

HMAS Colac – J242/M05



Namesake: Town of Colac, Victoria
Builder: Mort's Dock
Laid down: 18 April 1941
Launched: 30 August 1941
Commissioned: 6 January 1942
Decommissioned: 27 November 1945

Recommissioned: 20 February 1951
Decommissioned: 30 January 1953

Battle honours: Pacific 1942–45
 New Guinea 1942–44

Reclassified:
 Training ship (1951–1953)
 Tank cleaning ship (1962–1983)
 Out of service: 1983

Fate:
 Torpedoed by HMAS Ovens 4 March 1987
 in a weapons test



Class & type: Bathurst-class corvette
Displacement: 650 tons standard
 1,025 tons full load

Length: 186 ft (57 m)
Beam: 31 ft (9.4 m)
Draught: 8.5 ft (2.6 m)
Propulsion: triple expansion engine,

Speed: 2 shafts, 2,000 hp
 15 knots
 (28 km/h; 17

mph) 1,750 hp

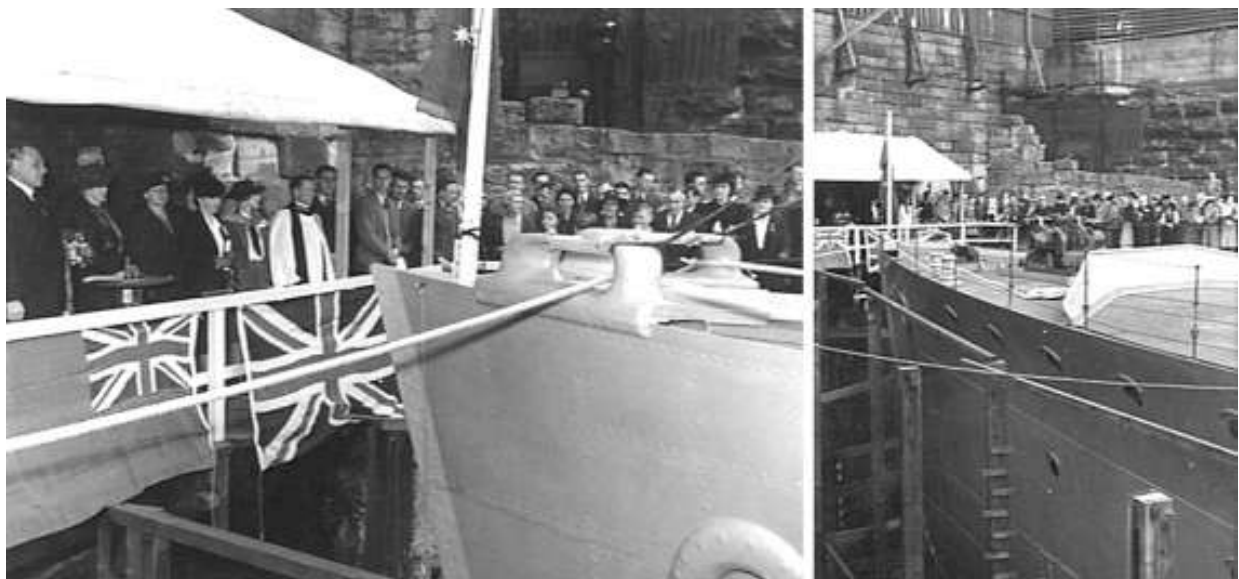
Complement: 85

Armament: 1 × 12-pounder gun
 replaced by
 1 × 4-inch gun)
 3 × 20 mm Oerlikons
 1 × 40 mm Bofors
 (installed later)
 Machine guns
 Depth charges chutes
 and throwers

HMAS Colac was laid down at Mort's Dock and Engineering Co Ltd, Sydney, NSW on 18 April 1941. She was launched on 30 August 1941 by Miss M Heady, senior lady on the staff of Mort's Dock and Engineering Co Ltd and was the first RAN warship to carry the name of the small city in the western district of Victoria. By the war's end Mort's Dock had constructed fourteen of the sixty Bathurst Class corvettes.



The launching of Colac by Miss M Heady, the Head Typist of Mort's Dock and Engineering Co Ltd. (AWM 009440)



The official launching party watch on as the dock valves are opened and the ship floated for the first time. (L: AWM 009439, R: AWM 009438).



HMAS Colac

Colac commissioned at Sydney on 5 January 1942 under the command of Lieutenant Commander Dudley Charles Northam RANR(S).

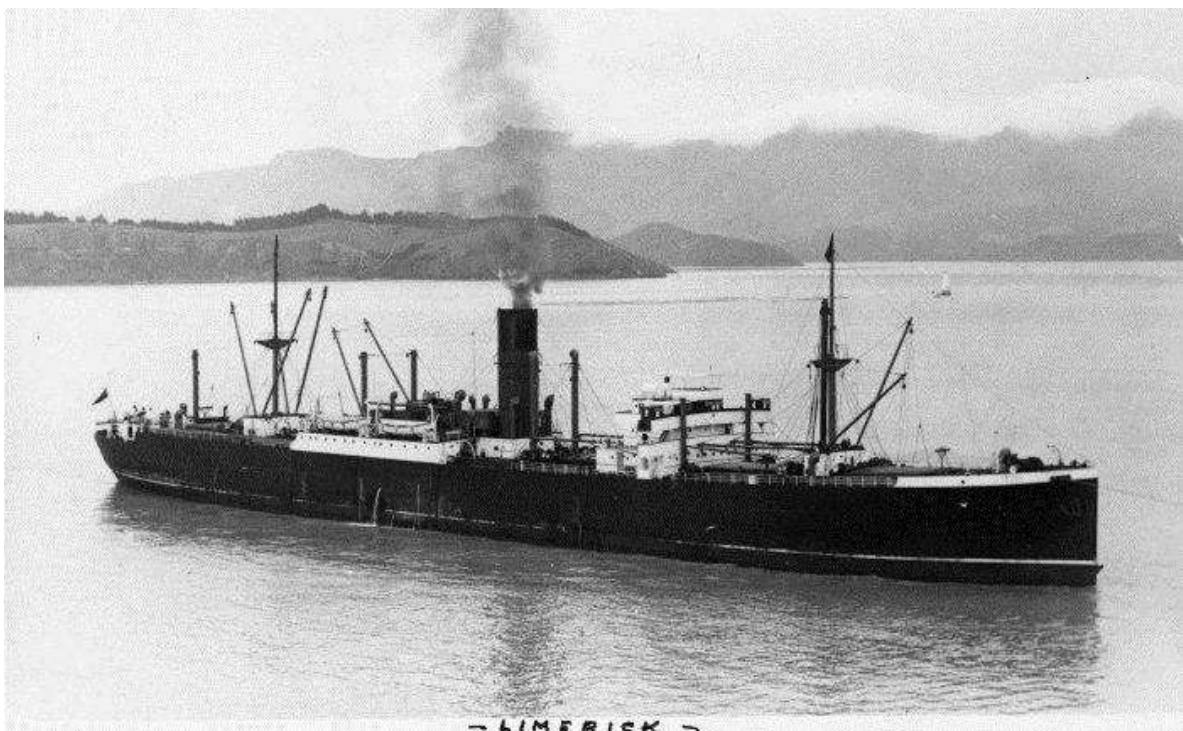


Following a working up period in January 1942, *Colac* was assigned to anti-submarine patrol and convoy escort duty, operating between Townsville and New Guinea.

In December 1942 *Colac* and her sister ships HMA Ships *Ballarat* and *Broome* 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 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 *Colac* was involved in troop carrying on three further occasions.

Colac took part in Operation LILLIPUT, the reinforcement, supply and development of the Buna/Gona area after its capture. In March 1943 *Colac* detached from operations in the forward areas and was assigned to convoy escort duty on the Australian east coast. Enemy submarines were operating in the area at the time and on 26 April a convoy of five ships escorted by *Colac* and *Ballarat* was attacked about 20 miles south-east of Cape Byron. The British ship MV *Limerick* was hit by a torpedo. Efforts to locate and destroy the Japanese submarine failed but *Colac* rescued all but two of *Limerick*'s crew.



The *Limerick* sank stern first at approx. 0630 whilst the *Colac* continued to search for survivors. "Of a crew of 73 we picked up 71, apparently two engineers were killed in the explosion. The crew gave the survivors a bit of TLC, a hot brew, feed and some clothes and arrived in Brisbane on Tuesday 27 April 1943."

In July 1943 *Colac* returned to the escort of convoys between Australia and New Guinea, which kept her almost constantly at sea for the remainder of the year. In January 1944 she resumed escort of east coast convoys for a brief period before a refit prior to further New Guinea service.



HMAS Colac at sea, circa 1944. (AWM 075751, R: AWM 075753)



Members of the 6th Australian Division marching to the beachhead of But Beach, New Guinea to board HMAS Colac and her sister ship HMAS Dubbo in preparation for the amphibious assault on the Wewak Peninsula, circa May 1945. (AWM 018495)

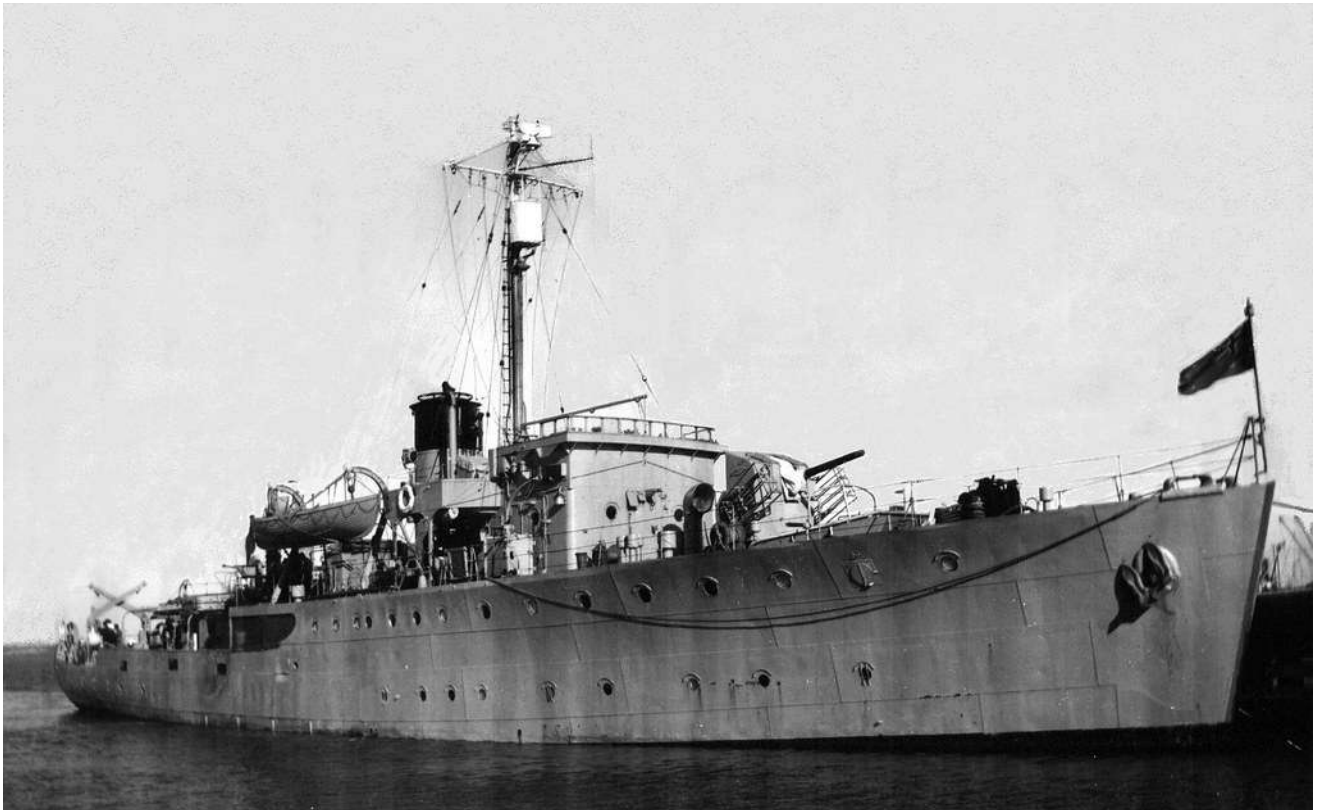
The ship returned to New Guinea waters in April 1944. Throughout the remainder of 1944 and the early months of 1945 she was operational on escort, patrol and transport duties as far forward as the Halmahera Group. In April and May 1945 *Colac*, in company with the sloop HMAS *Swan* and her sister ships *Deloraine* and *Dubbo*, gave bombardment support to operations in the Wewak area. Targets included Muschu Island, Kairiru Island, Cape Samier and Wewak.



1944-08-21. A LANDING BARGE LOADED WITH TROOPS OF THE 30TH INFANTRY BATTALION APPROACHING THE RAN CONVOY WHICH IS TO TRANSPORT THEM TO ALEXISHAFEN. THE CONVOY CONSISTS OF THE FRIGATE HMAS BARCOO AND THE CORVETTES HMAS COLAC, HMAS DELORAINE AND HMAS ROCKHAMPTON



HMAS Colac



HMAS Colac

In May she proceeded to Bougainville in the Solomon Islands where she took part in operations to prevent Japanese troops on Choiseul Island from evacuating to Bougainville and to harass the enemy and destroy his installations on the coast. During these operations *Colac* sustained her first casualties on 26 May when she received two hits from enemy shore batteries.

The first killed two ratings and wounded two others while the second shell struck the ship on the waterline. She began to settle by the stern, but after movable stores, depth charges and fittings aft had been jettisoned, she was able to proceed for Treasury Island, but had to be taken under tow for the latter part of the voyage to Blanche Harbour.

Army News (Darwin) Sun 15 Jul 1945:

CANBERRA. Saturday. - The Minister for the Navy, Mr. Makin today revealed that the Australian corvette *Colac* was seriously damaged when hit by two shells from Jap shore batteries during operations of the Solomon's. One man was killed, one fatally wounded and two others less seriously wounded. The dead men are Steward V. M. P. Schute of Perth and AB S. R. Smith of Sydney.

Colac was badly damaged but completed her mission and then was towed to an Australian port. Mr. Makin also revealed that in nine months. Australian warships gave close support to ground troops from the Solomon's to Okinawa and from Borneo to the Philippines. In the Philippines actions the Australian detachment took a big share of the damage and casualties suffered by the Allied fleets. Since then *Colac* is the only ship to have suffered damage in an aggregate of millions of miles covered by our ships in operations.

After temporary repairs the ship was towed to Finschhafen in New Guinea. From there she was taken to Sydney where she arrived on 18 June 1945, to go into dockyard hands, and was still in dock when hostilities ended on 15 August. She paid off into Reserve at Sydney on 27 November 1945, without again becoming operational. She had steamed 119,991 miles since commissioning.



RAN ships in reserve at Village Point, Watsons Bay, Sydney, NSW, circa 1948. The corvettes HMAS Kapunda, HMAS Strahan and HMAS Colac are present in this image. (AWM 304877)

On 20 February 1951 *Colac* recommissioned for service as a training ship for National Service Trainees and Naval Reserve personnel. In this role she served on the Australian Station for two years. She paid off into Reserve at Sydney on 30 January 1953, having steamed a further 33,317 miles.



HMAS Colac as training ship



Left: National Service trainee Don Kennett from Adelaide with full gear as he goes aboard Colac for three weeks. (Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, State Library of Victoria). Right: National Service Trainees bringing their gear aboard Colac for three weeks at sea. (Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, State Library of Victoria)

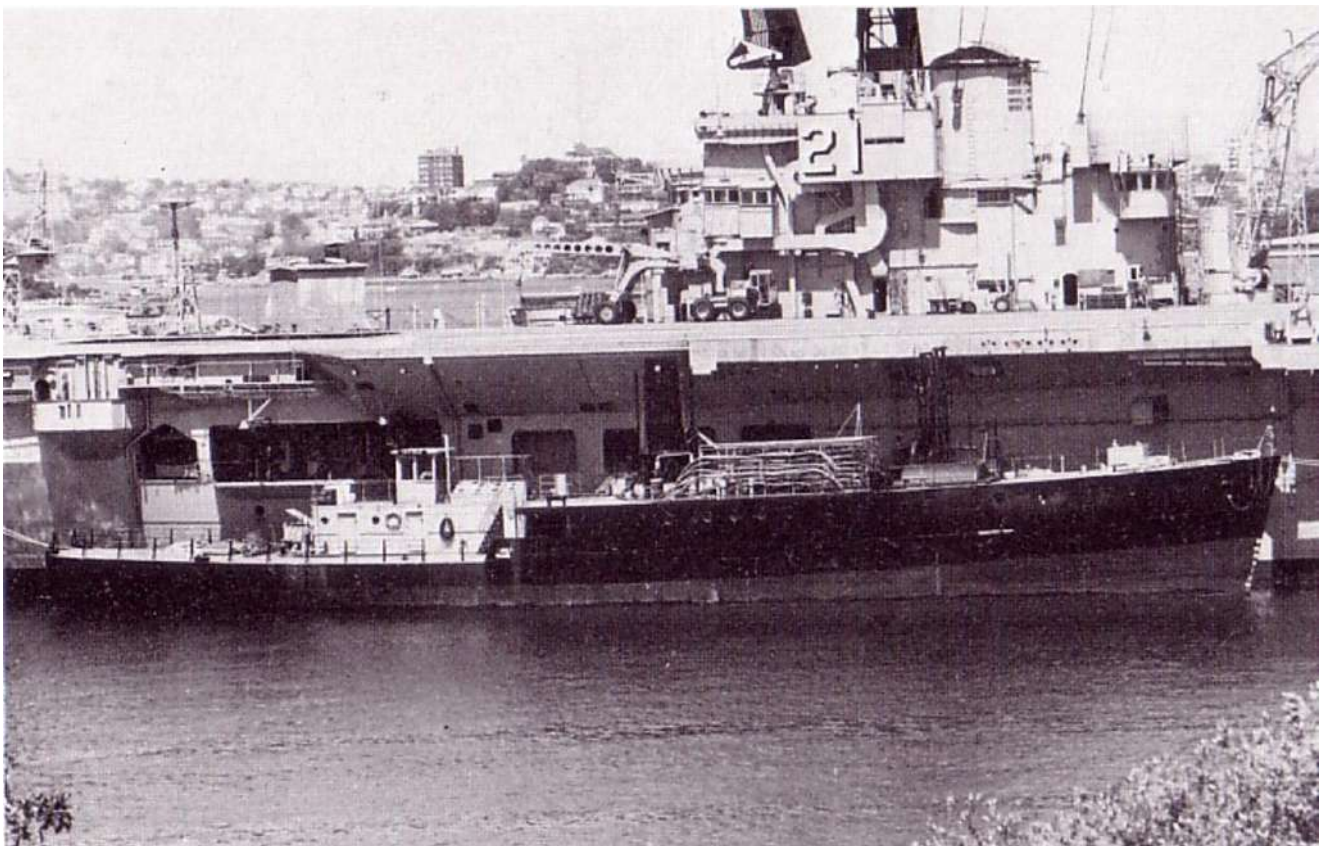


Colac Paid Off at Williamstown and stripped of armament

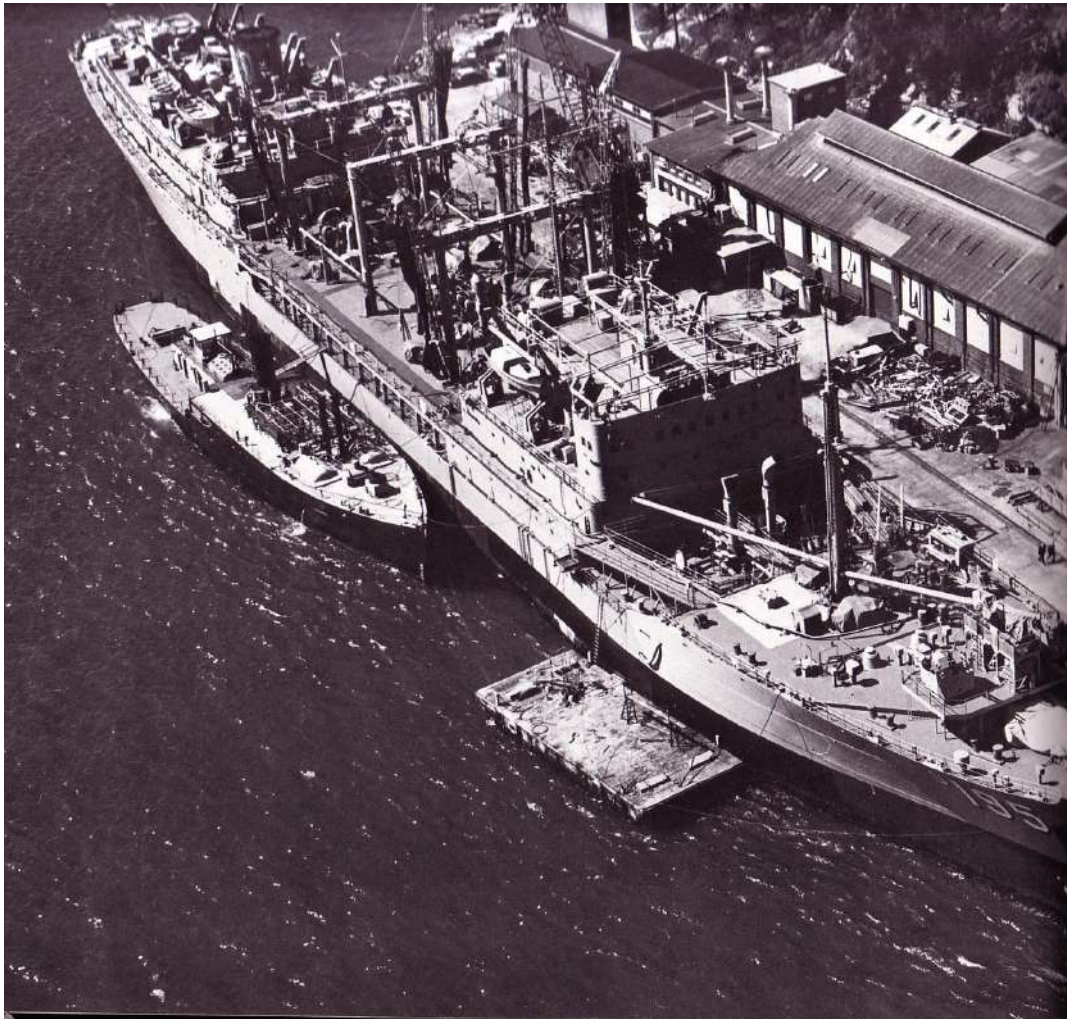
Colac was returned to reserve on 30 January 1953. In 1962, the ship was converted into a tank cleaning vessel, and served in this role until 30 September 1983. *Colac* was not recommissioned during this time.



Colac Converting to Tank Cleaning Vessel 1962



Colac working alongside HMAS Melbourne



Colac at work cleaning tanks of HMAS Supply



Colac ceased service as a tank cleaning vessel on 30 September 1983.

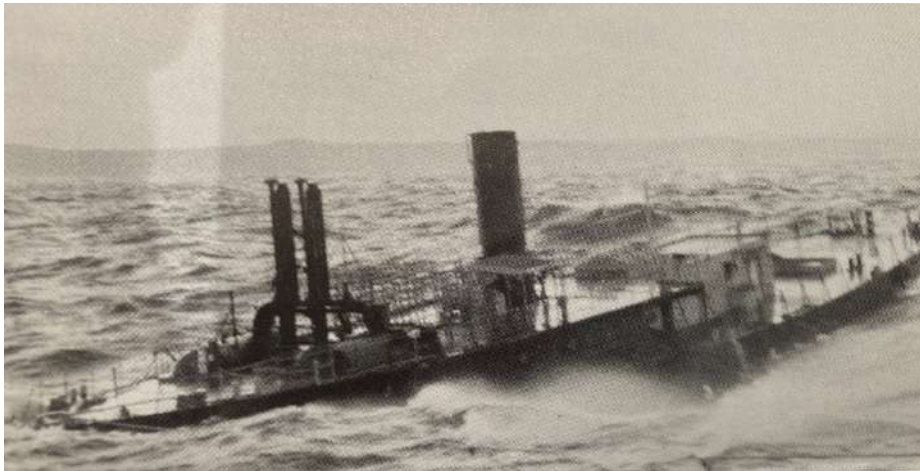
After more than 41 years' service in various roles, *Colac* was sunk by a Mark 48 torpedo fired by the Oberon-class submarine HMAS *Ovens* in a weapons test off Jervis Bay on 4 March 1987, in position 34°49.2'south, 151°32' east.



Colac prior to sinking



Prior to being sunk.



August 10, 2017 www.defence.gov.au/news/NAVYNEWS

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Deadly outcome of attack

HMAS Colac was lucky to lose only two of her crew in WWII, writes **SGT Dave Morley**.

DESPITE being in the thick of action on many occasions, the Bathurst-class corvette HMAS Colac ended the war with only two members of her ship's company killed and two wounded.

The casualties all occurred on May 26, 1945, when the ship was hit twice by Japanese artillery fire from Choiseul Island, part of the Solomon Islands group.

Jim Paizis, 94, of Melbourne, was a gunnery officer in Colac as a SBLT, which had finished a three-week operation bombarding Wewak and offshore islands with other ships when she was sent to Choiseul Island.

"Our task was to assist the Army by shelling Japanese landing barges which were transferring troops to Bougainville, where our Army was operating," he said.

"We entered Emerald Anchorage, a narrow sheltered harbour formed by a row of offshore islands about 500m from the coast, about 6pm on May 25, and steamed down the length of the harbour firing with all guns at barges, troops and anything we could see.

"There was no resistance and we were all happy with some action to break the monotony of convoys.

"On May 26, at about the same time, the CO decided to go in again for another shot."

Mr Paizis said they entered the harbour and as they turned to starboard



HMAS Colac at sea (left) and gunnery officer SBLT Jim Paizis during the war (above).

to proceed down the channel, he heard a shell roar overhead and land on an island on their port side.

"The Japanese guns were on a headland opposite the entrance and we started firing on the smoke from their guns," he said.

"We turned to exit the harbour, still firing at the target and a shell hit the quarter deck killing Steward Brian Shute and AB Stan Smith, who were manning a 50-calibre gun, and wounding another two sailors.

"We were still turning when another shell hit on the waterline and blew a hole where the engine room was, caus-

ing it to start filling with water. The crew had to abandon the engine room and eventually the engines were totally submerged, but were running under water because we still had steam from the boiler room."

Mr Paizis said Colac was settling by the stern with the weight of water, so they started to reduce weight by throwing anything heavy over the side.

"This included all our depth charges, mine sweeping cables and anything we could move; there was a concern she would sink and if that happened in the anchorage it would have been the end for all of us," he said.

"We exited the harbour and steamed away with speed reducing as the boilers reduced pressure due to the system salting.

"We anchored over a reef a short distance from the coast and next day buried Brian and Stan at sea, lashed up in their hammocks."

Mr Paizis said their loss was felt deeply by all as they were a close family in a small ship.

"I knew Brian better than others because he was an officer's steward," he said.

"There was a time when I lost my razor and he gave me a spare; it has sat

in my bathroom cabinet since the war and I see it every morning."

A signal for help resulted in a US Army supply ship arriving to tow Colac to Treasury Island.

There they met a salvage ship and had a plate welded over the hole and the engine room pumped dry.

Mr Paizis said they were towed from Treasury Island to Finschhafen in New Guinea, and from there an 11-day tow to Sydney by the Grimsby-class sloop HMAS Swan.

"We were still being repaired and refitted when the war ended," he said.

"Our CO later said going in for a second shot was the biggest mistake of his life."

Colac was recommissioned briefly from 1951-53 and used as a training ship for National Service trainees and Naval Reserve members, before being placed back in reserve for nine years.

In 1962, she was stripped down, painted black and used as a tank-cleaning vessel at Sydney's Garden Island until 1983.

Many photos taken of other warships during that era show Colac alongside.

After more than 41 years' service in various roles, Colac was sunk by the Oberon-class submarine HMAS Ovens in a test firing of a Mk48 torpedo off Jervis Bay in March 1987.

Article about the history of HMAS Colac from Navy News, Issue August 10, 2017.

