

HMAS *Bowen* – J285/M285



Namesake: Town of Bowen, QLD
Builder: Walkers Limited
Laid down: 9 February 1942
Launched: 11 June 1942
Commissioned: 9 November 1942
Decommissioned: 17 January 1946

Battle honours:
 Pacific 1942–45
 New Guinea 1943–44[1][2]

Fate: Bowen paid off on 17 January 1946 and was sold for scrap to the Hong Kong Rolling Mills on 18 May 1956



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
Speed: 15 knots (28mph) at 1,750 hp
Complement: 85
Armament: 1 × 4-inch gun, 3 × Oerlikons, Machine guns, Depth charges chutes and throwers

HMAS *Bowen* was laid down at Walkers Ltd, Maryborough, Queensland on 9 February 1942. She was launched on 28 July 1942 by Mrs G Crittall, wife of a long time employee of Walkers Ltd, and was the first RAN warship to carry the name of the coastal town in the Whitsunday region on the eastern coast of Queensland.

Bowen was commissioned at Brisbane on 9 November 1942 under the command of Lieutenant Gordon Leonard Olsen RANR.

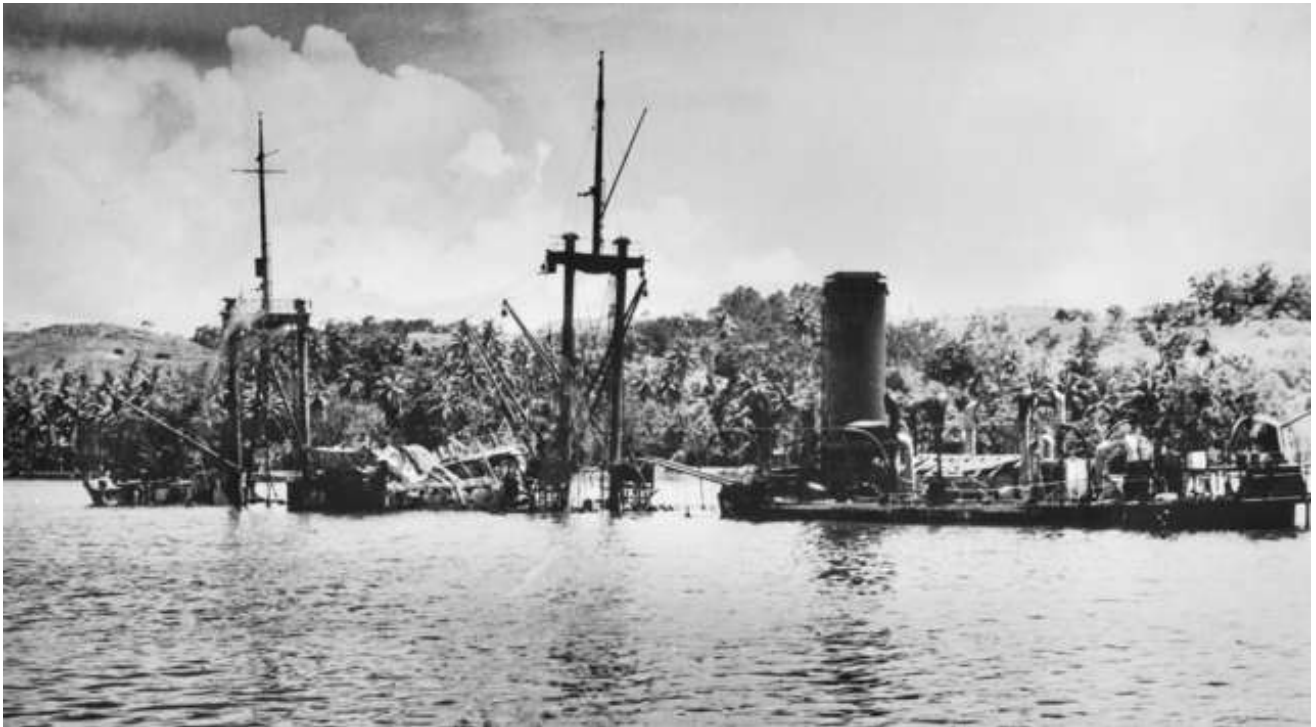


HMAS *Bowen*

Bowen began her active wartime career with convoy escort duty on the east coast of Australia and to the New Guinea forward areas. On 28 March 1942 at Oro Bay, a series of dive bombing attacks ended in the destruction of the Dutch ship *Bantam* (3014 tonnes) and the American tender *Masaya* (1065 tonnes), the former having been escorted into the bay by *Bowen* two days previously.

The corvette fortunately escaped the bombing but was strafed by two planes after they had released their bombs on *Bantam*. After taking off survivors *Bowen* successfully beached the burning Dutch ship away from the wharf. A stoker in *Bowen* suffered shrapnel wounds. There were no casualties on board the *Bantam* but the American ship suffered six killed and several wounded.

Convoy escort and anti-submarine patrols in the north eastern area continued throughout 1943. *Bowen's* usual employment was on the Cairns-Townsville-Port Moresby-Milne Bay run, interspersed with an odd run into Oro Bay or Buna.



BANTAM beached at Oro Bay. Later raised.

Patrols were mostly monotonous but essential, providing protection from submarines for the never-ending movement of supplies to the forward areas. In 1944 *Bowen* continued operating in the New Guinea area, escorting and patrolling further north as the war progressed, to Madang, Langemak, Saidor, Merauke and the Admiralties.

On 15 January, en route to Milne Bay, she rescued two survivors from a RAAF Beaufort bomber which had crashed into the sea. In April, en route to Hyane Harbour, Admiralty Islands, and she rescued the only survivor of a crashed United States plane.



NAVY OFFICE—COPY OF MESSAGE.

RS RJO TO "BOWEN" (R) H.O.I.O. MORREBY H.O.I.O. ORO BAY 2026/10/1474

FROM A.O.H.B. (PL. CODE CYPHER) H. CODE J

METHOD OF TRANSMISSION WT DATE SENT 3/5/43 DATE REC'D T.O.O. 031446Z

CONFIDENTIAL CONFIDENTIAL CODE

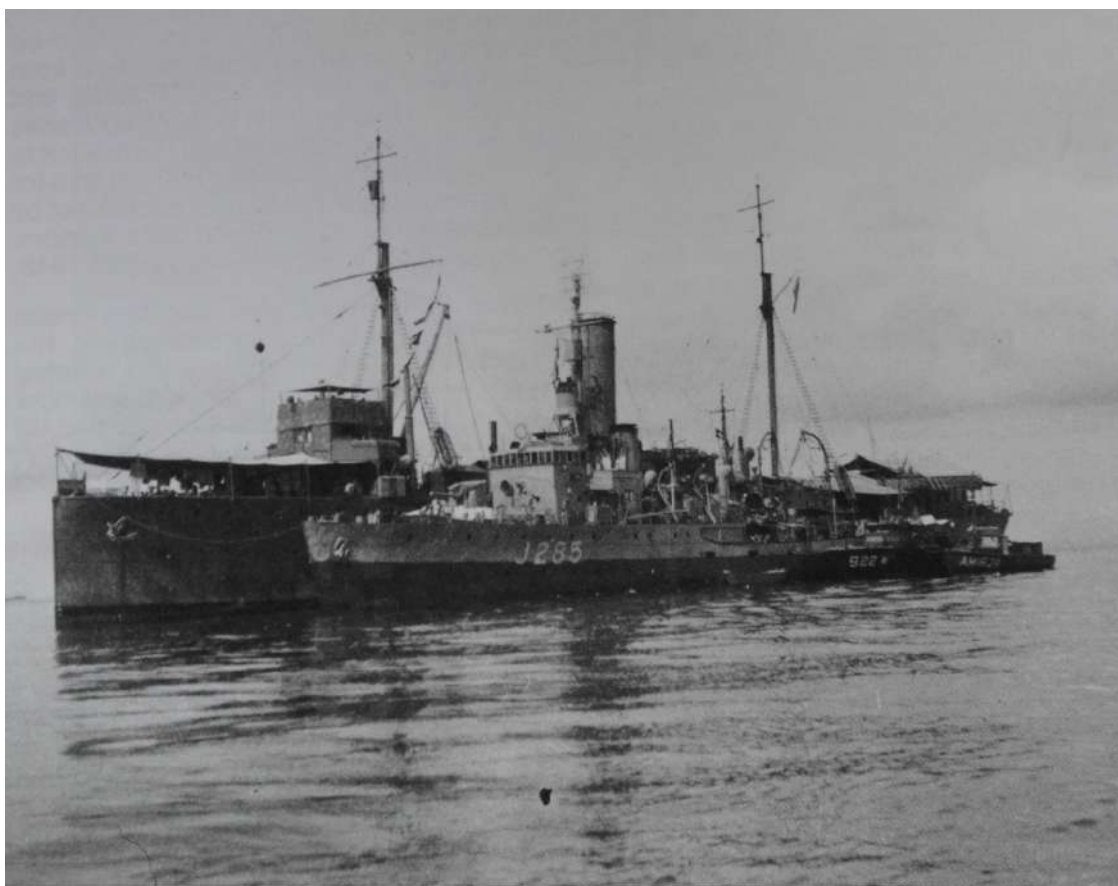
THE NAVAL BOARD HAVE NOW RECEIVED A
REPORT ON THE RAIDS ON ORO BAY ON 28/29TH MARCH AND
WISH TO CONGRATULATE THE CAPTAIN, OFFICERS AND SHIPS
COMPANY OF H.M.A.S. "BOWEN" ON THEIR GOOD SERVICE ON
THAT OCCASION.

*Min Woods
Pleasie Bowen*
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P.C.O.*

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Bowen's role in the Oro Bay action drew praise from the Australian Naval Board.



HMAS Bowen alongside HMAS Platypus



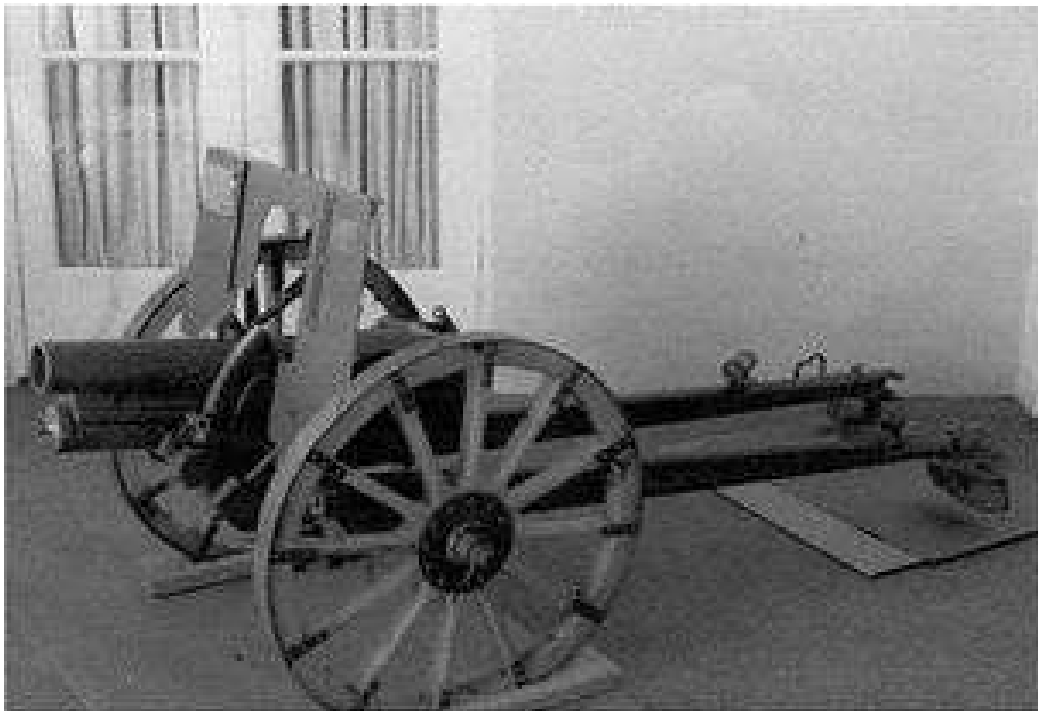
Bowen conducting a port visit in Melbourne. (Allan C Green, State Library of Victoria)

In June 1944 *Bowen* began a period of duty operating between Darwin and Thursday Island, ending in November when she arrived at Melbourne for refitting.

After four months in Australian waters, *Bowen* returned to New Guinea on escort duties, arriving at Lae in the middle of March 1945, and thence escorting shipping to Madang, Hollandia, Morotai and Biak. In July and August she visited Darwin and was in that port when hostilities ended.

On 14 October, 1945, the Japanese at Selebobo Island, just south of the Philippines, surrendered officially to the Allies, and during the ceremony the crew of *Bowen* were spiking the fixed-position garrison guns and dumping all Japanese arms and equipment off-shore.

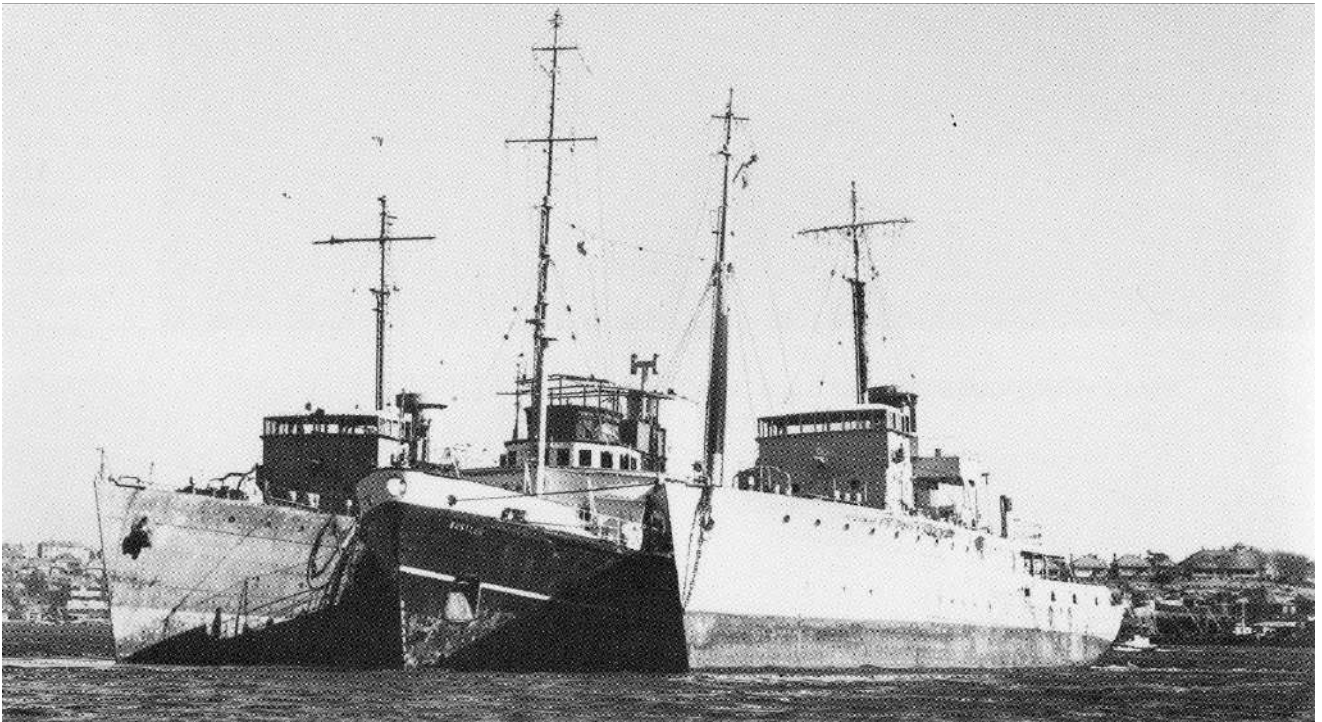
They came across a small Japanese mountain gun and decided to give it to the city of Bowen as a memento of their ship. On 11 December HMAS *Bowen* arrived at Bowen and next morning the ship's company towed the little gun to the town hall where the captain presented it to the mayor. With great ceremony it was given pride of place at the entrance to the building.



In the immediate post war period *Bowen* played her part with other units of the RAN in surrender and occupation operations in the Moluccas, before returning to Australia in December 1945.

After visiting the town of Bowen in Queensland for a three day stay, she proceeded to Melbourne where she paid off on 17 January 1946, having steamed 95,651 miles on active service.

Laid up in Corio Bay, *Bowen* was sold on 18 May 1956 to Hong Kong Rolling Mills, Hong Kong, to be broken up. The ship departed Melbourne 5 July 1956, along with HMAS *Latrobe* under tow of the tug *Bustler*.



L to R: *Bowen*, tug *Bustler*, *Latrobe*

The Argus Wed 1 Aug 1956:

TUG DOES JOB ON ONE ENGINE

BRISBÁNE, Tuesday: Bustler, one of the world's biggest tugs, towed two former Australian Navy corvettes into Brisbane today using only one of her two powerful motors. The other motor broke down about three days out of Brisbane. The 4,000 horsepower British Admiralty tug Bustler is on her way from Melbourne to Hong Kong shipbreakers with the former corvettes *Bowen* and *Latrobe*.



HMS Bustler