

HMAS Ararat — K34/M34



Namesake: Town of Ararat, Victoria
Builder: Evans Deakin & Co in Brisbane
Laid down: 6 July 1942
Launched: 20 February 1943
Commissioned: 16 June 1943
Decommissioned: 11 April 1947

Battle honours:
 Pacific 1943–45
 New Guinea 1943–44[1][2]

Fate: Sold into civilian service. Later scrapped.



Class & type: Bathurst-class corvette
Displacement: 650 tons (standard), 1,025 tons (full war load)
Length: 186 ft (57 m)
Beam: 31 ft (9.4 m)
Draught: 8.5 ft (2.6 m)
Propulsion: triple expansion engine, 2 shafts, 2,000 horsepower
Speed: 15 knots (28 km/h; 17 mph) at 1,750 hp
Complement: 85
Armament: 1 × 4-inch gun
 3 × Oerlikons
 Machine guns
 Depth charges chutes and throwers

HMAS *Ararat* was laid down in the yard of Evans Deakin & Co in Brisbane on 6 July 1942 and was launched on 20 February 1943 by Mrs Fadden, wife of the Leader of the Australian Country Party. *Ararat* commissioned at Brisbane on 16 June 1943 under the command of Lieutenant Norman Montague Muzzell RANR(S).



HMAS Ararat's commissioning crew, 16 June 1943.

The ship commenced her operational duty during the first week of August 1943 as a convoy escort vessel on the east coast of Australia.

16 Sep 1943 attempted to tow ship *Joseph A Holmes* of Sandy Cape shoal. Attempt failed. Tug *Tancred* arrived. 17 Sep 1943 Took tug *Tancred* under tow after wire fouled her propeller and proceeded to Urangan, Qld. Arriving 19 Sep 1943.



Joseph A Holmes



HMAS Tancred

On 17 October 1943 she proceeded from Townsville escorting her first New Guinea convoy for Milne Bay and thereafter continued duty as an escort vessel to the forward areas until the close of the year.

In 1944 *Ararat* continued escort and patrol duties between Queensland and New Guinea until March when she transferred to Langemak, New Guinea. Until May, when she proceeded for Melbourne to refit, she was engaged mainly on escort and patrol work in the New Guinea and New Britain areas.

During this period *Ararat* gained the distinction of being the first ship of her class to visit the newly captured Allied territory at Cape Gloucester and Arawe, New Britain. Following her refit, *Ararat* returned to New Guinea waters in July 1944 and resumed operational duty on escort and patrol work between Langemak and Hollandia.

On 11 August she transferred to the operational control of the United States naval command at Manus Island. Based there until the close of 1944 she was almost constantly at sea on escort and patrol to the forward areas of the rapidly developing Allied offensive.



HMAS Ararat in Sydney, circa August 1943.



*HMAS Ararat and her sister corvettes routinely conducted escort work throughout the war.
She can be seen here leading a merchant ship into harbour.*

Though mostly in New Guinea waters during this period, *Ararat*'s duties at times took her as far afield as the Palau Islands in the Pacific. On the night of 19 October 1944, *Ararat*'s sister ship HMAS *Geelong* sank after a collision with the United States tanker *York* (operated by the United States War Shipping Administration) off the north coast of New Guinea. All hands were saved by *York* and after being landed at Langemak on the morning of 19 October were taken to Milne Bay, some by aircraft and the others by *Ararat*.

The first six months of 1945 were spent on escort, patrol and guard ship duties, mainly in the Morotai area, escorting convoys for Mios Woendi and onward. In March 1945 she returned briefly to Australia when she visited Townsville and in June she was sent to Borneo where Australian troops were engaged in operations against the Japanese forces ashore.

On 22 July 1945, less than a month before the end of hostilities, *Ararat*'s war service came to an end when she departed Langemak en route for Adelaide to refit.



HMAS Ararat as she appeared as part of the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla. Note the number '20' painted on her funnel.

On 22 October 1945 *Ararat* joined the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla (led by HMAS *Swan*) for post war mine clearance operations. As a minesweeper, she operated first in Australian waters (October 1945 to April 1946) and then, until November 1946, in the waters of New Britain, New Ireland and the Solomon Islands.



GOOD COMPANY: The entire crew of HMAS Ararat in February 1946. Neg: Navy DJ2.



Some of HMAS Ararat Crew August 1946

The Advertiser (Adelaide) Thu 9 Ag 1945**HMAS *Ararat* ARRIVES****Tribute to A.I.F.**

At Tarakan after 14 months of escort work and submarine patrols in the Pacific, involving nearly 50,000 miles, the corvette HMAS *Ararat* - berthed at Port Adelaide yesterday. Included in the crew are about 20 South Australians, who will have a few days leave. The *Ararat* arrived at Tarakan shortly after the invasion, and many of the crew went ashore with the 9th Division. "They are the finest fellows we have ever met." said one South Australian rating, and this tribute was enthusiastically supported by officers and ratings.

Commissioned Engineer C. A. Bannigan, of Largs Bay, said that he and a party of officers had been taken to within close range of the front line by Col. F. A. Tucker, of Unley. "The morale of the army boys was astounding, operating as they were under adverse conditions of terrain and weather." He said that later the party visited the headquarters of Brig. Whitehead and his aide, Capt. Geddes, of Port Pirie. Five Americans Rescued. Able Seaman W. Supple of Adelaide, said that during their present tour they had rescued five Americans from a sunken barge adrift between Madang and Finschhafen.

The men had been adrift for nine hours, and were exhausted when rescued. One of the Americans was picked up in the sea seven miles from shore. It later transpired that this man had decided to swim to shore to seek help. He had been in the water for three hours. The story of a 1,500-mile trip by a native in an open canoe in an effort to evade the Japanese was told by Midshipman H. J. Lewis, of Broadview. Midshipman Lewis said that the corvette had gone to Hermit Islands, near the Admiralties, early this year, to evacuate 50 natives.

The natives told them that there was a Japanese on the island. When a boat party went to investigate they found an emaciated native who said that he had come from Ocean Island, about 1,500 miles away. The native said that when the Japanese had arrived on Ocean Island, he and three other natives had set out in an open canoe. After seven months in the canoe, the native arrived at Hermit Island. He said that he had run away from the Japanese because they were "cutting his people's heads off." His two companions did not survive the journey, one being eaten by sharks, and the other dying of exposure Japanese.

Cannibalism. Evidence that the Japanese were eating their own soldiers in beleaguered garrisons in the Pacific, was advanced by a number of the crew. Sub-Lt. J. Goth, of Melbourne, said that at Hansa Bay, during February of this year, the *Ararat* had picked up AIF patrols.

The captain of the patrol had told the crew that two days before his patrol had been involved in a skirmish with the Japanese, one Australian being killed. The next day the Australian patrol surprised a Japanese headquarters. The captain said that in a Japanese kitchen at the headquarters there was indisputable evidence that the Japanese had been practising cannibalism. Japanese soldiers were found with fleshy parts of the body mutilated, and parts of a human body had been found in a Kitchen.

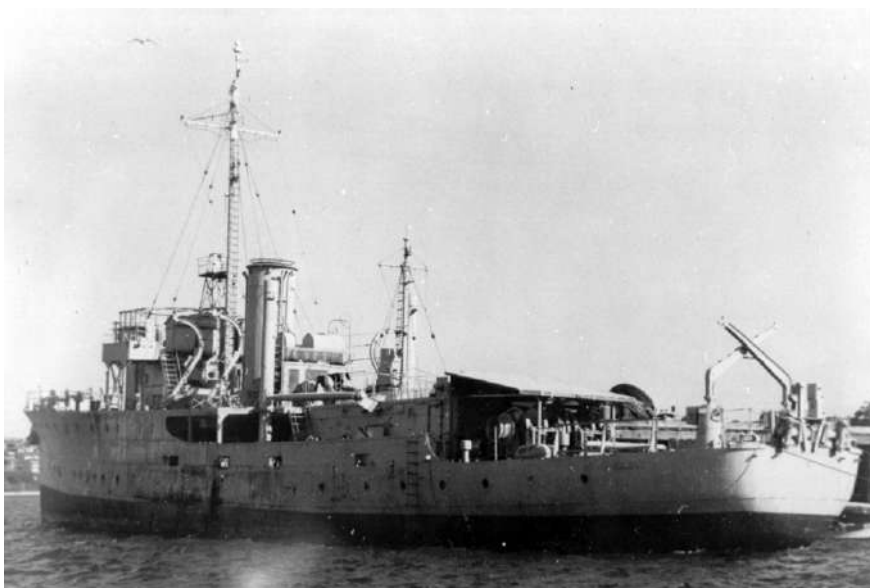
The commander of the *Ararat* Lt. N. Muzell, of Victoria, who received bullet wounds in the legs while on the minesweeper Gunbar during the bombing of Darwin, said that the outstanding impression he had gained during the cruise was the work done by the YMCA and Salvation Army in the forward areas of Tarakan. Among the South Australians who arrived were, Signaller B. Cotton, Clarence Gardens; Supply Assistant P. Spooner, Clarence Park; Stoker R. Hedley, Port Pirie; and Able Seaman D. Thomas, Adelaide.

On 19 November she arrived at Sydney from Rabaul, her work with the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla completed and her seagoing career ended. She had steamed 109,000 miles. *Ararat* paid off into the F Class Reserve Fleet at Sydney on 11 April 1947.



Ararat alongside at Garden Island, Sydney while placed in reserve.

After a lengthy period in Reserve, *Ararat* was sold on 6 January 1961 to Burns Philp & Co Ltd, Darwin. She was later resold to Japanese interests. Under that ownership she carried out salvage operations in Darwin Harbour.



HMAS Ararat laid up, post WWII.

Ararat left Darwin on 20 July 1961, under the control of the Fujita Salvage Company of Japan, towing a floating crane. Broken up in Japan 1962.

