Hard-Over Hec – Captain Hector Waller, DSO and Bar, RAN

By Dr Tom Lewis OAM

There are in warfare, just as there are in all professions, people who show of their best in only certain circumstances. Hector Waller of the Royal Australian Navy would most likely have passed into the ranks of those who had served except for World War II. If anyone had ever asked him if he enjoyed combat we are yet to have that revealed. In the world of civilians that is not a question readily answered anyway. But Waller excelled in warfare: it matched his instinctive sense of what course of action to take, and he was always correct. This made a man who others saw as a natural combat leader.

A typical engagement of Waller’s fighting career was the Battle of Matapan, a massive fight between the British and Italian fleets. On 28-29 March 1941 the destroyer HMAS Stuart, with Waller in command, and leading a squadron of other such vessels, was engaged in the action. Fought near Crete in the Mediterranean Sea, the battle saw the Italians deploy to protect the German invasion of Greece. Matapan was an action-filled combat action partly carried out at night. One participant put it bluntly:

Matapan was “a dog fight on a pitch black night in which collisions were narrowly averted and only a quick and snap judgement could distinguish friend from foe in the weird light from star shell and the glare of burning ships.”

Waller also had under his command the destroyers Greyhound, Griffin, Hotspur and Havock. In the ensuing battle, Waller and Stuart were in the hottest area of action with Stuart at one stage firing her full outfit of torpedoes at two cruisers, with a hit apparently scored. She then engaged an enemy destroyer with gunfire. Havock, one of Waller’s command, was credited with certainly sinking a destroyer. Waller at one point had the signal hoisted ‘Engage the Enemy more Closely’ – an echo of Trafalgar – an action that the commanding Admiral “ABC” Cunningham, doubtless in amusement, for Waller was a favourite, berated him for later: this sort of exhortation being the province of Admirals, not squadron leaders.

When the engagement was ended, the Italians had lost three cruisers, two destroyers, and around 2,800 men. The Allies lost five aircraft and four of their aircrews. The battle was testimony to the use of air power for both reconnaissance and striking power, and it was significant that Cunningham had carried this asset with him, although he was supported as well by land-based squadrons. The Italians, by contrast, had no air assets, although they had indeed been promised them by Germany. In fact, the only appearance by the Luftwaffe was when the Allied ships were rescuing Italians from the water the morning after the battle. Attacked by dive bombers, the action killed many Italians, and Cunningham withdrew, although he signalled the position of those still in the water to the Italian Admiralty.

Waller praised his crew for their part in the action, and noted that the majority of his guns’ crews were made up of Reserve seamen who had been in the ship for six weeks, with most of them having never seen a gun fired at night.

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Perhaps Australia’s finest fighting naval member, Captain “Hec” Waller was admired both within his own Navy and beyond as a great sailor and a resourceful warrior. A member of the second year of the RAN College, his career had been proceeding well in peacetime, but Hec Waller came into his own in combat and arduous conditions. His qualities as a leader made him both respected and admired both by his ships’ companies, his peers and his superiors alike.

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1 Clifford reported engaging ‘a cruiser’ with gunfire as well. There does seem to be a degree of confusion about who did what, where and to whom in the Battle of Matapan, even more than as is the case with most engagements. Stuart’s weapons fit is also variable: Signalman Clifford reports her (p. 164) as armed with five 4.7 guns in the Battle of Matapan, but other reports differ.
Early Life

Hector Macdonald Laws Waller was born on 4 April 1900, in Benalla, Victoria, the son of a grocer and one of ten children, eight of whom survived to adulthood. He was named after both the British Major-General Hector Macdonald, who had fought in the Boer War, and also after an ancestor of Nelson's time, Admiral Laws.

Waller entered the Royal Australian Naval College in 1914 as one of the second entry. By 1915 he had become Cadet-Captain, and then Chief Cadet-Captain. The only deviation from a fully successful three years was an incident which left him concussed in 1917 and necessitated some sick leave. He passed out after receiving the King's Medal and gaining his colours for rugby. He was promoted to Midshipman on 1 Jan 1918, and went to his first ship, the British battleship HMAS Agincourt, which did not see combat in this last year of the Great War. He transferred to the cruiser HMAS Melbourne in February 1919; returned to Australia in April, and was promoted acting Sub-Lieutenant on 1 September, the rank confirmed a month later.

He married comparatively early for a naval officer, to Nancy Bowes on 7 April 1923, in Petersham, NSW. Her father, the Rev. R. B. Bowes, was the celebrant. The previous month Waller had been given an appointment to the RAN College as an officer on the staff. It must have been an interesting experience to return once more to Jervis Bay as a member of one of the first classes to pass through the institution. Waller and his new wife lived in a small flat off the hospital. While there he organised a high horse vaulting display, the College History of 1948 noting that he 'himself, when a cadet (was) an outstanding figure in such performances'. Meanwhile, his new wife took charge of a fancy dress dance at the hospital. In April 1924 Waller was posted out of the College to HMAS Adelaide, and then to Britain for a Signals course.

Waller excelled at signals and communications, and qualified top of his class, the only officer to better Lord Louis Mountbatten. He perhaps possessed a 'photographic memory', as he could re-draw maps having seen one once. Throughout his career Waller took pleasure in reading ship to ship signals himself:

‘And he knew his signals as well as any Yeoman,’ Jacky contributed. ‘I was on the bridge reading a ship one day, and I could hear someone reading another somewhere behind me. ‘Course, I’m supposed to know what’s going on, so I called over my shoulder, ‘Who the bloody hell you reading?’ And a voice comes back, cool as any killkik buntin’ tosser. ‘That bastard over there, Yeoman.’ I nearly swallowed me signal pad, it was Hec.’

In his later years Waller was to be described as:

... stocky with heavy shoulders and thick legs and a head like a rounded head on a Roman coin....In those last days his hair was light brown and thinning, his eyes were blue-grey, his forehead high, his mouth - it clamped a thick-bowled pipe that seemed built into his face - was wide and full-lipped but firm and rather severe in repose. His voice was strong, resonant, the sort of voice you turned to listen to....his simplicity and his total lack of pretension, of sham, in any form which made it possible for him to take his place with ease in any society....strong physically and strong spiritually...(but)...neither massive or intellectual'.

His first experience of command was an appointment in 1926 to take charge of the Signals and Wireless Telegraphy School at Flinders Naval Depot in Westernport, Victoria. In his years as a comparatively junior officer Waller was distinguished by his ease of manner. Commander POL Owen ('Polo' to his friends) remembered well his first meeting:
I first met him in 1926 when I joined the RAN as Paymaster Cadet. I was required to Mess in the Wardroom at Flinders Naval Depot. Here were, to me, hard-bitten men barely conscious of my presence. Not so Waller. Freshly back from England where he had 'topped' his Long Signal Course, this unassuming man befriended me on my first 'guest night,' when I was petrified, fearful and lonely. Amongst some 60 Officers he had no cause to notice me! Yet he made the effort to seek me out and put me at my ease.\textsuperscript{iv}

Waller was posted to 	extit{HMS Broke} from August 1928, and served in her until May 1930, being promoted to Lieutenant Commander on 1 March 1929. In July 1930 he was posted to 	extit{HMAS Australia}, the flagship of the Australian Squadron, as the Squadron's Signals Officer. 'Polo' Owen, also on board, remembers him as being a person who was most efficient: 'Everything and everyone in his department were 'top line'. Signalmen and W/T Operators revelled in enthusiasm...'

As a communications officer, Waller performed with distinction. His early reporting places him usually above the average, and the comments made about him reflect a capable, solid leader, who participated in many sports and social activities. Occasionally a negative comment surfaces, but they are isolated and sometimes contradictory.

For example, in a report of 28 May 1931, the comments\textsuperscript{v} include: 'Although this officer possesses exceptional zeal and energy, it is sometimes misplaced. He is aware of this and his judgement is improving....Not very tactful.' A report of less than a year later – 6 April 1932 – commented however: 'An officer of above average leadership and influence, of good personality, outstanding loyalty and is tactful. Good social and physical qualities.'

His report of 15 April 1934 comments: 'A most efficient reliable Signal Officer...good powers of leadership...' The numerical scores were all sixes and sevens. He was promoted to Commander on 30 June 1934, and posted as the Executive Officer to the RAN College on 21 July 1934. At this time the College had left Jervis Bay, for reasons of economy during the Great Depression, and was relocated at 	extit{HMAS Cerberus} on the Mornington Peninsula south of Melbourne. There he performed well, although his reports' numerical scores were sometimes outweighed by the comments that accompanied the report.

His first report while Executive Officer of RANC, made on 21 June 1935, when recommended for the staff course, rated him as with good scores. The comments included 'He makes up for some lack of personality by a very correct bearing and manner...' A report of 14 June 1936 – at the same shore establishment – is similar. The written comments, however, assessed him as 'an exceedingly capable officer' but suggests he was 'inclined to be too self-assured'.

Another appointment followed, and Waller left the College a month later on 10 July 1936. So far, in a general summary, Waller's career was progressing along fairly normal lines. His reports are neither brilliant nor gloomy; and sometimes they have highlights; sometimes low notes, but often they are above average on the whole.

It was around this time that Waller purchased, at considerable expense, a full dress 'Number One' uniform to attend the coronation of the new king, Edward VIII, where he was to be an RAN representative.\textsuperscript{vi} Unfortunately the uniform was not to be used, for the connection of the King with divorcee Mrs Wallis Simpson became the scandal of the year, and in December Edward abdicated without having been formally crowned.

After a posting of six months to the Naval Intelligence Division of the Admiralty, Waller was then appointed Executive Officer of the Royal Navy repair ship 	extit{HMS Resource}. There he was assessed on 16 November 1937 as above the average in all respects, except in 'Judgement', which was rated as a five. He was posted to command 	extit{HMS Brazen} from 3 December 1937. His family – by this time Nancy Waller had given birth to two sons – were based at Plymouth. During 1937 	extit{Brazen} and another destroyer visited Gibraltar during the Spanish Civil War and also a Spanish port on the Mediterranean coast.

Later, back in British waters, there was an amusing incident when 	extit{Brazen} anchored at Oban, in Scotland. Bearings were taken on what appeared to be a boulder shown on the chart as 'conspicuous'. Then the rock stood up and walked away, understandably, as it was a sheep!
The navigator, Lieutenant (later Vice Admiral) Charles Mills comments that Hec was his usual imperturbable self, not being the type of leader to remonstrate with subordinates over incidents that could happen to anyone.\textsuperscript{xxi}

In August 1938, in perhaps the worst report of his career, Waller was deemed to be ‘...lacking in judgement and cannot be depended on when acting on his own’. His report for Brazen was quite gloomy, with a ‘2’ given for his ‘ability in handling ship’ and a ‘no’ recorded alongside the question ‘Fit for more important sea command?’

His other marks were:

\begin{itemize}
  \item a) General conduct - satisfactory
  \item b) Of temperate habits - yes
  \item h) Professional ability - 5
  \item i) Zeal and energy - 7
  \item j) Power of command - 5
  \item k) Judgement - 3
  \item g) Reliability - 3
  \item h) Initiative - 7
\end{itemize}

There were further negative comments from his reporting officer – Captain RR McGrigor - to make matters worse:

\begin{quote}
His ability in handling ship, in spite of much instruction and advice, is far below the average and, at sea, his erratic movements upset the whole flotilla....In consequence of his lack of judgement and his lack of ability in handling his ship and his sub-division, I am unable at present to recommend him for promotion.
\end{quote}

Commodore Phillips, the senior officer\textsuperscript{2} counter-signing the report, simply wrote ‘Concur’. However, two months later Waller was looking much better. The report of 20 December 1938, assessing some further four months of command of HMS Brazen, and given upon the termination of the appointment of the Captain of Destroyers, rated him as almost universally sevens and eights, with one ‘six’ for ship-handling. This report carries a note by the now Rear Admiral Phillips on his ship-handling abilities. It noted the low report the same Admiral had previously signed and commented that his performance in this area ‘has improved greatly’ and he was now recommended for promotion.

Another version of this comment appears on a half-yearly recommendation for promotion, dated 3 March 1939. The comment is similarly worded. Interestingly, a report signed by Captain RSG Nicholson, dated 11 April 1939, lowers Waller to almost-universal ‘fives’ with a sole six for ‘Reliability’, although it rates his ability in handling ship as ‘Very good’. The report is counter-signed by Rear Admiral Phillips, who noted ‘I recommend Commander Waller for promotion in ordinary course’.

It is not known what Waller thought of these changing fortunes. Perhaps he put them down to different personalities, or different measures of ability. In any event, his career now took an upward turn.

\textbf{Fighting Career}

After a short spell at Navy Office, Waller posted on board HMAS Stuart in command\textsuperscript{xxix} on 1 September 1939, shortly before the outbreak of war. The ship's company was well under strength when Waller joined, and many of the new people posting in were lacking in experience. He set himself the task of getting his people into shape, and he was not averse to lending a hand physically where necessary. Signalman LE Clifford later recalled:

\begin{quote}
We were indeed fortunate in having Comdr. Waller as Captain. He was an experienced Signal Officer, and fully understanding the difficulties under which we were
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{2} Later promoted to Vice Admiral, Tom Phillips went down with the ships under his command, battleship Prince of Wales and battle-cruiser Repulse, in a fight against Japanese aircraft on 10 December 1941.
operating, was ever ready to manipulate one of the signaling projectors when we were hard pressed..."xx

Indeed, another of the ship's company, Ordinary Seaman Harry Warr, remembers: 'Chief Yeoman Watkins was sometimes driven to distraction – Hec would read the signals before he had time to write them down.'xxi

The first work the ship was engaged in was anti-submarine patrolling outside Sydney harbour. She shared this duty with Vendetta and Waterhen. One afternoon Stuart received a message a submarine had been spotted off Terrigal, a little way along the coast. The ship proceeded there at high speed, and soon a moving asdic contact was found. This was depth-charged, and throughout the night the search continued, with frequent attacks. At daylight the ship was joined by Waterhen, and the chase continued, with attacks finally centring on an object that was no longer moving. No submarine was confirmed, however.xxii

The ship soon sailed for Singapore. On the way the ship 'crossed the Line', an event where a 'King Neptune' and retinue would initiate those who had not crossed the Equator before into the mysteries of the watery realm. In reality, of course, this was an opportunity for a day of fun and practical jokes. Each initiate was shaved, or ducked, or something similar. Waller was not exempt:

Comdr. Waller was 'arrested' on the Compass platform and brought before the Court charged with having sunk a submarine in Terrigal Bay. The usual sentence was carried out, after which he was presented with a home-made model of a submarine. This trophy decorated the captain's after cabin from that day onwards.xxiii

It is of interest that Waller joined in with the ceremony, as he was by rights not an initiate, having crossed the Line before on his way to Britain for courses. Presumably he became involved to help lift the morale of the ship's company. The ship's company caught a seven-foot shark, and once again Waller took part. The shark was hauled on board '. . . where he put up a great fight until Cmndr. Waller descended from the compass platform and emptied his revolver into the monster's head.'xxiv

Waller's personal report from December 1939 to March 1940, when he was commanding HMAS Stuart, graded him with a universal score of eights, and also recommended him for accelerated promotion. It appears, from looking forward through Waller's career from this time forward, that he excelled in war. He was certainly quick to adapt to a change in procedure. 'Polo' Owen rejoined his old commander in Stuart, and recalled Waller's attitude towards hostilities:

For him armament was mounted to be used. Even as early as October, 1939, he was firing shots across the bows of unidentifiable ships as we approached Singapore. Two years later warships were being sunk or put out of action for not doing just this. The Admiralty in early 1942 made a general signal concerning this failure.xxxv

The ship arrived in the Mediterranean in early December, and Christmas 1939 was spent in Malta Harbour. Once again Waller was thinking of his ship's company, even though sometimes his efforts went unrewarded: 'Comndr. Waller requested permission for one bottle of beer per man to be allowed onboard for the coming day; but this was not granted by the Admiral.xxxvi

Signalman Clifford thought of him in praiseworthy terms:

Commander Waller was the type of man in whom one could have complete confidence in an emergency; friendly in manner, and possessing the happy facility of making one feel completely at ease in his company. . . . As a disciplinarian, he was firm but just, displaying a personal interest in his ship's company. He could often be seen chatting with ratings on the upper deck, and when on his bridge, would join conversations on general subjects with the signalman on watch.xxxvii
It would certainly seem that Waller inspired his ship’s company, and those of other ships too, seeing as he was Commander of the Flotilla. A small dispute had arisen on Stuart about the length of service some ratings were liable for – with many claiming they thought they had signed on only for service in Australian waters. But, as G. Hermon Gill’s official history of the RAN in WWII later recorded:

...under the sympathetic and inspiring leadership which Waller exercised over his own ship and the Flotilla, the matter of liability for overseas service was soon lost in the team spirit which inspired the five ships’ companies; and within less than six months the description ‘the most lively and undefeated fellows I have ever had to do with’ was applied to the destroyer crews by Admiral Cunningham.xxxii

Time and again in seeing comments from those who served under Waller one is struck by the devotion, respect and even love this man inspired. WA ‘Bill’ Bee, who served with him in Perth, noted of his Captain: ‘...might I say a word of praise for our brave and much loved Captain Hec Waller....the ship’s company had complete faith in the ability of Hec Waller...xxxiii Neil McDonald (later Rear Admiral) recalls that Waller ‘...had the reputation of being an excellent Captain (D) who couldn’t wait to get at the enemy.’xxx

This was the beginning of a very busy time for all of the Australian destroyers in the Mediterranean. Gill reports Stuart being active as part of a screen for the ill-fated carrier Glorious, and the crews got to know the ports of Gibraltar, Marseilles, Malta, Haifa, Port Said and Alexandria, and of course the waters in-between. The worst thing about these times in the Mediterranean was, according to Waller, the lack of sleep for all concerned. It got worse as the war went on. From those early days in the Med. Stuart and other Australian destroyers were to participate in a variety of activities. They took part in battles both large and small; provided escorts; facilitated evacuations; attacked submarines, surface ships and aircraft from a variety of hostile forces, and were attacked by them, and all the while kept their ‘Scrap-Iron Flotilla’ – a derisive name bestowed by Italian propaganda - afloat by all sorts of means.

In Waller’s file appears a letter - dated 31 March 1940 - from Admiral Cunningham to the CO of Stuart. It congratulates Waller and the ship’s company on recent operations – in particular aid given to a stricken tanker - which were carried out ‘...in a most able and seamanlike manner which reflects great credit on all hands.’ It goes on:

Subsequent to this, H.M.A.S. STUART has again showed her metal [sic] in the way in which she brought help to the S.S.TROCAS. In the weather conditions prevailing, this operation called for particular seamanlike [sic] judgment and it was carried through with a determination for which there can be nothing but praise.

This reflects in an interesting way, of course, upon Waller’s abilities in ship-handling, the quality in which he had been judged badly in the damning report of August 1938. What brought about those poor scores? Perhaps it was a clumsy piece of ship-handling; perhaps something else, but whatever it was, it is understood better if the confidential reports are seen as comments upon that period of time only, and not suggesting that Waller’s ship-handling was bad then, and would therefore also be bad in the future.

On 27 May 1940 the five Australian destroyers were joined by four British vessels: Dainty, Diamond, Decoy and Defender. These ships formed the 10th Destroyer Flotilla under Waller.xxxi On 30 June 1940 he was promoted to Captain.

On 10 June 1940 Italy entered the war against the Allies, and thus a new threat faced the Allies and the ships in the Mediterranean. On the evening of 12 June Waller and Stuart spotted a tethered mine on the surface. While inspecting it numerous others were detected with the ship’s sonar. Other minefields were soon found further off, and Stuart eventually reported herself as ‘surrounded by mine echoes’ xxxii

An unofficial account describes it:
Trapped in the middle of a minefield laid by Italian submarines, Waller on board STUART remained cool. He had his asdic crew plot the mines while the ship remained hove to, while musstering the remainder of the ship's company amidships, reasoning it would probably be the bow or stern which hit a mine. Once charted, the ship was cautiously manoeuvred out of the field. Once clear, he signaled the local admiral: Have located enemy minefield in position xyz. Have buoyed centre of field. When I get out, I intend to search for further minefields.xxxiv

Under Vice Admiral Tovey, Allied ships were soon deployed to attack the Italian shore base of Bardia. Waller and Stuart were engaged in a shore bombardment operation on 21 June, with the destroyer's ship opening her bombardment at 12,000 yards — extreme range for the four Mark XIX 4.7" guns the ship carried.**xxxv Waller commented later that 'in opening fire at this range he had in view merely the moral effect on his guns' crews and ship's company generally', although it was later confirmed the guns had indeed engaged the target.*** It is a further measure of Waller, of course, that he took every opportunity he could to improve his ship's company morale.

Stuart was soon involved in the action that became known as the Battle of Calabria. Despite being outnumbered, Cunningham took every opportunity to bring the Italians to action and near the southern tip of Italy on 8 July the two fleets engaged. It was a classic naval action carried out on a perfect day. One observer put it: 'The battle of Calabria was "carried out in brilliant sunshine, with our ships teaming magnificently in formation, deploying in response to fluttering signals, wheeling in line, altering course in columns, every aspect of the fight easily visible."xxxx

After salvos were exchanged the enemy turned away in smoke, and lighter forces were brought in, with Stuart, despite being the oldest destroyer in the fleet, firing her opening salvo at 12,600 yards. Although hits were inflicted on both sides the Italian ships could not be intercepted.**xxxvi The end result, while minimal, meant the British Fleet was the superior in terms of morale.

Waller was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, on 11 September 1940, for his work relating to the discovery of the enemy minefields, with the citation reading ‘For courage, enterprise and devotion to duty in recent engagements.’**xxxii

Waller transferred to Vampire from Stuart with his staff on 26 September, as she was bound for refit. This however was not enough to prevent the ship and her company — Waller's trained strike force — successfully engaging an Italian submarine shortly afterwards under the temporary command of Lieutenant NJM Teacher. The submarine — Gondar — was depth charged and subsequently scuttled, with the recovery of 28 survivors, including the captain, the incident testimony to the skills forged to a keen edge under Waller.xxxix

Ashore Waller characteristically enjoyed life to the full. Polo Owen recalled:

He liked to relax and seized every opportunity of doing so, whether it was good dinner ashore (he loved his food and was a mighty ‘sweets’ eater from steamed pudding to Crepe Suzettes). He was quite a ‘trencherman’. A cabaret he enjoyed also.

On 15 December Captain Waller was made Senior Naval Officer Afloat for the many ships engaged in army support operations off Egypt, where the Allies were attempting to check the Italian advance.xi The ships under his command carried out a variety of tasks: shore bombardment, night offensive patrols, and generally protected the sea lanes to the Allies’ land forces. During this time Waller shifted his command, including his staff, from ship to ship as necessary. Bill Cook, who was First Lieutenant of Voyager at the time, recalled that his influence was ‘…all pervasive…and his leadership was inspirational. The sailors worshipped him and morale was always high when he led his flotilla to sea’.xii

In January 1941 a signal of appreciation was sent by Admiral Cunningham to the Admiralty for the work of the Australian ships of the 10th Destroyer Flotilla, under Waller.*** During February three of these Australian warships were together and while in Alexandria the ships
were visited by the Australian Prime Minister, Mr Robert Menzies. It was during this visit that Admiral Cunningham remarked to the PM: ‘...now you are going to meet one of the greatest captains who ever sailed the seas – his name is Waller.’ The comment is all the more genuine given that it was made as a casual aside rather than a nice-sounding compliment in an official letter.

In March there was much escort duty for the Australian destroyers, and the ships were often attacked by aircraft. It was perhaps during the time that Waller acquired a gloss on his reputation for ship-handling:

The cooks & stewards nicknamed Waller ‘Hard Over Hec’ as most of his wheel orders, in action, were ‘Hard a Stbd or Hard a Port’. Waller would lay back in his chair, with pipe in mouth, on the bridge and actually wait for the dive-bombers to release their bombs before ordering the wheel hard over one way or the other.

He himself noted such actions in a more cool fashion:

This last aircraft seemed to be out for my blood and nursed his second bomb until I remained on a steady course. The bombs being so large, however, they could be followed all the way down and the requisite alteration could be made.

As a commander he was certainly not a man who wasted words, as many an anecdote confirms. Flat on the deck during an air attack in the Mediterranean, he said to a sailor lying beside him, ‘Not bad, is it?’ and the sailor replied, ‘Not so f____ good, either sir.’ The reply is a measure of how his sailors accepted him. McKie noted on one occasion: ‘Waller had not said much – Waller never did...’ His signalling was short and to the point: ‘Follow me’ was a favourite exhortation to the ships under his command.

Following the aforementioned Battle of Matapan, during the evacuation of Allied troops from Greece Waller again showed resourcefulness. He re-arranged some transport operations, and the official RAN history from WWII notes that ‘it was due to Waller’s foresight in these operations that a far larger number was evacuated than otherwise would have been possible.’

With the war going badly for the Allies, Waller was soon involved in the evacuation of Crete. He was under tremendous strain, but perhaps in his element. He certainly became immersed in the part:

Once during those hectic days, in a moment when they took a brief gasp of breath, Stuart lay alongside Perth in Suda Bay, Crete. Both ships were dirty, stained and strained from constant action and keeping the sea so long. Stuart was oiling from Perth. Gun muzzles were charred black. Hollow-eyed, sleepless men dragged themselves about to attend to the needs of the ships. George, on the bridge, passed the time of day with some others on Stuart’s bridge, which was abeast and a little below him. One of the fellows there, with a grimed, brown face and a blue woollen skullcap pulled down to the top of his ears, in a thick roll-neck jersey, his trousers pushed into his leather seaboots, rolled a cigarette. He spotted George. ‘Got a match,’ he called.

‘Yeah, catch, mate,’ George replied casually as he threw his box across. ‘What’s the Skipper like?’ he asked to make conversation.

The man caught the matches. He was sturdy and tired-looking. ‘Not bad,’ and there was a flash of teeth as he grinned with puckish humour: ‘but some don’t think much of him.’ He lit his cigarette and threw the matches back. He picked up an old monkey jacket and turned to leave the bridge. And then George saw, on that old jacket, four torn and tarnished gold rings. ‘It was old Hec himself,’ George chuckled: ‘it was the first time I had seen him.’
Signalman Clifford also commented upon Waller’s like for ‘pirate rig’, and even the confusion it sometimes caused, with people unsure of who or what he was: ‘...he possessed a keen sense of humour, and personal remarks directed at him on these occasions afforded him a great deal of amusement’.

According to accounts of that time Waller treated admirals as he treated the youngest rating - directly, courteously. One of his officers commented: ‘When ratings said ‘Hec’s a gent’, they were not interested in his antecedents or his upbringing. They meant they liked him, respected him, and would follow him to hell if that was absolutely necessary. ‘Another account called on Shakespeare and noted:

Andrew Cunningham and Hector Waller were cast in the same mould: men would follow them, suffer, and be glad about it. These were both men made by Fate for those ever-recurring Saint Crispin’s Days of human affairs.

One of Waller’s leadership traits was that he kept people informed of what they and their ship was doing:

...he never failed to have the information passed on to his men. Armed with this knowledge every man knew exactly what was expected of him when the operation took place and thus its success was assured as far as preparation was concerned. His efficient leadership and faith in his men completed the triumph.

The Allied ships took no small part in the North Africa campaigns their armies were fighting against both Italians and Germans. Admiral Cunningham noted:

Preparations had also been made for using the harbour at Tobruk as soon as possible after its capture...the 6th Australian Division, supported from the sea by Terror and Ladybird, Captain Waller, Royal Australian Navy, in the Stuart, with the destroyers Vampire and Defender, broke into the outer defences at Tobruk at dawn on January 22nd, and by midday the town and harbour were in our hands.

The ships then supplied the beleaguered army forces within Tobruk, in what became known as “the Ferry Run”, “the Spud Run” or the “Tobruk Ferry”. Navigating into port at night, with no lights, the ships supplying the land troops there faced great danger, and despite this made 139 runs into port. By this time the old Australian destroyers were only kept going, as Admiral Cunningham put it, by ‘...the sheer grit and determination of the officers and men of their engineering departments’.

Waller was a man of his word in everything. At lunch with the Governor of Malta, he suggested to the Governor’s wife that her rose bushes were badly pruned. When she asked if he could do better, he spent the afternoon at it, and much improved them. When in Alexandria, then in a state of some chaos, he heard about the Allied ladies’ efforts there to make clothing, and that sewing machines were to be had in Tobruk, just taken by the Allies. Waller decided to take the situation in hand. Cunningham observed:

What persuasive blarney Waller used to get his own way I do not know, but some days later a lorry drove up to the Residency at Alexandria and discharged two sewing machines in crates. One, a most imposing-looking piece of machinery by Singer which Waller had labeled ‘The Admiral’s Model’ was rechristened ‘Marchesa Graziani’ by the ladies.

Waller was interested in firearms, and shot mines from the bridge of his ship in the Mediterranean with a rifle and armour piercing bullets. As Signalman Clifford noted: ‘Numerous floating mines were sighted and sunk by rifle fire. Captain Waller was a particularly good shot.’ He had a fondness for sailing, particularly alone in his own 12-footer, with a packet of sandwiches for sustenance. Ordinary Seaman Harry Warr remembers he was regarded with respect from everyone on board, partly because of this habit: it made him
a ‘sailor with the sailors’.

Waller trusted his men. Broken down in Stuart in the Mediterranean, his engineer Commander Walter Rands told him it would take five hours to fix the ship. The destroyer lay still in waters where no Allied ship should have been, a target even for friendly submarines. For that five hours, Waller kept from further inquiries.

His ship-handling, as has been noted, could be violent, and Waller was certainly an aggressive commander. Stuart under his command had the reputation for dropping more depth charges than any other ship in the Med:

One day, when the battleship was at sea and Cunningham was conferring with his staff in his cabin, the familiar woomph woomph woomph of depth charges came from the distance. Without looking up from his papers, A.B.C. said, ‘Ah, I see Waller’s rejoined the fleet.’

It was a trait Signalman Clifford noted too: ‘Stuart immediately increased speed and dropped a few depth charges on the position indicated. Captain Waller was always quick to act and did not take chances with any underwater object that might be a U-boat.’

His report on the period May to August 1941 saw him as Captain (D) of the 10th Destroyer Flotilla. On 25 August, for his first report as a Captain, his numerical scores ranged from seven to nine: indeed there were two of these. In the section ‘If in command of a sea going ship’? Waller was rated as a ‘8’, with ‘Professional Ability’ rated the same. The written comments described him as a ‘first class fighting leader’. Thus Waller can be rated as ‘Above the Average’ to ‘Exceptional’ given the rating system of the day. This is the best report of his service career. Perhaps Waller had now reached his peak, with warfare bringing out his best abilities.

Waller was awarded a Mention in Despatches on 29 July 1941 with the citation reading ‘For courage, skill and devotion to duty in operations off the Libyan coast’. The next – his last - assessment commented upon his performance as a Captain. His report of October 1940 to May 1941 commented:

A very good captain (D) with marked determination and tenacity of purpose. Though somewhat handicapped by the age of the ships in his Flotilla has always got the last ounce out of them. Has a sound knowledge of fleet work and shows initiative in handling Destroyers with the Fleet. Physically fit and with good social qualities.

Admiral Cunningham saw him off in style, noting that Stuart was ‘seriously in need of a refit’ and with one engine out of action. Despite this, he wrote:

It is with great regret that we part with HMAS Stuart... Under the distinguished command of Captain Waller she has an unsurpassed record of gallant achievement... the Mediterranean Fleet is the poorer by the departure of this fine little ship, and her gallant ship's company.

Waller’s last Service assessment – dated 6 September 1941 - rated him with sixes for judgement and administrative ability. ‘Ability to command’, ‘zeal and energy’ and ‘reliability’ were rated at seven, as was his ability in handling a ship. His initiative was rated at eight.

‘Polo’ Owen remembers him at this time:

Waller, like many others, was a little weary when he returned home in the middle of 1941 and just before he left the Mediterranean he confided in me that on more than one occasion he had awakened and rushed up on deck to find all was quiet and peaceful. Many Captains suffer this, not only in war, but in times of stress in peace. The mind is still in gear and sleep provides little rest.
On 12 August 1941, Waller’s next command – HMAS Perth - had arrived at Sydney and the following day moved to Cockatoo Dockyard for an extensive refit. The ex-HMS Amphion was a five year old light cruiser – a modified ‘Leander’ class, with a displacement of 6,890 tons. 555 feet in length, she was equipped with an aircraft and armed with eight 6” guns and a multitude of other anti-surface and anti-air weapons, as well as eight torpedo tubes. She was the sister ship of both HMAS Hobart and the famous – and ill-fated – HMAS Sydney. Her service with the RAN was to be short but glorious.

Acting Commander Charles Reid, RAN, had assumed command on 1 September 1941 and was relieved by Captain Waller on 24 October 1941. After completion of her refit on 22 November Perth and her 680 ship’s company members were engaged in exercises from 24 to 30 November and then sailed for Auckland.

Perth was in Sydney Harbour when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and she was closed up to anti-aircraft defence watch as a result. During the next two months she carried out patrols, escort duties, exercises and manoeuvres during December 1941 and January 1942, visiting both New Caledonia and New Guinea in that time. Waller’s son John recalls that Perth berthed in Melbourne in February 1942, close to his 9th birthday:

I went on board and must have been in the Day Cabin aft. We walked forward on the starboard side past ‘Y’ gun house, and a sailor stood near the rail and saluted Dad. Maybe he was less than 10 years older than I was….Dad had been to visit an American ship, and related he had been served coffee rather than gin. Of course, we never saw him again.\textsuperscript{xvi}

Waller had been awarded another Mention in Despatches on 11 November 1941, with the citation this time reading ‘For gallantry and distinguished service in Greek waters’.

Max Jagger recalls his days on Perth as an ordinary seaman, second class: ‘He was a wonderful seaman. We were a crack ship and Captain Hec Waller was the greatest skipper the RAN ever produced’.\textsuperscript{xvii} The later-Captain Norman White also remembers his time on board Perth under Waller as being memorable – but somewhat demanding:

I was well aware of his outstanding achievement as Captain ‘D’ of the 10th Destroyer Flotilla in the Mediterranean, so I was very glad to have him as my Captain on the Perth. He was the most efficient Captain I think I have ever served with in peace or war, but he was ‘dynamite’ on the bridge of a ship. He was easier on sailors than on officers. The slightest mistake, even the most minor of mistakes, by any officer was pounced on by Hec. One needed one’s finger well and truly OUT! He was never a father figure. In the time I served with him on the bridge of Perth with Hec I despairs of ever really pleasing him.\textsuperscript{xix}

The war begun by the Japanese in the Pacific was showing every sign of becoming a desperate struggle, with Allied forces on the back foot everywhere. With Singapore falling, on 14 February 1942 Perth sailed for the Java Theatre. On 3 February 1942 Waller had cause for celebration: he was awarded a Bar to his DSO, with the citation reading ‘For bravery and enterprise in the Battle of Matapan’.

Ships were retreating south everywhere, often under constant Japanese air attack. Brian Ogle on board the corvette HMAS Maryborough remembers being in dry dock in Tanjong Priok:

…21 Japanese planes came in low over the docks, mainly strafing with machine guns. We were as helpless as a duck sitting on a telegraph pole in the middle of a drought – and the ammo was ashore….the most unexpected relief steamed its way out of the roads and up the harbour with a bow wave quite unacceptable in such close waters. It was HMAS Perth blasting heavenwards with everything from six inch projectiles to machine guns…never was there a more glorious sight than Perth dispersing the Japs that day.\textsuperscript{xx}
Perth came now under ABDA Command: American, British, Dutch and Australian forces, with Commodore Collins commanding the British and Australian assets. The general plan was to defend the 600-mile length of Java. For this, the Combined Striking Force of naval assets was nine cruisers and 13 destroyers, of which two in each category were considered obsolete.\\n
Personal comments on Waller during his time with his last command, HMAS Perth, are largely drawn from Proud Echo, the unified account composed by eleven men: ten survivors of the Perth, and writer Ronald McKie. It began life as a 'ten-cent notebook', kept by Commander (S) POL Owen, RAN, during four years as a prisoner of war in Japan. In that notebook he recorded the genesis of the story, which was later used as a base for the further additions of another nine of the ship's company. The resulting notes were later polished and edited by McKie, and published in Australia.

At the beginning of the account in Proud Echo of Perth's last fight the author records that Waller was a 'sick man', with gall-bladder trouble and mild jaundice before the battle. Nevertheless, he was 'always dressed and ready for action'. The Commanding Officer's steward, Petty Officer Steward Bill Davis, remembers thinking that he had 'overwhelming faith in Waller. If Waller said they would get through Sunda, they would get through'.

Perth sailed next for the Java Theatre. She arrived on 24 February at Batavia, where she was attacked by Japanese aircraft during that day and the next, without sustaining damage. The ship sailed on 25 February for Surabaja in company with four Royal Navy vessels, because intelligence had been received by Commodore Collins that a large Japanese convoy and strong escort had been sighted moving down the Macassar Strait. HMAS Hobart was supposed to join them, but was unable to be refueled, because the bomb-damaged auxiliary War Sirdar could not fuel her in time.

In the time before Perth reached her destination, the Japanese were pressing south with scores of troop transports and warships. USS Langley, the USN's first aircraft carrier, was sunk by air attack at 7am on the 27th, and the situation was looking increasingly grim. However, although by this time the official ABDA command had been dissolved, with General Wavell having little left under his control, the Allies were determined to defend Java alongside the Dutch to the end.

Having received sighting reports of strong Japanese formations, on the afternoon of the 27th, the Dutch Rear Admiral KWFM Doorman led an attacking force to sea. The RN destroyers Jupiter, Electra and Encounter led the formation in line abreast, with the cruisers De Ruyter (flag), HMS Exeter, USS Houston. HMAS Perth and another Dutch cruiser - Java - following. Behind them came the four US destroyers - Edwards, Alden, Ford and Paul Jones. Out on the port beam of the cruisers were two Dutch destroyers: Witte De With and Kortenaer.

Soon they sighted the enemy. Exeter and Houston opened fire, and then Perth. At 4.25pm, according to Waller, the ship scored a hit on an enemy destroyer, and they then retreated. Then the Japanese attacked with torpedoes. Their four cruisers (two 8' and two 5.5'), together with destroyers, fired a total of 43 torpedoes. However, no hits were made, although by this time the Allied ships were taking occasional damage from gunfire, suffering numerous straddles, and vigorously returning fire, although not to great effect, as opposed to the Japanese, who had the advantage of using spotting aircraft. Waller observed: 'I found a long period of being 'Aunt Sally' very trying without being able to return the fire', mainly because of the Japanese manoeuvre and smoke. Some Allied hits were observed, but then more enemy torpedoes were fired, and the Dutch destroyer Kortenaer was struck, and Exeter hit in the boiler room. Perth closed her and circled, screening her with smoke, and then Electra was hit. Kortenaer soon blew up, and later, Electra sank after more enemy hits. The action, after some more inconclusive fighting, was broken off, although Waller claimed to have hit the 8' cruiser Haguro, and also managed to ensure a brief fight between Perth and some Japanese destroyers.
The Allied force was badly mauled, but *Perth* was the only ship not hit by the enemy. "...a great testimony to the superb seamanship of Captain Waller" as Peter Firkin has commented. Later that night *Jupiter* was sunk, probably by a mine, and other ships were detached, until only the four cruisers were left, still searching for convoys. More Japanese forces came into sight: the cruisers *Nachi* and *Haguro*, both directed in by aircraft again. Torpedoes were fired by the enemy, and the two Dutch ships were badly hit, blowing up and sinking at 11pm. Waller was now opposed by heavy forces, had very little ammunition, and *Houston*’s aft guns were out of action. Wisely, in RAN Historian Hermen Gili’s opinion, the ships withdrew, although some criticism of this retreat was later received from the Dutch Vice Admiral Helfrich. Doorman’s Striking Force had delayed the enemy for just 24 hours.

*HMAS Perth* and USS *Houston* arrived at Tanjong Priok on 28 February after the day and night actions off Surabaja. Unfortunately stocks of fuel were low and *Perth* could only receive 50% of her full capacity. Preparations were being made to destroy all warehouses and harbour installations, so the opportunity was taken to embark any stores that might prove useful. Orders were received for *Perth* to sail in company with *Houston* and the Dutch destroyer *Evertsen* through Sunda Strait, south to Tjilatjap. *Perth* and *Houston* cast off at 1900 hours. *Evertsen* however had not obtained her orders and signaled ‘no orders and no steam’, and so could not follow. Waller, as senior officer, ordered her to proceed when she could. Sailing, the two ships expected that the Japanese would concentrate on their convoys, and they would not be troubled by the enemy. However, strong Japanese forces lay across their path.

At 2306, a vessel was sighted about five miles close in to St Nicholas Point. When challenged she proved to be a Japanese destroyer - probably *Fubuki*, patrolling - and was immediately engaged, with Waller giving the helm commands. Shortly afterwards, other destroyers were sighted to the north and *Perth*’s fire was split so as to engage more than one target. The Japanese warships were protecting an invasion convoy of approximately 50 ships that had made a landing in Banteng Bay, Java. During the action a large number of enemy destroyers attacked from all directions. Due to the large number of Japanese ships - four heavy cruisers and 12 destroyers - involved, it was impossible to engage all targets at once and some were eventually able to close to a very short range. Nevertheless, the American and Australian cruisers fought well, and for a while held their own, firing guns, and in *Perth*’s case, torpedoes, sinking four transports - including *Sakura Maru* of 7, 170 tons - and hitting the enemy ships hard.

Little damage was caused to *Perth* until the very end of the action. At about midnight it was reported that very little 6" ammunition was left, so Captain Waller decided to attempt to force a passage through Sunda Strait. He ordered full speed and altered course for Toppers Island. *Perth* had barely steadied on course when she was struck on the starboard side by a torpedo. The report came that the forward engine room was out of action, and speed was reduced, to which Waller made the standard reply of ‘Very good’. The next report, from the Gunnery Officer, Lieutenant Commander Hancox, stated that the ammunition was almost all gone, that the turrets were firing practice shells and the 4" guns were reduced to star shells. The same reply was given. A few moments later another torpedo struck just ahead of the first hit, and the Captain gave the order to abandon ship. Hancox queried it, and asked if it was indeed not ‘Prepare to abandon ship’, but this was met with a sharp ‘No!’

After five or ten minutes a third torpedo struck well aft on the starboard side. This was followed shortly afterwards by a fourth torpedo, which hit on the port side. The ship then righted herself, heeled over to port and sank, about 0025 on 1 March 1942.

*Proud Echo* describes Waller as unwounded before the sinking: ‘Waller was standing with his arms on the front of the bridge looking down at the silent turrets.’ According to the Chief Quartermaster’s account, the Captain told him personally down the voicepipe to the compass platform to ‘Get to buggery out of it’ when asked if anyone was required to stand by telegraphs.
Lieutenant WL Gay was one of the last to see Waller alive.

The bridge was deserted. Peter Hancox turned and said to me: ‘Let’s get off before she turns over’. I replied: ‘What about Hec?’ ‘He says he won’t come’, Hancox answered. Captain Waller apparently heard this exchange, for he turned to me and said: ‘Get off the bridge Gay’. I went down the starboard ladder. Peter Hancox took the port ladder. It was the last time I saw him.

A similar account confirms some of this, and also notes:

Captain Waller was last seen with his ‘Mae West’ blown up at the front of the bridge looking down at the silent guns. Shortly afterwards the bridge was seen to receive a shell and Perth’s captain must have been killed instantly.

USS Houston was still fighting although badly on fire. She was hit by torpedoes and sank shortly afterwards rather closer inshore. The overall loss was felt perhaps more strongly by the Japanese however: although reports vary it would seem that they lost a minesweeper, four transports sunk and several ships damaged.

There must be some doubt cast on Gay’s account. Waller, we may judge from his character, was not the sort of person to give his life up when he knew how much he was worth to the Allied cause. His son John notes that in a private letter, Sir Charles Mills commented: ‘how typical’. John Waller surmised his father was just putting himself last, and maybe planning his next move. Therefore, perhaps Gay meant: ‘He says he won’t come [yet].’

Most of Perth’s crew abandoned ship between the second and third torpedoes, but it is doubtful if any of the boats were successfully launched. Many Carley rafts and wooden life rafts were deployed. During the abandon ship operation Perth was under fire from several destroyers at close range and several hits were scored and casualties caused. Many men were killed or wounded in the water by the explosion of the last two torpedoes and by shells exploding in the water. Of her complement of 680 personnel 352 were killed in the action, and 320 fell into Japanese hands, with others escaping.

On Waller’s loss Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, RN, said:

Hector Macdonald Laws Waller will always remain in my mind as one of the very finest types of Australian naval officer. Full of good cheer, with a great sense of humour, undefeated and always burning to get at the enemy, he kept the old ships of his flotilla – the Stuart, Vampire, Vendetta, Voyager, Waterhen – hard at it always. Greatly loved and admired by everyone, his loss in HMAS Perth in the Java Sea was a heavy deprivation for the young navy of Australia.

Waller is remembered in a number of ways in Australia. The ‘Costume and Pioneer Museum’ in Benalla – his home town – has a display dedicated to him, with his dress uniform and medals on display. A group of Sea Scouts operate Camp Waller on Perth’s Swan River. On a national basis, the present Royal Australian Navy submarine HMAS Waller is named after him. On 10 July, 1999, John Waller, one of Captain Waller’s sons, along with Mrs Diana Waller, wife of Michael, the eldest son of the late Captain, were present at the commissioning. A number of HMAS Perth survivors who sailed with Captain Waller were in attendance.

And 60 years after his death, his old shipmates still revere and remember Hec Waller. In the Anzac Day marches of 2002, as related to the author by another Navy member, two veterans were unfurling a banner at the beginning of the March. It read: ‘Hec Waller: Captain of the Scrap Iron Flotilla. He led, we followed’.

Waller achieved much in his wartime service. Perhaps he would not have become such a shining star in peacetime – the war seems to have brought out the best in him. But for his untimely death, he doubtless would have risen further in the service. There is strong
evidence that as a fighting captain he was one of the premier commanding officers and fighting leaders of the RAN, that he showed a great understanding of tactical naval warfare, and if we look further afield, Waller must be seen as a naval officer who could be matched against the best.

One of his best qualities was his ability to inspire others. Years after his death, his men were still following him in their ANZAC Day March. His cool head in combat must have been an inspiration to others. His continual hard work, courage under fire and unassuming manner caused others to emulate him. He had his greatest quality, perhaps, in his ability to empathise with others. Especially in wartime, Waller seems to have felt for his men’s condition far more than other commanders did – and he demonstrated that too. Waller, one of his men said, was ‘...fully understanding the difficulties under which we were operating...’ Waller’s attitude of ‘I will do my job to the best of my ability, and I expect you to do yours’, is one worth remembering and imitating. We can recall his confidence, displayed to great effect in probably causing others to imitate it, in his ship’s Engineer when Stuart was broken down in the Mediterranean. Many years later, another naval officer in another navy inspired his followers with his exhortation of ‘It’s your ship’. It was the sort of thing Waller would have said.

Sometimes quiet – ‘Waller had not said much – Waller never did...’ - he still possessed the gift of effective communication, and did this as much by his actions as by anything spoken. His signals of ‘Follow me’, and at Matapan: ‘Engage the Enemy more closely’ are typical of the verve he gave to his commands, and the initiative he took.

In summary, a sad loss for the Navy, of an officer who was not only a warrior of expertise, determination and initiative, but a much-loved leader as well. But the Royal Australian Navy’s loss is also its gain, for Waller is a bright star indeed to follow. His fellow captain Rooks, in command of Houston, was recognised with the Congressional Medal of Honour, America’s highest honour. Fighting together to the end, our own Hec Waller was worthy of the Victoria Cross.

1 HMAS. Australian War Memorial, 1942. (p. 50)
2 Gill (306)
4 Gill (312-316)
5 Waller, John. (Son of Hector Waller) Email communication. March 2003.
7 RAN College 1917 magazine.
8 Waller, Hector ML Officer (R.A.N.) Personal Record. Waller’s confidential reports are drawn from his Personal Record, provided by the Department of Naval Officers’ Postings. Royal Australian Navy, Canberra.
9 Personal communication with John Waller. April 2003.
12 McKie. (25)
14 McKie (18)
15 Owen, POL, Commander, RAN (Ret.) ‘Captain H.M.L. Waller - A Personal Appreciation’. Naval Historical Review. August 1972. (5)
16 Waller’s Personal Record.
19 Waller’s Personal Record.
22 Clifford (16-18)
23 Clifford (28-29)
24 Clifford (45)
25 Owen (9)
26 Clifford (50)
27 Clifford (73)
28 Gill (137)
29 See W. A. All Men Back, All One Big Mistake. WA: Hesperian, 1998. (Vil and 4)
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Gill. (157-158)
McKie (28). Gill describes Stuart as shortly afterwards inside another minefield; it is not known to which incident Proud Echo refers.
Gill (160)
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Gill, Royal Australian Navy 1939-1941, (174-181)
The DSO certificate, signed by the King and Anthony Eden, is in the Museum at Benalla. (As advised by John Waller)
Gill (224)
Gill (288)
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McKie (22)
McKie (10)
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Mainly anecdotal evidence from Proud Echo in its early pages. (5-25)
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Clifford (216)
As quoted in Gill (395)
Viscount Cunningham of Hyndhope. (308)
McKie (23)
Clifford (137)
McKie (27)
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Clifford (134)
Owen (9)
HMAS Perth's description and movements around this time are drawn from Alan Payne's HMAS Perth. NSW: Naval Historical Society of Australia, 1978.
Personal communication with John Waller. April 2003.
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McKie (14-15)
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Gill. (609-613)
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Gill. (620-621)
Gill. (621-622)
Gill. (622)
McKie (47)
Parkin (257)
Recorded in Brendan Whiting's Ship of Courage (96)
Gill (621)
Personal communication with John Waller. April 2003.
Gill. (622)
Cunningham (308)
thttp://www.maxilink.com/benaliannuseum/muse6.htm
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