

## HMAS Gladstone – J234/M234



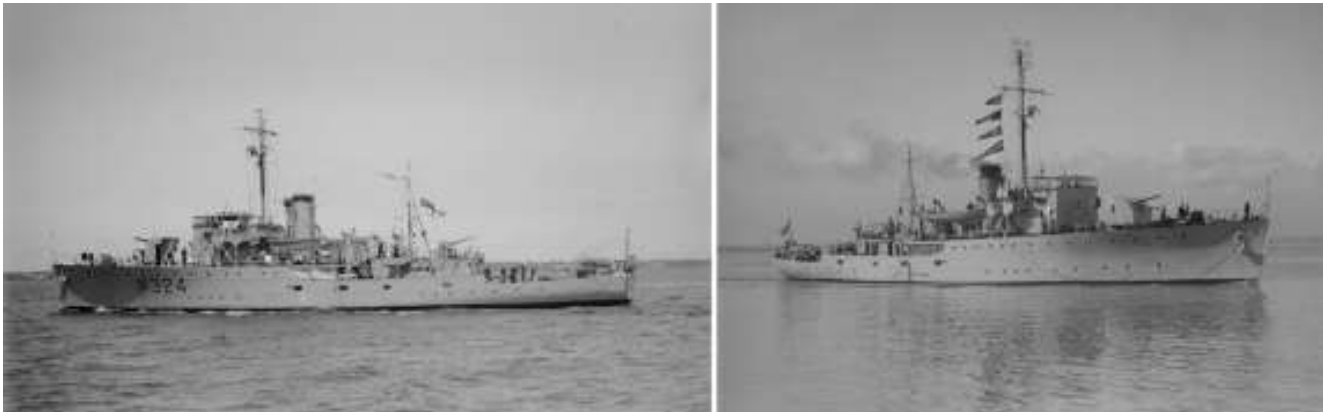
**Namesake:** City of Gladstone, QLD  
**Builder:** Walkers Limited  
**Laid down:** 4 August 1942  
**Launched:** 26 November 1942  
**Commissioned:** 22 March 1943  
**Decommissioned:** 16 July 1956  
**Reclassified:** Training ship (1946)  
**Battle honours:** Pacific 1943–45  
                             New Guinea 1943–44  
**Fate:** Entered civilian service in 1956, scrapped in 1983

**Displacement:** 650 tons (standard), 1,025 tons (full war load)  
**Length:** 186 feet (57 m)  
**Beam:** 31 feet (9.4 m)  
**Draught:** 8.5 feet (2.6 m)  
**Propulsion:** 2 × Yarrow boilers, 2 × triple expansion steam engines, 2 shafts, 2,000 hp  
**Speed:** 15 knots (28 km/h; 17 mph)  
**Complement:** 85  
**Armament:** 1 × 4-inch HA gun  
                   3 × 20 mm Oerlikons  
                   1 × 40 mm Bofors (installed later)  
                   Machine guns  
                   Depth charges, chutes and throwers



HMAS *Gladstone* was laid down at Walkers Ltd, Maryborough, Queensland on 4 August 1942. She was launched on 26 November 1942 by Mrs Watson, wife of a long time employee of Walkers Ltd, and was the first RAN warship to carry the name of the city located in the Gladstone region of Queensland, approximately 550km by road north of Brisbane. Gladstone is home to Queensland's largest multi-commodity shipping port.

*Gladstone* commissioned at Maryborough, Queensland, on 22 March 1943 under the command of Lieutenant John Wilson Penney RANR(S).



*HMAS Gladstone. (Allan C Green, State Library of Victoria)*

*Gladstone* began her active operational career in April 1943, escorting merchant convoys on the Queensland coast from Brisbane to northern ports and return. At the end of September 1943 she began escorting the first of a series of convoys between the Australian mainland and New Guinea, from Cairns to Port Moresby and Milne Bay. Eight merchant vessels fell victims to Japanese submarine attack during the period of April to September 1943. None of these, however, was under escort by *Gladstone*.

On 18 December 1943, *Gladstone*, in company with HMA Ships *Gympie* and *Stawell*, were escorting convoy TN 192 of eight ships with troops embarked bound for Milne Bay when almost the entire convoy ran aground on Bougainville Reef in the Great Barrier Reef just after 9:30pm that evening. *Gladstone* had observed Aldis Lamp signals down the convoy and intercepted the word "hit".

Assuming that the convoy was under attack, the ship closed up at action stations, altered course towards the ship thought to be under attack and increased speed. She then prepared to attack with a full pattern of depth charges.

Luckily for *Gladstone*, less than a minute after going to actions stations, she observed the signal "am aground" enabling her to reduce speed and prevent a hard grounding on the reef.

As it was, *Gladstone* made a soft grounding and, thanks to some masterful manoeuvring of the vessel, was re-floated 42 minutes later. She navigated her way clear of the reef and waited, in company with *Gympie* and *Stawell*, until daylight.

Seven of the eight merchant vessels in the convoy had run aground, SS *Charles M Russell* being the only exception. The vessels *Colorado*, *Ambrose Bierce* and *City of Fortworth* had all managed to free themselves by dawn and, with HMA Ships *Lithgow* and *Castlemaine* arriving to assist and her own starboard propeller damaged, *Gladstone* detached just after 7:00am to escort the trio back to Cairns.

All of the remaining ships were quickly re-floated, suffering varying degrees of damage, while *Gladstone* was forced to return to Brisbane to repair her damaged propeller.



*HMAS Gladstone. (Allan C Green, State Library of Victoria)*



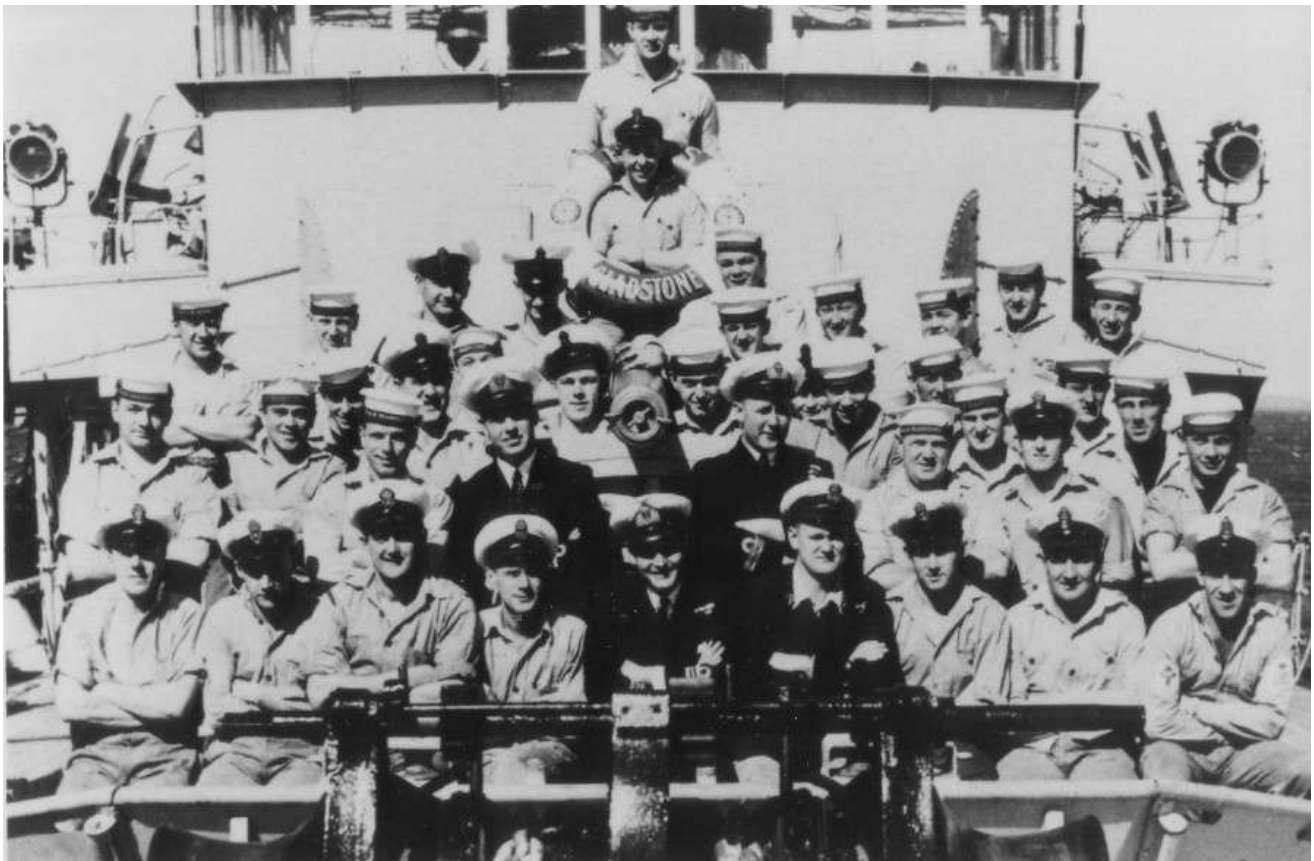
*Gladstone was one of sixty Australian minesweepers built for service during World War II.*

Operational again in January 1944, *Gladstone* resumed escorting convoys to Milne Bay until March when she proceeded to Adelaide for refit.

On 29 April 1944 she arrived at Milne Bay from Adelaide to begin a tour of duty in New Guinea waters, on escort and anti-submarine patrol duties in the Madang, Langemak, Hollandia and Biak areas. In October 1944 she paid a brief visit to home waters.

In January 1945 *Gladstone* began operations in the Morotai, Biak and Mios Woendi areas, chiefly on patrol and as a guard ship at Morotai. It was in the main routine and uneventful duty. In May 1945, cooperating with American PT boats, she bombarded Japanese barge concentrations in the Halmaheras.

Following the end of hostilities in August 1945 she proceeded to Darwin. In September she took part in the Timor surrender ceremonies at Koepang. In November and December 1945 *Gladstone* was employed on general surveillance of the Lesser Sundas and the transport of Netherlands East Indies troops from Darwin to Timor.



*HMAS Gladstone's crew members.*

On 12 December 1945 *Gladstone* departed Darwin for Sydney. En route she paid a three day visit to her namesake town on the Queensland coast. On 27 December she reached Sydney, having steamed 98,997 miles since commissioning.

Following a refit in Sydney, *Gladstone* arrived in Westernport, Victoria, on 23 February 1946, where she attached to Flinders Naval Depot as a training ship. She maintained this role for more than ten years. As a training ship *Gladstone* steamed 96,645 miles, giving a total of 195,642 miles steamed since commissioning.



*Left: A Cadet Midshipman from the Royal Australian Naval College, taking a trick at the wheel on a recent training cruise in Gladstone. (Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, State Library of Victoria). Right: A Cadet Midshipman from the Royal Australian Naval College took part in a navigation exercise in Gladstone. (Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, State Library of Victoria)*



*HMAS Gladstone dressed overall.*





*Sea Cadets help berth Gladstone at Station Pier, Port Melbourne, Victoria. (Argus Newspaper Collection of Photographs, State Library of Victoria)*



*Trainees report on board Gladstone with their kit bags over their shoulders. For ten years Gladstone was home to hundreds of trainees while based at HMAS Cerberus (Flinders Naval Depot).*



*HMAS Gladstone 1956 in heavy seas*

## H.M.A.S. GLADSTONE

*Gladstone* paid off at Melbourne on 16 July 1956. She was not to be idle for long however, as she was sold to the Port Phillip Pilots' Association and converted to a Pilot ship. She served as a pilot relief ship for seventeen years under the name *Akuna*



*As relief Pilot Ship of the Heads Port Philip*



The name *Akuna* commemorated the previous pilot vessel of that name which served from 1925 to 1956. That vessel, formerly HMAS *Una*, had also been sold to the Port Phillip Pilots' Association after service with the Royal Australian Navy. She was originally the German government vessel *Komet*, captured by the Royal Australian Navy in October 1914 following the capture of German New Guinea by Australian forces.

In November 1973 press reports stated that *Akuna* had been bought by a Melbourne businessman, Mr Scot Bevan-Davies, for use as a private yacht until about 1977 when he sold the ship. At one stage he installed a jet engine on the stern to help propel the ship.

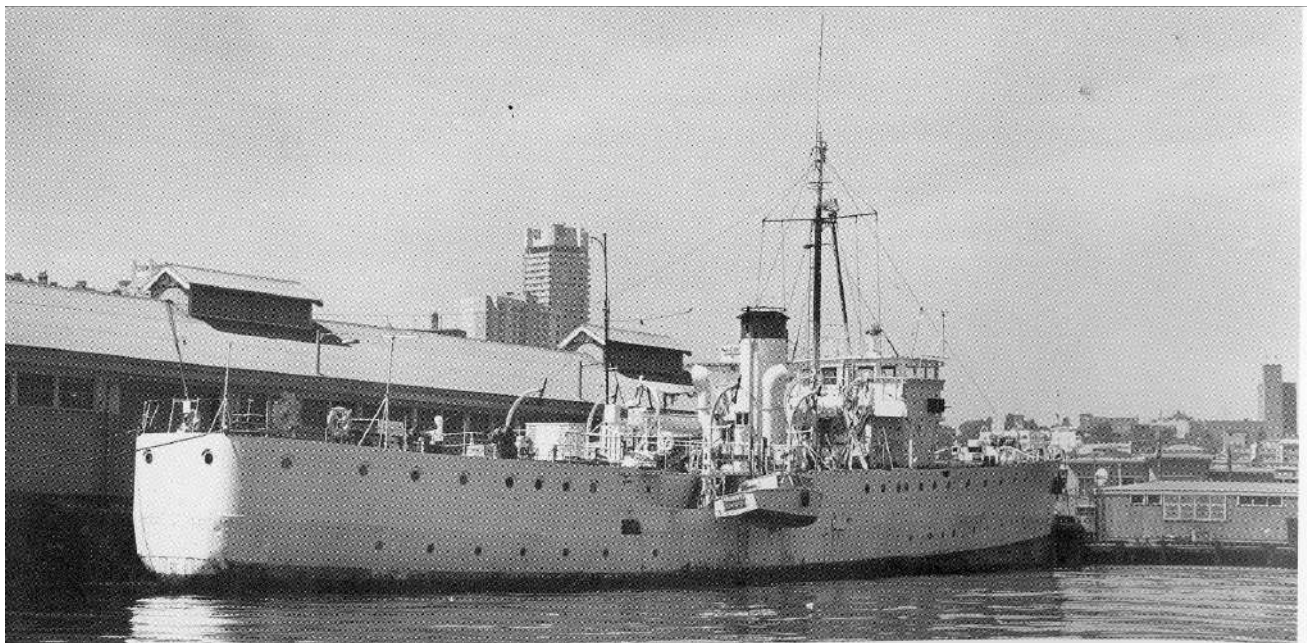


*Akuna at Reid St. Pier Williamstown*





AKUNA



*Akuna at Woolloomooloo Bay, Sydney 1975*

Sold 1977 to B Holohan then in 1978 sold to B Baron. In February 1981 a report was received that *Akuna II*, as the ship had been renamed, was owned by 'Food for the Hungry International' based in Arizona. The ship was re-registered as a Panamanian flagged private yacht under the name *Akuna II* in 1980, and worked from Singapore.





*Akuna in Brisbane 1978*

From here the picture becomes murky. For a time *Akuna II* was rescuing Vietnamese refugees escaping the communist regime in their country in small overland boats, and was also investigated by the CIA as part of a scam run by a former US air force pilot who was charging families large amounts of money to allegedly search for American soldiers missing in action from the war in Vietnam. It is believed she was broken up in Bangkok in 1983.