

HMAS *Bendigo* – J187/ B327/ A111



Namesake: City of Bendigo, Victoria
 Builder: Cockatoo Docks
 Laid down: 12 August 1940
 Launched: 1 March 1941
 Commissioned: 10 May 1941
 Decommissioned: 27 September 1946

Motto: "Advance with Purpose"

Battle honours:
 Pacific 1942–45
 New Guinea 1942–44
 Okinawa 1945[1][2]

Fate: Sold to a Chinese company as a civilian vessel, later absorbed into PLAN



Class & type: Bathurst-class
 Displacement: 590 tonnes (standard)
 Length: 56.69 m (186.0 ft)
 Beam: 9.45 m (31.0 ft)
 Draught: 2.59 m (8.5 ft)
 Propulsion: triple expansion engine,

2 shafts
 Speed: 15 knots (28 km/h)
 Complement: 85
 Armament: 1 × 4-inch gun,
 3 × Oerlikons,
 Machine guns,
 Depth charges chutes
 and throwers

Ordered for the British Admiralty and commissioned by RAN, HMAS *Bendigo* was laid down at Cockatoo Docks and Engineering Co Ltd, Sydney, NSW on 12 August 1940. She was the first RAN warship to carry the name of the city in Victoria situated 150km north west of the state's capital, Melbourne. She was launched on 1 March 1941 by Dame Mary Hughes, wife of the Minister for the Navy.



Bendigo on the slipway prior to launch



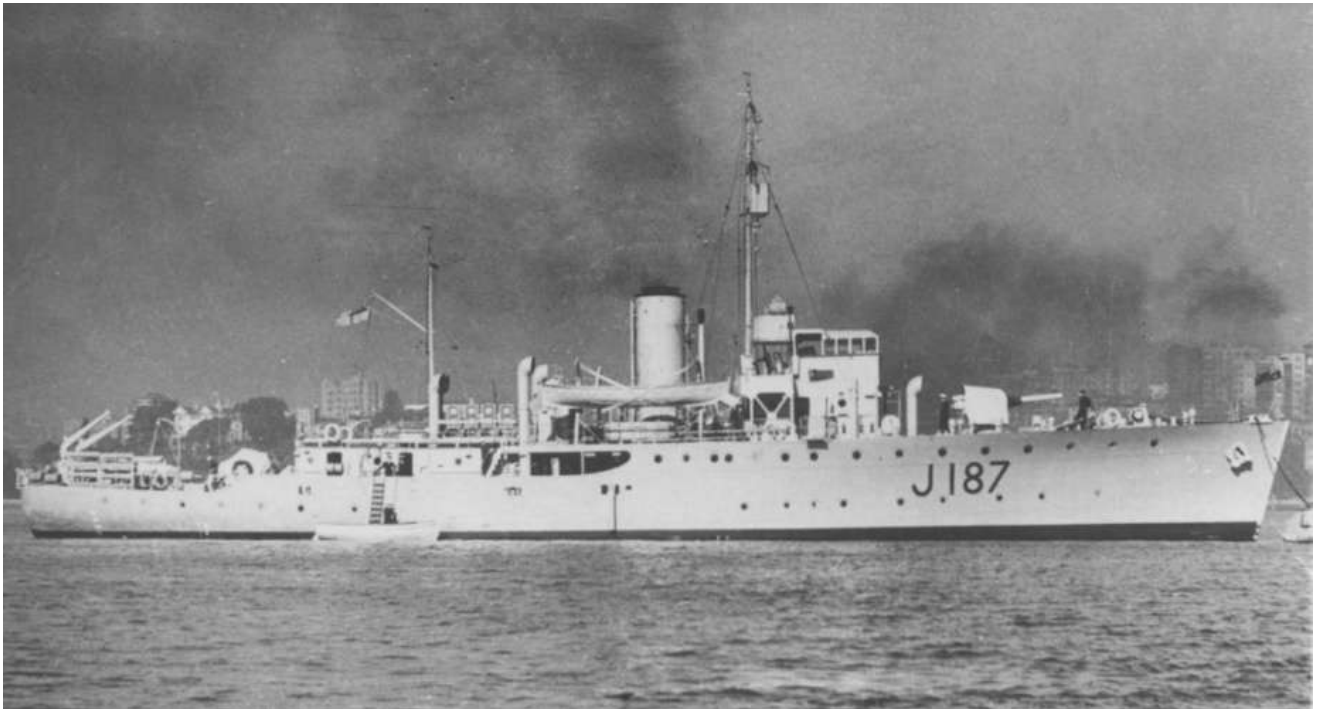


The ship is blessed and then officially named by Dame Mary Hughes before taking to the water for the first time

Bendigo commissioned at Sydney on 10 May 1941 under the command of Lieutenant Commander James Alexander Ronald Patrick RANR(S).

Bendigo departed Sydney on 4 July 1941 and began her active career in the Darwin area where she remained for a period of two months. On 22 September she sailed for Singapore to become a unit of the China Squadron. The period remaining before the outbreak of the Pacific War was spent on escort, sweeping and patrol duties in the Singapore area. On 24 November 1941 *Bendigo* became a unit of the 21st Minesweeping Flotilla (HMA Ships *Maryborough* (Flotilla Leader), *Goulburn*, *Burnie* and *Bendigo*).





The Bathurst Class corvettes were capable of performing a broad range of duties. During her commission Bendigo undertook minesweeping, patrol, convoy escort and anti-submarine roles.



Smokey the ship's cat

January 1942 saw *Bendigo* operating out of Singapore on sweeping, escort and patrol duties, down to Berhala and Banka Strait. On 30 January *Bendigo* anchored in Singapore Roads and remained there until 6 February. During this time the ship experienced 25 alerts and Japanese bombers were over two or three times a day.

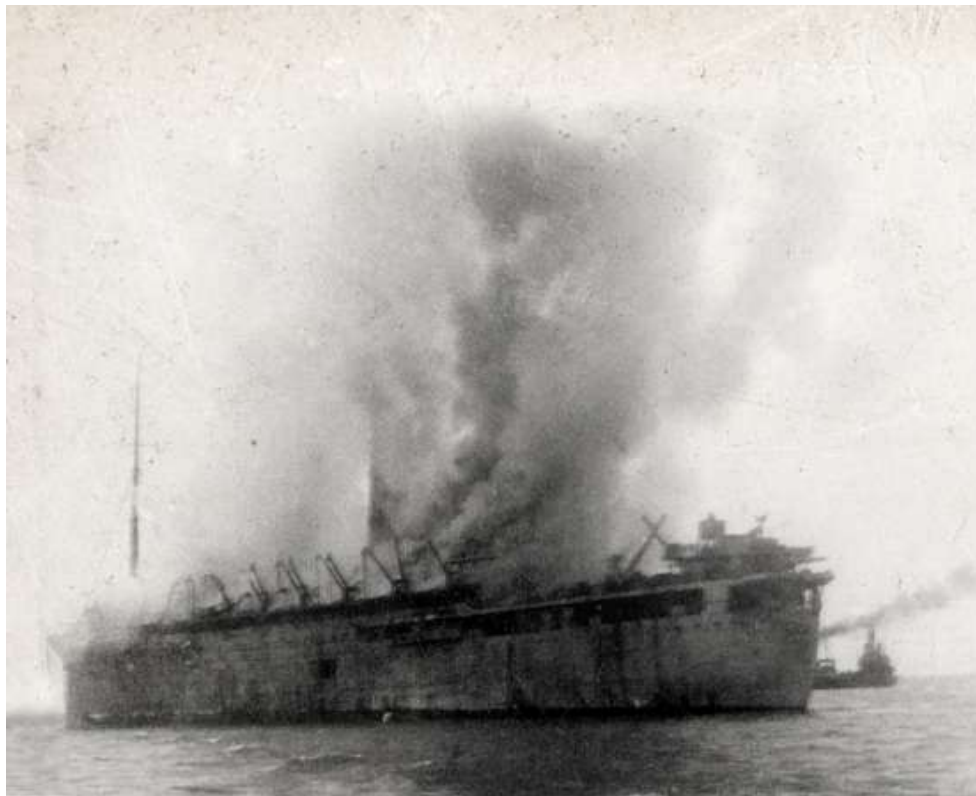


2-pounder AA Gun aft

On 2 February 1942, two near misses caused extensive scarring from shrapnel. *Bendigo* made only one move from her anchorage during this period.

On 5 Feb

Bendigo rescued 78 survivors from the burning *Empress of Asia* at Sultan Shoal.



Empress of Asia burning at Singapore



HMAS Bendigo wearing her disruptive wartime camouflage, circa 1942. (AWM 026663)

On 6 February *Bendigo* proceeded to No 24 Swept Channel north of Durian Strait, to act as lightship for an outward bound convoy. At 01:00 the following day, her sister ship HMAS *Wollongong* approached with instructions to proceed in company, as she had Senior Officer Minesweepers on board.

At daybreak *Bendigo* landed a party in the vicinity of Abang Besair to search for British airmen. Dense undergrowth forced the abandonment of the search. Subsequent signals informed *Bendigo* that the original message should have read 'search for survivors from British Airman' (presumably another ship).

Re-joining *Wollongong*, the two minesweepers proceeded to an anchorage off the west coast of Durei Island. At 23:00 *Bendigo* and *Wollongong* sailed to rendezvous with three auxiliary minesweepers. The three auxiliaries were contacted at daybreak on 8 February and all five ships proceeded to Amphitrite Bay.

Seventeen Japanese aircraft in one flight had been sighted en route and at 15:00 the same day the flotilla sailed for Batavia. During the course of the voyage two of the auxiliary sweepers lost contact in the darkness. *Bendigo* commenced a search at 01:00 on 9 February.

Failing to locate the missing ships, she put into Gambie Bay until 13:50, when an attempt was begun to locate *Wollongong*. The latter vessel was eventually rejoined at 08:00 the following day (10 February) at Pulo Benu Inlet. The two ships still missing had, unknown to *Bendigo*, proceeded independently for Batavia.



Left: An officer taking a compass bearing on the bridge of Bendigo. (AWM 078120) Right: Personnel receiving their pay aboard Bendigo. (AWM 084713)

At 06:59 on 11 February 1942 *Bendigo* and *Wollongong* entered Palembang Channel, moved up river and anchored off the oil refineries. After fuelling the following day, the minesweepers sailed at 13:40, picked up a convoy at the mouth of the Palembang River and proceeded for Batavia. Banka Strait was cleared by daybreak the following day (13

February).

On 13 February at 11:17, eight Japanese aircraft circled the ships, and 15 minutes later the planes returned and commenced bombing from approximately 10,000 feet. Ignoring the main convoy, the attacking planes singled out a merchant ship *Wuchang* which had overtaken the convoy and was then about a mile ahead. Many bombs narrowly missed *Wuchang*, but she was not hit or damaged. The planes made no attempt to attack the convoy and *Bendigo*'s Commanding Officer noted 'they had in fact found a more interesting target in the shape of seven large tankers some 40 miles to the east'.

At 23:00 the convoy anchored 20 miles south-east of North Watcher Head, where they remained until the following morning. At 06:00 the voyage to Batavia continued minus about half the convoy, the masters having elected to remain at anchor for a further period. The balance proceeded with *Wollongong* and *Bendigo* until 10:00 hours when the ships dispersed off Edam Island.



A fine view of HMAS Bendigo wearing her striking wartime disruptive camouflage paint scheme and original pennant number, J187.

Bendigo anchored in Batavia Roads at 12:45 on 14 February 1942 and remained awaiting instructions until 18 February, when she moved to the Outer Roads to give anti-submarine protection to incoming ships. On 21 February *Wollongong* relieved her of this duty and she returned to harbour.

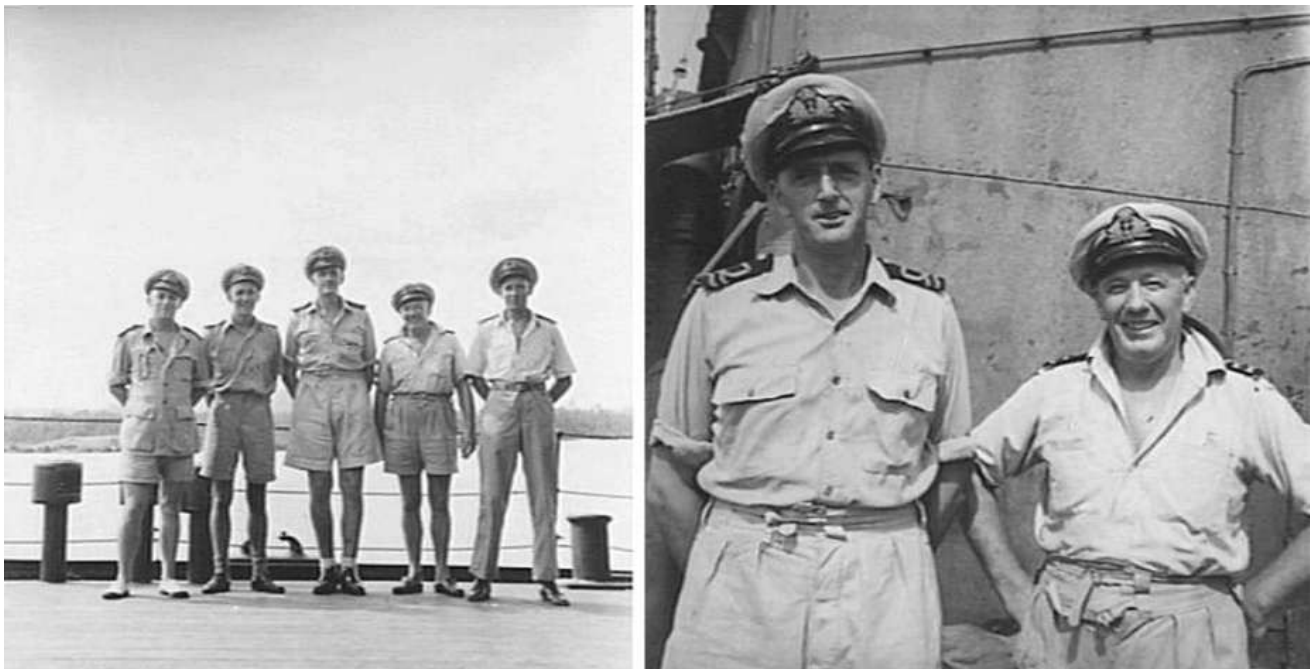
Next day *Bendigo* fuelled, took on board eight members of the AIF who had escaped from Singapore, and at 14:00 sailed with *Burnie* to join the Sunda Strait patrol off Merak. *Bendigo* remained at Merak as part of the Sunda Patrol until the night of 27/28 February, when Sunda

Strait was abandoned.

The only attack from enemy planes mentioned by *Bendigo*'s Commanding Officer took place on 27 February 1942. At 15:55 three Japanese Army light bombers commenced dive bombing and machine gunning the anchored ships off Merak. Three separate attacks developed and in all 27 bombs were dropped. An effective anti-aircraft barrage was put up and though the planes attempted to machine-gun swimming parties in the water, no hits were scored and there was no damage or casualties.

At daybreak on 28 February *Bendigo* sailed from Merak in company with her sister ships *Maryborough*, *Toowoomba*, *Ballarat*, *Goulburn* and *Burnie* for Tjilatjap. En route *Bendigo* detached with *Burnie* to pick up survivors of the Dutch ship *Boero*. The Fourth Engineer and 14 of the crew were rescued from the beach.

At 12:52 on 1 March *Bendigo* entered Tjilatjap Harbour. Shortly afterwards she was ordered to proceed to sea in company with *Burnie* to search for the Dutch ship *Sloterdijk*, which had been reported attacked by a Japanese submarine. Unable to locate the merchant ship, *Bendigo* returned to harbour.



Informal portraits taken of officers aboard Bendigo (L: AWM 078115, R: AWM 078117).

After fuelling and embarking 10 officers from the staff of Commodore John Collins RAN, commanding British and Australian naval forces, and one RAF officer, one civilian, five officers and 72 men from HMS *Jupiter*, *Bendigo* sailed for Fremantle.

One plane of undetermined nationality was sighted the following day, and at 17:20 USS *Asheville* was overtaken in 10°30'S, 110°10'E. On 3 March at 08:40, the ship was circled by a twin engine plane and at 17:00 *Bendigo* encountered USS *Phoenix*.

Fremantle was reached on 8 March with a margin of 21 tonnes of fuel and one day's supply of food. After her return to Australian waters *Bendigo* was assigned to escort Australia to New Guinea and coastal convoys, continuing in this role almost without a break until 1944 when convoys ceased.



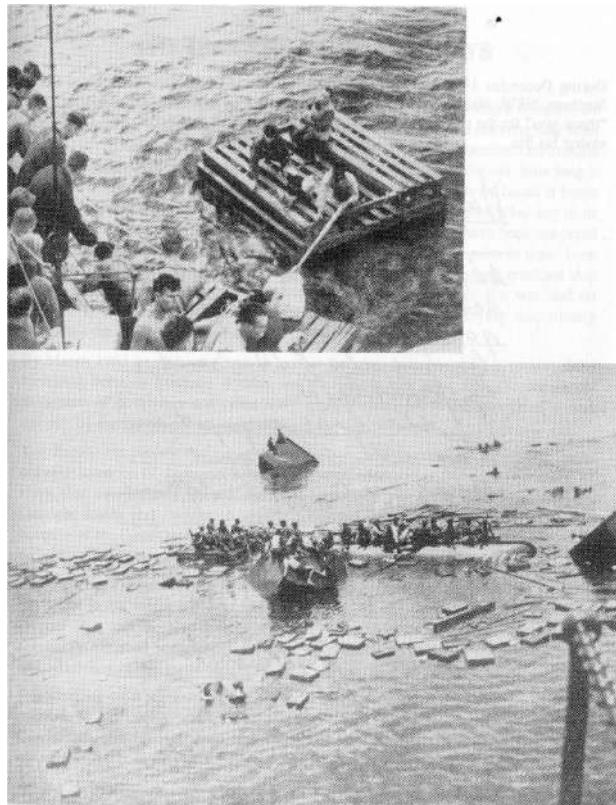
PORT MORESBY, PAPUA. 1942-09. AN AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER, WOUNDED IN THE FIGHTING IN NEW GUINEA, BEING CARRIED ON TO THE CORVETTE H.M.A.S. BENDIGO FOR FERRYING OUT TO THE HOSPITAL SHIP MANUNDA IN THE HARBOUR.

In March 1943 the Dutch ship '*sJacob*, escorted by HMAS *Bendigo*, left Milne Bay carrying troops, weapons, and supplies bound for Oro Bay. On 8 March 1943, as '*sJacob* rounded Cape Nelson, nine high-flying Japanese bombers escorted by 12 fighters attacked her near Porlock Bay. The aircraft scored three direct hits and at least 15 near misses, which caused serious structural damage and wounded several crewmen.

A large fire started on the foreship, and her water pumps shut down, which prevented firefighting. The order was given to abandon ship. All those aboard jumped overboard and clung to wreckage. *Bendigo* rescued 158 men, two of whom died on the way to Milne Bay. Within 18 minutes of the attack, '*sJacob* sank at 13:16 hrs off Porlock Harbor.



Dutch ship s'Jacob



All that remained of the Samuel Jacob after a bombing raid.

Sunk off ORO BAY, 8th March 1943.

Survivors are sitting on the keel of the lifeboat which fell upside down into the water. Two containers and part of a third, all floating pyramid-like, are identical to the one mentioned in the accompanying story.



Ship's crew January 1943

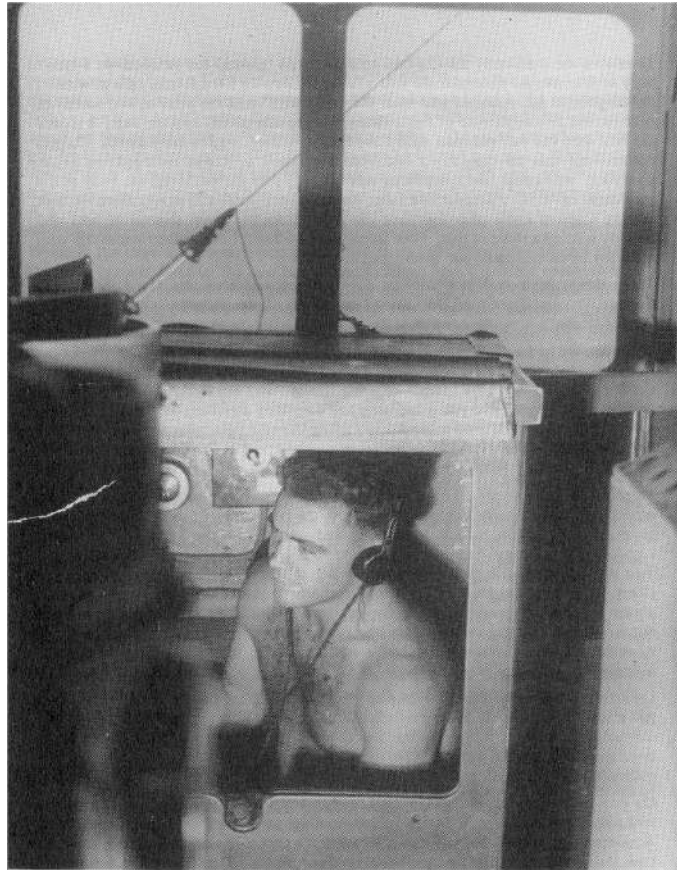
On 11 April 1943 *Bendigo* searched unsuccessfully for a Japanese submarine after the sinking of the Yugoslav ship *Recina* in convoy off the New South Wales coast with the loss of 32 lives. HMAS *Moresby* was her companion escorting vessel.



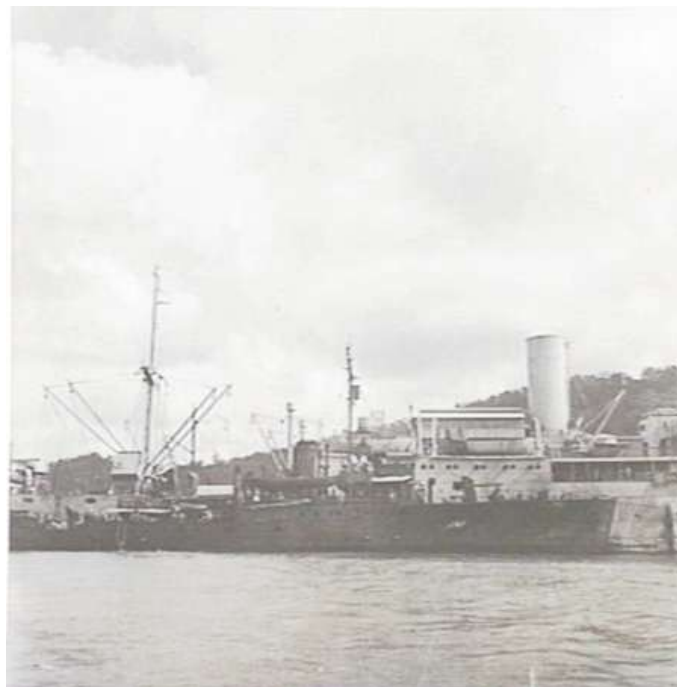
HMAS *Bendigo*, in her original warpaint, "swinging 'round the bouy" in an unidentified harbour. Could be Sydney - about 1943.



Members of the crew of *Bendigo* recover a whaleboat aboard while the vessel is anchored in the harbour of Madang, New Guinea, circa November 1944. (L: AWM 078118, R: AWM 078119)



This snap of ex A.B. Wally Eves on Asdic Watch in the tiny 'hut' on Bendigo's bridge was taken by the WOMEN'S WEEKLY magazine staff photographer Jack Hickson in July 1944. Because of wartime security however - plus the fact the Japanese did not have submarine detection equipment at the time - the photo was never published.



1944 refuelling from USS Victoria at Finschhafen

In February 1944 *Bendigo* began escort and patrol duties in the New Guinea area. She was the first Australian minesweeper to take up escort duties between Milne Bay and Manus. Except for docking periods in Sydney, the remainder of 1944 was spent in New Guinea waters on routine patrols and escort duties.



"HANDS TO TEA"

Left side of mess table from left to right.

"Wingy" Bennett. Q.O., Bruce McKee. H.S.D., Syd Barlow. A.B., Bert Creek. Asdic., Jack "Cock" Brittain LT.O., Robin "Lofty" Tooker. A.B., Rex Wells A.B.

At far end on left could be Wally Eves and Jimmy Sawyer, both Asdic.

Right side of mess table, L to R.

Jack Singline. A.B.?, Graham Walton. A.B.

Jack "Nana" Gore. senior A.B. (white cap), Partly obscured could be Jack "Jeeves" Hanson, Allan "Dizzy" Dalzeil.

Expressions on most of the faces indicate that HMAS Bendigo was indeed "a happy ship".



While serving with the British Pacific Fleet, HMAS Bendigo adopted the pennant number B237.

In March 1945 *Bendigo* arrived in Philippine waters, becoming part of a Task Unit operating with the British Pacific Fleet, to which she remained attached until the end of hostilities. She participated in the operation for the capture of Okinawa (Operation ICEBERG) between March and May 1945.



Bendigo in rough seas off Okinawa April 1945

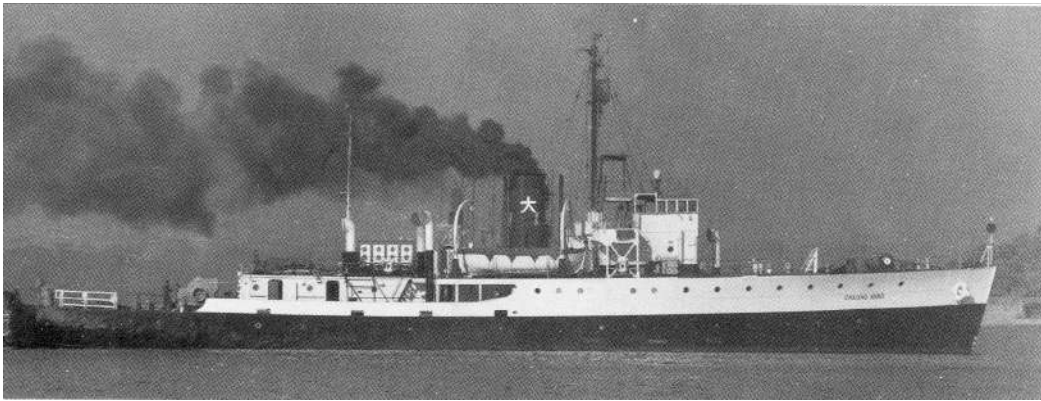
From September to November 1945, following the end of hostilities, *Bendigo* operated as a minesweeper in the Hong Kong area. Departed Hong Kong for Australia 9.11.45 via Amoy, Moratai, Thursday Island and Townsville. Arrived 1 Dec 1945 and returned to Williamstown on 20 December 1945.

On 4 February 1946 *Bendigo* sailed from Melbourne for Sydney, in company with *Ballarat*. Arriving in Sydney on 6 February, *Bendigo* was reduced to a Care and Maintenance basis. The ship paid off at Sydney on 27 September 1946. Since commissioning she had steamed 280,100 kilometres.

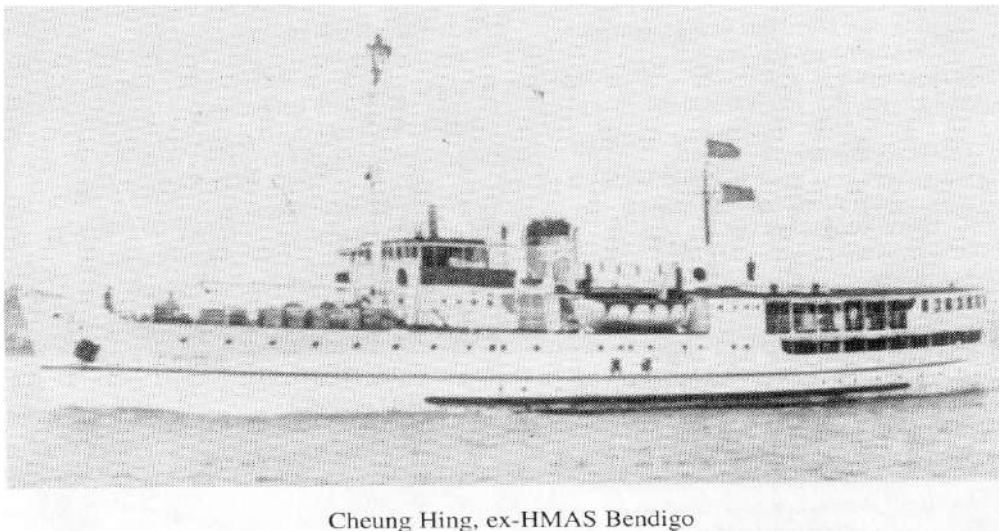
The Argus (Melbourne) Mon 26 May 1947

SYDNEY, Sun: HMAS *Bendigo*, an Australian-built corvette, is to finish her seagoing career as a Chinese river steamer. Stripped of naval equipment, she will leave dock on Tuesday and sail for China early in June.

Bendigo was sold as a seagoing vessel and delivered 2 May 1947 for £12,500 to Ta Hing Co (Hong Kong) and was renamed in Sep 1947 to *Cheung Hing*. With extensive alterations above and below decks at Hong Kong, provision was made for many passengers, and the former corvette became a ferry plying between Taiwan and the China coast.



Cheung Hing ex HMAS Bendigo before conversion at Hong Kong



Cheung Hing, ex-HMAS Bendigo

She was later acquired by the Navy of the People's Republic of China, during the 1960s, converted from a merchant ship and re-armed for naval service under the name of *Loyang*. The 1981-82 edition of Jane's Fighting Ships showed altered spellings for various Chinese ships, including a change from *Loyang* to *Luoyang*. These changes resulted from the introduction by the People's Republic of the 'Pin Yin' system of transliteration.

The last entry for *Luoyang* identified in Jane's Fighting Ships was in the 1987/88 edition. Fate unknown, presumed broken up in China.