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JUNE 2026 -- Volume 16 Edition 6

Editorial



The Scrap Iron Flotilla and the Enduring Legacy of HMAS *Waterhen*



There are moments in naval history when the character of a fleet is defined not by the tonnage of its ships or the sophistication of its armament, but by the spirit of the sailors who served within it. For Australia, few stories embody this truth more completely than that of the **Scrap Iron Flotilla**—a small group of ageing destroyers whose courage in the early years of the Second World War helped shape the reputation of the Royal Australian Navy. Among them, **HMAS *Waterhen*** stands as a symbol of endurance, sacrifice, and the unshakeable resolve of those who go to sea in defence of their nation.

The flotilla (HMA Ships *Stuart*, *Vampire*, *Vendetta*, *Voyager* and *Waterhen*) was dispatched to the Mediterranean in 1939, arriving in 1940 at a time when the region was one of the most fiercely contested theatres of war. These ships were already veterans of another era. Built for the Royal Navy during the First World War, they were transferred to Australia in the 1930s and were, by the standards of the day, slow, lightly armed, and technologically outdated. It was the German propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, who derisively labelled them the “Scrap Iron Flotilla,” a term meant to belittle their relevance. Instead, the Australians embraced the name with pride. If anything, it captured the gritty, unpretentious determination that would come to define their service.

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Events Calendar

(see [Calendar](#) for full details)

NOTE:



For information on all
Shrine ceremonies:

Phone: 03 9661 8100 or,

Email: ceremonies@shrine.org.au

30 Jun - 13:00 - HMAS *Waterhen*
commemorative service - Sanctuary -
Shrine

05 Jul - 10:30 - Reserve Forces Day -
WWII Forecourt - Shrine

06 Jul - 11:00 - FESR Wreath
Laying - Sanctuary - Shrine

27-Jul - 11:00 Korean Veterans
Association wreath laying Shrine -
Sanctuary

27-Jul - 1900 Naval Historical
Society meeting Clayton RSL -
Sovereign bistro

29-Jul - TBA Defence Force School
of Music "At Home Concert"
Simpson Barracks

In the Mediterranean, the flotilla quickly proved its worth. They escorted convoys, hunted submarines, supported land operations, and endured relentless air attack. Their work was constant, dangerous, and often carried out under conditions that would have broken less resolute crews. The men of the flotilla became known for their humour, their resourcefulness, and their refusal to be intimidated by the enemy's superior numbers or firepower. They were, in every sense, the embodiment of the Australian naval character: undaunted, adaptable, and fiercely loyal to one another.

Among these ships, HMAS *Waterhen* (affectionately known as "The Chook") earned a special place in the hearts of her crew and in the story of the flotilla. Commissioned into the RAN in 1933, *Waterhen* was already showing her age by the time she reached the Mediterranean. Yet she performed her duties with distinction, particularly in the hazardous "Tobruk Ferry Service," the lifeline that sustained the besieged Allied garrison at Tobruk. Night after night, *Waterhen* and her sister ships carried troops, ammunition, and supplies into the harbour, returning with wounded soldiers and prisoners of war. The work was exhausting and perilous, but essential. Without these destroyers, the defence of Tobruk would have been immeasurably more difficult.

It was during one of these operations that *Waterhen* met her fate. On the night of **29 June 1941**, while escorting the British ship HMS *Defender* on another run to Tobruk, the two vessels came under sustained attack from German and Italian dive bombers. The Mediterranean skies had become increasingly hostile, and the Axis air forces were determined to sever the Allied supply line. *Waterhen* manoeuvred with all the agility her ageing hull could muster, but a near miss caused catastrophic damage. Her engine room flooded, and she began to list heavily.

The crew fought valiantly to save their ship, but it soon became clear that *Waterhen* could not be kept afloat. Remarkably, despite the intensity of the attack and the severity of the damage, not a single life was lost. The crew was safely taken aboard *Defender*, and in the early hours of 30 June 1941, HMAS *Waterhen* rolled over and sank, the first RAN ship lost to enemy action in the Second World War.

Her loss was felt deeply across the flotilla. These ships had become more than just vessels; they were homes, workplaces, and symbols of shared hardship. The sinking of *Waterhen* was a reminder of the cost of their mission and the fragility of the ships that carried them. Yet it also strengthened their resolve. The remaining destroyers continued

05-Aug - 1400 & 1900 Soundwaves Concert HMAS Cerberus Band & Cinema complex

09-Aug - 11:00 Battle of Savo Island Service (HMAS Canberra) - Shrine – Sanctuary - NCCV

18-Aug - 11:00 Vietnam Veterans Day - Shrine - Cenotaph

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Latest Videos and News Headlines

Keep up to date on all the news and videos by visiting our website:

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NEWS shorts.....

Construction of Australia's first Hunter-class frigate has advanced significantly, with key manufacturing and prototyping milestones reached across the program, while the second vessel is moving closer to the start of fabrication.

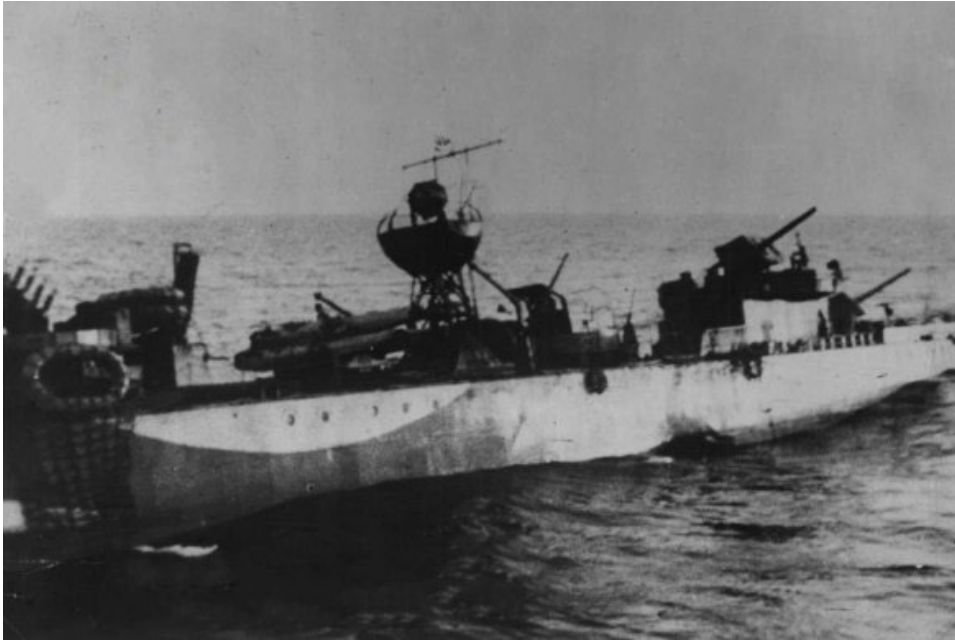
Japan's government has confirmed it will rename its air force to reflect a broadened mission set to include outer space. The upper house of Japan's parliament approved a bill today to rename the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) to the Japan Aerospace Self-Defense Force.

Australia has long debated the future of our submarine capability. The decision that we've reached is that nuclear-powered submarines are the answer. Since reaching that decision, very little has actually changed.

A Royal Australian Navy task unit departed Cairns on June 19, bound for the Pacific nation of Tuvalu to search for explosive remnants of war.

An Australian Defence Force veteran says caps on allied health spending for veterans are a betrayal and that any politician supportive of

their work with undiminished determination, earning battle honours and the admiration of Allied commanders.



HMAS Waterhen, to her crew 'the old Chook', was the Australian Navy's first loss at the hands of the enemy in World War II.

Today, the story of the Scrap Iron Flotilla and of *Waterhen* in particular, remains one of the most cherished chapters in Australian naval history. It is a story of ordinary men performing extraordinary deeds in ships that were never meant to bear the weight of such responsibility. It is a reminder that courage is not measured in steel or firepower, but in the willingness to face danger with steadfast purpose.

As we reflect on the legacy of HMAS *Waterhen*, we honour not only the ship but the spirit she represents. Her service, and the service of the flotilla as a whole, continues to inspire generations of sailors and citizens alike. In an age when technology dominates the conversation about defence, the Scrap Iron Flotilla reminds us that the true strength of a navy lies in the character of its people.

Their story endures because it speaks to something timeless: the belief that even the humblest vessel, in the hands of determined men, can shape the course of history. All are invited to the HMAS *Waterhen* service of remembrance in the Sanctuary, Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne at 1:00pm on Tuesday 30th June 2026.

May we be worthy of their service and sacrifice!

Yours Aye!
NVN Team

the changes will not be welcome at Anzac Day events.

From 1 July 2026, veterans can earn more, and the value of their assets can be higher, before their pension payments are affected.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel RFA Lyme Bay has arrived in the Middle East ahead of a potential multinational minehunting operation in the Strait of Hormuz.

The U.S.-led Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2026 exercise began on Thursday in Hawaii.

A new health support initiative from the Fleet Health Directorate has enhanced medical care for more than 300 young Australians on board Sail Training Ship Young Endeavour.

HMAS Moreton welcomed one of its earliest members home on June 16, as World War II veteran Doris Fay Royle marked her 100th birthday surrounded by family, friends and members of the Navy community.

More countries are building and operating submarines today than at any point in modern history. Yet amid this global expansion, China has emerged as the dominant force.

In a weeks' time, Australia's veteran support landscape will undergo its most significant reform in generations.

A Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Band officer has been awarded the prestigious Dame Adrienne Stewart Performance Bursary.

Cybersecurity agencies have sounded a warning to government and corporate leaders that the cyber risk posed by artificial intelligence (AI) demands urgent action.

OUR JUNE HERO



Vice Admiral Sir Roy Russell DOWLING, KCVO, KBE, CB, DSO

Roy Russell Dowling was an outstanding leader in the Royal Australian Navy. Born on 28 May 1901 at Condong, on the Tweed River, NSW, he joined the navy as a teenager and served with great devotion for over forty years.

During World War II, Dowling showed incredible courage. In 1942, his ship, HMS *Naiad*, was torpedoed by a German U-boat off the Egyptian coast, and sank in just over twenty minutes. Dowling remained in the water for an hour and a half before being rescued. Having survived he went on to command the cruiser HMAS *Hobart*. He led successful island invasions in the Pacific, earning the prestigious Distinguished Service Order for his bold wartime leadership.

After the war, Dowling moved into vital planning roles. He served as the Chief of Naval Personnel and by 1955, he rose to become the Chief of Naval Staff (CNS). He successfully guided the fleet through the tense early years of the Cold War. Then in 1959 he became Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC), the forerunner of the role of Australia's Chief of Defence Force (CDF). For his outstanding service, he was knighted twice by the Queen.

[Continue reading about one of Australia's finest naval heroes.....](#)



If you know of any of our Navy family who has crossed the bar and don't appear on our list below or Memorial Wall on our website, please don't hesitate to contact the webmaster at: webmaster@navyvic.net. If possible, list their Rank, Name, Number, the date of their passing and their age. Thank you.

- † ETC D. Bice, June 2026.
- † LSCOXN R. Love, 22 June 2026.
- † LWRWTR L. Palumberi (Coulthard), 21 June 2026.
- † CAPT R.J. Nattey, 21 June 2026. Aged 89.
- † CPOCIS K.B. Lange, 17 June 2026. Aged 63.
- † ERA J.A. Stanyer, R42976, 14 June 2026. Aged 78.
- † POCK R.J. Clausen, R53268, 13 June 2026. Aged 89.
- † NAMW K.R. Wardle, R93603, 11 June 2026. Aged 85.
- † CMDR P.T. Meakin, 08 June 2026. Aged 83.
- † LME W.N. Baker, R55509, 07 June 2026. Aged 84.
- † CPOMTP4SM I.M. Taber, R54419, 07 June 2026. Aged 88.
- † ABMTPSM R. Steltenpool, 04 June 2026.

The Future Defence Estate Audit, released in February, should be considered the beginning of the decision-making process on divestment, not its endpoint.

Chief Petty Officer Vanessa Toohey was recently awarded the Conspicuous Service Medal in the King's Birthday honours list.

Chief Petty Officer Marcus Effrett has been recognised for three decades of meritorious service. He was awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in the Military Division in the 2026 King's Birthday honours.

Robotics and 3D printing were among the new technologies being adapted to solve a realistic Navy engineering problem under a program designed to reinvigorate the Navy Engineering Challenge (NEC).

Australia's latest National Defence Strategy (NDS) has underlined the country's need to secure critical undersea infrastructure (CUI).

It's with a mixed bag of feelings that Royal Australian Navy Seaman Will Richards waved goodbye to his parents for his first overseas deployment.

The latest cohort of participants at the Navy Indigenous Development Program have officially graduated in a ceremony at HMAS Cairns.

Royal Australian Navy Hobart class destroyer HMAS Sydney sailed from Fleet Base East in Sydney Harbour last week commencing the third Regional Presence Deployment for 2026.

Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom have taken another major step towards establishing the AUKUS Submarine Rotational Force - West.

- † WOCOXN D.J. Reid, R59821, 30 May 2026. Aged 80.
- † LSRP C. Fletcher, R112427, May 2026.
- † POSN K.A. Rees, R50480, 23 May 2026. Aged 88.
- † CPOSBA G.H. Hermsen, R64364, 06 May 2026. Aged 78.

All of the above names now appear on the special [Memorial Wall](#) of our website.

Lest We Forget

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Mother and daughter graduate together



Mother and daughter, Recruits Jodie and Skye Broomham, graduated General Entry 447 Emms Division together at the RAN Recruit School, HMAS Cerberus, Victoria.

It's all in the family



Mother and daughter, Recruits Jodie and Skye Broomham, joined together and found support during their time together during GE447 Emms Division. They were joined at Recruit School by Jodie's other daughters; Seaman Communications and Information Systems Carissa Broomham (left) and Able Seaman Boatswains Mate Amber Broomham (right), for their Graduation Parade at the RAN Recruit School.

From shaping the Navy's future logistics capability to enabling operations across the joint force, Captain Christopher Searle's career has been defined by turning strategy into real-world results. As part of the 2026 King's Birthday honours, Captain Searle was awarded the Conspicuous Service Cross.

Perseverance and patience was rewarded when a young creative sailor was given the opportunity to pursue her passion for photography in the Royal Australian Navy.

Australian shipbuilding company Austal has launched the first Evolved Cape-class patrol boat (ECCPB) for the Australian Border Force (ABF).

Improving training outcomes, redesigning milestone activities and collecting recruit swim-test data earned Chief Petty Officer Michelle Bush a Conspicuous Service Medal.

The United States may be on the verge of an unprecedented step: procuring major naval vessels from allied shipbuilders in Japan and South Korea.

China is launching submarines at a pace unmatched by any other nation.

Gag orders imposed on former and current Defence personnel who have experienced sexual violence will not be enforced.

The RAN has commissioned Arafura-class offshore patrol vessel HMAS Eyre into the fleet in a ceremony at HMAS Stirling in Western Australia.

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