HMAS *Lithgow* – J206/M206

Namesake:	City of Lithgow,		Displacement:	650 tons (standard),
NSW Builder:	Mort's Dock			1,025 tons (full war
Laid down:	19 August 1940		load)	
Launched:	21 December 1940		Length:	186 ft (57 m)
Commissioned:	14 June 1941		Beam:	31 ft (9.4 m)
Decommissioned:	8 June 1948		Draught:	10 ft (3.0 m)
Battle honours:			Propulsion:	triple expansion
	Darwin 1942			engine, 2 shafts
	Pacific 1941–45		Speed:	15 knots (28 km/h;
	New Guinea 1942–44			17 mph) at 1,750 hp
			Complement:	85
Fate:	Sold for scrap in		Armament:	1 × 4-inch gun,
1956				3 × Oerlikons

HMAS *Lithgow* was laid down at Mort's Dock Engineering Company, Balmain, Sydney, NSW on 18 August 1940. She was launched on 21 December 1940 by Mrs Bennett, wife of a Director of Mort's Dock and Engineering Co Ltd and was the first RAN warship to carry the name of the city in the central tablelands of NSW. By the war's end Mort's Dock had constructed fourteen of the sixty Bathurst Class corvettes.

Mrs Bennett, wife of a Director of Mort's Dock and Engineering Co Ltd, names and launches HMAS Lithgow. (AWM 004395)

HMAS Lithgow takes to the water for the first time (L: AWM 004396, R: AWM 004397).

HMAS *Lithgow* commissioned at Sydney on 14 June 1941 under the command of Commander Alfred V Knight DSC, RANR(S).


Commander Alfred Knight RANR with ship's cat

HMAS *Lithgow* began her active career in July 1941 as a unit of the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla sweeping in Bass Strait and Tasmanian waters. Twenty German mines were swept by the Flotilla in 1941, *Lithgow* accounting for one of these off Tasman Island on 14 October.

The outbreak of the Pacific War ended sweeping operations for *Lithgow* and she temporarily assumed anti-submarine patrols off Sydney, before proceeding in January 1942, escorting the first US convoy to Darwin where she passed to the control of the Darwin command.

On 20 January 1942 *Lithgow* took part in the destruction of the Japanese minelaying submarine I-124, officially credited to HMA Ships *Deloraine*, *Lithgow* and *Katoomba*, and USS *Edsall*.
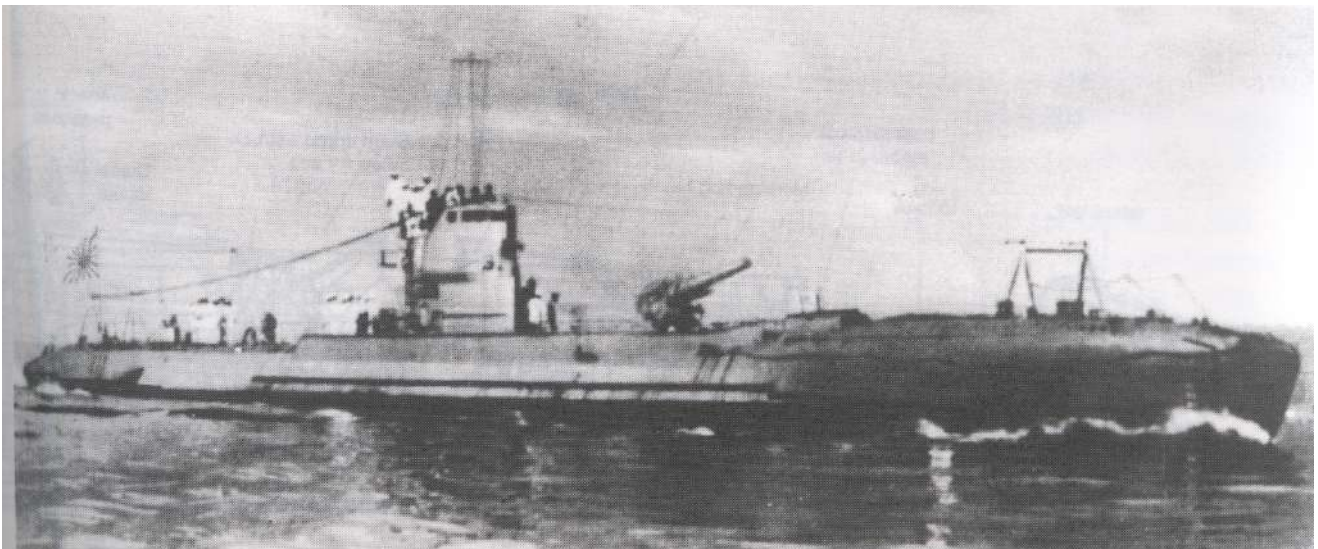
I-124

Escorting of Darwin-Thursday Island convoys occupied *Lithgow* until September 1942 when on the 18th she departed Townsville escorting a troop convoy of three ships for Port Moresby. The remainder of the year was taken up protecting New Guinea convoys. In December she took part in the landing of troops and equipment at Oro Bay for the Buna campaign.

HMAS Lithgow wearing her wartime disruptive pattern camouflage paint scheme. Corvettes often performed troop transport roles ferrying troops to and from New Guinea and the surrounding areas. Many can be seen in this image crowded on the upper decks.

On 30 December 1942, on completion of more than 18 months service, *Lithgow* put into Brisbane for refitting. The refit was completed on 5 March 1943 and the following day *Lithgow* began nine months of escort and anti-submarine duty on the Queensland coast. At around 12:30 on the morning of 19 December 1943, *Lithgow* was diverted from her own convoy escort duties to render assistance to convoy TN 192.

Seven of the eight merchant vessels in the convoy, along with one of the escorts, HMAS *Gladstone*, had run aground on Bougainville Reef on the Great Barrier Reef. By the time *Lithgow* arrived just before 6:00 that morning, *Gladstone* had managed to re-float herself and was waiting for daybreak in company with the other convoy escorts, HMA Ships *Gympie* and *Stawell*, just clear of the reef. The vessels *Colorado*, *Ambrose Bierce* and *City of Fortworth* had also all managed to free themselves and, with *Lithgow* and HMAS *Castlemaine* arriving to assist, and her own starboard propeller damaged, *Gladstone* detached at just after 7:00am to escort the trio back to Cairns.

Lithgow, along with *Gympie*, *Stawell* and *Castlemaine*, began disembarking troops from the stricken vessels at just after 9:00am. With all the troops transferred by 11:30 that morning, *Lithgow* began escorting those ships that were able to proceed back to Cairns early in the afternoon, arriving at around 7:00 that evening and subsequently returned to her own escort duties. All of the remaining ships were quickly re-floated, suffering varying degrees of damage.

The year of 1944 began with escort duties to New Guinea, followed by the ship's annual refit at Melbourne. In April *Lithgow* arrived at Milne Bay to begin a period of ten months escort and anti-submarine operations in New Guinea waters. She was in constant service to Langemak, Hollandia, Madang, Wakde, Biak, Morotai, Noemfoor and Mios Woendi.

A navy church service being conducted on board HMAS Kiama in Bougainville, circa July 1945. The service was conducted by Chaplain FO Hulme-Moir, Headquarters 2 Corps. Personnel from HMAS Lithgow and HMAS Dubbo also attended the service. The organist was Lieutenant-Colonel RR Winton, deputy assistant director of medical services, Headquarters 2 Corps. (AWM 093765)

Left: A signalman using semaphore from the bridge of HMAS Lithgow, as three RAN motor launches escorting Japanese barges approach carrying envoy for preliminary surrender discussions, Bougainville, circa August 1945. (AWM 095086) Right: An Oerlikon gun crew at action stations on the bridge of Lithgow, as Japanese barges approach. L-R: Signalman TF Barclay, Able Seaman RK Robinson and Able Seaman BD Beames (AWM 095088).

Left: The bridge of HMAS Lithgow showing Petty Officer LC Moore, coxswain and Lieutenant GSH Champion, Commanding Officer, on the occasion of the surrender negotiations with the Japanese envoy from Lieutenant-General M Kanda, Commander Imperial Japanese 17 Army Group. (AWM 095109) Right: Members of the crew of HMAS Lithgow watching from the gun deck during the interrogation of a Japanese envoy, Bougainville, circa August 1945. (AWM 095097)

A seven week refit at Williamstown in April and May 1945 was followed by a return to New Guinea waters. In June and July the ship took part in Allied operations in the Solomons, supporting the land forces with a series of bombardments against enemy held territory. *Lithgow* remained based on the Solomons until the end of September 1945, operating as a minesweeper in the latter period. She was present at the Japanese surrender at Rabaul. October was spent in New Guinea waters, the ship ending her active war career when she entered Sydney Harbour on 1 November 1945.

Lithgow 4" gun 1945
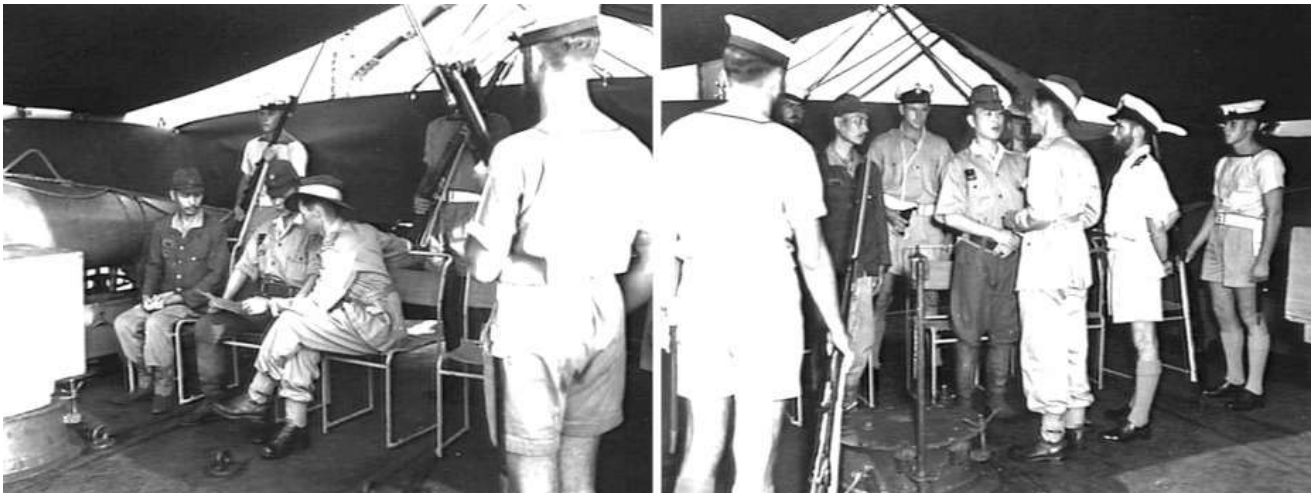
Left: An Australian officer aboard Lithgow off Moila Point explains surrender plans to two Japanese service personnel. (AWM P00001.186) Right: Japanese service personnel on board Lithgow off Moila Point listening to surrender instructions from an Australian officer. (AWM P00001.185)
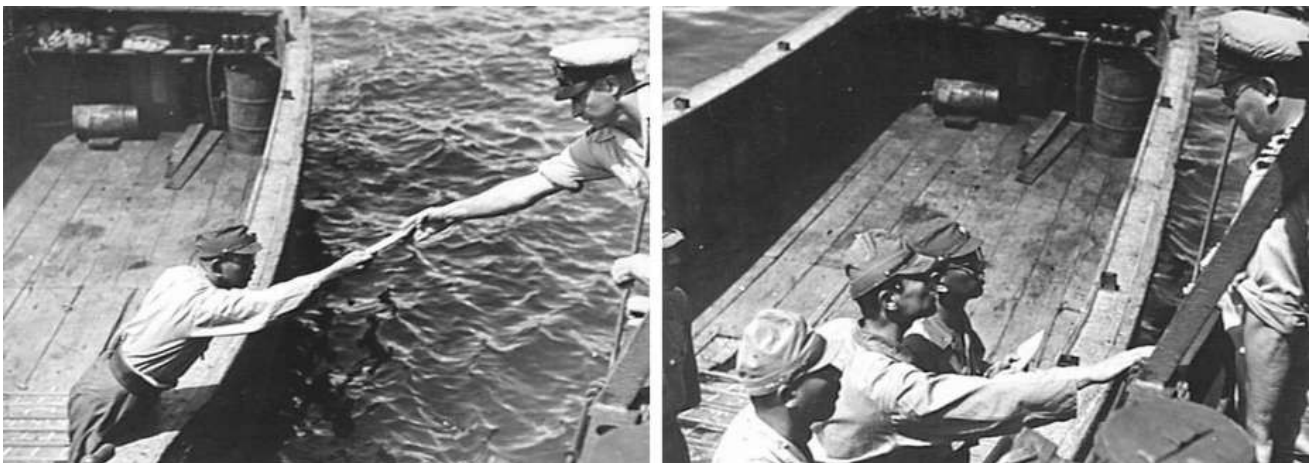
Left: Lieutenant Commander E Howitt, RAN, handing a message to an officer on a Japanese barge for relay to Lieutenant-General M Kanda, Commander Imperial Japanese 17 Army Group. (AWM 095111) Right: A member of the Japanese envoy holding a message for Lieutenant-General M Kanda, Commander Imperial Japanese 17 Army Group, and being advised that the two envoys on board HMAS Lithgow are to be taken to Torokina. (AWM 095112)

[Previous page] Left: Japanese envoy Captain Takenaka, accompanied by the Japanese interpreter Mr Takahaski, being conveyed on HMAS Lithgow, to Lieutenant General SG Savige's headquarters on Bougainville to receive surrender terms. The envoys were searched on board the warship and an armed guard was in attendance during the voyage to the headquarters. (AWM 019007) Right: Japanese barge flying the white flag, leaving HMAS Lithgow off Moila Point after delivering two Japanese Officers to be advised of surrender conditions and arrangements. (AWM P00001.194)

Crew 20 August 1945

The Herald (Melbourne) Sat 3 Nov 1945:

FIGHT TO SAVE SHIP IN STORM

SYDNEY.— The crew of the, wooden steamer Klnchela fought for 10 hours with buckets and a hand pump to keep the ship afloat coming down the coast.

A former Brisbane boom ship, the Klnchela left Brisbane on Monday morning towed by HMAS *Lithgow*.   Heavy seas that evening opened up the timbers at the stern. Water poured in, rose to the firebox in the engine room, and ashes choked the bilge pump.

When the ship's hand pump failed, a bucket, brigade was formed, the men hanging on with one hand and working with the other: but, they couldn't overcome the intake of water.

Eight miles off the coast, the Lithgow put a hand pump and working party on board.

The KInchela was taken into the shelter of Coffs Harbor, Where the water level was reduced and the bilge pump cleared. Each man in the working party was issued with a bottle of beer, and residents of Coffs Harbor put on a dance for them. Another corvette HMAS Wagga relieved the Lithgow and patched up the KInchela with copper and cement.

Kinchela

In 1946 and 1947 *Lithgow* operated as a unit of the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla. She was constantly employed on minesweeping duties, in 1946 in the New Britain/Solomon's area and on the Queensland coast the following year.

Daily Mercury (Mackay, Qld) Wed 23 Jul 1947:

CAPTAIN HAZARDED HIS SHIP

SYDNEY, Tuesday. — Lieut. Commander Harold James Hull, RANVR, captain of the corvette HMAS *Lithgow* was found guilty at a naval court-martial to-day of hazarding his ship and was severely reprimanded.

He was acquitted of a charge of stranding his ship. Hull was charged with having negligently or by default hazarded, or stranded his ship on Elford Reef in the Flora Passage in the Great Barrier Reef. The court's finding said Hull had not calculated his position by dead reckoning and had travelled too swiftly in view of the position of the sun.

The ship, belonging to the Second Division of the 20th Mine Sweeping Flotilla, sailed from Cairns to sweep near the Flora Passage.

Because of unsuitable weather conditions she anchored in the lee of Fitzroy Island. On May 9 went to sea to investigate the weather conditions. The next day she ran aground for three minutes before re-floating. No damage was caused to the ship.

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

HMAS Lithgow flying her decommissioning pennant as she sails into Melbourne for the last time, 8 June 1948.

Her seagoing career ended in January 1948 when she arrived at Fremantle, finally paying off into the Reserve Fleet on 8 June 1948, having steamed 178,000 miles and being under way for almost 20,000 hours.

8 June1948 Paid off into F Class Reserve. On 18 August 1956 *Lithgow* was sold as scrap to the Hong Kong Delta Shipping Company, Hong Kong.

11 January 1957 Along with *Deloraine*, departed Fremantle towed by tug *Loire*. Subsequently broken up in Hong Kong.
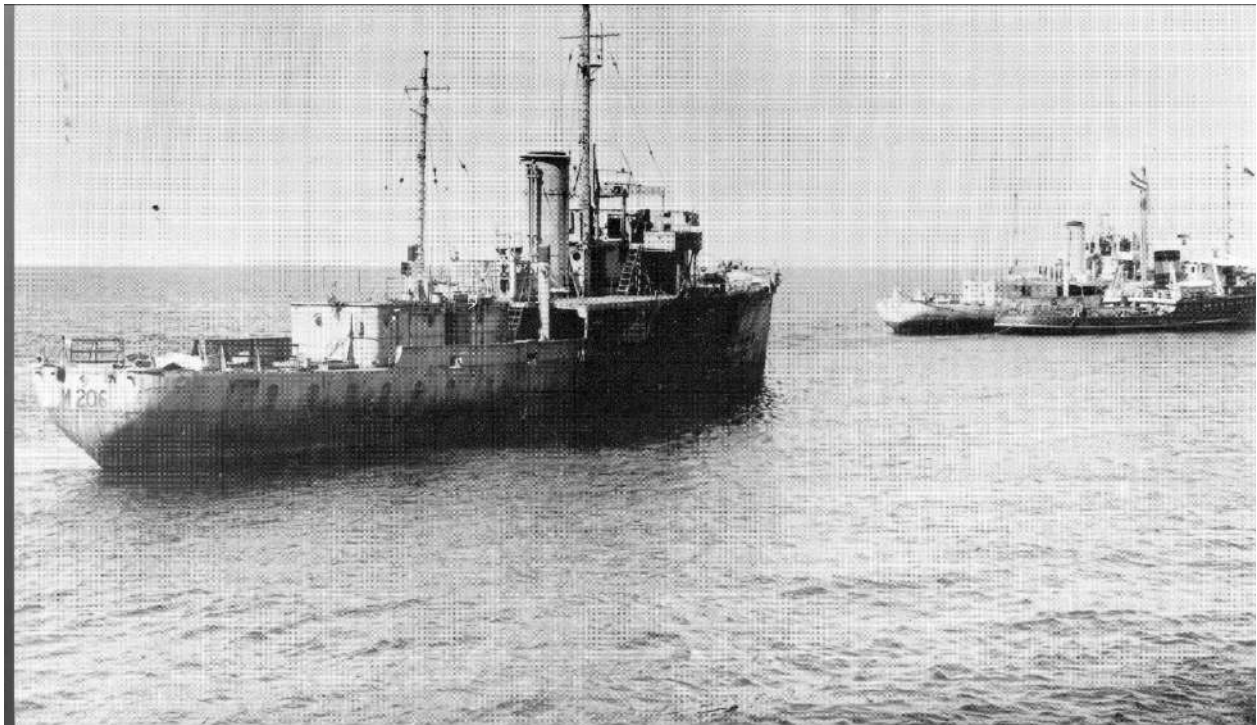
A sad and lonely end for a corvette. HMAS Lithgow, like so many other corvettes, was stripped of her armament and equipment after the war and left at anchor, waiting for somebody to buy her for scrap. (Ern Pask).