HMAS *Ballarat* – J184/ B236

Namesake: City of Ballarat, Victoria
Builder: HMA Naval Dockyard, Vic
Laid down: 19 April 1940
Launched: 10 December 1940
Commissioned: 30 August 1941
Decommissioned: 27 September 1946
Motto: "Defend the Flag"
Battle honours:
    Pacific 1941–45
    New Guinea 1942–44
    Okinawa 1945
Fate: Sold into civilian service in 1947
    Sold for scrap in 1953.
	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, 1,750 horsepower
	Speed: 15 knots (28 km/h; 17 mph)
	Complement: 85
	Armament:
	    1 × 4-inch gun
	    3 × Oerlikons (later 2)
	    1 × Bofors (installed later)
	    Machine guns
	    Depth charges chutes
	    & throwers

Ordered for the British Admiralty and commissioned by RAN, *Ballarat* was launched at Melbourne Harbour Trust Dockyard, Williamstown, by Mrs Dunston, wife of the Premier of Victoria, on 10 December 1940.

Launch of Ballarat at Melbourne Harbour Trust Dockyard, Williamstown.

The launching of HMAS Ballarat.

HMAS Ballarat following her launching.

HMAS Ballarat

Ballarat commissioned at Melbourne on 30 August 1941 under the command of Lieutenant Commander Alfred D Barling RANR(S).

After trials in the Melbourne area *Ballarat* sailed for Sydney on 20 September 1941. After arrival three days later the ship joined the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla, based in Sydney. On 1 November 1941 *Ballarat* sailed for Jervis Bay to give anti-submarine protection to the transport *Queen Mary*. That ship and another giant liner of the Cunard Line, *Queen Elizabeth*, were to comprise Convoy US13 to the Middle East, the troops embarked being mainly from the 6th, 7th and 9th Australian Divisions.

After embarkation of troops at Sydney the transports proceeded to Jervis Bay, whence they sailed for the Middle East on 3 November. *Ballarat* returned to Sydney the same day. On 14 November 1941, *Ballarat* departed Sydney towing Oil Lighter No 1. The vessels proceeded via Brisbane, Townsville and Thursday Island to Darwin, where they arrived on 8 December. Two days later *Ballarat* commenced escort duty between Darwin, Timor and Ambon.

She saw action early in her career, arriving at Batavia early in January 1942. She then proceeded to Singapore. After leaving Singapore on 3 February 1942 she carried out patrols in Banka Strait ('Bomb Alley'), and was employed also in rescuing shipwrecked crews and carrying out demolition work.

Ballarat carried out one of the largest rescue operations, picking up 215 survivors from the MV *Derrymore*, sixty miles north-west of Batavia on 14 February 1942. *Derrymore* had been sunk by Japanese submarine in position 5°18′S, 106°20′E. amongst those rescued by *Ballarat* was Flying Officer JG Gorton RAAF, who was later to become Prime Minister of Australia. Amongst other ministerial posts held by Mr Gorton before he became Prime Minister was that of Minister for the Navy.

SS Derrymore

Left: Survivors from Merchant Ship SS Derrymore. Right: Flying Officer John G Gorton (indicated by the arrow), later Prime Minister of Australia, among survivors from the torpedoed SS Derrymore (4799 tons) who are being taken aboard Ballarat. The survivors, numbering 215, included 189 British Airmen.

Oosthaven, Sumatra, Netherlands East Indies. 20 February1942. Starboard side view of HMAS Ballarat and valuable equipment, including aircraft and technical spares, being loaded on board.

Ballarat landed parties at Oosthaven in the Netherlands East Indies for demolition activities, successfully carried out without loss.

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Oosthaven, Sumatra, Netherlands East Indies. 20 February1942. Members of the Royal Air Force armed with tommy guns wait on the deck of the corvette HMAS Ballarat as she moves alongside and is secured to the wharf. A party of thirty airmen covered the northern approaches to the wharf while the remainder of the RAF units and ship's company loaded valuable equipment on board.

Ballarat wearing her standard Admiralty Pattern 507C paint scheme and early pennant number, J184.

With sister ships, *Ballarat* took a prominent part in the evacuation of Sumatra, operating from Palembang. She was the last RAN ship to leave, staying behind to sink a small unseaworthy minesweeper.

The ship then returned to Australia and was employed on convoy escort work, mainly to New Guinea. In November she and her sister ship HMAS *Katoomba* (I) were heavily attacked by Japanese dive bombers.

In December 1942 *Ballarat* and her sister ships *Broome* and *Colac* were detailed to transport Australian troops and land them as far forward as possible in the Buna area. The three vessels reached the landing point at Cape Sudest near Oro Bay without incident, but a few minutes later unidentified aircraft began dropping flares.

Because of the threat of attack from enemy aircraft and from enemy warships believed to be in the area it was decided to retire temporarily after only 46 men had disembarked out of a total of 762.

Later the same day (14 December) the operation was successfully completed using a new landing position and under cover of darkness all troops were put safely ashore. During the remainder of the month *Ballarat* was involved in troop carrying on three further occasions.
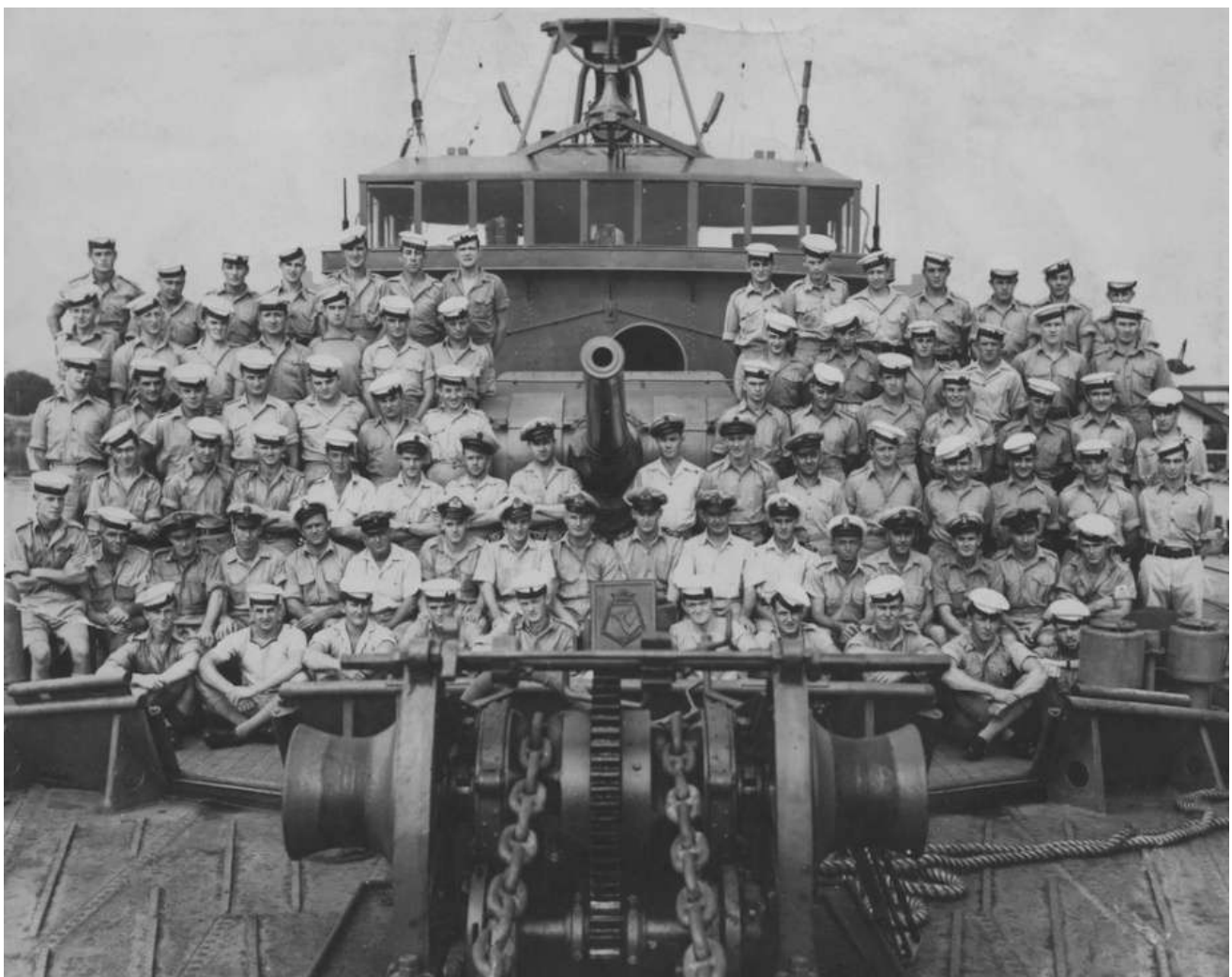
HMAS Ballarat's ship's company, May 1944.
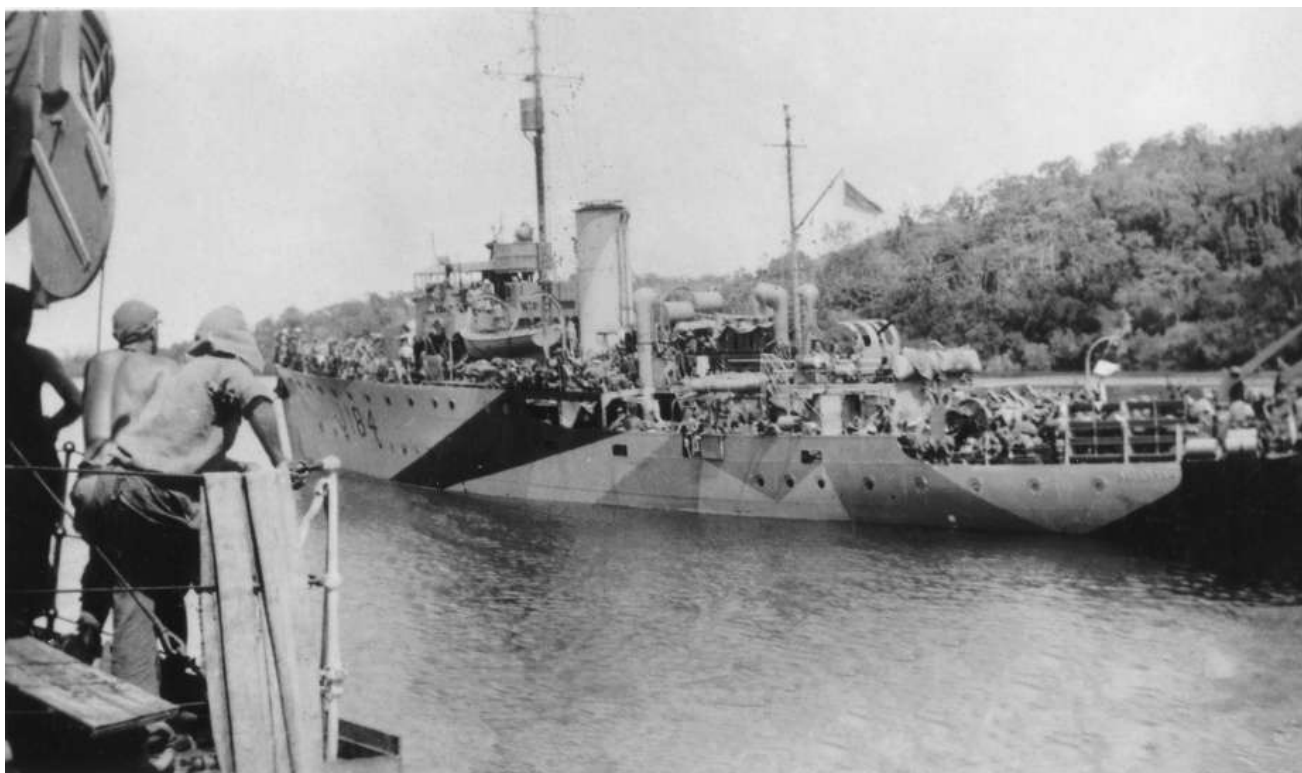
Ballarat wearing her disruptive pattern wartime camouflage paint scheme.

In April 1943 *Ballarat* was ordered to operate off the Australian east coast to counter the Japanese submarine menace. On 27th, after exchanging convoys, the ship headed south again.

Two days later *Ballarat* was detached from the escort to search for survivors from S.S. *Wollongbar* which had been torpedoed and sunk off Port Macquarie. None were found, but five out of thirty-seven were picked up by another vessel.

Returning north for escort duty to New Guinea in January 1944 *Ballarat* was later employed between Thursday Island and Darwin. In August 1944 she ferried troops from Eilanden River (southern Dutch New Guinea) bringing them without loss to Merauke.


Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, GCB, KBE, RN inspects men of the 2nd Minesweeping Flotilla in Watsons Bay, Sydney, November 1944.

In 1945 she was minesweeping off Sydney prior to the arrival of the British Pacific Fleet, departing for Manus on 25 February and arriving at Leyte Gulf on 26 March. *Ballarat* then participated in the operation for the capture of Okinawa (March-May 1945).

Ballarat arrived at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, in September 1945 and took part in the surrender ceremony at Tokyo, after which she was engaged in minesweeping in the Hong Kong area with the 20th and 21st Minesweeping Flotillas.

Crew members of Ballarat have something to cheer about as their ship secures for the first time to the Japanese homeland territory of Yokosuka Naval Base, exactly six years after war was declared.
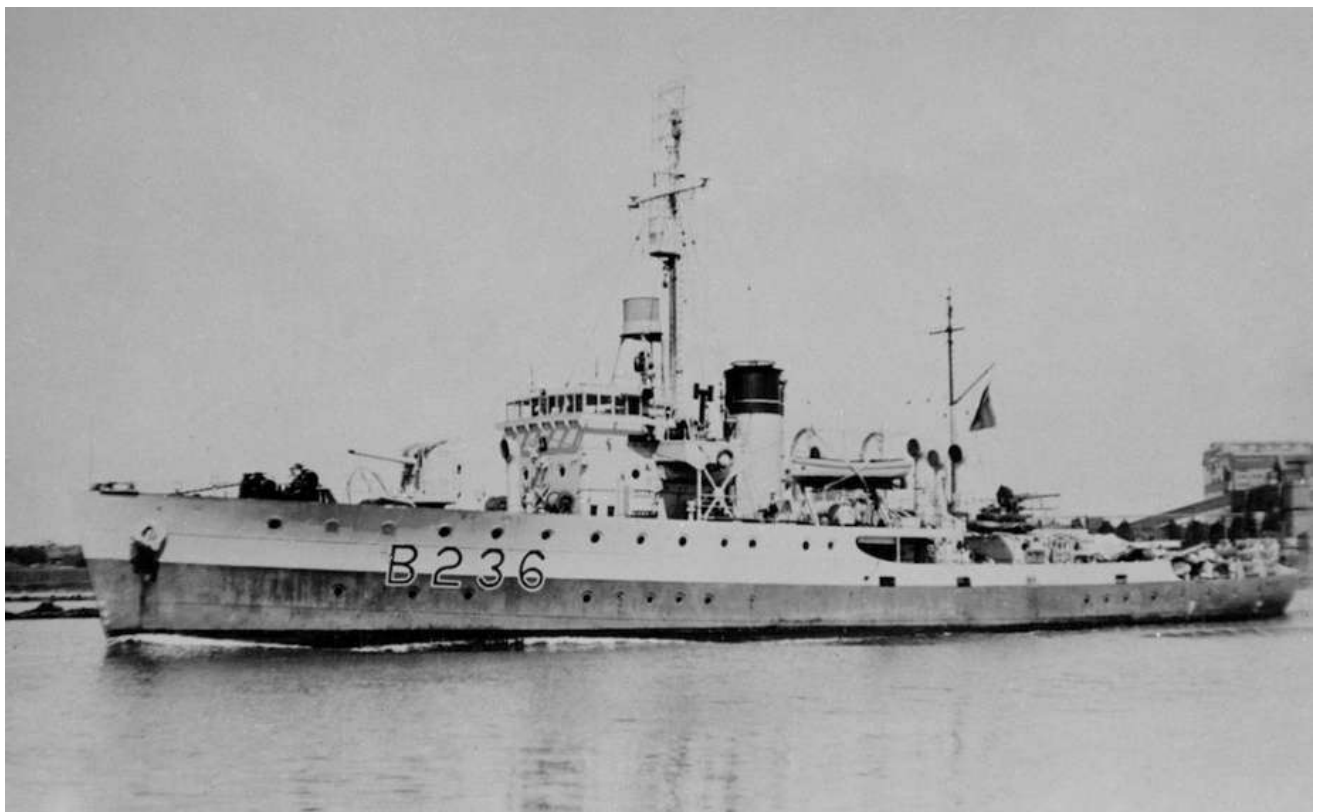
HMAS Ballarat wearing her British Pacific Fleet pennant number, Yokosuka Naval Base, circa 1945. Note also the type 271 radar at the foot of the foremast and the type 291 radar aerial mounted at the masthead.

Sailors from Ballarat clear the wharf on the ship's arrival at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, September 1945.

Unidentified memoir:

"Then the almost inevitable happened. On 6 Nov 1945 at Amoy, as she finished the day and headed for harbour, a tremendous explosion split the waters just astern, damaging our ship. A magnetic or acoustic mine had risen from the seabed and detonated. It was only the shortness of our hull and the speed at which we were travelling, that saved the ship from being blown apart with the loss of many of the crew. We were badly shaken and again wondering if we would yet fail to make it back home. We did survive, however, and after being towed into harbour for repairs, set sail for Hong Kong and then homeward to Sydney."

Army News (Darwin) Thu 8 Nov 1945

HMAS *Ballarat* Damaged

SINGAPORE, Wednesday HMAS *Ballarat* was damaged when a mine exploded about 20 feet astern as she was entering Amoy Harbour on the, China coast, yesterday. The corvette's steering gear was put out of, faction, but it is expected that temporary repairs at Amoy Harbour will enable the warship to be sailed to Hong Kong Harbour.

Ballarat berths inboard of her sister ships Bendigo and Tamworth (B250) at Williamstown, January 1946.

Returned to Melbourne on 13 December where the ship's company went on long leave. At the conclusion of hostilities *Ballarat* had steamed 130,000 miles. The ship paid off into Reserve at Sydney on 27 September 1946.

On 7 January 1947 *Ballarat* was sold to Mr. Patterson, Hong Kong for £12,200, then later sold to a Hong Kong shipping company, China Traders Ltd, on 10 July 1947. However, *Ballarat* did not leave Australian waters, and in December 1950 was resold to the Ta Hing Company (Hong Kong) Ltd.

THE CORVETTES EX-HMAS BALLARAT AND EX-HMAS GOULBURN LAID UP AT PYRMONT, NSW. SOLD TO THE TAI HING COMPANY OF HONG KONG, THEY WERE REGISTERED UNDER THE HONDURAN FLAG AS CARMENCITA AND BENITA RESPECTIVELY. THE BALLARAT HAS HAD HER FORECASTLE DECK EXTENDED AFT AND HER BOAT STOWAGE INCREASED. HER BRIDGE HAS BEEN ALTERED AND A DECKHOUSE FITTED AFT. THE MINESWEEPING WINCH IS STILL FITTED ON THE QUARTERDECK (RIGHT CENTRE). SHE HAS BEEN REPAINTED IN CIVILIAN COLOURS.

Many of the Bathurst Class corvettes were sold for commercial use after the war. Here the former HMAS Goulburn (Benita) can be seen outboard of Ballarat, renamed Carmencita.

Ballarat was subsequently refitted for the Chinese coastal trade and renamed *Carmencita*. but in January 1951 the Commonwealth Government issued a Statutory Order banning her from proceeding to Chinese waters.

The Daily Telegraph Mon 39 Mar 1953

WARSHIP MAY BE SCRAPPED

A former Navy corvette, which has been at anchor in Sydney Harbor for six years, will probably be sold as scrap. The Government has refused its owners permission to move it to Hong Kong. The ship, formerly H.M.A.S. *Ballarat*, is now named *Carmencita* she is anchored at Long-nose Point. In 1947 China Traders Limited, of Hong Kong, bought the ship from the Australian Government for about £12,000.

In December, 1950, China Traders sold *Ballarat* to Ta Hing and Company, Hong Kong, who renamed it Carmencita. A condition of the sale was that *Carmencita* could get a clearance from Sydney.

The Government refused a clearance for *Carmencita* and *Benita* — formerly the corvette HMAS *Goulburn* which another buyer, P. J. Lobo and Company, Hong Kong, had purchased. The Government refused a clearance after reports that the ships would go to Communist China. Sale of both ships lapsed when the Government refused clearance.

Since then both *Carmencita* and *Benita* have been anchored together at Long-nose Point. China Traders last week cabled its Sydney agents, John Manners and Company, to take delivery of Carmencita from American Trading Company, Sydney agents for Ta Hing.

A representative of John Manners said yesterday that he had advised China Traders that *Carmencita* be sold as scrap or sold to a friendly Government for combat duty. But I think that the vessel will be scrapped," he said.

Shipping men said yesterday that the future of *Benita* was uncertain.

Unidentified newspaper report, September 1953:

Ex-H.M.A. Ships BALLARAT and GOULBURN Leave Australia.

On 1st September an interesting tow left Sydney heading north. The towing vessel was the 382-ton S. S. ISABEL, owned by the Isabel Navigation Co, (John Manners and Co. Ltd.), and the ships towed were the former Ocean Mine-sweepers BALLARAT and GOULBURN purchased by John Manners and Co., Hong Kong;, and renamed CARMENCITA and BENITA respectively.

The first leg of the tow was to have been to Rabaul, where John Manners and Co, have sold BENITA to Messrs, Nelson and Robertson Pty.Ltd. as a lighter for copra storage, (BENITA is virtually a hulk, as she has been almost completely gutted out and her engines removed in Sydney).

S.S, ISABEL was to continue the tow of CARMENCITA to Kobe, where the ex-O.M.S, is apparently to be broken up. (CARMENCITA has been demilitarised, but her boilers and engines are in suitable condition for refitting to permit the vessel to steam).

Little publicity accompanied the departure of the tow from Sydney, BENITA being the first ship at the end of the tow-line end CARMENCITA being secured to the stem of BENITA All went well for ten days, the tow making a good speed of advance of 5 knots. On 12th September, however, whilst in position 500 miles north-east of Townsville, CARMENCITA broke adrift and ISABEL commenced a search for her whilst still towing BENITA. After several days' fruitless searching, during which an air search by R.A.A.F, aircraft from Townsville was also unsuccessful, ISABEL continued to Samarai with BENITA.

Leaving BENITA at Samarai she returned to the area to search and was fortunate in recovering CARMENCITA on 20th September. ISABEL proceeded to Cairns for fuel and departed with CARMENCITA on 29th September for Kobe, via Hong Kong.

It is understood that John Manners and Co. acquired the two vessels for £4,000. A previous purchaser of the ships, the American Trading and Shipping Co., is believed to have paid out £25,000 on purchase money and harbour dues for the period the ships were lying in Sydney prior to the present sale.

It has been reported that the ship was broken up in 1953.