

HMAS Warrnambool – J202



Namesake: City of Warrnambool, Vic
 Builder: Morts Dock
 Laid down: 13 November 1940
 Launched: 8 May 1941
 Commissioned: 23 September 1941
 Motto: "Protect And Avenge"

Battle honours:

Darwin 1942
 Pacific 1942–45
 New Guinea 1942

Fate:
 Sunk during mine clearance on 13 Sept 1947



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,

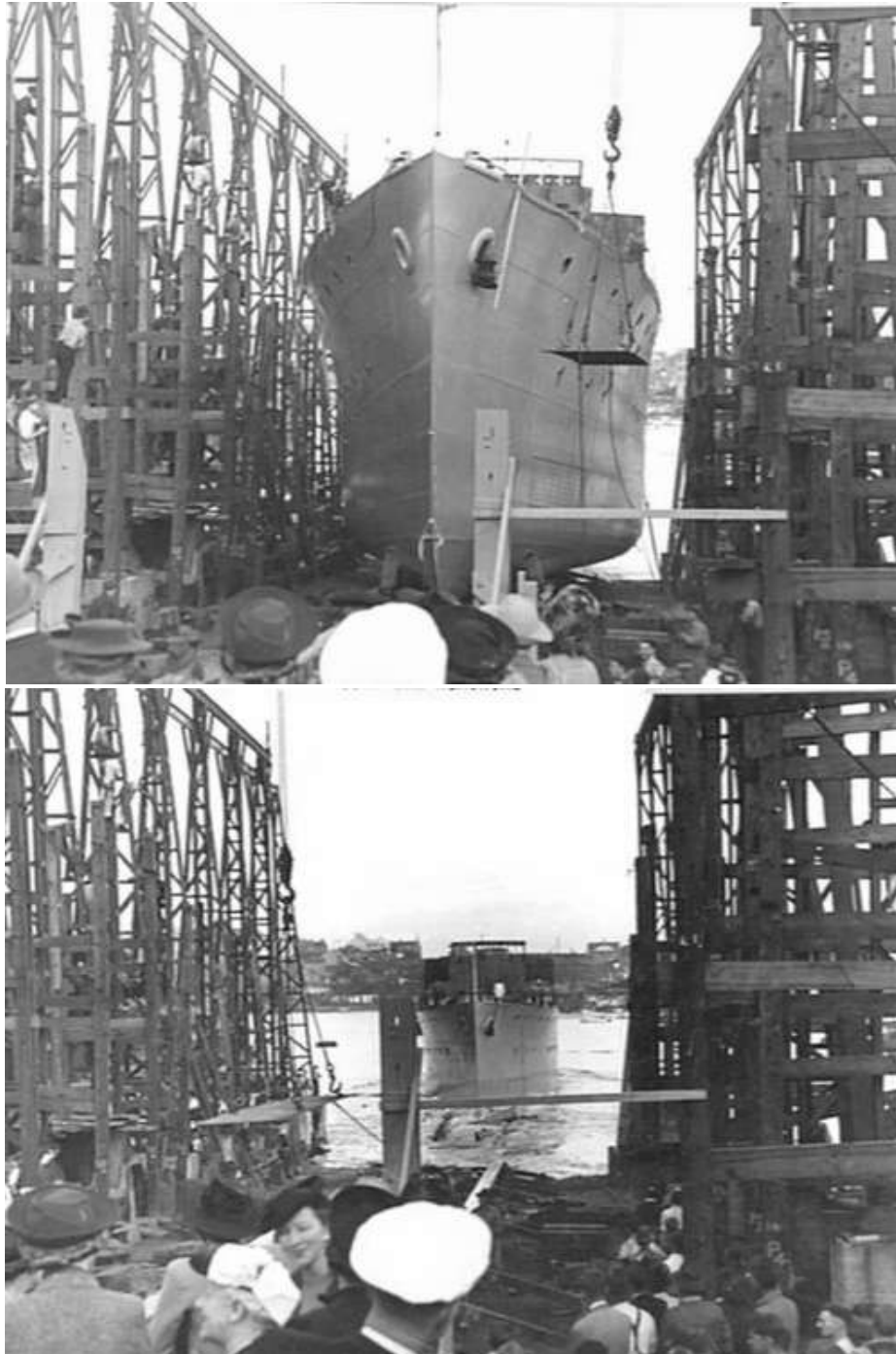
2 shafts

Speed: 15 knots (28 km/h; 17 mph) at 1,750 hp

Complement: 85

Armament: 1 × 4 inch gun
 1 × 40mm Bofors
 AA gun (installed later)
 3 × 20mm Oerlikon (1 later removed)
 machine guns
 depth charge
 chutes and thrower

HMAS *Warrnambool* was laid down on 13 November 1940 at Mort's Dock and Engineering Co Ltd, Sydney, NSW. She was launched by Mrs ET Simpson, wife of a Director of Mort's Dock, on 8 May 1941.



Warrnambool slides down the slipway at Mort's Dock, Sydney, 8 May 1941.



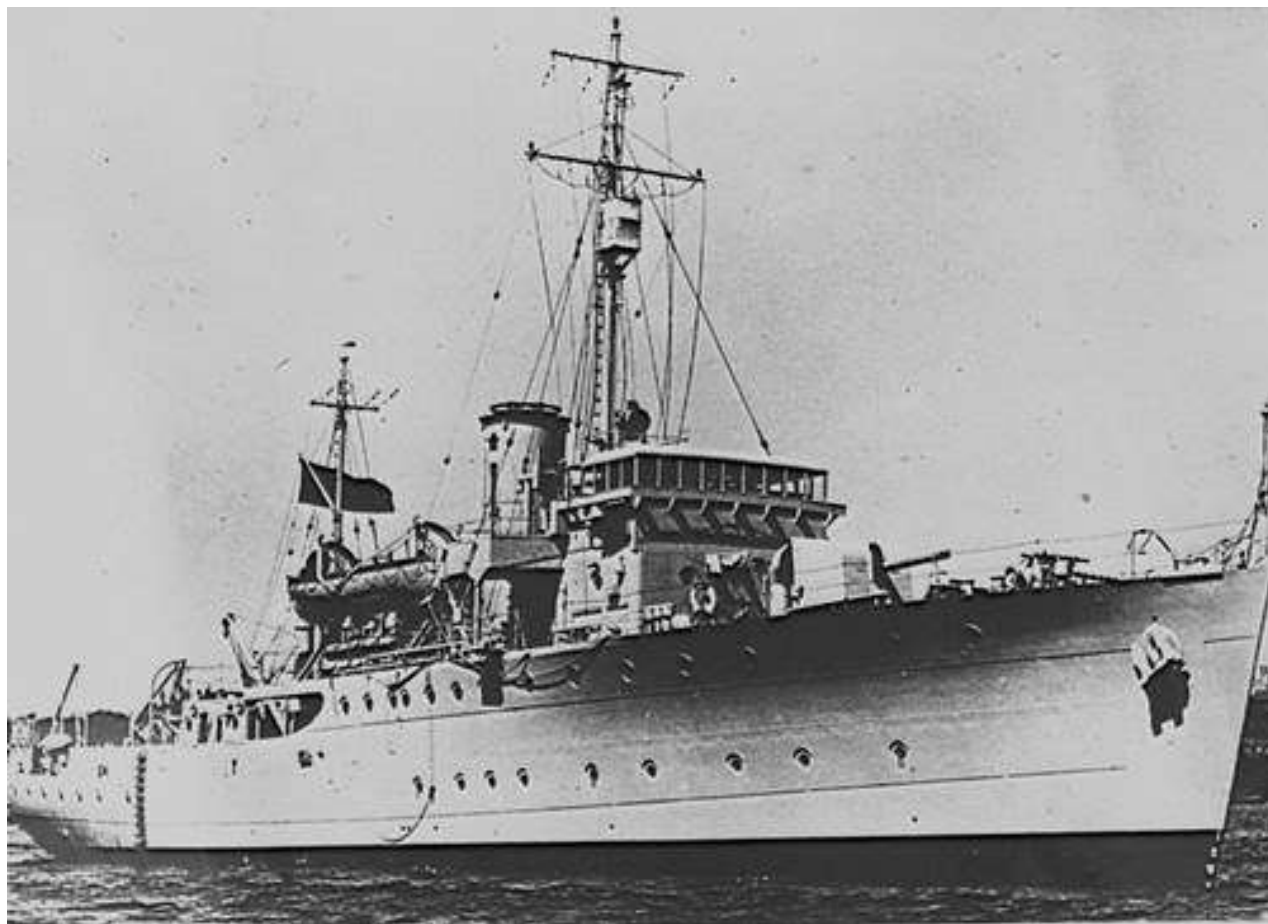
Warrnambool on trials



Commissioned in the RAN at Sydney on 23 September 1941 under the command of Lieutenant Eric J Barron RANR(S).

Following completion of sea trials, *Warrnambool* was immediately engaged in patrols in Bass Strait before proceeding to northern Australian waters. She was present at Darwin when the first Japanese air raid occurred on 19 February 1942, but sustained no damage or casualties.

The following day the ship rescued 73 survivors of the chartered US Army transport ship *Don Isidro* which had been attacked and set on fire by Japanese dive bombers. During the rescue operation *Warrnambool* was bombed by a Japanese flying boat, but sustained no damage or casualties.



Warrnambool on trials



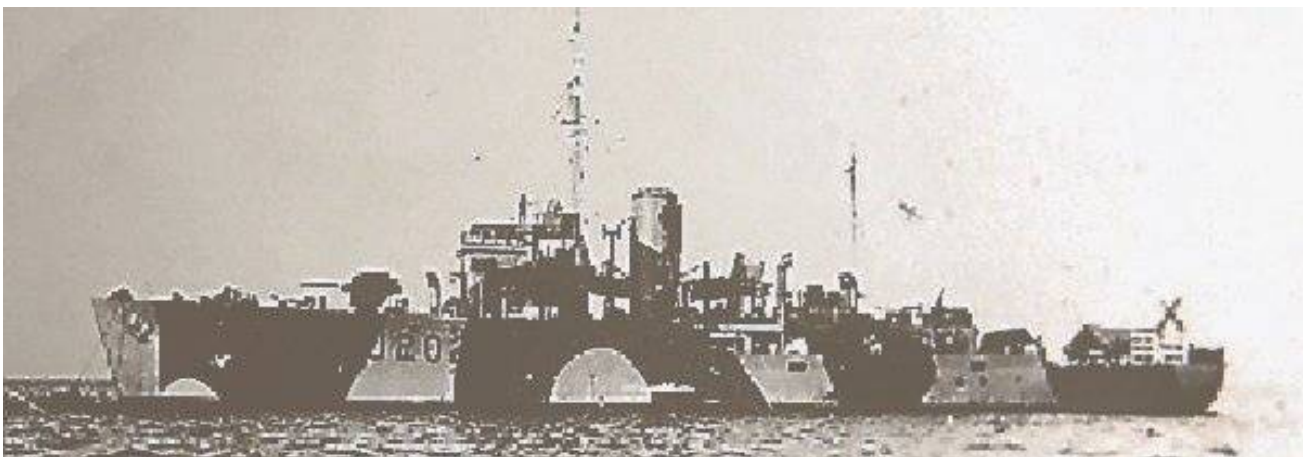
Burnt out wreck of Don Isidro off Melville Island

In the first twelve months of *Warrnambool's* commission, all except the first three of which were spent in northern waters, the ship had carried out five evacuations or rescue trips, been present during 18 air raids, and ferried 4000 troops in New Guinea.

In July 1942, in company with HMAS *Southern Cross*, she carried Netherlands East Indies troops and stores from Darwin to Dobo, in the Aru Islands. In September 1942 *Warrnambool* rescued survivors of the force from Dobo.

Later in September the ship assisted in the rescue of personnel of HMAS *Voyager*, which had grounded at Betano on the south coast of Timor while landing Australian troops and subsequently became a total loss.

Late in 1942 *Warrnambool* transferred to the Australian east coast and spent most of the remainder of the war operating in that area on anti-submarine patrols and convoy protection.

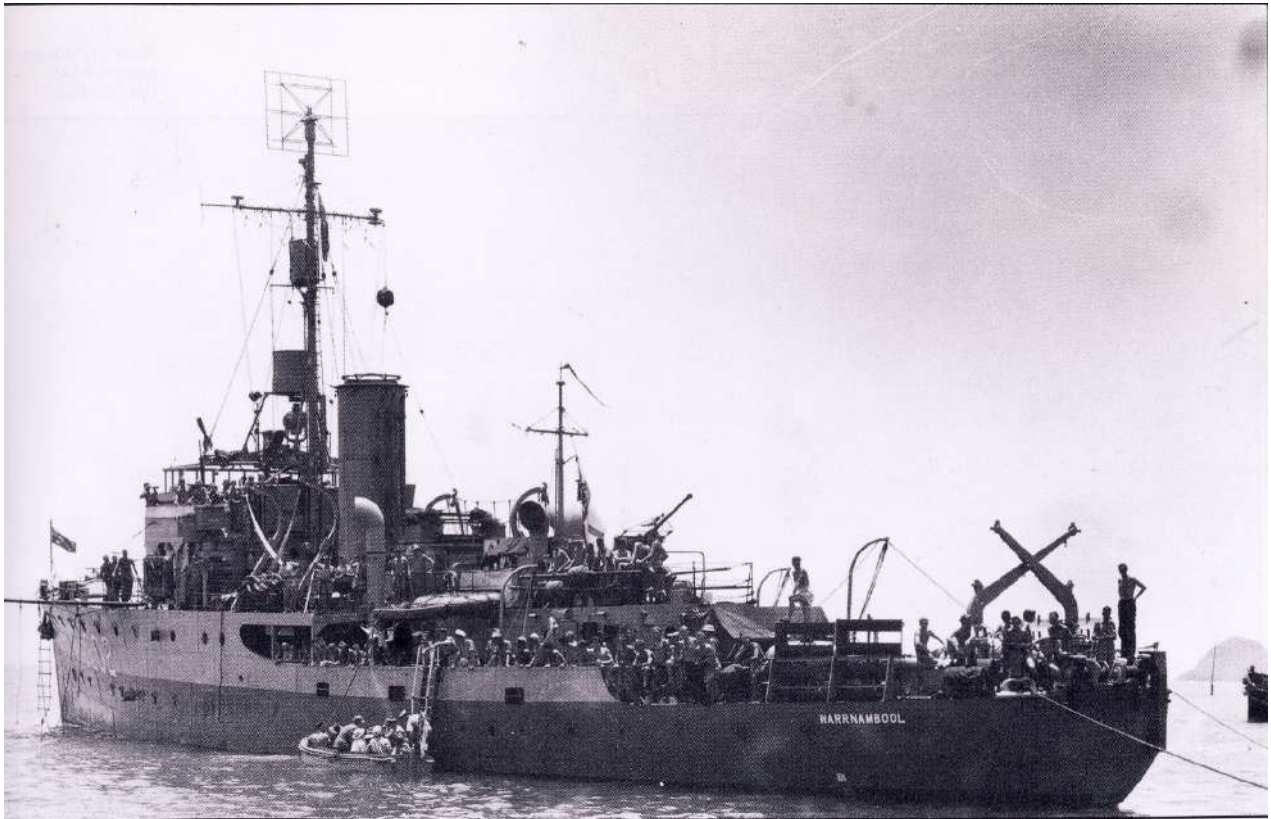


Crew 1943

Late in September 1944 she proceeded to Fremantle where she was based until the end of February 1945. *Warrnambool* then transferred to Darwin where she was based for the remainder of 1945.



Warrnambool Crew 1944

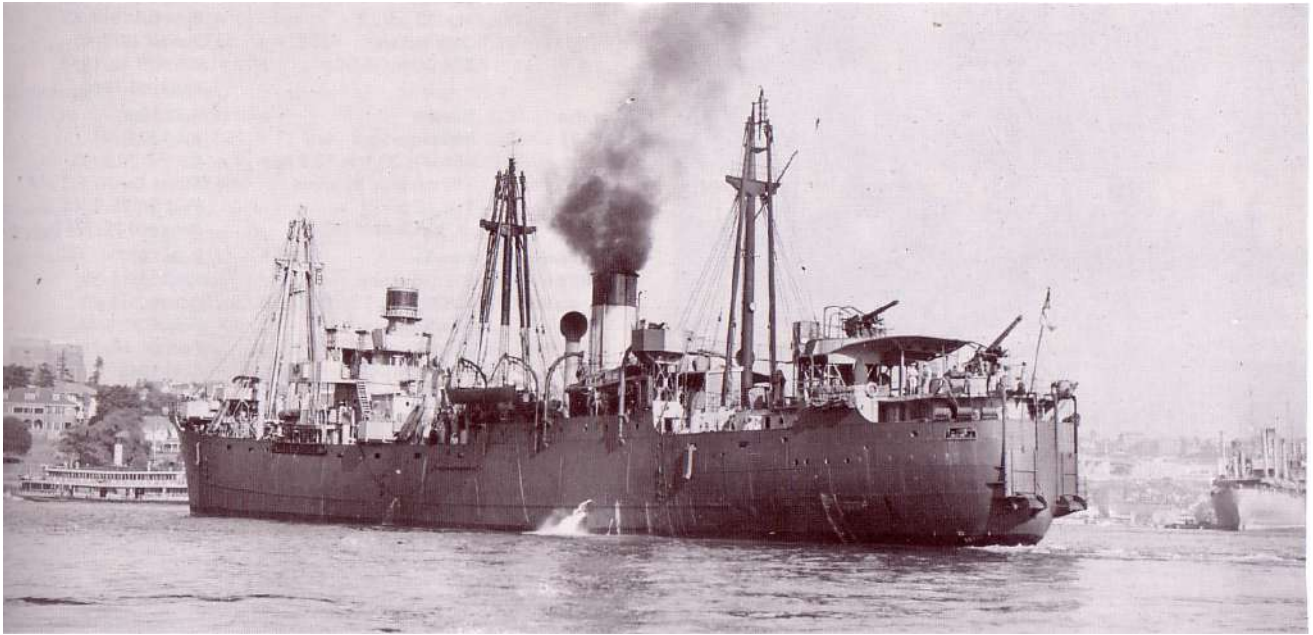


Following the cessation of hostilities, *Warrnambool* was present at the Japanese surrender at Koepang, Timor, on 11 September 1945.



Warrnambool as she appeared when part of the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla.

Warrnambool's subsequent post war career consisted of mine clearance work in Solomons and New Guinea waters, followed by similar operations in the Great Barrier Reef area. On 13 September 1947 minesweeping operations were in progress in the Great Barrier Reef area to clear the defensive minefield laid by HMAS *Bungaree* during 1941-43 to protect entrances to the reef.



HMAS *Bungaree*

Warrnambool was leader of the 1st division comprising her sister ships *Mildura*, *Katoomba*, HDML 1326 and HDML 1329. The operation was under the command of the Senior Officer, 20th Minesweeping Flotilla, in the sloop HMAS *Swan*.

At 15:56 on 13 September 1947 *Warrnambool* struck a mine.

As a result of the explosion Signalman Norman Lloyd Lott, 28608 was lost overboard and listed as missing, believed killed. Thirty two men (three officers and 29 ratings) were injured. Stoker Ronald John Garrett, 34344, Ordinary Seaman John Herbert Hyland, 28583 and Able Seaman Donald Bain Sigg, 31199 subsequently died from the injuries they sustained. All of those killed were from Victoria.

BRISBANE, September 14 1947

HMAS *Warrnambool* struck a mine near Cape Grenville, 500 miles north of Cairns. The vessel had a complement of 90. Other ships of the flotilla with HMAS *Warrnambool* were HMAS *Swan*, *Mildura* and *Katoomba* and harbour motor launches 1326 and 1329.

This is the only accident sustained by RAN sweepers since they began ridding Australia and New Guinea waters of mines laid during World War II.

BEDS READY

Twenty-six beds have been prepared at the Cairns Hospital to receive the injured. A navy Dakota plane will fly the more seriously injured to Greenslopes Hospital, Brisbane tomorrow. Five ambulances will be at the wharf to meet the ship. Local doctors and blood donors have been told to stand by.

The superintendent of Cairns Hospital (Dr Flynn) said: "We will be able to cope with any emergency. Blood transfusions and emergency operations, if any, are all provided for."

MOSTLY N.S.W. CREW

The complement of the minesweeper is about 60. Most of them are from N.S.W. and the majority are permanent navy men with war service.

The *Warrnambool* sank so quickly that few men had time to remove their personal belongings, but most of the survivors were rescued.

Captain of the *Warrnambool* Commander Travis was in command of the sloop Swan during the first air raid on Darwin on February 19, 1942. HMAS Swan had just tied up at Darwin when the raid started after an unsuccessful attempt to reach Timor with Australian troops on board.

During the attempt to reach Timor with HMAS Swan, Commander Travis was attacked by 14 Japanese planes. It was during the battle that the American cruiser Houston was sunk.

Travis is married to a Brisbane girl, formerly Felicity Jackson, of Kangaroo Point. The wife of the *Warrnambool* skipper. Commander Travis, is living in Cairns.

It is believed that the *Warrnambool* struck a contact mine and sank in about an hour. Although all mines in northern minefield were laid five years ago they are all alive and heavy loss of gear has been caused by detonations during the sweeping early this year. Personnel of the flotilla were granted extra money as danger pay.

Mines are cut adrift by corvettes and sunk by gunfire from launches.

QUEENSLAND CASUALTIES: Queenslanders in the casualty list are: Injured.-Lieut J. B. Sinclair, of Brisbane; Stoker E. J. Hodges, of Redcliffe; Ordinary Seaman D. Young, of Dalby.

Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton) Mon 15 Sep 1947

HMAS *Warrnambool* STRIKES MINE: 2 DEAD

CANBERRA, September 14.-Whilst mine-sweeping north of Cairns yesterday, H.M.A.S. *Warrnambool* struck a mine. Two men are dead, one is missing and 26 were injured.

All the ship's company have been accounted for except the missing man.

Casualties were:

DIED FROM INJURIES: Stoker Garratt, Able Seaman Hyland.

MISSING; Signalman Lott.

Six were critically injured and 12 severely injured. Dangerously injured numbered eight, including the ship's captain, Commander Travis.

The Minister for the Navy (Mr Riordan) said tonight that the next of kin had been advised. HMAS *Warrnambool* was one of a flotilla engaged in sweeping a mine field laid along the Queensland coast during the war.

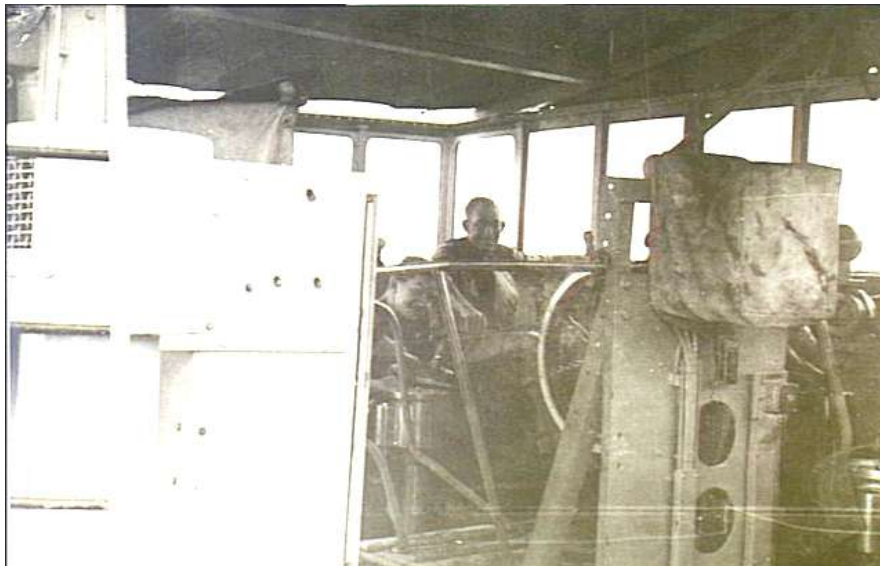
Mr Riordan said the flotilla leader HMAS *Swan*, commanded by Captain Wheatley, was due at Cairns at 6 a.m. today.

P.M.'s MESSAGE

The Prime Minister (Mr Chifley) said tonight he had learned with regret of the loss of life and he hoped all injured would recover. He conveyed his deepest sympathy to the relatives.

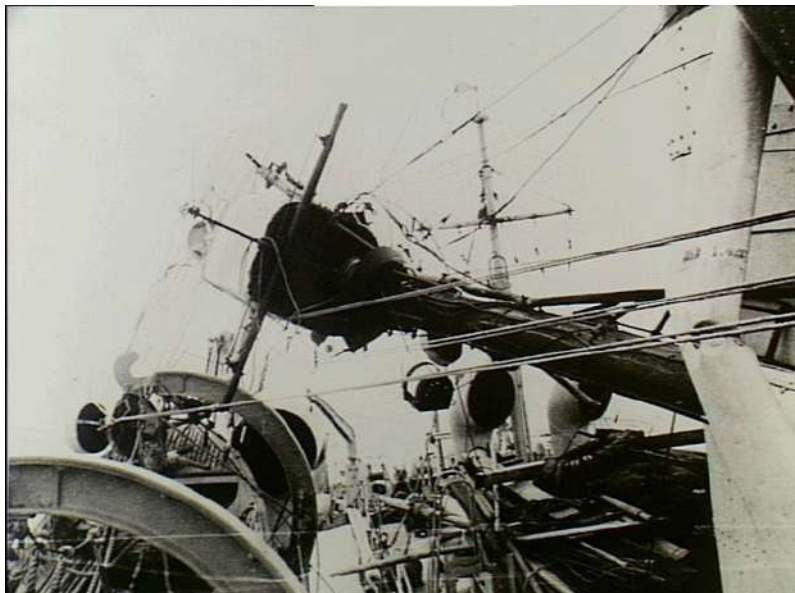
Mr Riordan has sent the following message to Captain Wheatley:

"Shocked to learn of tragedy. Please accept my deepest sympathy and convey same to all ships' companies of the flotilla at the loss of gallant shipmates. "I trust the injured will make a speedy recovery. If I can do anything further please contact me"



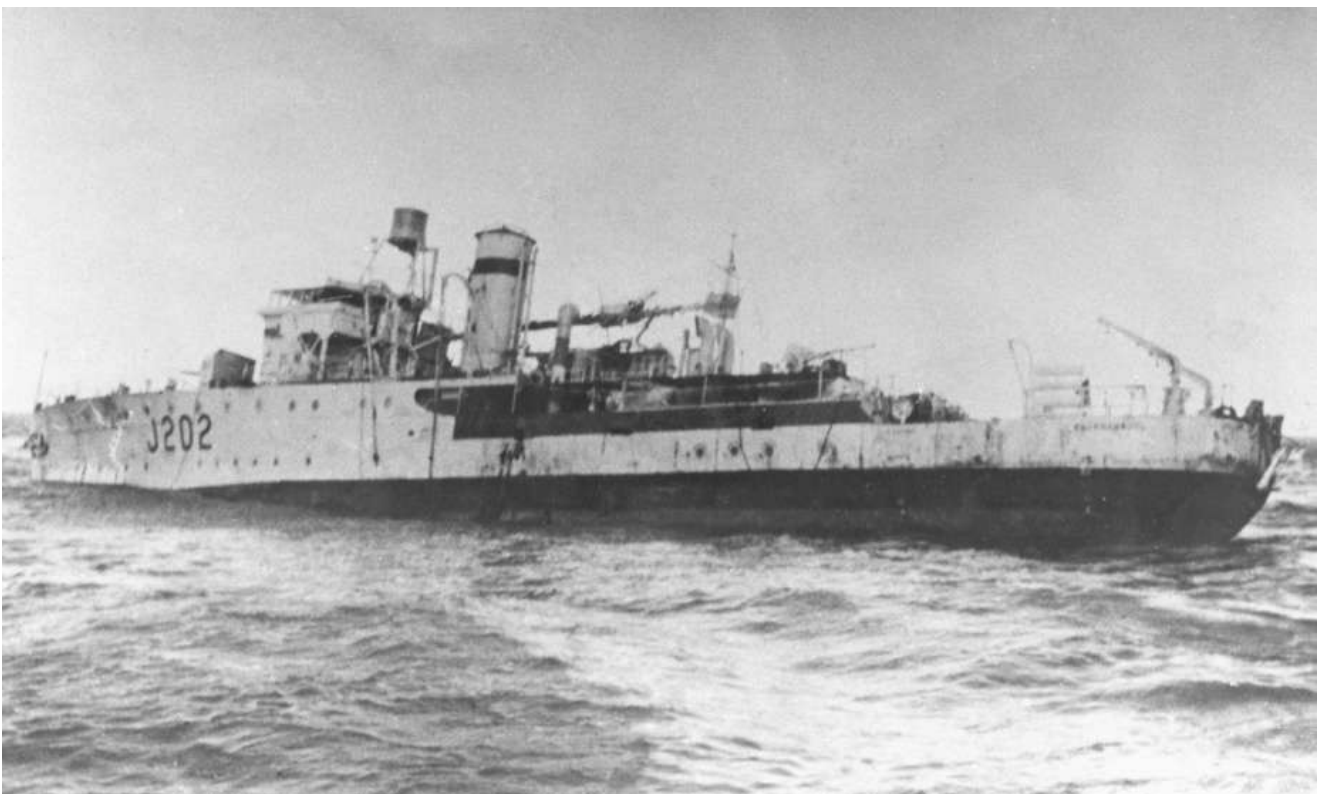
Injured Captain receiving medical attention on bridge







After the rescuing *Warrnambool*'s survivors, an attempt was made to tow *Warrnambool* clear of the minefield by HDML 1326 but because of the strong tidal stream the corvette drifted back towards the line of mines and was abandoned at 16:54. She then drifted across the line in a sinking condition and finally turned over and sank at 17:45. *Warrnambool* was the only RAN ship ever lost in a minesweeping operation.



Warrnambool after she drifted across the line of mines and began sinking.

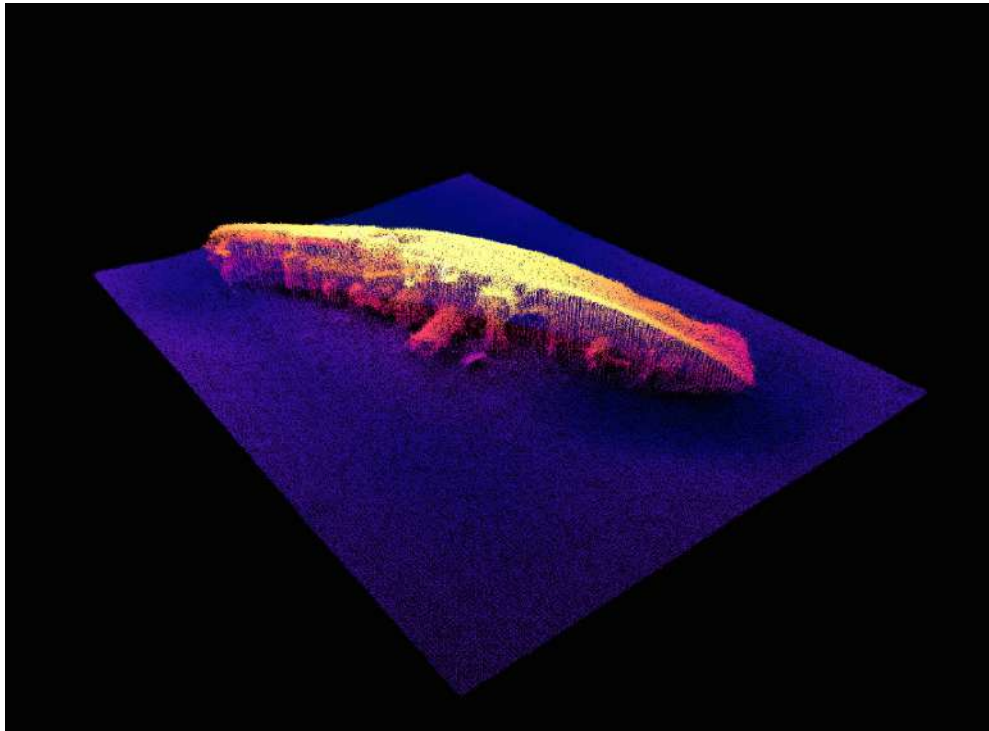
Operations by Navy divers in May 1948 recovered a number of items, including the ship's bell and a plaque depicting the seal of the town of *Warrnambool*. The latter item had been presented to the ship by the *Warrnambool* Town Council, to whom it was returned. The wreck lay in position 11 degrees 45.5'S, 143 degrees 14.2'E (approximately) or five cables from Fairway Reef on a bearing 73 degrees 30'.



Left: The barnacle encrusted seal of Warrnambool. Right: Warrnambool's ship's bell (believed to currently be located at Flagstaff Hill, Warrnambool) both items were retrieved from her wreck by RAN divers in May 1948.

As a result of an enquiry by another firm in 1970 tenders were called for the purchase and removal of the wreck, Southern Cross Diving and Salvage being the successful tenderer. The former Department of the Navy reserved the right to any items considered to be of historical interest.

Salvage operations took place between 1972 and 1975. The salvor reported that the wreck was in 26 metres lying on her starboard side with the funnel top buried in coral. The wreck was pointing in a north easterly direction and had sunk approximately 1.2 metres into the mud.



On 8 March 2016 HMAS Mermaid conducted a survey over the wreck of *Warrnambool* producing the above high definition image.

It was considered by the salvor that because of the condition of the wreck after being so long submerged, it would almost certainly break up if lifting it were attempted. It has, therefore, not been removed as provided for the contract of sale. The wreck does not constitute a navigational hazard.





The four RAN members lost in Warrnambool are interred in the Cairns War Cemetery.

