

## Foreword

Shortly after the USA entered World War II, Germany launched a devastating U-boat campaign against merchant marine traffic along the eastern seaboard of America. As a result, the Eastern Sea Frontier, the stretch of the Atlantic between Nova Scotia and Florida, had the unhappy distinction of being the most dangerous area for shipping in the world. This frontier was the responsibility of Vice Admiral Adolphus Andrews, USN who in the first months of 1942 had inadequate forces to combat this threat.

In *Send Some King's Ships* David Bruhn and Rob Hoole focus on the assistance provided by the Royal Navy (RN) in deploying to the USA in March 1942, 24 anti-submarine vessels: 22 converted fishing trawlers and 2 whalers from the Royal Navy Patrol Service (RNPS). Manned by RN Reserve officers and sailors, many who had much experience combating U-boats in British waters, these rugged little coal burners provided valuable assistance to Andrews.

The book follows the fortunes and tribulations of these King's ships and their subsequent deployment in October 1942, to counter the U-boat threat off South Africa. By this time six of the 22 trawlers had been lost; three to U-boat actions and three to collisions at sea. The King's ships remained in South Africa until war's end.

Whilst the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) was not involved with the RNPS, it did provide qualified anti-submarine warfare (ASW) personnel to the RN many of whom served in ASW trawlers. The background to this support was an Imperial Conference held in London in 1937 where the various categories of naval training required to provide manpower for the outbreak of a major war were analysed and Australia agreed to provide trained Reserve personnel, both officers and sailors, for anti-submarine operations.

The RAN Reserve Depot at Rushcutters Bay in Sydney's eastern suburbs was selected as the site for a specialised school and the RAN's anti-submarine school, HMAS Rushcutter, was commissioned on 13 February 1939. By the outbreak of war in September 1939, 62 officers had qualified as Anti-submarine Control Officers (A/SCO) and 32 sailors had qualified as Submarine Detectors (SD). The RN was offered a supply of 12 A/SCOs and 12 SD Sailors every two months but responded by asking for as many A/SCOs as possible and for 20 SDs each month. To meet this requirement, there was an immediate increase

in the training output to 72 officers and 240 sailors per year. RAN requirements also had to be met but these were relatively small at this stage.

The A/SCO course was a well-rounded training course of five months duration consisting of four modules:

- One month at HMAS Cerberus with instruction in gunnery, torpedo and signals,
- One month sea time in the tender HMAS *Kybra*, studying seamanship, navigation and electrics,
- Two months ASW instruction at Rushcutter,
- One month at sea in the sloop HMAS *Moresby* gaining ASW experience as well as seamanship and navigation, and
- One week at Rushcutter – examination.

The sailor's SD course was five weeks, involving three weeks instruction at Rushcutter and two weeks practical experience at sea.

The first of what was to be a steady stream of officers and men soon set off for the United Kingdom. The 'Phoney War' ended with the German invasion of Norway in April 1940. Eight large trawlers of the grandly named 15th and 16th Anti-Submarine Striking Forces, each with an Australian A/SCO, were soon in action in Norwegian waters, operating close to enemy-held airfields. Given the intensity of the air attacks, it was remarkable that only three of the trawlers were lost. All eight Australians survived, winning between them a Distinguished Service Order (DSO), a Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) and two Mentions in Despatches.

The conquest of France, Belgium and Holland brought Germany to the sea and confrontation with the RN. A second struggle with U-boats began and the transfer to the UK of qualified Australian officers was stepped up. At first, the officers went to trawlers and the new corvettes, while sailors were usually allocated to destroyers. By the end of 1943, some 1,119 RAN officers and sailors were serving in British ships and by the War's end, twenty percent of the specialist ASW officers and sailors in the Battle of the Atlantic had been trained in Rushcutter.

A few of the more experienced officers were given their own commands in ASW trawlers. One of these officers, Lieutenant Commander Arthur Callaway, RANVR, took command of HMS *Lady Shirley*, in March 1941. *Lady Shirley* became the first RN vessel commanded by an Australian to destroy a U-boat. On 4 October 1941, the trawler encountered *U-111* southwest of the Canary Islands and

engaged her with depth charges and gunfire. Callaway was awarded the DSO, 'For great daring and skill in a brilliant action against a U-boat.' Two DSCs, six Distinguished Service Medals, a Conspicuous Gallantry Medal and five Mentioned in Despatches were awarded to the members of the crew.

Tragically, Callaway and *Lady Shirley*'s crew of 33 later lost their lives when she was attacked by *U-374* in the Strait of Gibraltar on 11 December 1941. *U-374* was sunk on 12 January 1942 off the coast of Cape Spartivento, Sardinia, by torpedoes from the submarine HMS *Unbeaten*; there was one survivor.

At least another six enemy submarines were sunk by ships commanded by Australian officers. Among them, perhaps the most distinguished graduate of Rushcutter, Lieutenant Commander (later Captain) Stanley Darling, RANR.

Stanley Darling was born in Hobart, Tasmania, on 17 August 1907. He joined the RANR as a Midshipman in July 1925, was promoted Sub Lieutenant in April 1927 and Lieutenant in April 1929. He undertook annual RAN Reserve training periods of 30 days in various ships and was noted as having 'above average ability, initiative and zeal.' He was promoted to Lieutenant Commander in April 1937 and commenced anti-submarine training at Rushcutter in early 1940 and on completion, was loaned to the RN.

On arrival in Britain in October 1940, he was given command of the ASW trawler HMS *Loch Oskraig*. He was also given tactical command of a group of four ASW trawlers operating off the British east coast escorting convoys through the dangerous waters of 'E-Boat Alley.' In December 1941 he commanded another trawler, HMS *Inchmarnock*, doing months of hard sea time from Gibraltar to the Faeroes. In August 1942, Darling went to North America to command the Flower-class corvette HMS *Clarkia*, which was loaned to the USN in early 1942. He saw service as a convoy escort in the Atlantic, West Indies and the run from Britain to Gibraltar. In November 1943, he was appointed command of the first of a new class of frigates, HMS *Loch Killin*. She was fitted with the latest ahead-throwing weapon, Squid, and state-of-the-art electronics, some experimental. All much appreciated by Darling who was an audio engineer by profession.

In June 1944, *Loch Killin* was attached to the Second Escort Group under Captain 'Johnny' Walker, which was guarding the western flank of the Normandy invasion. He was to receive a DSC and two bars for sinking three submarines during his period in command. Darling's first victim was *U-333* which was sunk west of the Scilly Isles on 31 July 1944. A few days later in the Bay of Biscay, on 6 August, *Loch Killin*

detected and sunk *U-736*. With the war in Europe drawing to a close, Darling accounted for his third U-boat, *U-1063*, in the English Channel off Start Point Devon, on 15 April 1945. Stanley Darling continued in the RAN Reserve after the War, retiring as a Captain, with an Order of the British Empire (OBE) to add to his three DSCs.

Another RANVR officer who served in the King's ships in both the US Eastern Sea Frontier and South African waters was Lieutenant Commander Stuart Fell. He commanded four ships during his loan service in the RN. Stuart Faithful Fell was born in Ballarat in the Central Highlands of Victoria on 26 February 1916. He enlisted in the RANVR in September 1939 and completed the anti-submarine course at Rushcutter in November 1940 after which, he took passage to the UK.

Fell joined the ASW trawler HMS *Wellard* in Londonderry Northern Ireland on 14 February 1941 as A/SCO and for watchkeeping duties. On 2 May he was promoted to Lieutenant and on 12 August 1942 became the 1st Lieutenant (Executive officer) and A/SCO. During his period in *Wellard*, he served in the Eastern Sea Frontier and in South Africa. He joined the ASW trawler HMS *Northern Dawn* in command on 12 August 1943, again in South Africa. On 30 October 1944, he assumed command of the ASW trawler HMS *Blackfly* which was in Home Waters. In February 1945 he undertook a tank landing ship (LST) familiarization training at HMS St Clement in Essex, England, one of the many Combined Operations Training Establishments. Fell then briefly commanded the escort patrol craft HMS *Kilmore* from 20 March 1945, before taking command of *LST-3014* on 26 July 1945 as an Acting Lieutenant Commander. He returned to Australia in January 1946 and demobilized in May.

*Send Some King's Ships* describes a brutal episode in the campaign against the German U-boats in World War II. As well as highlighting the very positive contribution of the ASW trawlers lent by the RN to assist the USN, the book provides an excellent insight into the anti-submarine operations in US and subsequently South African waters. It also reminds the reader of the difficulties in engaging a relentless and capable foe and the fact that many casualties occurred.

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