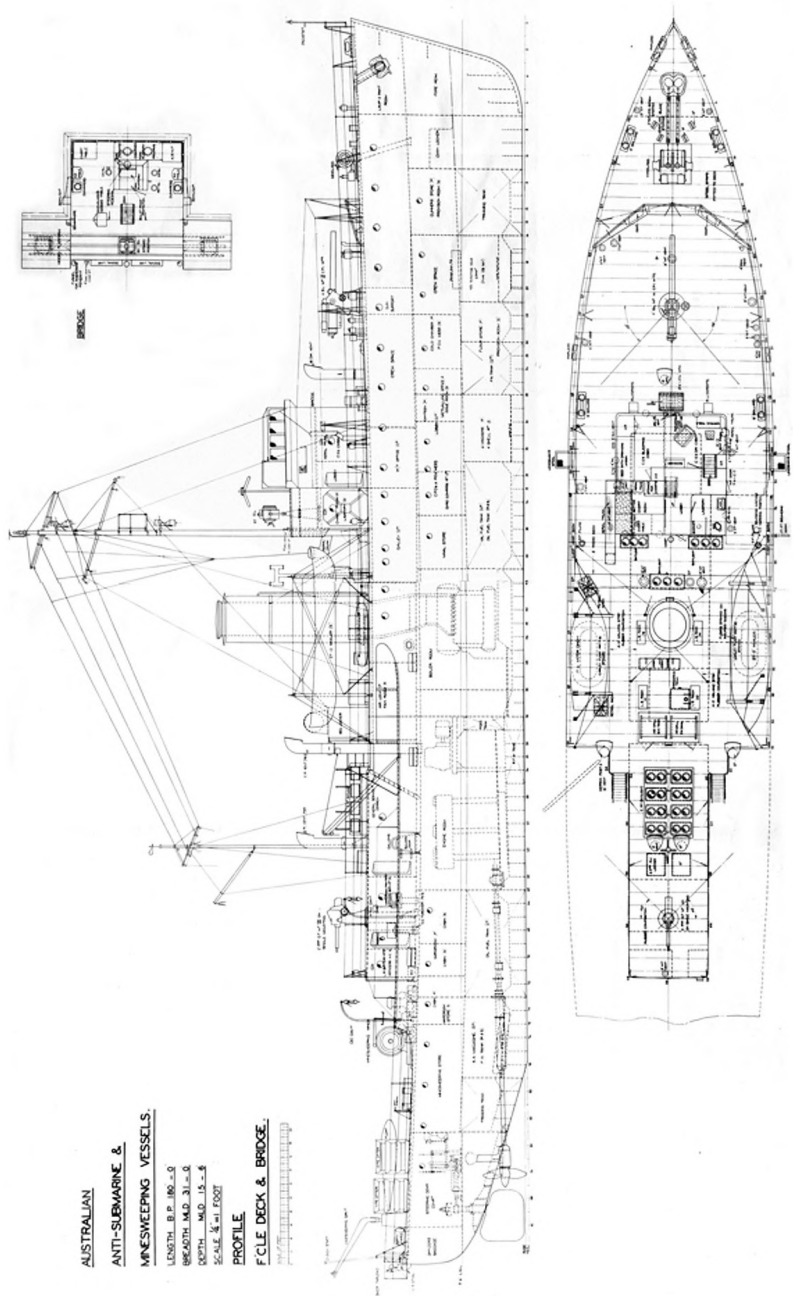
21 Engine Room Branch: 1 Chief Engine Room Artificer [ERA], 3 ERAs, 1 Chief Stoker, 3 Stoker POs, 3 Leading Stokers, 10 Stokers.

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 extra equipment added during various refits.

*Castlemaine's* pennant number was J244. 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

On Monday June 22nd 1942, HMAS *Castlemaine* prepared to sail for Sydney and her work-up program before joining the Fleet.

The following morning the ship departed Williamstown for Swan Island, near Queenscliff, Port Phillip, to embark 20 depth charges, and then sailed for Sydney in the afternoon.

On arrival in Sydney *Castlemaine* underwent final completion steps, with the fitting of 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 fighting team, before the ship was to begin escort duties with convoys from Sydney to Melbourne.

## **Collision**

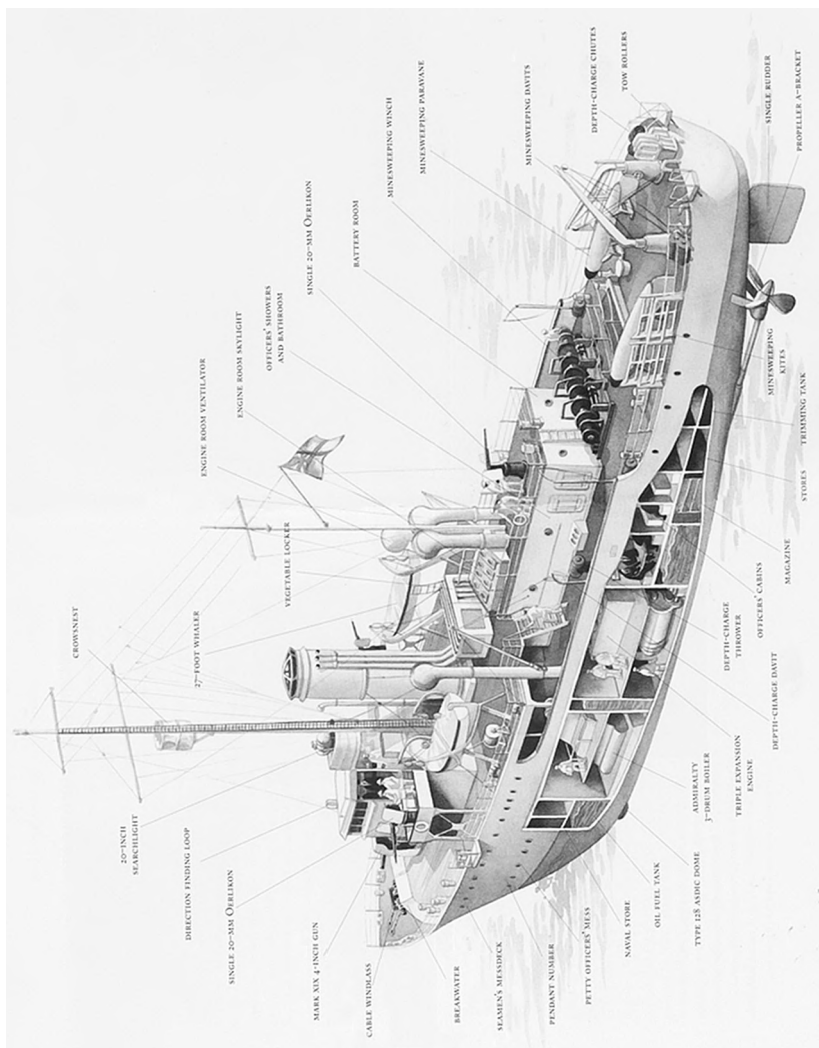
On the night of 11-12 August 1942, at a speed of 3 knots and showing dimmed navigation lights, *Castlemaine* was inbound along the Eastern Channel of Sydney Harbour, between the Boom Gate Vessel and the Eastern Channel Green Pile Light.

The lights of another vessel were observed 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.



Corvette ([www.navy.gov.au/hmas-bathurst-i](http://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-bathurst-i))

Next morning's paper reported the incident as follows:

**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*

### **Townsville-Port Moresby Convoys**

After the inquiry *Castlemaine* departed Sydney for Darwin. En route they stopped at Townsville to replenish supplies where, on Naval Board Authority, the ship became engaged in operations for the Naval Officer-in-Charge Townsville,

## 20 • HMAS *Castlemaine*

escorting convoys between Townsville and Port Moresby for a period of four weeks.

On 2 September 1942, in company of 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 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, and *Castlemaine* took them back to Port Moresby.

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.



*Castlemaine in Port Moresby, 1942 (navy.gov.au/hmas-castlemaine)*

## **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 Heutz*.

At Darwin she came under the control of the Naval Officer-in-Charge Darwin, and started 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 the numerous raids by aircraft on the city of Darwin.*

*Castlemaine's duty was escorting merchant shipping across the*

*hostile waters north of the continent between Darwin & Thursday Island and return.*

**A member of the Radar Crew, Bill Palamountain, kept a movement record for his year on the ship from mid-1942.**

Below are his entries for July to November 1942. [Ed: some details added in brackets.]

### **July 1942**

- 29 Radar crew joined ship at Garden Island.

### **August 1942**

- 01 Sailed to Broken Bay for settling in.  
04 Returned to Sydney.  
06 Sailed with convoy to Melbourne.  
07 Encountered submarine – fired depth charge.  
09 Reached Port Phillip Heads – turned back with another convoy – HMAS *Deloraine* with us.  
11 Collided with ferry on entering Sydney Harbour. Holed port side.  
14 Ship moved to Cockatoo Dock.  
24 Moved back to Garden Island.  
26 Left Sydney for Townsville at 1300.  
30 Arrived Townsville. Rough to Brisbane.

### **September 1942**

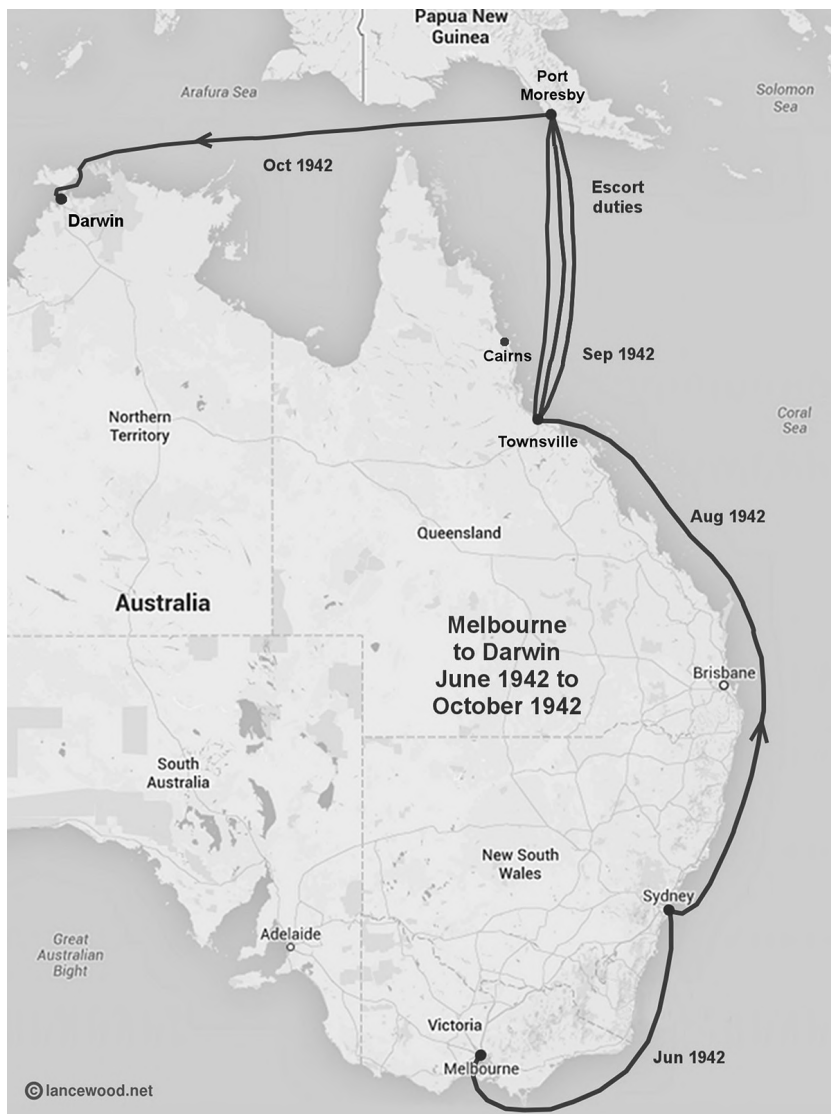
- 02 Left Townsville with convoy of troop ships for Port Moresby. Rough trip.  
05 Arrived Port Moresby 1200. Left again towards Townsville to pick up another convoy.  
08 Arrived back at Port Moresby at night.  
09 0400-1900 transported American and Australian troops from troopships to wharf.  
12 Set off with convoy but returned to Port Moresby, then went out and rescued 2 American airman shot down.  
14 Left Port Moresby for Townsville. Met *Arunta*.

- 16 Passed by Fleet including *Australia*, *Hobart* and 4 destroyers.
- 17 Arrived at Townsville, went on anti-submarine exercises with Fleet at Palm Island.
- 21 Left Townsville for Port Moresby.
- 24 Arrived Port Moresby. Ferried troops ashore. Air raid.
- 28 Sailed out and met convoy. Worked until 0230 ferrying American troops ashore.
- 29 Left Port Moresby at 1000 for Thursday Island.
- 30 Arrived Thursday Island after rough trip.

**October 1942**

- 01 Began repayment messing.
- 02 Left Thursday Island for Darwin.
- 05 Arrived Darwin at 1900 [escort for *Van Heutsz*].
- 06 Left Darwin at 0500 for log tests.
- 07 Arrived in Darwin late – moored alongside *Platypus*.
- 08 [Escort for *Sibigo* to Thursday Island, returned].
- 10 Went on swimming trip to Barry Springs.
- 12 Left Darwin at 0730 for Thursday Island [escort for *Joseph Lane*].
- 14 Arrived at Thursday Island at 0930.
- 15 Left for Darwin at 1800.
- 18 Did minesweeping on entering Darwin. Arrived 0730.
- 20 Left Darwin at 1000 on minesweeping assignment – anchored at Popham Bay.
- 23 Swept for 2 days and returned to Darwin.
- 24 Air raid 0345. Left Darwin but engine defective. Turned back and tied up to *Platypus*.
- 25 Air raids at 0430 and 1300.
- 27 Air raids at 0200 and 1100.
- 31 Went minesweeping with *Kalgoorlie*.

24 • HMAS *Castlemaine*



*Castlemaine's voyages, June 1942 to October 1942*

### **3. ISLAND OPERATIONS**

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...

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