

HMAS *Benalla* – J323/M323



Namesake: City of Benalla, Victoria
 Builder: HMA Naval Dockyard
 Victoria
 Laid down: 24 March 1942
 Launched: 19 December 1942
 Commissioned: 27 April 1943
 Decommissioned: 28 January 1946

Motto:
 "We Lead Others Follow"

Battle honours:
 • New Guinea 1943-44[1][2]

Fate: Sold for scrap on 20 February
 1958



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

Speed: 15 knots
 (28 km/h; 17 mph) at 1,750

hp
 Complement: 107

Armament: 1 × 4-inch gun
 1 × 12-pounder gun
 (temporary installation)
 3 × Oerlikons (later

increased
 to 5, then decreased to 4)
 Machine guns
 Depth charges chutes and
 throwers

Launched 19 December 1942 by Mrs Drakeford, wife of the Minister for Air and Minister for Civil Aviation at the Melbourne Harbour Trust Yard, Williamstown.



HMAS Benalla before launch



HMAS Benalla launching

Benalla commissioned at Melbourne on 27 April 1943 under the command of Acting Lieutenant Commander Leslie Norman Morison RANR(S).



Although nominally a minesweeper, *Benalla* was fitted during construction for survey duties and did not carry minesweeping gear. 'X' Deck was extended to accommodate a large chart room. Occasionally if her program permitted *Benalla* combined convoy escort duty with passage to another operating area.



Commissioned on 27 April 1943, HMAS Benalla

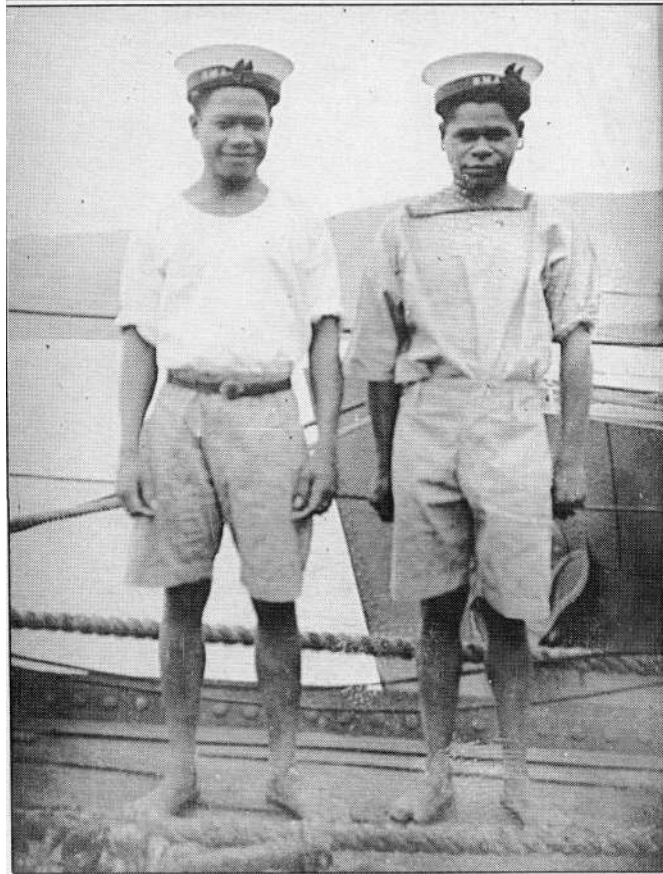
On 19 May 1943 the ship departed Melbourne for Sydney, where she arrived on 22 May. After completion of trials *Benalla* was assigned to duty in northern waters. She sailed from Sydney for Brisbane, on 2 June 1943, with an ammunition lighter in tow and arrived at Brisbane on 6 June.

On 15 June she sailed for Townsville, arriving on 18 June. En route to New Guinea waters to take up survey duties *Benalla* was one of the escorts for a convoy of six ships (three for Milne Bay and three for Port Moresby), which departed Townsville on 20 June 1943. *Benalla's* sister ship HMAS Katoomba was the second escort.

When the convoy split *Benalla* and Katoomba escorted the Milne Bay and Port Moresby sections respectively. Another sister ship, HMAS Bunbury, joined the convoy from Cairns and accompanied *Benalla* to Milne Bay.

On 30 June 1943 *Benalla* and her sister ship HMAS Shepparton were units of the naval force supporting the landing by United States troops on Kiriwina Island. Landings on that island and Woodlark Island, both in the Trobriand Group, were unopposed, there being no Japanese troops on the islands. Following this operation *Benalla* was based at Milne Bay for survey duties.

During July-September 1943 a Survey Group comprising *Benalla*, Shepparton, HMA Ships Stella and Polaris and other small craft carried out preparatory work for Australian landings at Lae, Salamaua and Finschhafen. *Benalla* continued her survey work based at Milne Bay until early December.



FORMAL: Manuel (left) and Sally in uniform. They served on the *Benalla* while it was in New Guinea waters and joined it from the *Whyalla* at Townsville in June 1943. Neg: Navy 8TL



INFORMAL: Manuel and Sally in their own clothes. The boys were paid off at their home Nuakarta, an island off the north coast of New Guinea on Christmas Day 1944. Neg: Navy 5TL.



HMAS Benalla during her 1943 refit in Sydney.



IN THE SHALLOWS: Survey tenders Sealark, Hearty and Skiff alongside Benalla in New Guinea. Neg: Navy 2TL

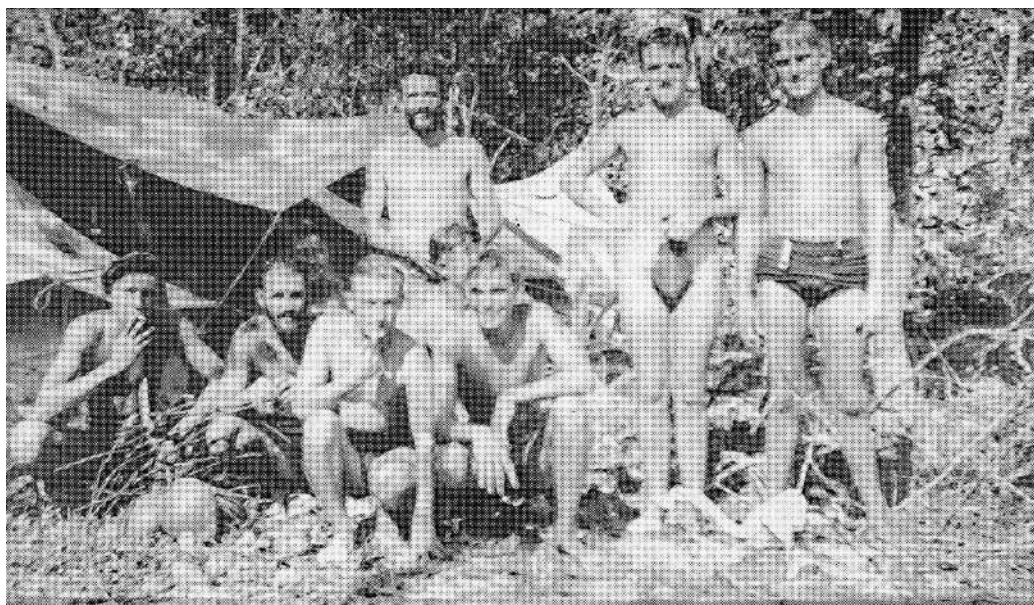
On 9 December 1943 the ship arrived at Sydney to undergo a refit. *Benalla* sailed from Sydney on 29 January 1944 and returned to survey duties in New Guinea waters. During March and April 1944 the ship participated in surveys of Seeadler Harbour (in the Admiralty Island Group) following the capture of the islands by United States troops. In August she returned to Brisbane for a refit lasting two months.

On 11 October 1944 *Benalla* sailed for Hollandia, from where she sailed for the Philippines on 29 October as part of the escort for 20 United States liberty ships.

Arriving at Leyte Gulf on 4 November 1944 *Benalla* joined the frigate HMAS Gascoyne for survey duty in San Pedro Bay before returning to New Guinea waters in December where she continued survey work. Christmas Day 1944 was spent at Nuakata Island.



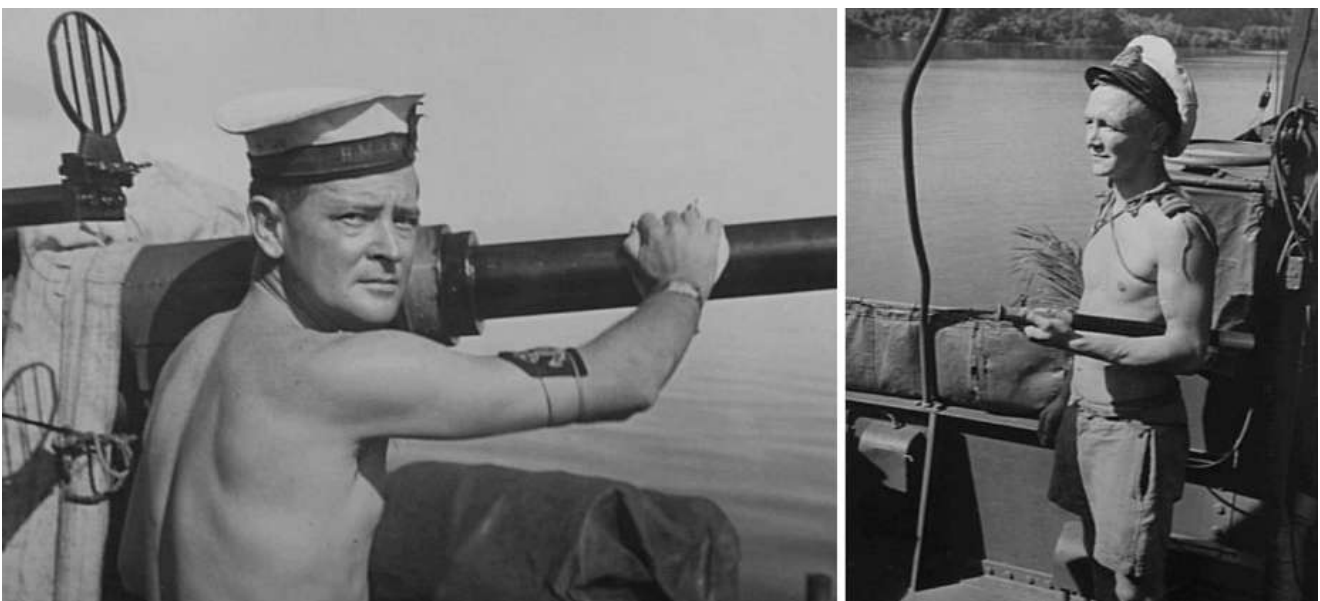
Christmas celebrations on board Benalla. On the right can be seen Telegraphist John Barry of Victoria dressed as Father Christmas.



Some of the crew at a tide pole party on shore. Neg: Navy 1TL.



Christmas lunch being prepared on board Benalla. Left: Known as 'spud barbers', Rex Calvert, Stoker Bob Jones, AB David Scholley, Leading Stoker George Hodge, Ordinary Seaman Jeff Davies and AB Max Hungerford peel potatoes on Benalla's upper deck. Right: Leading Cook Owen Keer preparing Christmas turkeys in Benalla's galley.



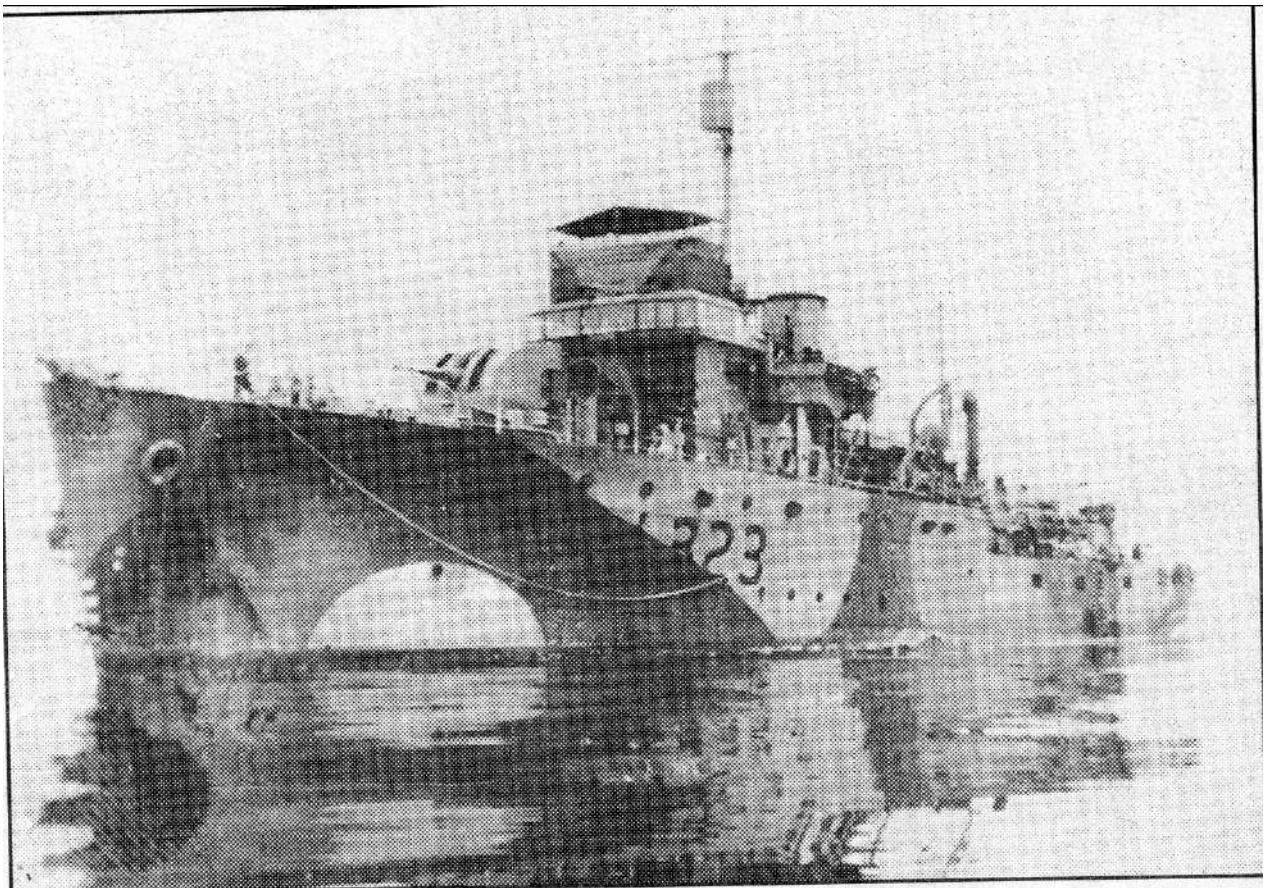
Left: Benalla's captain Lieutenant Commander T Gale exchanges duties with Able Seaman Anthony Copley as part of the Christmas Day merriment.

Benalla arrived at Darwin on 6 January 1945 to take up duty with a Survey Group on the Australian north west coast. This work occupied her for four months and on 3 May she sailed from Darwin for Fremantle, where she remained until July. On 20 July *Benalla* arrived at Darwin to resume survey duty.

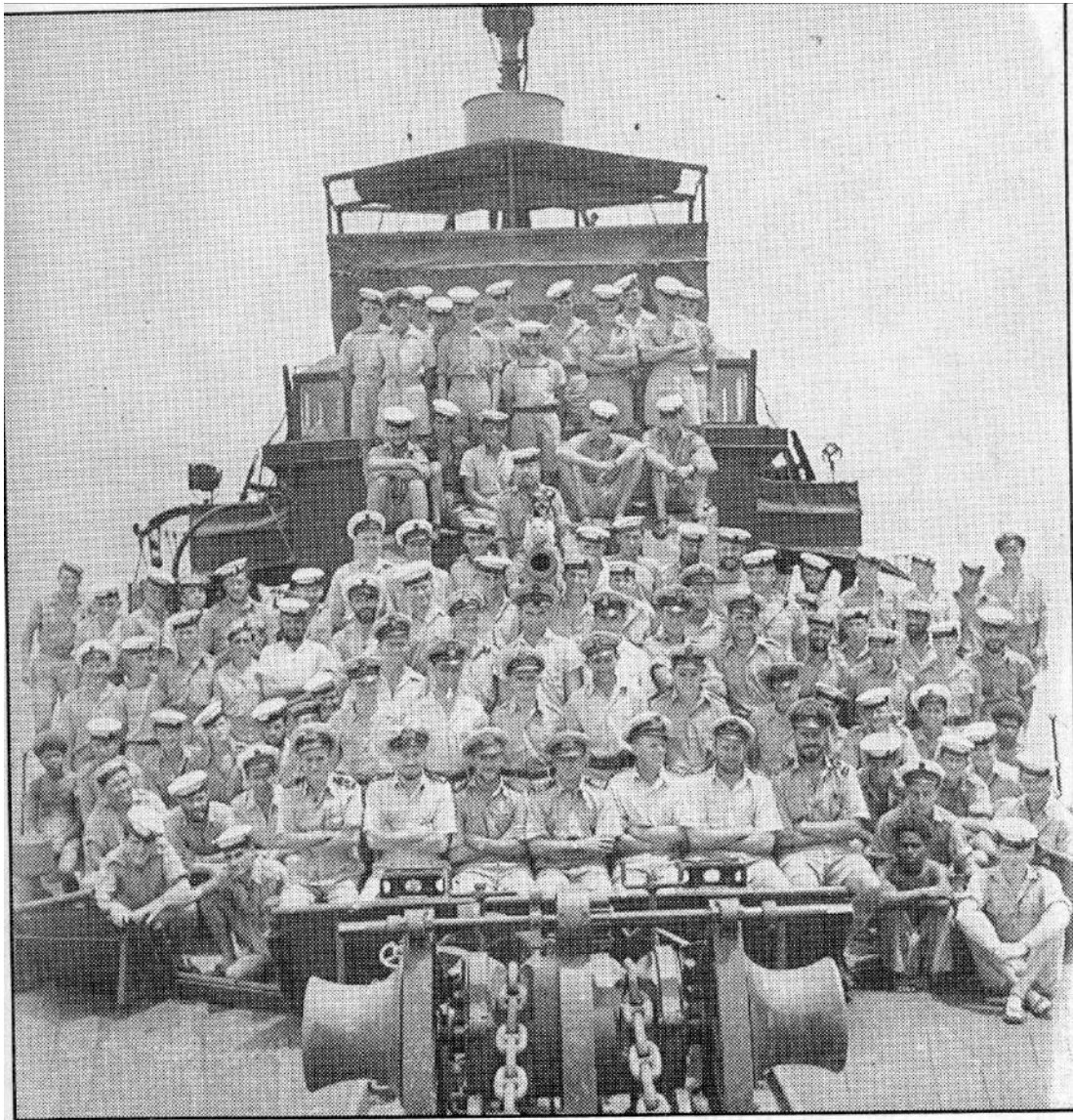
Benalla sailed from Darwin on 7 September 1945 as a unit of the Australian/Dutch force ordered to Koepang for the ceremony of surrender of all Japanese forces in Timor. The ships arrived at Koepang on 11 September and at noon that day the Japanese commander signed the instrument of surrender aboard the sloop HMAS Moresby. After returning from Timor, *Benalla* resumed survey duty in the north western area.



HMAS Benalla differed from her sister corvettes with an additional 'monkey island' fitted above her bridge. In this photo, taken later during the war, types 271 and 291 radar can be seen mounted at the base of the foremast and at the masthead.



The ship in chocolate and green camouflage for Pacific survey work.



The entire ship's company of the *Benalla*, taken in 1944. Neg: Navy 9TL

On 2 November 1945 she departed Darwin and proceeded to Fremantle. She paid off into reserve at Fremantle on 28 January 1946. *Benalla* remained at Fremantle until 25 March 1955, when the tug HMAS *Sprightly* sailed for Melbourne with *Benalla* in tow.

The ships arrived at Melbourne on 4 April and *Benalla* remained in reserve but was later transferred to Geelong. While still remaining in reserve the ship was towed from Geelong to Sydney by *Sprightly*, departing Geelong on 21 January 1956 and arriving at Sydney on 25 January.

On 20 February 1958 *Benalla* was sold for scrap to Mitsubishi Shoji Kaisha Ltd of Tokyo. The Japanese salvage vessel *Tokushima Maru* sailed from Sydney on 25 April 1958 with *Benalla* in tow and in due course she was broken up for scrap in Japan.

