



NAVY LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

September 2021  
Volume 5, Issue 09

# DOWN THE VOICEPIPE

*do you hear there!*

COMING UP

Executive meeting Monday 01st. November  
2021 at 1700

HMAS PERTH (I) Memorial Foundation INC  
Executive meeting Saturday 16th. October  
2021 1000

ALL ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN THIS  
NEWSLETTER ARE PRINTED IN GOOD FAITH  
AND DON'T NECESSARY REFLECT THE VIEWS  
OF THE NAVY LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA





### **Navy League of Australia Western Australia Division News update**



As we reach the end of September, we are still trying to shake off the effects of winter with its cold nights, colder mornings and seemingly incessant rain.

This month has been quite slow, the slowest in a long time, but suffice to say, we still held meetings and regular catch-ups.

Building works ground to a temporary halt, again due to the weather and the majority of work to be carried out is to the outside of the building. This is just a minor set back and work will continue again as soon as the weather improves enough for it to be carried out safely.

One of our members has a commercial premise which was in need of a little facelift and clean up. It was extremely pleasing to see such a large turnout on the day and all in all, we achieved much more than expected with all work carried out safely and with many jokes thrown in, making the day go faster. A sausage sizzle lunch was provided which pleased all and sundry and provided a great opportunity to mingle with friends old and new. I believe this is another example of our ethos, we help who we can, when we can and as often as we can.

The Executive Committee voted and subsequently purchased an upright freezer for the facility which goes hand in hand with a recent purchase of a fridge. No doubt we will get good usage out of these items and in keeping with our support of Navy Cadets, I'm sure the cadets and their families will be able to put these to good use.

Planning is underway for our next NLWA getaway in November. These getaways have been embraced by many and each time we head out of the city for a few days, we seem to attract new interest. This has a two-fold effect in that it provides a relaxing break from the mundane and provides the perfect opportunity to get our name out among the public which is beginning to lead to an increased interest and ultimately, an increased membership base.

As mentioned above, the month has been quite slow and due to this, there really isn't a lot to report in this newsletter, from me anyway, no doubt that will change by next month.

Until next month,

Regards

Brad

## NLWA Monthly Roundup.

NLWA has purchased a fridge and freezer for the use of TS Perth, NLWA and functions.

Defence have recently fixed a further leak in our fire fighting equipment where a split in the fire hose main pipe decide to spray the parade ground.

Quotes are now being received to re-clad the outside of the Memorial and Facility as our modernisation and refurbishment schedule picks up pace. It is envisaged after this is completed in the future we will reseal the main deck floor and repaint. Followed by an appraisal to build a purpose built boatshed for the use of TS Perth and the Australian Navy Cadets in general.

As you would be aware it all costs money Main deck estimate \$10000, Boatshed estimate \$18000 and recladding estimate of \$13000 this will be on top of the \$40000 upgrade that has already been completed at the facility.

### US submarine strikes object while submerged



The Seawolf-class fast-attack submarine USS Connecticut (SSN 22) struck an object while submerged on the afternoon of Oct. 2, while operating in international waters in the Indo-Pacific region. The safety of the crew remains the Navy's top priority. There are no life threatening injuries, the US Navy reports.

The submarine remains in a safe and stable condition. USS Connecticut's nuclear propulsion plant and spaces were not affected and remain fully operational. The extent of damage to the remainder of the submarine is being assessed. The U.S. Navy has not requested assistance. The incident will be investigated.

Happy Birthday Frank McGovern just turned 102 last remaining survivor of HMAS Perth (I)  
Frank was an AB aboard Perth and a prisoner of war on the Burma railway then transported to Japan ,



## FRANK MCGOVERN

Able Seaman, Royal Australian Navy

"There was a bombing raid a few weeks before the war ended, killed thirty of our fellas, including my mate."

For Frank McGovern, the distance of 75 years has failed to ebb the vivid memory of the day he returned to Sydney. Among the first group of Australian prisoners of war to be repatriated home, he still recalls fondly the brilliance of the sunshine that day on 15 September 1945, and the crowds that amassed to welcome their diggers home. The emotion still evident in his voice as the almost 101-year old veteran recalls the sight and embrace of his parents. When asked about his feelings that day, Frank recurrently emphasises just two words: overwhelming and tremendous.



Frank McGovern (left) during the Second World War

The true remarkability of Frank McGovern's wartime experiences lies not only in the extraordinary level of endurance he exhibited in his six and a half years of service - three and a half of which were spent in Japanese POW Camps - but the amount of times in which he narrowly evaded death.

Frank's story begins in 1939 when, at the age of nineteen he, along with a group of his mates, decided to enlist in the Naval Reservists, describing his service experience simply as "quite good prior to the war". Initially deployed with the HMAS Westralia for eighteen months, Frank later joined his older brother Vincent, who worked in the engine rooms on the HMAS Perth. The ships were regularly tasked with convoy and patrol duties in the Pacific.

However, on the night of 28 February 1942, a mere two weeks after the Fall of Singapore, HMAS Perth met its tragic end. *Perth* and USS Houston, both surviving the Battle of Java the day prior, ventured into the Sunda Strait. Unbeknownst to those aboard, they would soon come into contact with the Japanese Western Invasion Convoy.

Despite an initial engagement, HMAS Perth, vastly outnumbered and with no ammunition remaining, desperately attempted to retreat at full speed. The decision, however, came too late. The first Japanese torpedo to strike HMAS Perth tore through the forward engine room. By the third torpedo, the order came to abandon ship. Frank managed to survive the sinking, however, 375 sailors ultimately perished, among them Frank's brother Vince.

The oil-coated survivors of the wreckage were ordered onto Japanese destroyers. Frank McGovern had officially become a prisoner of war. For the twelve months that followed, McGovern toiled on the Burma railway and was starved, beaten, demoralised. In the camps and on the railway, diseases ravaged the prisoners and death remained ever-present.

By 1944, the order came for prisoners to be transported to the coal mines and factories of Japan. Frank was among the over one-thousand Australian and British prisoners forced into the cramped hull of the Rakuyō Maru. For five days, he endured stifling heat, deprived of clean air, with barely enough room to sit and a mere half a cup of water each day. Dysentery soon spread amongst the cramped prisoners.

In the early morning hours of 12 September 1944, [Rakuyō Maru, along with another prisoner transport ship, were struck by American torpedoes.](#) “We were torpedoed going up to Japan by an American submarine. It was an unmarked ship so the sub-mariners didn’t know there were POWs on board.”

In one of Australia’s worst maritime disasters, 1,559 POWs perished, of which 543 were Australian. Yet in another extraordinary twist of fate, Frank McGovern managed to survive the attack and locate a lifeboat left behind by the Japanese. For three days he and thirty other predominantly Australian soldiers survived in this lifeboat.

“We were in an open boat so we decided to head towards China which was a couple of hundred miles away; we had no food in the boat, very little water.”

While some survivors were rescued days later by American submarines, others were reportedly massacred by Japanese machine guns. By the third day, Frank and his crew were ordered at gunpoint to board a Japanese ship. For the second time, Frank McGovern had survived a torpedo attack only to become a prisoner of war.

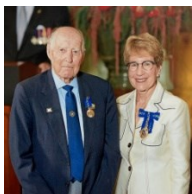
Aboard the frigate, the recovered prisoners were permitted a handful of rice “which was difficult to eat because we were so dehydrated from being in the open boat.” They endured a nightmarish voyage, with further submarine attacks before they finally reached Japan. Frank remembers vividly the local people who watched as the prisoners were unloaded in Moji, “some of the fellas were sick with malaria and dysentery, we were in full view of the local people and it wasn’t very good. Half of us were half dressed; bits of clothing...some had a small old blanket around us.”

That night the prisoners were herded onto a train, “all the shutters down, we weren’t allowed to look out. We headed there on a thirty hour trip by train up to Yokohama near Tokyo. It was a cold, wet, miserable day.”

At Kawasaki camp in Tokyo, the men endured months of arduous work in the factories until, on the night of [9 March 1945, the United States commenced the deadliest air raid in history.](#) It is a night that Frank remembers vividly. Over the course of 48 hours, 2,000 tonnes of incendiary bombs were dropped over just 16 square miles of Tokyo. Frank McGovern again miraculously managed to survive, despite their camp being reduced to ashes. The prisoners were transferred to another camp.

Mere weeks later as Frank sat beside his close friend Keith Mills, a bomb was dropped directly onto the camp. “There was a bombing raid a few weeks before the war ended, killed thirty of our fellas, including my mate. He was blown up, I was blown up but I got out of it with a fractured spine...”

Frank spent the duration of the night unable to move, surrounded by the dead as the screams of the wounded slowly faded into the night. Finally rescued the following day, he was transported to Shebora hospital, where he remained for days without treatment. He soon noticed that other former prisoners, initially healing from shrapnel wounds to their legs, were suddenly declared dead in the operating theatres. An American working in the hospital warned Frank that he had reportedly witnessed Japanese doctors draining the blood of those incapable of walking for the sake of transfusions. With this warning, McGovern, despite his fractured spine, managed to muster the strength to stand and walk at quick pace during an inspection by Japanese guards. This action would again narrowly spare Frank’s life as he was ordered to return to camp.



Frank receiving the Order of Australia in 2019; pictured with Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC QC, Governor of New South Wales

Over seven decades after liberation, Frank still precisely recalls the date when the war ended in the Pacific: 15 August 1945. Despite the lack of information provided, the mood had noticeably shifted in the camp. Food parcels began to be dropped to the emaciated prisoners. Shortly after buses arrived to transport them to the hospital ship, the [USS Benevolence](#), where the men were examined and treated for approximately two weeks. They were subsequently transferred to Manila where they were debriefed, before boarding a plane to Darwin and another to Sydney. It was a terrific feeling for Frank to return home and be reunited with his parents once more. He visited Keith Mills’ parents to inform them about their son and provide some form of comfort and closure. In return he was gifted a photo of the friend that had endured so much by his side. In the aftermath of the war, it took many years for Frank to adjust to being home, confronted with the many painful memories of his wartime experiences.

“I found it difficult at home, as most of our blokes did, because my older brother was on the same ship the Perth and he did not survive it...so that was difficult to come home to.”

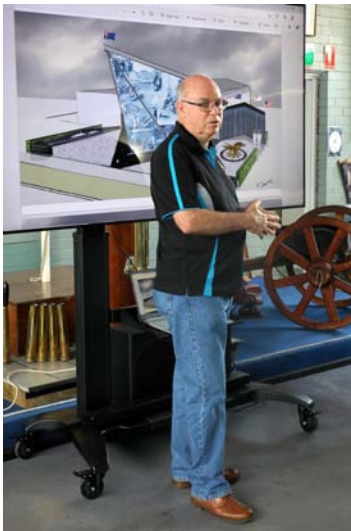
Yet there is still unfailing optimism in the almost 101-year-old veteran. In 2019 he was awarded the Order of Australia for services to veterans and their families. The award recognising Frank’s extensive service with the HMAS Perth Association, the HMAS Perth Prisoner of War Association as well as the Coogee Randwick Clovelly RSL sub-branch.

Frank McGovern remains the sole survivor of the 683-man crew that sailed with the HMAS Perth that fateful night almost eight decades ago. He continues to ensure that their story and legacy lives on.





## HMAS Perth (I) Memorial Foundation Inc Round-up and events



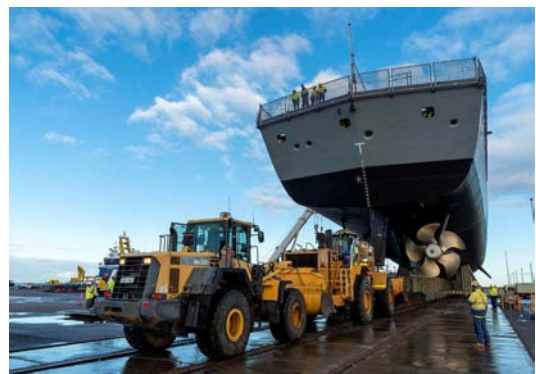
The Foundation held its 2nd Annual General Meeting on Saturday 25th. September. An outline of the project and the current status was presented. All outgoing executive members were re-elected into their present positions for the year 2021-2022. These positions will be confirmed at the next executive meeting to be held on 16th. October 2021.

The executive is interested in forming a sub committee Friends of HMAS Perth Memorial to man stalls or exhibitions that we hold in the future to promote the memorial and raise everyday funding and events separate from the fund raising scheme to erect the memorial. So if your interested please let our secretary know on [secretary@hmasperth1memorial.com.au](mailto:secretary@hmasperth1memorial.com.au). Electronic copies of the 2nd. Annual Report is available on request.

Photos courtesy LEUT David Nicolson RAN RTD



## HMAS PERTH (III) ROUNDUP in pictures



HMAS PERTH (III) now has its own facebook - [www.facebook.com/hmasperth111](https://www.facebook.com/hmasperth111)





## HMAS SIRIUS LAST DEPLOYMENT BEFORE PAYING OFF





**Shepparton the First Lady of the Fleet**  
**By Able Seaman Emily Wain and Able Seaman Rebecca Churches**  
**1 October 2021**



HMAS Shepparton's Hydrographic Department proudly displays the First Lady of the Fleet plaque at HMAS Cairns.

Paluma-class survey motor launch HMAS *Shepparton* II is the new First Lady of the Fleet.

The title, recognising the longest-serving commissioned ship in the fleet, was handed over to *Shepparton* at a ceremony at HMAS Cairns following the decommissioning of HMA Ships *Paluma* and *Mermaid* in September.

Commanding Officer *Shepparton* Lieutenant Commander Andrew Shiels said the vessel was in her 31st year of commissioned service and the crew was honoured to take possession of the prized First Lady of the Fleet plaque.

"The previous First Lady, HMAS *Paluma*, served the fleet with pride until its recent decommissioning and we will aim to continue the tradition as we fulfil our hydrographic role within the fleet," Lieutenant Commander Shiels said. The plaque is made up of pieces from previously decommissioned ships. The voice pipe and base are from HMAS *Sydney* IV, the border from HMAS *Gladstone* and the corner pieces from HMAS *Duchess*.

The plaque also features an image of Nancy Bentley, from Tasmania, who is recognised as being the first female to serve in the Navy. In 1920, six-year-old Nancy was bitten by a snake and was in urgent need of medical treatment.

Looking for help, her father rowed her to HMAS *Sydney* I at anchor off Port Arthur.

At the time, medical treatment in the Navy was reserved for members of the ship's company, so the commanding officer of *Sydney* ordered that Nancy be formally enlisted in the RAN so she could receive medical care. The tradition of awarding the First Lady of the Fleet title began in 1997 to recognise Nancy's story.

HMAS *Shepparton* II was built in Adelaide and commissioned on January 24, 1990. *Shepparton* is a 36.6m, 325-tonne catamaran designed for coastal surveying in waters around Australia and Papua New Guinea. Originally painted white, the ship adopted her Navy grey colours in 2002 to reflect her role informing maritime warfare through data collection. The ship continues to play an important role providing maritime environmental data for navigational charts and publications. The ship also provides hydrographic support to operations and exercises.

In 2000, *Shepparton* deployed in company with HMAS *Benalla* to Timor-Leste on Operation Tangar.

As the new First Lady of the Fleet, *Shepparton's* crew will continue to live up to the ship's motto of 'By Wisdom and Courage'.



HMA Ships *Paluma* and *Mermaid* are farewelled at a decommissioning ceremony at HMAS Cairns. Photo: Leading Seaman Shane Cameron  
The Navy's oldest vessels, HMA Ships *Paluma* and *Mermaid*, were farewelled from service during a ceremony at HMAS *Cairns* at the weekend. For more than 30 years, the survey motor launches collected hydrographic data necessary for creating products used by military, commercial and private vessels to safely navigate the waters around Australia.

In addition to their critically important survey function, Commanding Officer *Mermaid* Lieutenant Commander Christopher Voysey said the ships also moved into operational support roles over the years. "Since *Mermaid's* first hydrographic operation at Bee Reef on February 26, 1990, the ship has steamed nearly 420,000 nautical miles and conducted innumerable surveys," Lieutenant Commander Voysey said. "Surveys aren't the only function undertaken though. In February 2000, *Mermaid* and *Paluma* deployed to Bougainville Island in support of the peace monitoring group conducting Operation BEL ISI II ashore. "Later in November that same year, the ships deployed to East Timor to support the United Nations transitional administration to East Timor operations."

More recently, the ships supported Operation Resolute, which Lieutenant Commander Voysey said showed the breadth and adaptability of the platform and crews. As the older of the two, *Paluma* held the 'First Lady of the Fleet' title, which was passed on to HMAS *Shepparton* during the decommissioning ceremony. Commanding Officer *Paluma* Lieutenant Commander Craig Hamilton said the title handover and ceremony were fitting and memorable moments to recognise the important legacies the ships leave behind. "Our ships have served the Navy and region for many years and many proud personnel have served on board," Lieutenant Commander Hamilton said. "The ceremony today and the response we've had in the lead-up to it from previous crew members and those with an affiliation to the ships, shows the impactful role our vessels have had to so many.

"We now look forward to integrating into and helping to develop Navy's incoming maritime mine countermeasures and military survey capability through SEA1905 Phase 1." SEA1905-1 will provide Defence with innovative and adaptive capabilities to meet the growing threat of mines, while developing maritime environmental knowledge. The decommissioning of *Paluma* and *Mermaid* is part of the staged introduction of up to eight specialist vessels, which will have robotic, autonomous and artificial intelligence systems.

"While the future is very exciting and technology-driven, today was about our people past and present and these two robust vessels, which have served the Navy so well over the years," Lieutenant Commander Voysey said.













## Australia-India: alliances and self-reliance



**By Rear Admiral Sudarshan Shrikhande, Indian Navy(Ret)\***

It is difficult to recall so much global and naval attention being focused on submarines, nuclear or conventional, at any time in the past few decades in the wake of the sudden and surprising announcement of the AUKUS pact, the cancellation of the French Barracudas and Canberra's intent to "go SSN." It is likely that even the USS *Nautilus*' "Underway on nuclear power" may have drawn less media attention, even while making allowances for quieter times.

The scrutiny on the likely geo-political impact of the AUKUS formulation and its "reactive core" of a trilateral agreement on inducting nuclear attack boats into the RAN has been intense not only in Australia, but in several countries.

### **Irony and Contradictions**

There are, of course some geo-political and naval contradictions and ironies that illustrate enduring realities of how long-standing relationships matter even if they can be suddenly shaken up; how new concerns bring new adversaries but also new coalitions; about the problems of hardware-decisions when force planners cannot be hard-nosed enough about making the choices they might need to make from options they might have or that need to be created. Finally, great is the attractiveness of the money that can be made by selling hardware even at the expense of better national (and, coalitional) strategic security objectives. This should be as applicable for the selling country(-ies) as it is for the buying country.

First, there was a bit of a mix-up, historically speaking, about who are allies and who may have been adversaries or at least miffed allies. The US' first ally and fighting partner was France in its war for independence in the late-18<sup>th</sup> century and Britain its first and, actually a fairly long-lasting enemy and competitor! Through much of September 2021, it seemed— at least in Paris—the labels had been reversed in Washington and London.

Second, contexts change, and they require new responses that may seem radically different, or ironic depending on how different sides want to think. One cannot say what the driver for AUKUS was; that could conceivably be known only to a small circle within Canberra. Was the need for a smaller, perhaps tighter—even as some said—an Anglo-Saxon security trilateral the larger consideration? Or, was the deal to enable the RAN to have SSNs with Anglo-American "characteristics" only feasible via a Trilateral Security Partnership, AUKUS? It seems more likely that the need for nuclear boats drove the deal and the add-ons of other hardware and areas for cooperation brought a larger spectrum. Were it not so, one irony could consequently arise: Was the ANZUS, or more realistically, its Australian-US component, not providing adequate geo-strategic assurance? What, besides the *Astute* class or its evolved version, could the UK be really relevant for in the Indo-Pacific in decades to come? Time may tell. It is also difficult to say if the Australian government could have, or did envisage the anger, and not just deep disappointment that France felt at such a big deal slipping away when it seemed nearly assured? To be fair, over the years the submarine question has always been a matter of vigorous discussions in several Australian quarters including in the Parliament and media. This has encompassed the matter of nuclear propulsion which seemed to have been conclusively ruled out until it was suddenly ruled in for an AUKUS-enabled nuclear-propelled boat. In terms of the French boats, this was especially ironical in which a nuclear-propelled French SSN was to be modified to be an SSK, a somewhat risky proposition in terms of redesign, final platform capabilities and deployability into say, the 2060s- 2070s.

An irony related to India and the Indian Navy (IN) also comes to mind and is something I mentioned in another discussion. In the closing half of the 1980s, India leased a SSN (INS *Chakra*) which the IN manned and operated for three years. Australian politics and media then had a boogeyman approach to India and the IN. That there was no substance to any political/ economic threat to Australia from India and hence no cause to see the IN as a threat is besides the point because international relations don't always work to logic. There could have been some countries that would be justifiably concerned about the IN's SSNs and they had better be, else what was the point in acquiring capabilities that do not contribute to deterrence if they are not seen as threatening? In the case of future Aussie SSNs with the RAN similar reactions are to be expected if not from official sources, at least from media and other commentators. On the one hand, China has expressed concerns with Chinese "characteristics" and that's not a bad thing because SSNs are certainly more effective platforms along a growing range of naval and military missions. At the same time, rarely is hardware, even a clutch of SSNs a "game-changer." Rather, they may help Australia play the game significantly better and help allies and other partners play the counter-balancing game with coercive Beijing more effectively. The RAN's or the IN's planned SSNs may together contribute within a more cohesive and multi-dimensional military arrangement, as a force for good. Of course, there may be some neighbours who may express concerns in a vein similar to what Canberra and RAN may have in the 1980s about India and the IN. Australian diplomacy and assurances may need to counter those and there are signs that this is happening. While there have been no official reactions from India either way, the commentary has generally welcomed the development.

### **Money (a.k.a. Defence sales) can't easily buy a strategy**

The cancellation of the French deal and the signing of an impending Anglo-American project by Canberra throws up a few points of discomfort for significant arms importers like India and Australia. Each one's attractiveness as a prospective customer may result in a few issues. First, there is a problem in conflating the quantifiable value of a deal with the qualitative value of strategic consonance. A spin on sales enabling strategy can even be dangerous because commercial lobbies pitch their sales strategies as a security strategy. Most major arms exporting countries do this, some more than others. But, as I did say in some earlier forums, it may be the *job* of companies to push sales, but it is the *duty* of governments to pursue national interest. To that extent perhaps Canberra has now done that, even if in the process it has put off the prime French contractor and the government in Paris. France needs an Indo-Pacific strategy with or without Canberra buying their submarines or New Delhi being pressured to make good the loss by stepping in. The money from sales or purchases cannot really buy a country a strategy. It can create vulnerabilities and weaknesses, neither of which are strategic strengths. Although true for both our countries, the situation is far more serious for India because our concerns have the evidence of post-independence conflicts; are more immediate; are continental as well as maritime; and are multi-front as well as multi-dimensional. Moreover, India is not in any alliance, although partnerships that are being nurtured do hold promise. Moreover, these could prove vital, strategically speaking. The Quad is the most important. Australia is better off because its alliance with the US helps it. Nonetheless, a greater measure of self-reliance in hardware seems problematic due to limited quantities, costing problems and the chimera of jobs that does not benefit from political exaggeration.

On India's part, the pitch for self-reliance, where required with some degree of partnerships, ought to continue. A self-reliant Indian defence manufacturing base would be strategically more useful as a counter-balancing entity to Indo-Pacific partners than if India were to be seen merely as an attractive importer.

Japan lost out on the SSK deal with Australia, but nonetheless has tried to pursue an Indo-Pacific strategy and roles and so perhaps will France in due course. In India there already are several possibilities being talked about of how India may leverage France's setbacks by signing into a fire-sale of sorts or even entice the French government to help build their types of SSNs here. There have also been commentaries about unofficial refusal by the Americans to sell naval reactors or technologies. Both these imported or partnered options may ultimately be worse than the slower indigenisation route that India has taken towards self-reliance in SSBNs and hopefully for SSNs as well. Strategic autonomy does not militate against partnerships like Quad. It may even contribute better through the strength that autonomy brings to such partnerships. When governments don't inordinately focus on sales or purchases, they might end up crafting and pursuing better strategies. Finally, on the subject of manufacturing and inductions, the title of a recent article seems apt for both IN and RAN: "Don't Count Your Submarines Before They are Built" (WOTR, Eric Sand, 29 Sep 2021)

**High technology sales may not be TOT** Some part of AUKUS suggests that apart from the SSNs, there could be high-tech available for Australia to develop. That may be so, but here there is another area where there may be an element of spin of high-tech sales and access amounting to transfer of technologies. This is not really different from the danger of spinning sales as strategy. How each national buyer and absorber of technology does this may be different but the core problems for India and Australia are somewhat similar.

**Proliferation Concerns** To me, proliferation concerns seem to be red-herrings. International commentary has both, highlighted the concern as well as negated it. While HEU fuel may be weapons-grade, the "fill her and forget her" boats actually reduce the likelihood of fuel going "missing." On the other hand, it is the triumvirate of China, North Korea and Pakistan that have often been alleged to be proliferators. Yes, there could be issues of IAEA safeguards and contradictions that have to be handled for and by Australia, just as in the bilateral Anglo-US nuclear arrangements. Similarly, India is a well-regarded "non-proliferator" despite declining to sign the NPT. There are ironies here, but good ones.

**Leasing and Lend-Lease Again?** India's acquisition of two separate Soviet/Russian nuclear attack boats was certainly unusual. However, the subcontinent was already no stranger to leasing. In fact, the first submarine in a sub-continental navy was Pakistan's *Ghazi*, leased in 1963 from the US. In World War II, leasing benefited both the UK as well as the USSR as allies of the US. Importantly, both these partners were strategically useful allies because they were both essentially self-reliant with impressive manufacturing capacities of their own without which the war would have been difficult to win. Therefore, it would not be surprising if the RAN also leases a submarine or two. Further, during the first Cold War, USN attack submarines were based in a few European ports and in US territories in the Pacific. This reduced transit times and increased time on task where it might matter more. US or British boats could similarly deploy from Australian harbours as well while the ones that are to fly the Aussie ensign are being built.

**Quad v/s AUKUS or Quad and AUKUS** Strong opinions have been expressed in India along the Quad *versus* AUKUS or Quad *and* AUKUS lines. Neither Quad nor AUKUS are Asian NATOs but the ANZUS treaty already comes close, as do the US' bilateral treaties with others in the Western Pacific. AUKUS enables a focused defence hardware framework for Australia in which SSNs are the key product/technology. The Quad is a security dialogue and of necessity began as a talk shop that is evolving rapidly. While it is not a treaty organisation—nor needs to be—it ought to build up its security-strategic value for it to appeal geo-strategically to possible "plus" members of a Quad-plus shape. A wishy-washy Quad is not likely to serve that purpose. Likewise, AUKUS could complement Quad's security angles indirectly, even while Quad expands into other areas of coordinated statecraft. Indian and Australian statecraft has evolved and it never was the case that "Indians would lock themselves to the peninsula." Mr Paul Keating—likely a participant in the boogeyman positions vis-a-vis India in the 1980s and 90s—didn't advantage Australia vis-a-vis India then and his recent arguments seem to have no radio-activity left even in the domestic discourse within Australia. The Quad has work to do and it seems that it will. Likewise, AUKUS will not be without its challenges and contradictions, but it is likely to bring overall benefits to Indo-Pacific security.

**Rear Admiral Shrikhande** commanded three ships in the Indian Navy and is a graduate of both the Soviet and the US Naval War Colleges. He has served as the Indian Defence Advisor in Canberra and later Head of Naval Intelligence, Chief of Staff of the Indian Navy's training command, as well as serving in various joint staff positions including in the nuclear forces.



## ADF sends ship to rescue HMAS Diamantina stranded in Pacific

Exclusive by defence correspondent [Andrew Greene](#)

MV Sycamore has travelled to Port Vila to help return HMAS Diamantina.

You can watch this and read at the same time with picture An Australian warship stranded in the Pacific may have to be towed back home after being hit with mechanical problems during a maritime surveillance mission.

- Twenty-year-old warship HMAS Diamantina is stranded in Vanuatu because of a "maintenance issue"
  - Another Defence contracted vessel has been dispatched to Port Vila carrying engineers and repair equipment
- One option being considered is to tow the stranded Minehunter vessel back to Australia The ABC can reveal HMAS Diamantina, one of the Navy's Huon-Class Minehunter Coastal (MHC) vessels, is stuck in Vanuatu because of what Defence describes as a "maintenance issue".

In the past week another vessel contracted by Defence, the MV Sycamore, arrived in Port Vila to begin a repair effort that has been complicated by strict COVID-19 measures in the small island nation. So far Defence has been unable to determine when the 20-year-old Mine hunter vessel might be able to return to Australia.

"Defence can confirm that a Huon-Class Minehunter Coastal vessel developed a maintenance issue that has prevented its return from Port Vila in Vanuatu back to Australia," a spokesperson told the ABC. A source familiar with the repair operation says one option being considered was using the MV Sycamore to tow HMAS Diamantina back to Australia, because "her problems are pretty bad".



MV Sycamore is en route to help HMAS Diamantina.(/

A Defence spokesperson would not comment on the suggestion, only confirming that "the Defence-contracted vessel MV Sycamore has sailed from Sydney to Vanuatu with a maintenance team and equipment to support repairs". Defence insists Australian personnel involved in trying to fix HMAS Diamantina are also avoiding any contact with Vanuatu's population, which so far remains free of COVID-19 cases. "The movement of personnel across both vessels will be managed in a COVID-safe manner in order to prevent personnel from either vessel interacting with the local community".

HMAS Diamantina arrived in Vanuatu last month to provide maritime surveillance for the Pacific country as it prepares to begin using a new Australian provided Guardian-class Patrol boat. The deployment is part of regular Australian Defence Force deployments throughout the South-West Pacific in support of the federal government's Pacific Step-up initiative. Launched in December 2000, HMAS Diamantina, is one of four Huon-Class Minehunter Coastal (MHC) vessels operated by the Royal Australian Navy which considers them "the most advanced of its type in the world".

### Samoa's Australian-supplied patrol boat to be towed back after running aground

As Defence attempts to repair the stranded HMAS Diamantina, a patrol boat recently handed over to Samoa is also expected to be repaired in Australia after running aground.

The Australian-donated Nafanua II [ran aground on a reef not far from the Salelologa wharf on Savai'i island on August 4](#) and has been stuck there ever since. Samoan Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata'afa said the incident had left a big hole in the country's maritime surveillance capability.

Last month a Defence Department spokesperson said an advance team had arrived to stabilise the boat before it was towed to Australia for assessment. At the time of the grounding, the Nafanua was transporting police to Savai'i ahead of a political protest by the former prime minister Tuilaepa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi and his supporters. The Guardian class patrol boat was formally handed to Samoa by Australia in August 2019.

## US NAVY SELLS TWO DECOMMISSIONED AIRCRAFT CARRIERS FOR SCRAPPING

By **Baird Maritime** - October 11, 2021



The  
US Navy aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk underway in the Philippine Sea on May 7, 2004 (Photo: US Navy/Photographer's Mate 2nd Class William H. Ramsey)

The US Navy, through the Naval Sea Systems Command, has sold two decommissioned aircraft carriers to a Texas shipbreaking firm for eventual scrapping. Sold to International Shipbreaking of Brownsville are ex-USS *Kitty Hawk* and ex-USS *John F. Kennedy*, the last two conventionally powered aircraft carriers to be operated by the United States. Following their retirement in the early 2000s, the two carriers were placed in lay-up, with ex-*Kennedy* at the Naval Inactive Ship Maintenance Facility (NISMF) in Philadelphia and ex-*Kitty Hawk* at the NISMF in Bremerton, Washington. Both ships have since remained at the two facilities.

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10 OCTOBER, 2021 BY [RICK BAYLEYSUBMARINESNO COMMENTS](#)

## **AUKUS Nuclear-Powered Submarine Deal – Non-proliferation Aspects**

By John CARLSON – Senior Fellow at the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation. Courtesy of APLN.

*The following article is part of a [series of Asia-Pacific Leadership Network analyses](#) by experts and members assessing the implications of the Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) deal.*

The following is a brief overview of the nuclear non-proliferation and safeguards aspects of the proposal for Australia to build and operate nuclear-powered submarines.



This proposal involves nuclear propulsion only, under no circumstances will Australia pursue nuclear weapons, which would be a violation of our obligations under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). The NPT prohibits non-nuclear-weapon states from acquiring nuclear weapons, and nuclear-weapon states from providing any assistance in this regard. Under the NPT, non-nuclear-weapon states must accept International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards on all nuclear material in their territory or under their control to verify this material is not diverted to nuclear weapons.

The NPT does not prohibit non-nuclear-weapon states from non-explosive military uses of nuclear material, the principal example being the operation of naval propulsion reactors. Where nuclear material is proposed for such a non-prescribed military use, the standard NPT safeguards agreement provides for safeguards measures to be suspended while the material remains in military use. However, the non-explosive use obligation continues to apply, and safeguards measures are to immediately re-apply when the military use has ended. The state is required to make an arrangement with the IAEA to keep the IAEA informed about the material and to ensure its eventual return to safeguards.

There is an obvious concern to ensure this suspension provision is not used as a loophole to evade safeguards and divert nuclear material to nuclear weapons. There has been much discussion about the kind of arrangement the IAEA should require, but to date, there has been no practical case. So far no non-nuclear-weapon state has acquired a nuclear-powered naval vessel. Canada considered nuclear-powered submarines in the 1980s but did not proceed. Currently, Brazil has a naval reactor program but this is still in the R&D phase. South Korea has indicated an interest in nuclear-powered submarines but no concrete steps have been taken. It is possible Australia could become the first practical case for the development of arrangements with the IAEA to deal with nuclear material in naval propulsion, but given the long lead time – the first submarine is not expected to be operational until 2040 – this is not certain.

The possibility of a state diverting nuclear material from a naval propulsion program depends on the range of nuclear activities associated with the program. Where, as in the case of Brazil, the state proposes to enrich and fabricate the reactor fuel, the concern will be to ensure against diversion during these processes. The IAEA has indicated that safeguards would be suspended only on the material actually in military use, and nuclear processes such as enrichment would be under the usual safeguards. Fuel fabrication could require special arrangements because the fuel design may be secret, but there are safeguards approaches that would maintain continuity of knowledge of the nuclear material without revealing sensitive details. If fuel loading and unloading is monitored, and the submarines are known to be operational, adequate assurance could be established that no fuel is diverted.

In Australia's case, it is envisaged that the reactors would have lifetime cores. This means that Australia would not produce the fuel and would not be refuelling the reactors. The reactor would be supplied already fuelled, and at the end of the submarine's operating life – which is expected to be around 30 years – the submarine with its reactor would be returned to the supplier, in this case the US or possibly the UK.

This approach avoids the proliferation concerns raised where countries claim they need to operate enrichment plants to ensure the security of supply for naval fuel. With the Australian project, it will be straightforward to demonstrate to the IAEA that Australia is not removing and diverting fuel.

For completeness, mention should be made of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (the Treaty of Rarotonga). This treaty prohibits acquisition, possession, stationing and testing of nuclear weapons in the treaty zone, but does not prohibit nuclear-powered vessels.

The AUKUS parties have committed to ensuring full compliance with each nation's commitments under the NPT, and to "... undertake this effort in a way that reflects the longstanding leadership in global non-proliferation and vigorous verification standards, in partnership, in consultation with the International Atomic Energy Agency."

*Disclaimer: The opinions articulated above represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Asia Pacific Leadership Network or any of its members. The APLN's website is a source of authoritative research and analysis and serves as a platform for debate and discussion among our senior network members, experts and practitioners, as well as the next generation of policymakers, analysts and advocates. Comments and responses can be emailed to [apl@apl.network](mailto:apl@apl.network).*



**Tuning in to new technology**  
**By Lieutenant Geoff Long**  
**8 October 2021**



Able Seaman Nathan Mayfield uses a Harris PRC-150 HF radio set.

A junior sailor serving in the submarine HMAS *Sheean* has developed a more reliable method of delivering radio communications that could bring major benefits to the fleet for years to come. Able Seaman Nathan Mayfield took a fresh look at the current fleet-wide high frequency (HF) radio procedures used by the crews of ships to communicate with each other and realised they were not being used to their full potential.

Able Seaman Mayfield's ideas revolved around a radio technology called 3G ALE (Third Generation Automatic Link Establishment), which provides more robust HF communications that could potentially be used when regular satellite communication links are down.

"My light-bulb moment came when I was reading through equipment manuals to better understand the new submarine communications' centre," Able Seaman Mayfield said.

"Having read about the capabilities of the equipment suite on board and following discussions with 152 Signals Squadron and Leading Seaman Aaron Hill from Australian Clearance Diving Team Four, I realised that this existing non-utilised capability could be integrated into fleet procedures."

*Sheean*'s weapons electrical maintenance supervisor, Petty Officer Sara Clarke, said the recently introduced Fleet Optimisation Program provided a channel for Able Seaman Mayfield to submit his proposal. Fleet Commander Rear Admiral Mark Hammond introduced the Fleet Optimisation Program in March this year. Its aim is to attract new ideas that improve the availability, sustainability and lethality of the fleet, as well as develop measurable improvements in Navy capability. "The Fleet Optimisation Program is a great initiative and inspired Able Seaman Mayfield to make a more detailed proposal that could test his ideas," Petty Officer Clarke said.

*Sheean*'s communications and information systems' team has proven the 3G ALE concept alongside, and is looking to test the procedures at sea.

*Sheean*'s signals and communications officer, Lieutenant Lachlan Darrow, said Able Seaman Mayfield's proposal addressed a capability gap and could have benefits across a range of platforms. "This capability can be used to replace current HF procedures or become the primary method of HF communications with current procedures as a backup," Lieutenant Darrow said. "It can be used in task group workings, fleet HF broadcasts, as a platform-specific communication circuit and during periods where conventional HF communications may not be possible."

It isn't the first time Able Seaman Mayfield has turned his mind to innovation.

In 2019, he was awarded a Chief of Navy Excellence Award for his work on the 3D design, testing and manufacture of an electrical interlock device that provided electrical safety for the Collins-class submarine fleet.



## **Austal USA awarded first USN steel ship contract**

7 October 2021

Austal USA has been awarded its first steel vessel construction contract by the US Navy, a US\$145 million (~A\$198.5 million) build of two Towing, Salvage, and Rescue ships (T-ATS 11 and 12).

The contract modification establishes options for up to three additional T-ATS ships, which, if exercised, will bring the total cumulative value of the contract to US\$385 million (~A\$528.6 million).

Austal was initially awarded a US\$3.6 million contract by the US Navy for the functional design of the Navajo-class T-ATS vessels. Overnight it was awarded the US\$145 million (~ A\$198.5 million) fixed-price incentive (firm target) contract modification, to include the detailed design and construction of two T-ATS 11 and 12, as well as the option for the additional ships.

The T-ATS contract is the first steel ship construction program awarded by the US Navy to Austal USA and will be the first program to be delivered in the new steel shipbuilding facilities nearing completion at the shipyard in Mobile, Alabama.

Austal CEO Paddy Gregg said the contract was an exciting milestone in the history of the company and a great demonstration of the company's new steel shipbuilding capabilities in the US, following on from the successful addition of steel shipbuilding in Australia.

"This is great news for Austal USA as they enter a new era of steel shipbuilding in the United States, supporting the Navy's requirements for steel ships," Gregg said.

The Navajo-class T-ATS has ocean-going tug, salvage, and rescue capabilities, with a multi-mission common hull platform, capable of towing heavy ships. These ships will be able to support USN fleet operations and a variety of missions, including oil spill response, humanitarian assistance, and wide area search and surveillance.

Austal USA will use the company's new enclosed steel production facility which is set to open in April 2022.

The shipyard previously announced it had submitted a bid to build the US Coast Guard's Offshore Patrol Cutter and continues to execute a Light Amphibious Warship (LAW) concept studies and preliminary design contract for the US Navy and Marine Corps.





*Photo: United Shipbuilding Corporation*

Russia's Nevsky Shipyard has begun construction on a new series of vessels that will be used in fisheries and oceanographic research. The two Project 17050 vessels were ordered by the All Russian Research Institute of Fisheries and Oceanography (Vserossiyskiy nauchno-issledovatel'skiy institut rybnogo khozyaystva i okeanografii; VNIRO). Equipment will include trawls, acoustic survey sensors, and other tools for assessing fish stocks.



**The US Navy's inaugural littoral combat ship (LCS) USS Freedom has been decommissioned at a ceremony held in September this year.**

The vessel was decommissioned at a naval base in San Diego after 13 years of being a part of the US Navy's fleet.

US Navy awarded the contract to build the first Freedom-class ship to Lockheed Martin in December 2004. The keel for USS Freedom was laid in June 2005 at the Marinette Marine shipyard in Wisconsin. It was launched in September 2006.

Commissioned in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on 8 November 2008, USS *Freedom* was home-ported in San Diego, and assigned to Littoral Combat Ship Squadron One. On 20 June 2020, the US Navy announced that they would be taking the vessel out of commission in March 2021, and placing it in reserve.

In April this year, the ship returned from its final deployment. The vessel was deployed to support Joint Interagency Task Force South's mission, which includes counter illicit drug trafficking in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific.



## The Whiskey Project launches new craft

2 October 2021

The Whiskey Project has unveiled their latest Whiskey watercraft – the WHISKEY Multi Mission Reconnaissance Craft (WHISKEY MMRC) – to key US government and military defence stakeholders in Washington DC.

The result of a two-year collaboration with USMC veterans, WHISKEY MMRC is purpose-designed and built to meet the US military's strategic maritime modernisation to address near peer and evolving threats – with specific emphasis on the United States Marine Corps' (USMC) pivot to the Indo-Pacific.

Following on from the recent announcement of the establishment of the AUKUS alliance with the United States and the United Kingdom, The Whiskey Project says it looks to build upon AUKUS' intent by significantly deepening their cooperation with the USMC on a range of security and defence capabilities.

### 'Down the hatch'

An alternative toast to 'cheers', this everyday phrase was spoken by English sailors when drinking together.

The phrase 'down the hatch' is said with the glass raised and the drink is usually finished in one gulp.



On a ship, the hatch is the opening that leads below deck, and to go below the deck (or to lower the cargo below deck) you would need to go 'down the hatch'.

In this drinking toast, the hatch is your mouth, so you would throw the drink down the hatch into your stomach.



## RAN to bolster Seahawk helicopter fleet

11 OCTOBER 2021

By: **Charbel Kadib**

### **Australia's \$1.3 billion request to enhance its Sikorsky MH-60R combat helicopter fleet has been approved.**

The US State Department has greenlit the Commonwealth government's request to purchase an additional 12 MH-60R Multi-Mission (Seahawk) helicopters from Lockheed Martin subsidiary Sikorsky for approximately US\$985 million (\$1.3 billion).

The deal, which will take the total size of the fleet to 36, includes the provision of spare engines, radars, targeting systems, rocket and missile launchers, sensors, missile warning systems, GPS technology, and electronic countermeasures. US contractors are also expected to provide engineering, training and logistics support services.

"This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of the United States," the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said in a statement.

"Australia is one of our most important allies in the western Pacific. The strategic location of this political and economic power contributes significantly to ensuring peace and economic stability in the region. "It is vital to the US national interest to assist our ally in developing and maintaining a strong and ready self-defence capability."

The Royal Australian Navy's fleet of Seahawk helicopters are tipped to bolster anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare capability, while also supporting the execution of vertical replenishment, search and rescue, and communications relay missions.

The Seahawk is equipped with a sophisticated combat systems designed to employ Hellfire air-to-surface missiles and the Mark 54 anti-submarine torpedo.

Some reports have suggested the fleet has expanded in response to technical issues associated with the Airbus-built MH-90 Taipan helicopters, deployed by both Navy and Army.

In June, Defence suspended flying operations of its 47 Taipan aircraft as a “safety precaution” after an issue relating to the “application of the helicopter’s maintenance policy” in the aircraft’s IT support system was identified.

This was the latest in a series of technical incidents associated with the Taipan’s operation.

In 2019, a tail rotor vibration forced the MRH-90 helicopters based at HMAS Albatross to be [grounded](#).

This followed a precautionary landing on HMAS *Adelaide* from an Army MRH-90 a fortnight earlier, prompting officials to temporarily suspend the entire fleet.

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) again listed the MRH program (AIR 9000 Phase 2, 4 and 6) as a “project of concern” in its *2019-20 Defence Major Projects* report.

The ANAO stated there remains an “ongoing inability” to meet materiel capability delivery milestones and performance criteria relating to the Taipan’s gun mount, aero-medical evacuation equipment and the Common Mission Management System.

In December, the joint committee of public accounts and audit called on Defence to [commission a performance review or independent external audit](#) of the entire helicopter acquisition program in lieu of concerns raised by the ANAO.

This followed the establishment of Project SEA 9100 Phase 1 Improved Embarked Logistics Support Helicopter Capability in response to the 2020 Force Structure Plan, which outlined the need to expand and rationalise the support and logistics helicopter fleet operated by Navy, in anticipation of an increase in future naval operations.

"With the Navy’s amphibious and afloat support fleet increasing in number and capability, a commensurate growth in the number of aircraft used by Navy in the support helicopter role is required," a Defence spokesperson said.

Defence is currently in the process of preparing project options for consideration, with the government confirming it is yet to select an aircraft for the Navy’s future fleet of support helicopters as part of the program.







Combined unit maritime camp held at TS Perth last week.





## AUSTRALIAN NAVY CADETS ROUND UP



TS Morrow enjoyed “Operation Long Row” on the Greenough River Geraldton recently. The cadets had a ball and rowed five kilometres up river and camped overnight and rowed back the next day. Weather was perfect but cold. Reports CMDR Jones Commanding Officer of TS Morrow. The morning was absolutely wonderful and we caught a fish that jumped into the boat.





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