

HMAS *Seamist*

*Seamist*³⁸⁵ was constructed in 1939. She was one of the modern sleek Halvorsen cruisers from their Neutral Bay yard and probably the last to be designed by Lars Halvorsen. Whilst some reports indicate she was built for Oliver Triggs,³⁸⁶ the founder of Meadow Lea, or for motor racing identity Hope Bartlett,³⁸⁷ she was in fact built for Mr and Mrs Gale of Potts Point. Gale was a 'well known' member of the Broken Bay branch of the Royal Motor Yacht Club and managing director of Consolidated Trust Ltd, the largest property owner in Kings Cross at the time, controlling over 400 properties.³⁸⁸

As with other luxury motor cruisers, this was not the first *Seamist*.

The first vessel, also named *Seamist*, had been built for the Gales by Halvorsen's at their Neutral Bay yard and had been launched in October 1937.³⁸⁹ Despite its small size at just 45 feet (13.72m), the first *Seamist* was described at the time as 'luxury afloat' with flying bridge, large main saloon, kitchen that 'you could not call a galley', and accommodation for six with the French polished Queensland maple paneling lending a 'dignity seldom found afloat'. She was powered by twin 40hp engines giving her a speed of 11 miles (17.6km) per hour. The media reported she would be added to the 'large list of palatial cruisers registered with the Broken Bay branch of the Royal Motor Yacht Club'.



The first *Seamist*.³⁹⁰

By March 1939, the first *Seamist* had been sold to Oliver Triggs.³⁹¹ At the time she was subsequently requisitioned by the Navy on 14 August 1942, she was owned by Percy Walton. From the time of the requisition, she was named *Sea Mist* by the Navy. In early 1943, *Sea Mist* had been taken over by the US Army for their Services of Supply/Army Service Forces (SOS/ASF) Unit.³⁹² The purchase for £2,000 was finalized in April 1943.³⁹³ As the vessel became the property of the US Army, there are no records in the Australian Archives of her service. However, a vessel of the same name appears in the Queensland newspapers in 1945 operating out of Brisbane.³⁹⁴ That vessel was described as an 'American launch, the

³⁸⁵ Different forms of *Seamist* have been applied. See Footnote 73 on page 27

³⁸⁶ <http://nicholasjcornish.blogspot.com/2012/08/hmas-sea-mist-and-attack-on-sydney.html> A Blog by Nicholas James Cornish, nephew of one of the owners. Last entry on 8 September 2018.

³⁸⁷ Wikipedia – source not cited

³⁸⁸ See: Singleton Argus, 26 August 1938, p.4., The Sun (Sydney), 18 May 1939, p.44. and 22 December 1939, p.9., The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 5 April 1940, p.6

³⁸⁹ Referee (Sydney), 21 October 1937, p.24

³⁹⁰ RAN Sea Power Centre - Australia

³⁹¹ The International Powerboat and Aquatic Monthly, 10 March 1939, Advertisement for Halvorsen vessels

³⁹² NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/2350: Purchase of Motor Yacht *Sea Mist*, p.12

³⁹³ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/2350: Purchase of Motor Yacht *Sea Mist*, p.1

³⁹⁴ The Telegraph (Brisbane), 29 December 1945, p.4 and 31 December 1945, p.4

Sea Mist and '*The Sea Mist is a 45 foot trunk cabin motor launch*'. Perhaps this vessel was Gale's first *Seamist*.



Mrs. R A Gale naming *Seamist* at its launching.³⁹⁵

Gale's second *Seamist* was launched on Monday 14 August 1939,³⁹⁶ less than two years after the launch of his first *Seamist* and just three weeks before the outbreak of war in Europe. Seventy guests attended the cocktail party and toasted the launch of the new 60 foot (18.29m) cruiser.³⁹⁷

The new *Seamist* included four bedrooms with accommodation for eight people, dining room, bathroom, galley and wheelhouse. *Seamist's* launch was attended by owners of other motor cruisers, including Percy Christmas, owner of *Toomeree*, and Fred Harris, the future owner of *Steady Hour II*.



Seamist – successor to the smaller 45 foot *Seamist*.³⁹⁸

Seamist was requisitioned on 17 June 1941. Prior to the requisition, the Navy had been advised the vessel was owned by Automobile and General Finance Co Ltd with Mr Hope Bartlett of Nowra being the hirer via a hire purchase agreement.³⁹⁹ Evidently, Gale had sold the vessel in the previous 22 months, or perhaps he had an involvement with the finance company. Bartlett delivered her from Jervis Bay to Garden Island and claimed his costs of doing so. The survey completed by Automobile and General

³⁹⁵ Halvorsen photograph album, No. 2 held by the ANMM

³⁹⁶ The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 15 August 1939, p.14

³⁹⁷ There is some confusion regarding the length of *Seamist*. The Halvorsen Register includes '*Seamist II*' as a '*60' Motor Cruiser*'. Svensen records her length as 60 feet (18.29m). The Lloyds survey for the Navy, records a length of 60 feet. However, Cornish and Wikipedia record a length of 65 feet (19.81m). The current owner confirms the length at 20m (65.6 feet) from the '*anchor roller to the stern*'. Both measurements are correct. The official measurement for Registration is from the '*fore part of stem to the fore side of the head of the rudder post*' which is 60 feet, whilst the overall length from '*anchor roller to the stern*' is 65.6 feet (20m).

³⁹⁸ The International Powerboat and Aquatic Monthly – September 1939

³⁹⁹ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/4966 – Vessel *Seamist* for Airmist. This Record includes details of requisition and purchase.

identified total rentals owing by Bartlett of £4,460 with a further £500 yet to be paid to Gale. A total cost to Bartlett of £4,960.

Seamist was commissioned into the Navy on 21 July 1941 under the command of Sub-Lieutenant John A Doyle RANR(S).⁴⁰⁰ Significantly as will be seen, Doyle was due to remain her commander till midnight on 31 May 1942, however, at 4.00 pm on the afternoon of 31 May 1942, Doyle handed his command to Sub-Lieutenant Reginald T Andrew RANVR.

Seamist was armed with .303 Vickers machine guns mounted fore and aft with depth charges on the stern.

The Navy's Lloyd surveyor valued her at just £4,000. By August 1941, Bartlett had not received payment for his delivery costs and wrote a stinging letter to Muirhead-Gould and referred to there being no '*end of red tape and humbug generally associated with Government dealings*' and proposed the matter should be written up so '*the public can see what sort of treatment one gets from your department, and I can assure you that I shall never be caught again like this*'.

By September, the 'owner's value' was set at £5,500 which included the value of sundry works Bartlett had undertaken prior to the requisition. Lloyds maintained their value at £4,000, which the Director of Engineering (Naval) accepted as the maximum amount to be paid for *Seamist*. However, he did recognize, that purchase for that sum, may not be possible due to the hire purchase agreement. Bartlett again raised the question of payment for his delivery costs with Muirhead-Gould in October. Muirhead-Gould passed the matter up the line to the Naval Board.

On 8 November 1941, the Naval Board approved the deployment of *Seamist* with *Silver Cloud* to Port Moresby. The transfer did not occur and by the end of May 1942, she remained at Sydney.⁴⁰¹



HMAS *Seamist*.⁴⁰²

In December, the Naval Board arranged for negotiations with the owner, Automobile and General, to be conducted by Mr Tennant who had been involved in negotiations for other vessels. The first negotiation was held on 29 December 1941. Tennant's offer was for £3,750. The following day Mr Gard of Automobile and General advised he thought he could persuade Bartlett to agree to £4,000. Tennant informed Gard that sum would not be recommended to the Navy, but if Bartlett could be persuaded, it would be recommended and '*might be regarded as fixed*'. Gard advised Tennant that Bartlett's position had hardened and Bartlett considered the Hire Purchase Agreement Act would protect his position. Tennant disagreed.

Through Gard, Bartlett replied saying he was not prepared to accept a figure less than £4,250. The Secretary of the Contracts Board advised the Navy the only course was to proceed by way of an

⁴⁰⁰ See Footnote 14.

⁴⁰¹ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/6400 – *Lolita* – Sinking due to explosion in engine room 13/6/45, p.65

⁴⁰² AWM Photograph 301988

'Impressment Order'. Gard advised Tennant that Automobile and General would like to settle the matter at £4,000 but were unsure of their position with regard to Bartlett as the hirer, and wished to seek advice and asked for the 'Impressment Order' to be delayed.

For her role in the Battle of Sydney Harbour, *Seamist* was awarded the 'Pacific 1942' Battle Honour.⁴⁰³ Following the Battle, she spent time patrolling at Port Kembla and Sydney.

Just a month after the Battle on 2 July 1942, the purchase of *Seamist*, by the Commonwealth, was finalised. Automobile and General accepted the purchase price of £4,000. Of Bartlett's claim for delivery costs of £36.18.0, only £10.6.8 was paid. Not only had Bartlett's *Seamist* been requisitioned at a reduced value, his claimed costs of delivery from Nowra to Sydney had been significantly reduced.

In March 1944 she was transferred to the Naval Auxiliary Patrol, and following a refit in Sydney,⁴⁰⁴ she was assigned as an Air Sea Rescue vessel for duty at Darwin. On 18 April 1944, she departed Sydney with *Steady Hour*, under tow by HMS *Springdale*.⁴⁰⁵ From Cairns, both vessels proceeded under their own power and arrived in Darwin on 22 May 1944, having sailed via Thursday Island and Melville Bay. On arrival, *Seamist* was allotted to Melville Bay⁴⁰⁶ for air-sea rescue duties, 650 km to the east from where she had just sailed. There are no records of her duties and actions whilst at Melville Bay.

On 4 January 1945, *Seamist* left Melville Bay to return to Darwin to be surveyed. Together with *Steady Hour*, she was to be assessed for re-engineering with new Gardner Diesel engines.

She sailed via the inshore route. Whilst en-route, during gale conditions and with visibility down to 50 feet (15.24m), she struck a submerged object. On checking the bilges, there appeared to be no apparent damage. She arrived at Port Essington later that afternoon and anchored in Berkeley Bay. Further inspections were carried out which failed to discover any damage.

The following day *Seamist* continued to Popham Bay where she anchored overnight. The following Day she reached Cape Hotham and, on 11 January, whilst approaching Darwin, the port engine stopped. She anchored off Vernon Island for emergency repairs and reached Darwin the following day. On being slipped, it was confirmed she had struck something, and the copper sheathing over her keel was found to be in a very bad condition, crumbling away in numerous places.

On 26 February 1945, with *Steady Hour* and the former three-masted coastal trader *Alma Doepel*,⁴⁰⁷ she departed Darwin for Thursday Island and Townsville for a refit.⁴⁰⁸ On 3 March 1945, she was at Melville Bay when *Steady Hour* was destroyed by fire whilst refueling.⁴⁰⁹

By 1 April 1945 *Seamist* had arrived in Cairns⁴¹⁰ and on 6 and 7 April, she sailed to Townsville in company with *ML 825*. Her commander's, 2 May 1945 monthly report, records she had sailed 7,743 miles (12,390km) since she had been commissioned into the Navy - and she still had to sail from Townsville to Sydney.⁴¹¹ The NOIC Townsville noted to NOIC Darwin that a defect list he had received included for the installation of the two Gardner diesel engines, but no such engines were available, and that considerable structural and electrical alterations would be necessary. He indicated such work could not

⁴⁰³ RAN Ship/Unit Approved Battle Honours, 1 March 2010

⁴⁰⁴ NAA: MP1049/5, 2026/27/160: Loss of HMAS *Steady Hour*

⁴⁰⁵ NAA: AWM78, 418/1: Sydney Log.

⁴⁰⁶ NAA: AWM78, 400/2: RAN Administrative Authority – Darwin Naval Base (HMAS Melville): Reports of Proceedings., Part 2

⁴⁰⁷ See <http://almadoepel.com.au> for details of the ongoing restoration project

⁴⁰⁸ NAA: AWM78, 400/2: RAN Administrative Authority – Darwin Naval Base (HMAS Melville): Reports of Proceedings., Part 1, Report for period January to March 1945

⁴⁰⁹ NAA: MP1049/5, 2026/27/160: Loss of HMAS *Steady Hour*

⁴¹⁰ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/4966: Vessel *Seamist* for Airmist

⁴¹¹ NAA: AWM78, 309/1: HMAS *Seamist* [Sea Mist]: reports of Proceedings

be completed in under four months and would prejudice the refit of other vessels. He asked for instructions. On 10 May, it was determined *Seamist* would proceed to Brisbane for her refit.

Seamist arrived at Brisbane on 20 May 1945 for her 'general refit' and by September, with no further naval commitment for her, she was directed to Sydney.⁴¹² She departed under tow by HMAS *Koala* and arrived in Sydney on 8 October 1945.⁴¹³ She was 'paid off' on 9 November 1945 for disposal.

On 18 December 1945, she was valued at £2,850 to £3,000 for disposal. The Navy advised Hope Bartlett and offered her for sale to him for £3,000. Bartlett accepted the offer, and the Navy was instructed to arrange delivery to his address in Nowra. She was delivered (perhaps one could say returned) on 16 January 1946 – 4½ years after she was taken.

As for the value, it seems preposterous she had been taken for £4,000 and resold to the owner, for £3,000, when based on the Navy's own depreciation of 10% per year, and given the work required to return her to her former glory, she would have been worth considerably less.

During her post war years, *Seamist* was subsequently owned by a succession of owners.

It appears Bartlett sold her to a Sydney businessman before she was purchased in 1954 for a sum of £10,000 by 2GB radio personality, Jack Davey.⁴¹⁴ By the time Davey acquired her, she had adopted the name of *Sea Mist* which has remained to this day.

Davey's personal assistant Lew Wright⁴¹⁵ referred to her as '*little more than a hulk*' when he first went aboard. He said his heart sank when he surveyed the chaos aboard, '*Sea Mist was a scene of neglect and disorder*'.

Within months, she was fitted with a new pair of Gray marine diesels and had been transformed into a floating palace, including piano and cocktail bar. The first official outing was with a group of nurses who had cared for him whilst he had been in hospital. It was to be one of many cruises on which he entertained celebrities including Abbott and Costello, Shirley Bassey, Liberace and Frank Sinatra and many others from more humble backgrounds associated with the many charities he supported. Over four years, *Sea Mist* travelled on numerous voyages as far afield as Eden near the Victorian border and Tangalooma Whaling Station north of Brisbane. In July 1956, she was nearly wrecked. She was being taken north from Sydney Harbour to Southport for one of Davey's holidays. With rough conditions, the delivery crew decided to shelter in Port Stephens and made for Tea Gardens. But confused by a fishing boat that had gone aground in the dark, *Sea Mist* became wedged and stranded on a submerged heap of 'slag'. Water began flooding in through portholes that had not been closed. By morning, locals advised the crew to abandon the cruiser as a total loss, however, the crew knew of Davey's love for the cruiser and worked to save her. At low tide, they roped her securely to another vessel and as the tide rose, she lifted so the pumps could be operated to discharge enough water to refloat her. Wright was of the view she was undamaged due to the craftsmanship and '*solid triple-skin type construction*' of '*Old man Halvorsen*'. With one engine working, she returned to Sydney and within two months, returned to her '*former opulence*'.

Davey sold *Sea Mist* in 1958, to a 'Sydney businessman'.⁴¹⁶ His identity remains a mystery, but by 1963 she had been included in the Register of British Ships to Jack Sydney Kelly of Elizabeth Street, Sydney. She was sold again in July 1968 to W A and H H Kilby. As the new owners were American citizens, the

⁴¹² NAA: AWM78, 381/1: Small Craft [Fairmile, ML] Base, Brisbane: Reports of Proceedings

⁴¹³ RAN Sea Power Centre - Australia, Ship Histories, HMAS *Sea Mist*. See also NAA: AWM 78, 418/1: Sydney Log

⁴¹⁴ The Australian Women's Weekly, 8 November 1972, p.21-22

⁴¹⁵ The story of *Sea Mist* with Jack Davey is told in: Wright, Lew, *The Great Jack Davey*, 1976

⁴¹⁶ The Australian Women's Weekly, 8 November 1972, p.21-22

vessel could not be registered and the Certificate of Registry was returned. The registration was closed on 14 October 1968.⁴¹⁷

In 1972, she was purchased by Graham Moffatt to entertain vacationers on Keppel Island, off the central Queensland coast. At the time of purchase, she was moored in Middle Harbour, a tributary of Sydney Harbour. For Moffatt, Keppel was a fantastic natural place but lacked pleasure activities and he planned to overcome the deficiency by taking tourists on coral-viewing expeditions, deep-sea fishing, and excursions to any one of the other twenty-seven islands in the area.⁴¹⁸ She was again registered on 25 September 1972 to Kenneth McMahon and Partners Pty Ltd of George Street Sydney – possibly Moffatt’s company, and a month later on 12 October 1972 she was sold to Civic Industrial and Country Projects Pty Ltd, of Southport, Queensland.⁴¹⁹



Sea Mist at Royal Queensland Yacht Squadron, 2012.⁴²⁰

By May 1975, she was owned by Francis Hugh Aston (Retired) of Florida Gardens, Queensland.

By 1978, Aston had sold *Sea Mist* to John Donnelly of Donnelly Benefits Pty Ltd of Tarbot Street, Brisbane. He then sold shares in the vessel to a consortium of owners in 1981. According to the current owner, *Sea Mist* underwent a refit in 1979 for her to be used for charter work.

In 1982, she was purchased in Brisbane by her current owner, Ray Munro. During his 39 year ownership, he has lovingly maintained her and she is a cherished member of his family. In 2000 he replaced the Grey engines installed by Jack Davey in 1954 with ‘shiny new Perkins Sabres’⁴²¹ and in recent years, Ray managed to purchase Jack’s piano, which is now onboard once again.⁴²²

Despite her role in the Battle of Sydney Harbour and receiving the ‘Pacific 1942’ Battle Honour, HMAS *Seamist* is not included in the Navy’s ‘Ship Histories’.

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⁴¹⁷ Register of British Ships, Microfilm C2/16 held by ANMM, Registration No. 316388, No. 7 in 1963

⁴¹⁸ The Australian Women’s Weekly, 8 November 1972, p.21-22

⁴¹⁹ Register of British Ships, Microfilm C2/17 held by ANMM, Registration No. 316388, No. 55 in 1972. This Register also records the later purchases by Aston and Donnelly.

⁴²⁰ <http://nicholasjcornish.blogspot.com/2012/08/hmas-sea-mist-and-attack-on-sydney.html>

⁴²¹ <http://nicholasjcornish.blogspot.com/2012/08/hmas-sea-mist-and-attack-on-sydney.html>

⁴²² Personal communication from the owner.

HMAS *Silver Cloud*

Over a number of years, Halvorsens constructed three *Silver Clouds*, for Jack Bruce, cousin of Stanley M Bruce, former Prime Minister and later Australia's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.⁴²³

In 1933, Bruce traded his former motor cruiser, *Lurnea* for a new 40 foot Halvorsen cruiser which he named *Silver Cloud*. (Halvorsens subsequently resold the *Lurnea* to a Mr J Hall.) Three years later, Bruce traded his first *Silver Cloud* for a new 'Halvorsen Fifty' (refers to a length of 50 feet (15.25m)) which he named *Silver Cloud II*. (Halvorsens resold Bruce's first *Silver Cloud* to Commodore W D Lawson. Lawson renamed her *Sylph*.) Subsequently, Bruce, sold his second *Silver Cloud*, and placed his order with Halvorsens for a new 65 footer which he would name *Silver Cloud III*.⁴²⁴ With the three orders, the editor of *The International and Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly* believed that Harold Halvorsen could claim a record for having constructed all three *Silver Clouds* for one owner – Jack Bruce.

The construction of *Silver Cloud III*, which was to become HMAS *Silver Cloud*, commenced in mid 1938. She was launched in 1939, however the exact date of the launching is unknown. In November 1938 she was said to be worth £5,000 and to be the largest cruiser to have been built by Halvorsens in eight years.⁴²⁵ By late February 1939, she had been launched and was designated the flagship of the NSW Volunteer Coastal Patrol, visiting and conducting patrol exercises off Wollongong over the weekend of 25 February 1939.



Silver Cloud III in 1939 after launching.⁴²⁶

At 65 feet (19.81m), she was one of the larger vessels in the Hollywood Fleet. Her keel and frames were of Spotted Gum, planking was of Oregon and her superstructure and interior woodwork were of Queensland maple. She was powered by two six-cylinder Buda marine engines. She included; a two berth cabin aft with adjacent toilet, a two berth cabin to port and another to starboard, crews cabin forward, galley with an Electrolux gas refrigerator and a Blue ray gas stove, bathroom with bath, a dining saloon which included a wireless set and built-in writing desk. A deck saloon with steering and engine control station was also included.⁴²⁷

On 17 April 1939, the new *Silver Cloud III* left the Halvorsen's Neutral Bay yard for an extended cruise to the Barrier Reef.⁴²⁸ She had been chartered by a wealthy American who was on his Honeymoon tour. After what was described as a '*terrifically rough trip*' to Brisbane, she was taken over by the Putnams at Gladstone with the intention of conducting big game fishing.

⁴²³ The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 19 November 1938, p.8

⁴²⁴ The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly, April 1938

⁴²⁵ The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly, April 1938

⁴²⁶ Halvorsen Album Number 2, held by ANMM

⁴²⁷ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/3100 – Motor yacht *Silver Cloud*. See Lloyds survey.

⁴²⁸ The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly, May 1939, p.54



Jack Bruce and family on *Silver Cloud III* on the Hawkesbury River.⁴²⁹

One of the crew on the voyage to Brisbane claimed the seas encountered were ‘*mountainous*’ and the weather on the night of 18 April was the ‘*worst in his experience*’. *Silver Cloud III* came through the gale with ‘*flying colours*’ having suffered a little superficial damage by the exceptionally heavy sea. The gale delayed all coastal shipping.

The Naval Board ordered the requisition of *Silver Cloud* on 30 May 1941.⁴³⁰ Bruce acknowledged the requisition order by return letter on letterhead of the Commonwealth Film Laboratories Pty Ltd. He advised the Naval Board that he would deliver her to Garden Island as he had been directed. However, he took the opportunity to advise the Board there had been no intimation as to compensation although he believed she would be chartered by the Navy. Believing the vessel would require substantial structural alterations he said it ‘*seems hardly possible*’ it could ever be returned to him in the same condition and on that basis, he believed the vessel should be purchased. Bruce’s valuation was £5,100. In a follow up letter to Muirhead-Gould, he repeated *Silver Cloud* had been built primarily as a pleasure craft and could hardly be classified as a tug-boat or trawler and again sought outright purchase. She was surveyed for the Navy by a Lloyd’s surveyor who valued her at a mere £4,000.

Silver Cloud was formally ‘taken over’ on 23 June 1941, and by the end of June, Bruce was advised by the Director of Engineering (Naval), that his views had been noted, and the terms of compensation were ‘*under consideration*’. She was commissioned into the Navy on 21 July 1941 under the command of Lieutenant R E Breydon, RANR.⁴³¹ Breydon was also appointed commander of the fleet of Channel Patrol Boats that made up the Hollywood Fleet. Breydon was to continue in command of *Silver Cloud* and the Hollywood Fleet to 7 June 1942.⁴³²

She was armed with one .303 Vickers machine gun mounted aft, however the ‘Ship Index Cards’⁴³³ record she was fitted with a second, presumably with the second mounted on the fore deck, with depth charges on the stern.

⁴²⁹ ANMM - <http://arhv.anmm.gov.au/en/objects/details/164185/>

⁴³⁰ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/3100 – Motor yacht *Silver Cloud*. This NAA Record includes the further details of requisition and purchase.

⁴³¹ AWM 78, 418/1 - Sydney Log

⁴³² NAA: SP338/1, 201/37 – (Japanese) Midget Submarine Attack on Sydney Harbour, May 31st June 1st 1942, p.1 and 2

⁴³³ RAN Sea Power Centre - Australia, Ship Index Cards



HMAS *Silver Cloud*.⁴³⁴

Having heard nothing regarding compensation, Bruce wrote again on 8 October 1941, reiterating his previous queries and putting forward an offer to sell the vessel for £5,100. He advised he had obtained an independent certificate of valuation of £5,500 which he could produce if required. The response was the same as before, indicating that purchase or hire was '*under consideration*'. The Director of Engineering (Naval) recommended purchase for £4,000.

In November 1941, Muirhead-Gould recommended she be allocated to Port Moresby with *Seamist*. The Naval Board agreed and directed that both vessels be '*metal sheathed*' for protection in the tropical waters. Muirhead-Gould advised the Board both vessels were suitable for ASDIC.

With no response from the Navy, Bruce engaged solicitors who wrote to the Naval Board in December. His solicitor, Mr Manion, claimed their client was not receiving the '*reasonable consideration that might have been expected*' and that Bruce could not '*allow the present position to remain in abeyance any longer*'. The solicitor advised the Naval Board that their officer had omitted to comply with the regulations to notify Bruce of the amount of compensation at the time of requisition so he could take the '*necessary steps to safeguard his rights*'. It was suggested the matter be promptly remedied given the Board's attention had been drawn to the '*injustice under which our Client has unduly been suffering*'. At the time, neither Bruce nor his solicitors would have known the matter of compensation was to continue for another two years.

In mid-December 1941, the Board agreed with a further recommendation from Muirhead-Gould that *Esmeralda* should be allocated to Port Moresby in lieu of *Silver Cloud*, due to her better ventilation and long range. The same month, without finalizing the charter or purchase arrangements, the Board agreed Bruce would be paid a rate for charter to be determined by a Naval Charter Rates Board set up under the National Security Regulations.

A meeting was held on 30 December 1941 with Bruce, Mannion, the Business Member of the Naval Board and Mr Tennant representing the Commonwealth. Manion advised Bruce had revised his valuation to £5,500 plus special damages of £500 for compensation for depriving him of his place of residence. Bruce reiterated he had only been in possession of the vessel for 14 months prior to its requisition. Tennant put that a depreciation rate of 12½% for the first year and 10% for the following years would apply to a '*non-utilitarian*' vessel. The submission was strongly opposed by Manion who claimed the vessel had been extremely well looked after as Bruce had always been in residence, and it had been on the slips regularly every two to three months. Manion asked the Commonwealth to make an offer. In response, the Commonwealth informed Manion and Bruce, that the difference between the parties was so wide '*it would be of no value to name a figure*'. The '*interview*' closed on a '*note of dissatisfaction sounded by Manion that no figure was put by the Commonwealth*'.

⁴³⁴ AWM Photograph 301992

A week later, Bruce was served with an 'Impressment Order' which contained a value of £4,000 - for the Navy to take his loved *Silver Cloud* and his home. The following week, Manion responded to the Naval Board with a formal notice requiring the value to be determined by a Compensation Board. In a covering letter, Manion included, *'In these times our Client, indeed, most reputable people, do not look for or expect anything in the shape of profit by reason of the deprivation of property but they are of the opinion, as the Commonwealth has rightly determined, that the method of the assessment of compensation is as fixed by the Statute, namely, the market value of the subject vessel as at the date of requisition.'*

The Commonwealth responded advising *'there is some doubt as to whether this notification was lodged within the prescribed period'*.

Manion's response was swift including, *'... we propose seeing that representations are made through the proper channels to acquaint the Minister in charge with what is apparently taking place in your department, namely, an attitude utterly unfair and one which we have no doubt is entirely foreign to the intentions of the Government in regard to the treatment of people whose property the naval authorities have seen fit to appropriate'*. Manion acknowledged that neither he nor Bruce questioned the Navy's need for the vessel which quite properly required its requisition. Among other matters, Manion confirmed that Bruce, since the outbreak of the war, had been a member of the Voluntary Coastal Patrol which, and in association with the NSW Police, carried out patrol work and gave up the use of his vessel without any monetary payment whatever, and that Bruce was providing voluntary services as a member of the Films Advisory Committee to the Department of Information. Bruce clearly believed his contribution to the war effort had already been substantial.

The Commonwealth advised that *'Bruce's Notification'* was not received in the proper time and his right to have the amount of compensation assessed by a Compensation Board had therefore lapsed. Manion did not respond immediately and the Commonwealth put the matter of *'finalizing the purchase'* in the hands of the Deputy Crown Solicitor. The letter was copied to Muirhead-Gould.

When Manion wrote again to the Naval Board, he included two valuations obtained by Bruce for the sums of £5,400 and £5,500. Manion also referred to *'the particular Official who has been responsible for endeavouring to take the advantage of Mr Bruce'* and again referred to Bruce's contribution and services to the *'Military authorities who apparently have been pleased to accept the same ... which we have no doubt will be of considerably more use to his Country than that of the Official who has been dealing with his claim'*. He concluded *'It is not too late for the decent thing still to be done'*.

The Crown Solicitor considered the matter and in a pointed letter, informed the Naval Board on 6 May 1942, that the Notice issued by the Navy to Bruce was not a *'proper notice'* with regard to permanently acquiring the vessel. The Crown Solicitor confirmed it was not possible for the Navy's Purchasing Officer to assess the fair market value for the purpose of the 'Impressment Order', and the valuation of £4,000 was no more than an offer to purchase at that amount. The Crown Solicitor confirmed he had communicated with Manion who maintained the proper value was £5,500 and that Bruce had recently seen the vessel *'in such a state and condition, that in his considered opinion, it would be practically impossible to restore it to the state and condition in which it was when taken over by the Department'*.

Muirhead-Gould however, had already relied on the force of the invalid 'Impressment Order' and had drawn an advance of £4,000 which had been forwarded to the Crown Solicitor for the *'final'* payment to Bruce. The Crown Solicitor returned the payment and informed the Naval Board that if any further action was required, they should instruct him accordingly. The matter of the requisition was firmly back in the hands of the Navy.

Whilst the RAN Sea Power Centre histories record her being employed on patrol duties of the swept channels to seaward of Sydney, and on patrol duties on the NSW coast, there is no record in the Sydney Log of *Silver Cloud* leaving Sydney after the Battle of Sydney Harbour. In 1978 when discussing the

Battle of Sydney Harbour, Reg Andrew said *Silver Cloud* rarely 'ever' went on patrol as she was for 'base duties and VIP cruisers'.⁴³⁵

By the Battle of Sydney Harbour, the Navy had yet to complete the requisition of *Silver Cloud*. On 25 July 1942, a new 'Impressment Order' was issued requisitioning the vessel permanently. The Order included the Navy's value of just £4,000. Bruce's solicitor, Mr Manion, responded with a formal notice requiring the value to be determined by a Compensation Board. In his covering letter, he asked for details of the compensation the Navy would pay for the use of the vessel from the date of initial requisition to the date of the permanent requisition, especially as the Navy had 'considerably knocked' her about. Two days later on 17 August 1942, Manion wrote again to the Board requiring satisfactory information otherwise Bruce would be advised to 'exercise his legal remedies' forthwith.

By the end of the month, the Secretary of the Naval Board confirmed the compensation would be assessed by a Compensation Board.

In November, the Naval Board advised Bruce he would receive payment of £694 for the hire of *Silver Cloud* from the date she was 'taken' to the time of the Navy's permanent requisition. Bruce was advised, the payment would reach him within a few days. As could be expected, Manion responded that until the matter of Bruce's claim for compensation in respect of the 'deprivation of the subject vessel' had been determined, Bruce and Manion would refrain from making any comment as to the charter rate imposed by the Navy.

The matter dragged on, and on 28 April 1943, wearied by the delay, Bruce instructed Manion to put an offer of £5,000 to settle the claim, subject to acceptance within fourteen days. The Naval Board did not accept the offer. The Navy proposed a settlement sum of £3,500 (in addition to the earlier charter payment). On 12 May, Manion accepted the Board's offer of £3,500, 'without prejudice' to Bruce's claims 'as stated', and requested 'the promised cheque immediately'. On 20 May the Board acknowledged a cheque for £3,500 for 'progress payment on account' would be received within a few days.

Six weeks later, *Silver Cloud* was devastated by fire. On 12 July 1943 at 0815 (8.15 am), she was moored to a buoy in Hunters Bay off Balmoral Beach. The commander at the time, Lieutenant Gasking had just come aboard and ordered a flag to be raised directing the Fleet to prepare to slip their moorings in sequence of their Fleet numbers. He ordered her engines to be started to 'Warm through motors' which was passed by the Coxswain to the wheel-house. He heard the starboard engine start followed by a cry of 'Fire in the engine room'.

Fire stations were immediately ordered. Gasking proceeded into the wheel-house and from there to the engine room where he heard the mechanic cry, 'look out for the gas' and immediately caught the mechanic who was falling backward, having been overcome by the fumes. Griffin said he observed the port motor was burning and 'rushed' the mechanic to the top of the ladder and ordered him on deck into fresh air. Gasking ordered 'gas masks on', and returned to the engine room with his gas mask on. But the smoke was extremely dense with what he believed to be 'deadly gas'. His mask immediately choked him as he made a 'great endeavor' to get into the engine room but failed to do so, and found himself collapsing at the top of the ladder as he managed to drag himself out of the mess deck. The mess deck by that time, was filled with dense with smoke. He ordered 'Stand by depth charges', 'Stand by to release depth charges'.

All hands including the coxswain assisted to see all depth charge pistols were set to safe and primers withdrawn, where upon the depth charges were released overboard. Gasking held the view, they were the 'main menace to Balmoral and everywhere else' if they were to explode. All of the depth charges were subsequently recovered by divers.

⁴³⁵ Carruthers Collection, RAN Sea Power Centre - Australia. Letter from Reg Andrew dated 23 June 1978

Having sufficiently recovered, the motor mechanic was ordered to shut off the petrol which he eventually achieved by the cocks at the aft tanks.

By his written statement, Gasking advised that during the first few minutes, the vessel was slipped from the buoy and every aperture into the engine room was sealed in an effort to contain the spread of fire. *Steady Hour* was ordered to tow her clear of the buoy at which time the diving boat *Otter*, arrived from HMAS *Penguin* with the intention of beaching her. But Gasking realised a 'Fire Party' was proceeding to the jetty at *Penguin* and order she be towed to the wharf. At the wharf she was attended by two fire brigade engines and crews and naval personnel, who extinguished the fire at 1020 (10.20 am). By that time, *Silver Cloud* was well down by the bow, having approximately two-thirds of her displacement of water pumped into her.



HMAS *Esmeralda* on the left with the stern of HMAS *Seamist* to the right standing by as HMAS *Silver Cloud* smolders at the HMAS *Penguin* wharf. The photograph was probably taken from *Steady Hour*.⁴³⁶

The fire brigade pumped water out of her and all salvageable stores were removed. By midday she had regained normal stability and Gasking was ordered to have her towed to Garden Island for examination.

Two of the crew were admitted to sick bay suffering from the effects of the gas. Two days after the fire, the commanding officer of *Penguin* issued the results of a survey of the hulk, '*the hull has been so extensively damaged as to be beyond repair*' and, '*the planking, timbers and stringers from the water line to the upper deck, from the forward bulkhead of the crew's quarters to the after end of the engine room, about two thirds the length of the ship, has been destroyed*'.

A Board of Inquiry was established which met on 16 July 1943 at the naval base of HMAS *Kuttabul*. Again, the members were formed by senior staff of the local Sydney command. As with the Board of Inquiry for the loss of *Nereus*, there were no investigation reports from experts and no fire experts were questioned. Three days later, the Board presented their report to Muirhead-Gould, still commander in charge of Sydney. During the examination, the Board questioned an officer of the NSW Fire Brigade who had attended and assisted to extinguish the fire. The Board asked if the Naval service respirators were effective against the gas produced by the carbon tetrachloride based extinguishers. The response was shocking, '*not effective against the gas that is produced when carbon tetrachloride vaporizes. It is*

⁴³⁶ Copies of this photo are held by the Sydney Harbour Fleet and the Sydney City Council Archives. Both are attributed to the Graeme Andrews Collection with the photographer cited as N Byrne. At the time *Silver Cloud* was destroyed, Byne was attached to HMAS *Leewin* in Western Australia. He could not have been the photographer. It is understood, this and similar photographs of the CPB's and midget submarines in the Andrews Collection, most probably originated from the Naval Historical Collection, some of which form the photographic collection at the Australian War Memorial.

approximately five times heavier than the atmosphere. The Service type of respirator needs oxygen, and there is no oxygen in the atmosphere in these circumstances. You need some apparatus where the man has his own supply of oxygen. He was asked *'It is not protection because there is a lack of oxygen'* to which he responded *'Yes Sir – owing to the heavy gravity of the carbon tetrachloride'*. The Board failed to enquire why the Navy was using fire extinguishers that were incompatible with the supplied gas masks?

On 10 August 1943, Muirhead-Gould issued an updated 'Confidential Memorandum' titled 'Prevention of Fire in Small Vessels' but did not include commanding officers of small vessels on his distribution list. The Board found the fire was caused by the '*flooding*' of the carburetor on the port engine and subsequent ignition of the escaping petrol by a '*blow back*' through the carburetor owing to an inlet valve sticking up. The resulting small fire led to the melting of the die metal casting of the petrol pump which thus left an open ended petrol pipe through which petrol streamed by gravity from the aft petrol tanks. Had the petrol been isolated, the spread of the fire would have been prevented.

Muirhead-Gould reviewed the Board's findings and reported to the Naval Board that '*arrangements are now being made to fit a CO2 fire extinguishing system in CPB's*' and he recommended that breathing apparatus with 40 feet (12.2m) of hose be supplied to the CPB's. There is no evidence the matter was actioned.

On considering Muirhead-Gould's report, the Naval Board found that Lieutenant Gasking, was considered blameworthy for not ensuring a person was in the engine room at the time the engines were started, did not shut off the petrol valves when he had an opportunity to do so and did not ensure the valves were shut off as soon as possible after the outbreak of fire. The Naval Board directed Gasking be informed accordingly.

Silver Cloud had been severely damaged but not completely destroyed. The planking, timbers and stringers for two-thirds of her length and from the water line to the upper deck, were burnt beyond repair.⁴³⁷

But, despite the devastation from the fire, *Silver Cloud* had not reached the end of its life. By mid-August 1943, plans had been prepared to convert the remaining hulk into a '*Store Vessel*', complete with a new engine room with twin 50hp diesel engines, 10 ton cargo hold in the aft section of the vessel complete with 10 ton derrick, and with a new wheel house and captain's cabin.

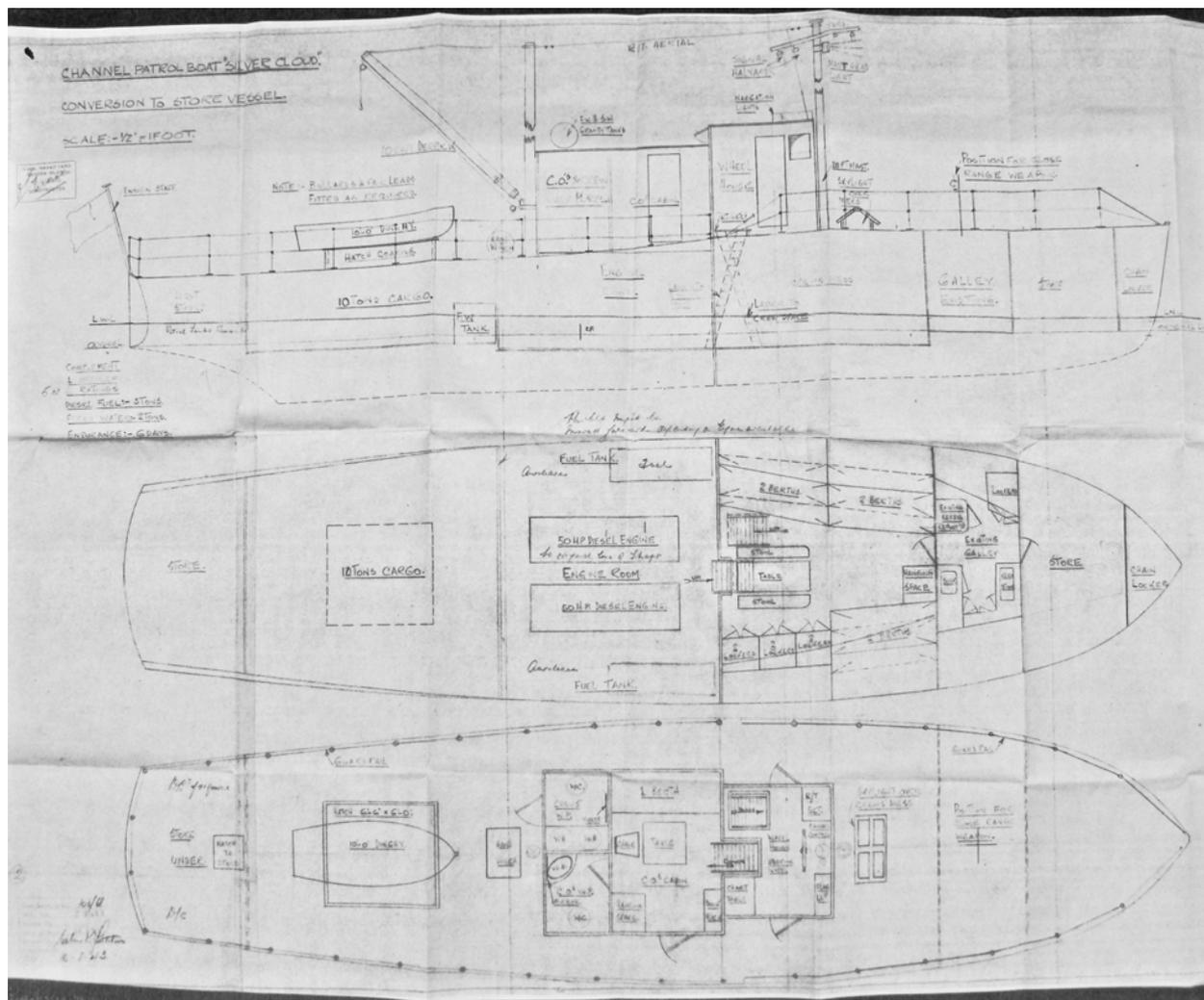
A month later, Muirhead-Gould submitted a report to the Naval Board including a proposed cost of £5,700 for the work which he said could not be completed in less than four months, subject to the delivery of machinery. But Muirhead-Gould was of the opinion, that a '*complete new boat with the same power and of more suitable form could be built for £200 to £300 over the cost of reconditioning*'. Therefore, he said, it would appear desirable that *Silver Cloud* be offered for sale through the Contract Board.

However, the Director of Engineering (Naval) raised potential difficulties with such a course as the purchase of *Silver Cloud* was still in dispute. Despite being requisitioned over two years earlier, the Navy and Bruce had still not settled the agreed purchase of the vessel. And in any event, who was the owner?⁴³⁸ The Naval Board were of the view, that as Bruce had already accepted a '*progress payment*' of £3,500, and given *Silver Cloud* had been '*permanently*' requisitioned, the Commonwealth was the owner of the remaining hulk and could deal with the hulk as it wished. The Navy Board approved the sale, but the price to be paid to Bruce, still needed to be settled.

⁴³⁷ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/3553: Motor launch *Silver Cloud*

⁴³⁸ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/3100: Motor yacht *Silver Cloud*

By October 1943, a Compensation Board had finally been established, and lawyers acting for Bruce had lodged papers for his claim for compensation on just terms. At the time, Bruce was one of eleven owners including Harold Christmas for *Toomeree*, seeking a favourable determination from the Board.



Plan for the conversion of the HMAS *Silver Cloud* hulk to a Store Vessel.⁴³⁹

Prior to the matter being heard by the Compensation Board in January 1944, Bruce through his solicitors finally reached agreement with the Navy for settlement of the purchase. The agreed total sum to paid was £4,500 including interest, with the earlier progress payment to be deducted which would yield a final payment of £1,000. Not only had Bruce received a reduced value for his *Silver Cloud*, he had lost the use of his vessel for over 2½ years, and had lost the pleasure of using her as his home. And she had been destroyed. On 2 March 1944, Muirhead-Gould reported to the Secretary of the Naval Board the final payment had been made.⁴⁴⁰

A week later, authorization was received for the remaining hull of *Silver Cloud* to be sold through the Contract Board⁴⁴¹ and to transfer the original 'Budd' engines to 'Army Salvage'. By September 1944, the hull of *Silver Cloud* had been purchased by Lars Halvorsen Sons Pty Ltd for the sum of £510.⁴⁴²

Despite the Contract Board having disposed of the damaged engines, Halvorsens managed to find them and have them reconditioned. Halvorsens then set about the task of re-building *Silver Cloud*. During the

⁴³⁹ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/3553: Motor launch *Silver Cloud*

⁴⁴⁰ Despite reports in later publications, *Silver Cloud* was not 'awaiting return to Jack Bruce' at the time she was gutted by fire. See ANMM magazine, *Signals* No. 90, 2010, p.18

⁴⁴¹ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/3553: Motor launch *Silver Cloud*

⁴⁴² NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/3553: Motor launch *Silver Cloud*

rebuilding, Trygve Halvorsen left a portion of the burnt timber below her deck as a lasting '*salute*' to her '*wartime efforts*'.

Following the reconstruction, she was sold to Stan Oldfield⁴⁴³ who then sold her the following year to Norman Hannan who moored her back at the Royal Motor Yacht Club at Rose Bay. Author Tony MacKay says she was maintained by her fastidious owner which '*placed her back in the forefront of prestige boating*'.

In the 1950s, she was purchased by Bob Ibbotson for £10,000 after which she became the flagship of the St George Motor Boat Club. Ibbotson registered *Silver Cloud* in the Port of Sydney section of the Register of British Ships on 31 March 1971.⁴⁴⁴

In 1974,⁴⁴⁵ *Silver Cloud* was acquired by the Hon Dr Derek Freeman, then a Member of the NSW Legislative Council and was used by the family for excursions up and down the coast. MacKay describes her as being viewed with '*reverence*' with '*sleek lines and charismatic appearance*' which he said added an air of mystery to '*her charm*'. During his ownership, Freeman made a number of alterations adding a '*flying bridge*' and her original Buda engines were replaced with twin MWM diesels.

Freeman sold *Silver Cloud* in 1994 to Gary Rothwell. The following year, further refit work was undertaken and her MWM diesels were replaced with Cummins six-cylinder diesel engines. She starred in the 2004 movie '*The Mystery of Natalie Wood*' as the yacht *Splendour*, from which Robert Wagner's wife fell overboard and drowned in 1981.

Silver Cloud was sold again in 2005 to Robert and Lee Hunter. She was sailed to Port Macquarie where she was completely overhauled and restored between 2007 and 2010 before being displayed at the Australian National Maritime Museum for her '*re-launching*' by Rear-Admiral Peter Sinclair on 19 March 2010.



Silver Cloud restored with the addition of a flying bridge, on display at the Australian National Maritime Museum – March 2010.⁴⁴⁶

She occasionally makes visits to Sydney to join the Wooden Boat Festival.⁴⁴⁷ HMAS *Silver Cloud* is not included in the Navy's '*Ship Histories*'.

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⁴⁴³ This recent history is based on Tony MacKay's article in ANMM, Signals No. 90, 2010, p.16

⁴⁴⁴ Register of British Ships, Microfilm C2/16 held by ANMM, registration No. 343646, 14 in 1971

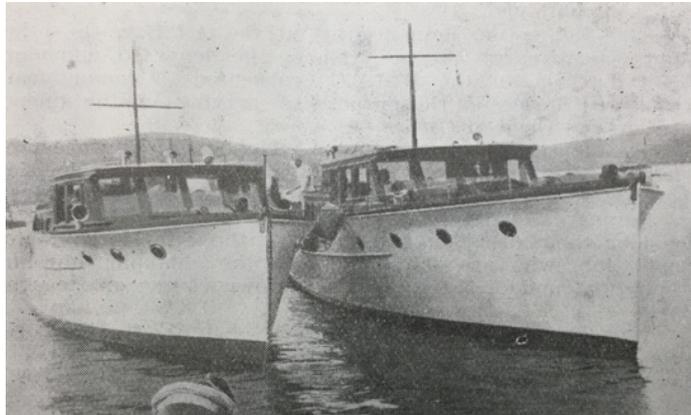
⁴⁴⁵ According to the Registration, *Silver Cloud* was acquired by Freeman on 26 February 1976

⁴⁴⁶ Photo courtesy ANMM

⁴⁴⁷ See ANMM - <http://arhv.anmm.gov.au/en/objects/details/164185/>, for further information.

HMAS *Steady Hour*

Like many of the other vessels which formed the Hollywood Fleet, HMAS *Steady Hour* was not the first vessel by that name. *Steady Hour I* had been built for Fred Harris but details of her builder remain a mystery, as there is no record of her being built by Halvorsen's.



Steady Hour I to the left of *Sylph* (*Sylph* was formerly Bruce's first *Silver Cloud*).⁴⁴⁸

However, the register records *Steady Hour II* was another motor cruiser from the Halverson yards. Built for Fred Harris in 1940⁴⁴⁹ and at 56 feet (17.07m), she was one of the smaller vessels in the fleet, similar in size to *Lolita*.⁴⁵⁰

By early June 1941, Harris had been informed his new motor cruiser was going to be requisitioned. Being less than 8 months since he launched her, Harris did not willingly allow the Navy to requisition her. Besides, he was living on the vessel at the time and would have to find a new home if the vessel was taken from him. On 12 June 1941, he wrote to the Minister for the Navy – The Hon. William Morris Hughes and pleaded the assistance of his local member, The Hon. E J Harrison.⁴⁵¹ Harris set out his valuation for the vessel at £4,751. He understood the speed for the required patrol vessels was to be 14 to 15 knots which needed more powerful engines.

He invoked the support of Lars Halvorsen, who submitted he could build a purpose made vessel to suit the Navy's requirements⁴⁵² in the time it would take the Navy to have *Steady Hour* refitted to meet the wartime requirements. Harris asked that as a matter of urgency, Lars' proposal should be investigated and all further acquisition of boats should be temporarily suspended. The Navy did not accept the submission and informed the Minister.

Steady Hour was formally requisitioned by the Navy on 17 July 1941,⁴⁵³ and surveyed the following day. The survey report provided details of her construction; spotted gum keel and frames with Queensland maple superstructure and interior woodwork, twin six-cylinder Chrysler marine engines, accommodation for eight in four cabins, two bathroom facilities, and an extensive galley.

The vessel cost Harris in the vicinity of £4,700 and given further works since she was launched, he considered the value to be £5,000. Harris argued that as *Steady Hour* was only new, depreciation should not apply.

⁴⁴⁸ The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly – November 1937, p.12

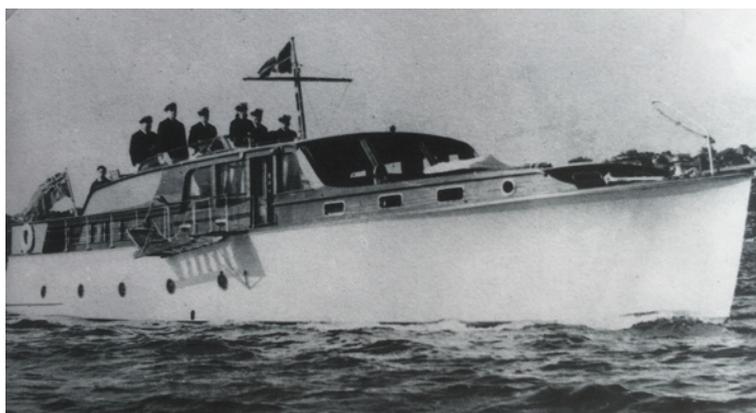
⁴⁴⁹ Neither Svensen, R. in *The Halvorsen Story* or the Lloyds Survey for the Navy identify the exact date in 1940 she was launched

⁴⁵⁰ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/3859 – Purchase of HMAS *Steady Hour*, See Survey Report, p.48 to 52

⁴⁵¹ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/3859 – Purchase of HMAS *Steady Hour*, p.73

⁴⁵² Halvorsens subsequently constructed more than 200 craft for the Navy, and other armed services during the War, ranging from dinghies to the 112 foot (34m) fast Fairmile ML Patrol Boats.

⁴⁵³ AWM 78, 418/1 - Sydney Log



HMAS *Steady Hour* 'under naval command'.⁴⁵⁴ This Photo would have been taken soon after the initial requisition and before she was converted for naval operations.

Negotiations dragged on, as occurred with other requisitioned vessels and by January 1942, Harris was prepared to accept £3,500. The Navy did not accept the position and forcibly acquired her on 7 February 1942 by 'Impressment Order' for a sum of £3,300 - significantly below Harris's value. Harris finally signed over his rights to the vessel on 10 April 1942 and finally received his money two months later on 10 June 1942.



HMAS *Steady Hour* at Port Kembla in 1944.⁴⁵⁵

Steady Hour was formally commissioned into the Navy on 26 August 1941 and was to be used as a non-ASDIC patrol boat.⁴⁵⁶ Like other vessels, she was armed with two .303 Vickers machine guns and two sets of depth charges on the stern. Her first commander was Lieutenant Athol G Townley who remained in command till 1 June 1942. For her role in the Battle of Sydney Harbour, *Steady Hour* was awarded the 'Pacific 1942' Battle Honour.⁴⁵⁷

It appears she spent a considerable period of time in Sydney following the Battle, before relocating to Port Kembla in November 1943. In April 1944, she was refitted in Sydney,⁴⁵⁸ and arrived in Darwin via Thursday Island and Melville Bay on 22 May 1944 in company with *Seamist*. When she arrived in Darwin, she had sailed 5,096 miles (8,150km) since she had been commissioned into the Navy.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁴ Halvorsen photograph album, No. 2 held by the ANMM

⁴⁵⁵ AWM Photograph 301996

⁴⁵⁶ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/3859 – Purchase of HMAS *Steady Hour*, p.38

⁴⁵⁷ RAN Ship/Unit Approved Battle Honours, 1 March 2010

⁴⁵⁸ NAA: MP1049/5, 2026/27/160: Loss of *Steady Hour*

⁴⁵⁹ NAA: AWM78, 321/1: HMAS *Steady Hour*: Reports of Proceedings., p.7

On arrival, *Steady Hour* was allotted to Drysdale Island approximately 450 km east of Darwin off the northern coast of Arnhem Land.⁴⁶⁰ In early October, she investigated a report of a submarine approximately 350km west of Darwin in the vicinity of Lesueur Island off the north-east coast of the Kimberleys and continued with air sea rescue duties at West Bay approx. 200km north-east of Darwin.⁴⁶¹

In November, the Naval Board advised Darwin that new Gardner diesel engines were to be fitted to *Steady Hour*. She returned to Darwin for survey and was slipped between 25 and 27 January 1945.⁴⁶² In February, the NOIC Darwin advised the Board that whilst the work could be undertaken in Darwin, it would take 3½ months and would seriously impact other work.⁴⁶³

As a result, the work was directed to be undertaken at Townsville. On 26 February 1945, she departed Darwin with *Seamist* and *Alma Doepel* for Thursday Island and further south for refit.⁴⁶⁴ On 3 March whilst refueling at Melville Bay, 650km east of Darwin, *Steady Hour* was destroyed by fire. Her companion ship *Seamist* was nearby and the crew heard a loud explosion. The commanding officer of *Seamist*, Sub-Lieutenant (RANVR) Askew described the scene and the actions taken to save the vessel. Askew said he cast off *Seamist* from the wharf whilst mustering nearby RAAF personnel to remove fuel lines and drums from the wharf adjacent to *Steady Hour*. The crews from both vessels fought the fire with extinguishers and water hoses, but as the fire had full control and ammunition began to explode, Askew evacuated the crew and let go her mooring lines. A towing line was fastened, and *Steady Hour* was towed into the stream where she drifted '*a mass of flame with ammunition exploding*'. She was eventually towed to a beach where an unsuccessful attempt was made to sink her in shallow water.

The commanding officer of *Steady Hour*, John Sykes was badly burnt, and together with the engineer and telegraphist, were taken to hospital.

The subsequent Board of Inquiry⁴⁶⁵ found a static spark ignited fumes that had accumulated in a gap above the fuel tank. The Board considered the crews of both vessels did everything possible to extinguish the fire and salvage the ship. In addition, the Board recorded their appreciation of the action taken by Percy Allan, a sailor from *Seamist* who despite being unable to swim, dived into the shark infested waters to rescue Leading Seaman Piper. Piper had been blown overboard from *Steady Hour*. The NOIC of Darwin subsequently recommended to the Naval Board, that Allan be recognised by the Royal Humane Society for his actions. It is unknown if he was so recognised.

But following the war, by 1947, Fred Harris, the former owner of *Steady Hour* was aboard a motor cruiser of the same name – *Steady Hour*. As Commodore of the Royal Motor Yacht Club at Rose Bay, he was reported taking the salute in '*his cruiser Steady Hour*'.⁴⁶⁶

Given *Steady Hour II* had been destroyed, he could only have been aboard his former *Steady Hour I*, unless he had acquired another vessel and named her *Steady Hour*! HMAS *Steady Hour* is not included in the Navy's 'Ship Histories'.

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⁴⁶⁰ NAA: AWM78, 400/2: RAN Administrative Authority – Darwin Naval Base (HMAS Melville): Reports of Proceedings., Part 2

⁴⁶¹ NAA: AWM78, 400/2: RAN Administrative Authority – Darwin Naval Base (HMAS Melville): Reports of Proceedings., Part 1, Report for period October to December 1944

⁴⁶² NAA: AWM78, 400/2: RAN Administrative Authority – Darwin Naval Base (HMAS Melville): Reports of Proceedings., Part 1, Report for period January to March 1945

⁴⁶³ NAA: MP151, 524/202/1960: HMAS *Steady Hour* and *Sea Mist*

⁴⁶⁴ NAA: AWM78, 400/2: RAN Administrative Authority – Darwin Naval Base (HMAS Melville): Reports of Proceedings., Part 1, Report for period January to March 1945

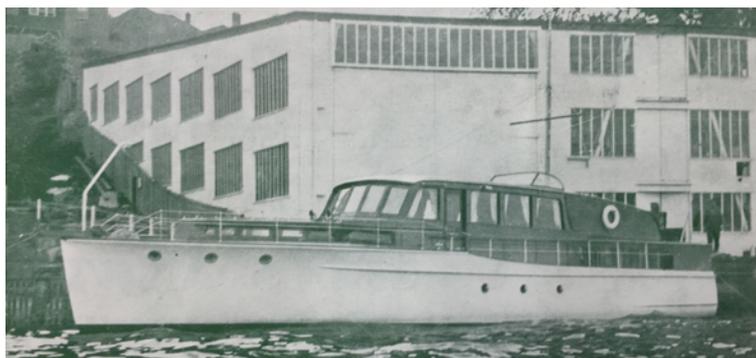
⁴⁶⁵ NAA: MP1049/5, 2026/27/160: Loss of *Steady Hour*

⁴⁶⁶ The Sun (Sydney), 12 September 1947, p.8

HMAS *Toomeree*

Toomeree was built by Halvorsens in 1937 for Harold Percival (Percy by his friends) Christmas,⁴⁶⁷ one of the founders of Woolworths⁴⁶⁸ who already had a long association with the Halvorsens. Christmas was also the owner of *Winbah*.

Toomeree was delivered by Halvorsens to Brisbane. The voyage to Brisbane was made in 51 hours – harbour headland to river headland, so a friend of Percy Christmas from the United States could holiday aboard on the Barrier Reef. The voyage to the reef extended over four weeks and included ‘dozens of islands’. On the homeward trip, a severe sea was encountered in which *Toomeree* behaved admirably, so much so that her crew expressed their willingness to take her anywhere.



Toomeree moored outside the new Halvorsen's factory.⁴⁶⁹

As with other Halvorsen cruisers, *Toomeree* was relatively small at 55 feet (16.76m). She was designed for extended cruising and tropical service. Opening windows in the trunk cabin over the forward deck, in the wheelhouse and in the after-section of the vessel where the galley and crews quarters were located provided ample ventilation. Unlike the other cruisers, *Toomeree* was fitted with Gardner diesel engines. She was of the normal stout Halvorsen construction - spotted gum keel and frames and oregon planking. She included a deck saloon, a twin cabin complete with toilet facility, a two berth cabin to starboard with toilet facility, a single berth cabin to port and another two berth cabin aft also complete with a WC facility.

In February 1940, well before the Navy commenced their requisition process, shipbrokers and valuers, A J Ellerker, working for the Navy at the time, said *Toomeree* was in their ‘hands’ for sale for £3,750.⁴⁷⁰ Ellerker enquired if the Navy was interested in acquiring her, adding she was a ‘really magnificent cruiser with every conceivable comfort and convenience’ specially designed and built for extended ocean cruises, with fuel tanks large enough to take her from Sydney to Auckland and return without re-fueling. Having had little use, Ellerker said she was to all intents and purposes, a new craft which they regarded was of exceptional value. The Navy advised they had no immediate service for her.

In March 1940, Christmas in *Toomeree*, collected his friend, A D Walker, and together they visited the assembled fleet at the Easter Regatta at Sackville. It may have been that visit to collect Walker from his farm on the Hawkesbury River that induced Christmas to purchase the adjacent farm in an arrangement that would see him taken to the Supreme Court. In June 1941, the former owner of the farm, a Lieutenant Smith of the ‘home garrison’, alleged Christmas failed to clear his debts so as to properly acquire the farm. The jury found against Christmas and order him to pay the former serviceman compensation for his losses.

⁴⁶⁷ Svensen, R., *The Halvorsen Story*, p.72, 165

⁴⁶⁸ The Sydney Morning Herald, 6 April 1937, p.13., 27 April 1938, p.12., The Sun (Sydney), 6 February 1940, p.16

⁴⁶⁹ The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly, September 1937

⁴⁷⁰ NAA: MP138/1, 603/201/529 – Question of purchase - ... - Also cruiser *Toomeree*

Toomeree was the last of the Hollywood fleet to be requisitioned by the Navy. She was requisitioned on 8 January 1942 and commissioned on 15 May 1942 under command of Lieutenant J P T Hanson RANVR. Even before she was requisitioned, on December 1941 she was selected for anti-submarine patrol duties at Port Moresby.⁴⁷¹

She was armed with one .303 Vickers machine gun mounted aft, however the Navy's 'Ship Index Cards' record she was fitted with two, presumably with the second mounted on the fore deck. She was fitted with depth charges on the stern.

Having heard nothing from the Navy re compensation, Christmas wrote to the Navy Office in Melbourne, not just about his *Toomeree* but also about his *Winbah*, '*If the war is to be paid for as it goes along, I would like some finality as to whether these boats are to be chartered or purchased*'.



HMAS *Toomeree*.⁴⁷²

The Secretary of the Navy responded that the question of hire or purchase was '*under consideration*'. An offer of progress payments was provided pending finalization of the arrangement. Christmas accepted the offer.

As for the value, Christmas advised she had cost £5,928 but was prepared to sell her for £5,000. In April 1942, Lloyds acting for the Navy valued her at just £4,000. The Director of Engineering (Naval) recommended a maximum price of £4,000. The Navy placed the purchase in the hands of the Contract Board.

During the Battle of Sydney Harbour, following the first explosions, *Toomeree* proceeded to the eastern end of the boom net to assist the protection of the harbour. Following the Battle, *Toomeree* continued regular patrol duties at Sydney, Port Kembla and Newcastle.⁴⁷³ But the Navy had still not settled her requisition.

With two of Percy Christmas's vessels having been requisitioned (*Toomeree* and *Winbah*), the Deputy Director acknowledged the purchase of *Winbah* had been '*considerably delayed*' and recommended the purchase of *Winbah* should be settled before approaching Christmas with respect to *Toomeree*.

By October 1942, there had been several discussions with Christmas where he had rejected the Commonwealth's offers and said he would not reduce his price to less than £4,500 less any progress payments. He concluded the last conference saying he proposed to '*withdraw*' the boat altogether from the offer but asked for a few days to consider his decision. Christmas responded the next day confirming he would proceed with the sale but he was only prepared to accept £4,500. With the Commonwealth only prepared to pay £4,000, the official representative acknowledged the only

⁴⁷¹ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/5943 – Motor vessel *Toomeree*. This Record includes details of the negotiations and finalisation of the purchase.

⁴⁷² AWM Photograph 302007

⁴⁷³ NAA: AWM78, 418/1: Sydney Log

alternative would be to proceed in accordance with an 'Impressment Order'. Christmas stood his ground and in a subsequent discussion with the official representative, said '*he would obtain more equitable treatment from the Compensation Board, than from the Department*'.

At the end of February 1943, Christmas had his solicitor write to the Navy. The Secretary for the Department stood firm and reiterated to the Deputy Director of Contracts, the Department '*cannot vary its offer of £4,000 plus interest*'. Christmas' solicitor responded advising that Christmas was not prepared to accept the Commonwealth's offer and required the matter to be referred to the Compensation Board. A fortnight later he wrote again requesting a progress payment in the sum of £4,000. In doing so, he referred the official to a recent decision of the High Court, that he said would favour him, if he did not receive fair compensation.

In July there was a follow up letter from Christmas' solicitor. The Commonwealth responded with an 'Impressment Order' for the sum of £4,000 and paid a progress payment of £3,000. On 21 July 1943, Christmas formally rejected the Commonwealth's valuation and requested the matter be referred to the Compensation Board. His solicitor asked to be informed when the request has been submitted to the Board. Again, the solicitor again referred to the recent case in the High Court - and reserved all of his client's rights.

In support of their position, the Navy in December 1943, obtained a further valuation which found *Toomeree* had increased in value compared to other vessels because of her diesel engines and gave a value of £4,250. A meeting of the Compensation Board was held in December but the matter of *Toomeree* was not addressed due to the time taken by other applications.

In December 1943, nearly two years after his *Toomeree* had been taken, Christmas' solicitors wrote again to the Secretary of the Navy advising their client would now accept the offer of £4,000 plus interest, and whilst their client adheres to the amount which has been claimed by him as fair and reasonable, he has decided that in order to support the '*National effort*', he was prepared to put an end to the litigation and close the matter. There is nothing in the file that any consideration was given by the Navy to increase the payment to the value in the Navy's last valuation, namely £4,250.

Muirhead-Gould confirmed to the Secretary of the Naval Board, the purchase was finalized on 21 February 1944. Six days later on 27 February 1944, *Toomeree* departed Sydney for Merauke on the south-west coast of New Guinea.⁴⁷⁴ There is no information regarding her voyage.

Whilst at Merauke, she undertook air sea rescue, patrol and pilot duties. By the end of September 1945, whilst still at Merauke, she had steamed 5,798 miles (9,275km) since she had been commissioned.⁴⁷⁵ On 27 September 1945, there was no further need for her at Merauke and she was ordered to be returned to Sydney for disposal.⁴⁷⁶ She was dispatched to Thursday Island on 4 October 1945. Whilst en-route, she '*developed trouble*', presumably engine trouble approximately 50 miles (80km) due south of Merauke. Search aircraft were dispatched and in the afternoon of the following day she was sighted in the vicinity of Thursday Island.⁴⁷⁷

By February 1946 she was in Sydney when the Navy wrote to Harold Christmas offering *Toomeree* to him for the sum of £2,500. Harold accepted the offer and on 6 March 1946 confirmed his acceptance by letter on Woolworths Limited letterhead. Christmas took possession on 18 March 1946 at Garden Island.

⁴⁷⁴ NAA: AWM78, 418/1: Sydney Log

⁴⁷⁵ NAA: AWM78, 345/1: HMAS *Toomeree*: Reports of Proceedings

⁴⁷⁶ NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/5943: Motor vessel *Toomeree*

⁴⁷⁷ NAA: AWM78, 413/1: RAN Administrative Authority – RANLO [Royal Australian Naval Liaison Officer] and NOIC [Naval Officer in Charge], Merauke: Reports of Proceedings

However, by June 1946, it appears she had been acquired by Tea Gardens-Nelson's Bay Ferries as a 'suitable craft for special trips'.⁴⁷⁸ She was reported in 1948 competing in the New South Wales Big Game Fishing Association's competition off Port Stephens and Newcastle where it was proposed to release pigeons to carry news from the competition vessels whilst at sea, to the shore station at Shoal Bay, Port Stephens.⁴⁷⁹ She was still working in 1951 when she was reported taking visitors to the local off-shore Cabbage Tree Islands.⁴⁸⁰

Nothing further is known of her. HMAS *Toomeree* is not included in the Navy's 'Ship Histories'.

* * *

HMAS *Winbah*

Winbah, another Halvorsen's vessel, was constructed in 1936 for Harold Percival Christmas, owner of the later *Toomeree*. She was the last boat built by Lars Halvorsen, the founder of the Halvorsen boat building industry.⁴⁸¹ Just after *Winbah* was launched in September 1936, Lars Halvorsen died and Percy Christmas assisted the young Halvorsen family.

Winbah was 62 feet (18.90m) in length with a 15 foot (4.57m) beam and a 4 foot (1.22m) draught. She included two complete decks giving full headroom throughout, yet the effect of height had been 'subdued' by the use of 'restrained streamlining'. She was described as having a feel of spaciousness and light.



Mrs P Christmas with launching bottle in hand about to christen *Winbah*. A D Walker is in the centre with Harold Christmas and Lars Halvorsen on the right.⁴⁸²

Large windows surrounded the bridge-deck giving the helmsman uninterrupted vision in any direction. She included an owner's state room aft that occupied the full width of the vessel, two guest staterooms with separate toilet rooms for the owner and guests. A large dining saloon paneled in Japanese oak was included with an adjacent galley forward of the bridge deck. A cabin for crew provided in the bow.⁴⁸³

She was powered by two 105hp six cylinder Gray marine petrol engines giving a speed of 12 miles (19.2km) per hour. Spotted gum was chosen for her stem, keelson, keel and frames with 1½ inch

⁴⁷⁸ Dungog Chronicle: Durham and Gloucester Advertiser (NSW), 7 June 1946, P.3

⁴⁷⁹ Northern Star (Lismore), 28 January 1948, p.7

⁴⁸⁰ The Land (Sydney), 10 October 1951, p.37

⁴⁸¹ Svensen, R., *The Halvorsen Story*, p.63, and Register

⁴⁸² Halvorsen photograph album, No. 2 held by the ANMM

⁴⁸³ The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly - Aug. 1936, p.10

(38mm) New Zealand kauri planking. Decking was 1½ inch (38mm) Queensland beech. Despite her size, it was said she could be sailed by one person.



Winbah on Sydney Harbour.⁴⁸⁴



Winbah's palatial bridge-deck.⁴⁸⁵



Winbah's dining saloon.⁴⁸⁶

Winbah was requisitioned by the Navy on 22 September 1941. Christmas valued her at £5,000. Lloyds for the Navy valued her at £5,500.

As with his other vessel *Toomeree*, Christmas was concerned he had heard nothing from the Navy regarding compensation for *Winbah*, and wrote at the end of February 1942, to the Secretary of the Department of the Navy. He was told the issue of hire or purchase was under consideration. He asked for progress payments at £33 per month for each vessel which was agreed by the Navy.

⁴⁸⁴ Halvorsen photograph album, No. 2 held by the ANMM

⁴⁸⁵ Halvorsen photograph album, No. 2 held by the ANMM

⁴⁸⁶ The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly – November 1936, p.25

The Director of Engineering (Naval) recommended purchase for a much reduced value at just £3,000. The purchase was passed to the Contract Board and onto Mr Tennant for negotiation with Christmas. Tennant informed Christmas of the Navy's value of just £3,250. There was no disclosure by Tennant of the Lloyd's higher value of £5,500. Christmas withdrew his earlier offer of £5,000 and put forward an offer of just £4,200. The Contract Board approved the purchase at £4,200 and a week later, the Navy had acquired *Winbah* for a bargain sum.

By early November, *Winbah* was recommended for service at Darwin with *Nereus* and *Marlean* and was commissioned on 23 November 1941 under command of Commissioned Officer from Warrant Rank RANR(S) Eric S MacPherson.⁴⁸⁷ Macpherson was replaced by Lieutenant RANVR Rex G Callaway on 18 February 1942. He was replaced by Lieutenant RANVR John P Newey on 25 May 1942.



HMAS *Winbah*.⁴⁸⁸

Winbah was fitted with one .303 Vickers machine gun mounted aft (however the Navy's 'Ship Index Cards' record she was fitted with two, presumably with the second mounted on the fore deck), with depth charges on the stern. She was also fitted with the anti-submarine ASDIC '134' equipment.⁴⁸⁹

According to a memorial plaque unveiled in 1992, *Winbah* served in Darwin during the first Japanese air raid on 19 February 1942.⁴⁹⁰ But for the same reasons provided above for *Marlean*, it seems unlikely she was ever in Darwin, given *Winbah* was in Sydney during the Battle of Sydney Harbour.⁴⁹¹ Unless together with *Marlean*, she had been rushed back from Darwin, which is highly improbable.

Like other vessels of the Hollywood Fleet, following the Battle of Sydney Harbour, *Winbah* continued regular patrol duties at Sydney, Port Kembla and Newcastle.⁴⁹²

By December 1944, HMAS *Winbah* was in Sydney where she remained 'alongside' the wharf awaiting replacement engines. The engines were finally installed in July with further maintenance work in August. Her stores were returned in late August and she was 'paid off' on 1 September 1945. She had sailed 5,294 miles (8,470km) since she had been commissioned in November 1941.⁴⁹³

On 20 September 1945, *Winbah* was offered back to Harold Christmas for the sum of £2,750. Christmas declined the offer whereupon the vessel was auctioned with a collection of other vessels. *Winbah* was purchased on 27 October 1945⁴⁹⁴ by Fred Harris of Centennial Park, owner of the destroyed *Steady Hour*. The purchase price was £2,850.

⁴⁸⁷ AWM 78, 418/1 - Sydney Log

⁴⁸⁸ AWM Photograph 302015

⁴⁸⁹ RAN Sea Power Centre - Australia, Ship Index Cards, HMAS *Winbah*

⁴⁹⁰ <https://vwma.org.au/explore/memorials/1664>

⁴⁹¹ NAA: MP1049/5, 2026/21/79: Midget Submarine Attack on Sydney Harbour., p.32

⁴⁹² NAA: AWM78, 418/1: Sydney Log

⁴⁹³ NAA: AWM78, 369/1: HMAS *Winbah*: Reports of Proceedings

⁴⁹⁴ RAN Sea Power Centre - Australia: Ship Histories, HMAS *Winbah*

On 20 September 1949, Harris Registered a vessel in the Port of Sydney section of the Register of British Ships under the name of *Steady Hour*. A review of the registration identifies the vessel was constructed by Carl Halvorsen in 1936 and to be of 59 feet, 6 inches – the same dimensions and date of construction as *Winbah*.⁴⁹⁵

Fred Harris had found his new replacement *Steady Hour* on which he took the salute at the Royal Motor Yacht Club at Rose Bay in September 1947. Harris died in September 1954 and the vessels remained with his family until it was sold to George Frederick Cratchley of Newport in 1958.

Nothing is known of her since. HMAS *Winbah* is not included in the Navy's 'Ship Histories'.



HMAS *Yarroma*

Yarroma was built by W L Holmes and launched on 24 September 1939.⁴⁹⁶ She was built for a Mr Philip Bevan, however there is no mention of her in the newspapers of the period. She was included in the Port of Sydney section of the Register of British Ships on 25 September 1939. Bevan's address was given as 260 Kent Street Sydney.⁴⁹⁷

Yarroma was 58 feet 6 inches (17.83m) with a beam of 14 feet 9 inches (4.50m) powered by twin eight cylinder 180hp Gray Marine engines. She included a two berth cabin, a single berth cabin, a crews cabin, galley with gas stove and electric refrigerator, shower room, toilet, dining saloon and a deck saloon. Keel and frames were of spotted gum, New Zealand kauri planking and Queensland maple superstructure and interior woodwork.⁴⁹⁸

On 30 May 1941, the Secretary of the Naval Board directed that *Yarroma* be requisitioned and fitted with ASDIC if trials on *Miramar* proved satisfactory. *Yarroma* was formally requisitioned by the Navy on 20 June 1941.⁴⁹⁹ Bevan completed a questionnaire in June 1941 in which he indicated the purchase price from Holmes was £5,349 and that he had added additional items which resulted in a total purchase cost of £6,625. He nominated his valuation at £5,000. If that was his real purchase price, his valuation was a substantial depreciation, given she had been launched less than two years before.

On 19 August 1941 *Yarroma* was formally commissioned as HMAS *Yarroma* under command of Sub-Lieutenant S G Kingsford-Smith RANVR. Two months later, Kingsford-Smith was replaced by Lieutenant James B Griffin RANVR, and was subsequently replaced by Sub-Lieutenant Harold C Evers RANVR on 25 May 1942.

In mid-September 1941, Bevan met with representatives of the Department of Navy and subsequently stressed in his letter of 22 September, 1941, he held the view that vessels like *Yarroma* were built for intermittent duty and pleasure work and that to return the vessel to him in anything like her current condition, would cost the Navy considerably more than the sum he was willing to accept for her. He said the vessel had been launched on 24 September 1939 and '*so it is just two years old at the present time*'. He also said he had obtained two independent valuations which were 25% more than his reduced £4,000 asking price. The Director of Engineering (Naval) again entered the process recommending she be purchased for no more than £3,150. Lloyds on behalf of the Navy valued her at £5,500. There was no explanation for the significant difference.

⁴⁹⁵ Register of British Ships, Microfilm C2/15 held by ANMM, Registration No. 191179, 16 in 1949

⁴⁹⁶ Letter dated 22 September 1941, signed by Philip Bevan in NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/5464: *Yarroma* – Purchaser Std Vacuum Oil Co

⁴⁹⁷ Microfilm C2/14 held by ANMM – Registration No. 172891, No. 16 in 1939

⁴⁹⁸ NAA MP138/1, 603/246/5464 – *Yarroma* – Purchaser Std vacuum Oil Co. See Lloyds survey.

⁴⁹⁹ NAA MP138/1, 603/246/5464 – *Yarroma* – Purchaser Std vacuum Oil Co. This Record deals with requisition and purchase.

Yarroma.⁵⁰⁰

By November 1941, Bevan had not heard anything and requested information regarding the procedure to be adopted to determine the value to be paid. As for the other vessels, the Secretary of the Navy gave the same response – under ‘*consideration*’. In December, he wrote again requesting payment to be made ‘on account’. He said he believed charter would not be appropriate and the procedure to be adopted should have been decided as ‘*it is not fair to an owner not to know what his position is*’. The matter was passed to the Contract Board for negotiation for the ‘*best possible price*’. The Department agreed to progress payments on account at £24 per month.

At the time, the Contracts Board and Tennant were dealing with other vessels including *Steady Hour*, *Seamist*, *Silver Cloud*, *Leilani* and *Yarroma*. With so many vessels being taken with protracted negotiations, there was plenty of reasons for the owners to discuss the situation among themselves.

HMAS Yarroma.⁵⁰¹

The 29 December 1941 was certainly a busy day for Tennant. On that day he met Bevan re *Yarroma*, Ray Vaughan re *Leilani* and Hope Bartlett and Mr Gard re *Seamist*. Bevan outlined issues with regard to his asking price and provided reasons for his insurance value only being half the purchase price – because he had installed a fire prevention system, had maintained at least one person on board and he covered the other half of the value of the vessel. He was advised his offer of £4,000 would be recommended to the Contracts Board. Given the depreciated value, even on the basis applied by the Navy at £5,135, it is perplexing to understand why Bevan was willing to settle for much less.

An explanation can be found in a Navy Memorandum dated 19 January 1942 which records a ‘*telephonic communication*’ received from the Taxation Commissioner’s Office stating the money for the vessel was to be paid by Bevan to the taxation office. Clearly Bevan had an outstanding tax account and had entered into an arrangement with the ‘tax man’.

⁵⁰⁰ The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly – Feb. 1940. Photograph from advertisement for W L Holmes.

⁵⁰¹ AWM Photograph 302023

Yarroma, like *Lolita*, was armed with .303 Vickers machine guns fore and aft, and was fitted with twin depth charge chutes. She was also fitted with the new anti-submarine ASDIC '134' equipment.

For her role in the Battle of Sydney Harbour, *Yarroma* was awarded the 'Pacific 1942' Battle Honour.⁵⁰²

For Bevan, the purchase of *Yarroma* was completed in mid-June 1942, two weeks after her actions in the Battle.⁵⁰³ But in finalizing the purchase, it was discovered Bevan had registered *Yarroma* as a British Ship under the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 and the Registration Certificate was required to complete the purchase. Bevan said the certificate was onboard when he handed the vessel to the Navy. The Certificate was not found and the Registration was formally cancelled on 9 October 1942.⁵⁰⁴

There is no record in the Sydney Log of *Yarroma* departing the harbour after the Battle of Sydney Harbour, and it appears she may have continued her duties at Sydney throughout the remainder of the war. On 20 May 1944, *Yarroma* was transferred to the Naval Auxiliary Patrol (NAP)⁵⁰⁵ with a new commander Sub-Lieutenant d'Alpuget RANVR, who had been appointed on 22 May 1944. In late 1944, the vessel underwent a refit. During mid 1945, she underwent a further electrical and mechanical refit including the installation of new Hudson Invader marine engines. By June 1945 she was back patrolling the boom net before returning to the Sayonara slip for hull cleaning and repairs to the propeller shafts. She had 'steamed' a distance of 1,782 miles (2,850km) in the twelve months since her transfer to the NAP,⁵⁰⁶ which indicates she conducted patrols at ports, other than just Sydney.

Yarroma was 'paid off' on 25 August 1945⁵⁰⁷ and was offered back to Philip Bevan for the sum of £4,000 - the same sum he had received from the Navy three years before. His response was short and to the point - 'Not interested in purchase of vessel *Yarroma*'. She was advertised for sale on 9 December 1945, together with *Miramar*.⁵⁰⁸ *Yarroma* was sold at auction to Standard Vacuum Oil Co on 18 December 1945 for £5,250.⁵⁰⁹

Like other Hollywood Fleet vessels, there is no further history. HMAS *Yarroma* is not included in the Navy's 'Ship Histories'.

HMAS *Yarroma* Postscript

It was a beautiful Canberra autumn day in 2019, when I visited the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. During the morning I discovered a manuscript prepared by Frederick Horace Doyle.⁵¹⁰ He had served on HMAS *Napier* for nearly a year in 1941, including when she had been straddled by enemy bombs whilst evacuating forces from Crete. His shaky hand-writing prompted me to realise he may well have been in his eighties when he wrote his document. That afternoon I read of his experience on HMAS *Yarroma* during the Battle of Sydney Harbour, and his story of how on the morning of 1 June 1942, her engines had been lifted off their mounts because of the explosion of her first depth charge she dropped in Taylors Bay. Doyle referred to *Yarroma* being disabled from making a second run.

This was new information, never revealed in Muirhead-Gould's reports, that *Yarroma* had been disabled, and had only dropped one depth charge.

⁵⁰² RAN Ship/Unit Approved Battle Honours, 1 March 2010

⁵⁰³ NAA: 138/1, 603/246/5464: *Yarroma* - Purchaser Std Vacuum Oil Co

⁵⁰⁴ Register of British Ships, Microfilm C2/14 held by ANMM, Registration No. 172891, 16 in 1939

⁵⁰⁵ See Appendix B - Naval Auxiliary Patrol (NAP)

⁵⁰⁶ NAA: AWM78, 375/1: HMAS *Yarroma*: Reports of Proceedings

⁵⁰⁷ NAA: 138/1, 603/246/5464: *Yarroma* - Purchaser Std Vacuum Oil Co

⁵⁰⁸ The Sun (Sydney), 9 December 1945, p.3

⁵⁰⁹ NAA: 138/1, 603/246/5464: *Yarroma* - Purchaser Std Vacuum Oil Co

⁵¹⁰ See Footnote 14.

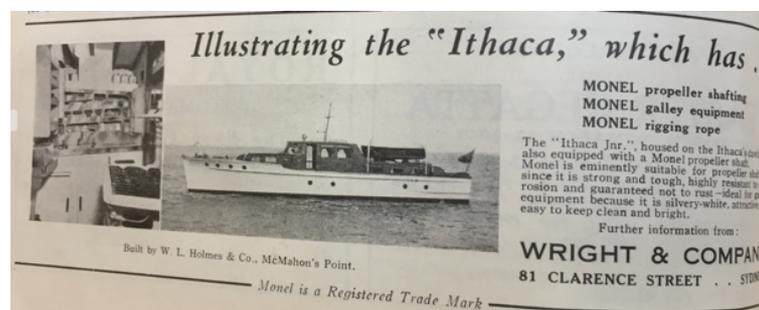
But I could not believe what I read next, where he described the work undertaken at Garden Island later that morning to reposition the engines back onto their mounting blocks;

On the lifting of the port engine I noticed a brass plaque with the name 'Athacia:'. I thought that name rings a bell. I could not remember what.

Later that night while home I remembered the 'Shark Arm Boat' was the 'Athacia'. I have always wondered if they were the same craft. One of the few incidents that have received so much publicity.

If *Athacia* was the 'Shark Arm Boat' it would have been Reginald Holmes' speedboat on which he shot himself and later avoided the police pursuit for four hours. Despite an extensive search, I have no evidence of a speedboat of that name.

However, weeks later I was in the library leafing through journals searching for information on the vessels of the Hollywood Fleet. I came across an advertisement for Wright and Company for their Monel products. What struck me, was the name of the vessel in the advertisement – *Ithaca*, and its similarity to the name of Doyle's vessel, *Athacia*. However, what also struck me, was that she was constructed by W L Holmes.



The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly – Feb. 1940, (Monel Advertisement).

Could Doyle's recollection over the years have transposed an 'A' for an 'I'? And in any event, why would there be a 'brass plaque' with the name *Athacia* or *Ithaca* of another large motor cruiser, in the engine room of *Yarroma*? As I pondered the possibilities, it struck me, the vessel in the advertisement I was looking at was familiar. I quickly found another advertisement that included *Yarroma*. It was in the very same edition of the magazine. It was certainly a different photograph, but both vessels were the same - exactly the same in every detail!



The International Power Boat and Aquatic Monthly – Feb. 1940, (W L Holmes Advertisement).

With some more searching, I found *Ithaca* had been launched a few months before *Yarroma* to the same owner – Philip Bevan!⁵¹¹



A CHEERY PARTY which watched the launching of Mr. Philip Bevan's new motor yacht *Ithaca*, at Holmes' Boat-shed, McMahon's Point, yesterday. Mrs. Bevan (third from left) endeavored to break a bottle of champagne over the bows in the traditional manner—but missed. Also in the picture: Misses Marjorie Nall (left), Mayvery Bevan, Lieut.-Commander J. C. Morrow, and Miss Ann Bevan.

A CHEERY PARTY which watched the launching of Mr. Philip Bevan's new motor yacht Ithaca, at Holmes' Boat shed, McMahon's Point, yesterday. Mrs. Bevan (third from left) endeavoured to break a bottle of champagne over the bows in the traditional manner – but missed. Also in the picture: Misses Marjorie Nall (left), Mayvery Bevan, Lieut.-Commander J. C. Morrow, Miss Ann Bevan.

For me, it was unbelievable there could be two advertisements in the same edition of a magazine, with photographs of the same vessel, but with two names – *Ithaca* and *Yarroma*. It also seemed unbelievable *Ithaca* had been launched on 27 June 1939, followed a few months later on 24 September 1939 by *Yarroma*!⁵¹² Whilst the launch of *Ithaca* was reported in the media,⁵¹³ there was no mention of the later launch of *Yarroma* in any media.

I was left wondering, why Bevan would want to own two luxury motor cruisers, that appeared from the photographs, to be exactly the same, and launched within three months of each other?

I wondered if the vessel the Navy acquired had not been *Yarroma*, but was *Ithaca*, and for some reason, the Holmes shipyard had renamed her, or perhaps done a 'switcharoo' – a swap – but had forgotten to remove the brass identification plate found by Doyle and the Garden Island dockyard staff?

Or perhaps if there really was only one vessel and *Ithaca* had been renamed, that would not explain why Bevan had told the Navy, *Yarroma* had been launched in September 1939 when the newspaper confirmed the earlier launch of *Ithaca*?

Certainly a mystery, yet to be resolved!

* * *

⁵¹¹ The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 28 June 1939, p.12

⁵¹² Letter dated 22 September 1941, signed by Philip Bevan in NAA: MP138/1, 603/246/5464: *Yarroma* – Purchaser Std Vacuum Oil Co

⁵¹³ The Daily Telegraph (Sydney), 28 June 1939, p.12