

YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 57

TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Throughout 2021, the Virtual Visit series will be continuing to present interesting features from the collection and their background stories.

The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is now open four days per week, Wednesday through Friday plus Sunday. Current COVID19 protocols including contact tracing will apply.

Amphibious Capabilities and the Army's Small Boat Fleet

Both the Navy and the Army have had a role in providing vessels to support amphibious warfare and littoral operations. The Australian military's first amphibious warfare ships were the three Landing Ships Infantry (LSI): HMAS *Kanimbla*, HMAS *Manoora*, and HMAS *Westralia*. These three ships had been built as civilian motor vessels and were converted to armed merchant cruisers at the outbreak of war in 1939. They were converted again to LSIs in 1943 and took part in United States and Australian amphibious assaults in the South West Pacific Area. The ships had a capacity of about 1,200 troops, which were landed from boats carried by the LSIs. Following the war, the three LSIs remained in service as transports until 1949 when they were returned to their owners.



An assault landing craft being swung aboard HMAS *Westralia* during the landing of 2/24 Infantry Battalion on Morotai, 18 April 1945.

The RAN borrowed six Landing Ships Tank (LSTs) from the Royal Navy between 1946 and 1955. The LSTs were used as general-purpose vessels and did not specialise in amphibious operations. After the LSTs were disposed of, Australia was left without any amphibious warfare ships. To rectify this situation the Army purchased four *LSM-1* class Landing Ship Medium from the United States Navy in 1959. These ships were operated by the 32nd Small Ship Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers and supported Army exercises and operations. Each vessel was renamed after famous Australian generals - Harry Chauvel, Brudenell White, Vernon Sturdee and Clive Steele. Some five years later the Squadron also acquired a small 1,400 ton conventional cargo vessel, John Monash from Adelaide Steamship Company.



AV1356 Clive Steele conducting loading trials at sea with a Skycrane, Vietnam, March 1968

All five ships saw active service during the Vietnam War where they carried supplies between Australia and South Vietnam and between South Vietnamese ports. The first four ships were decommissioned in September 1971 when the 32nd Small Ship Squadron was disbanded. The John Monash was sold in 1975.

Western Australian and Army Small Boats

During World War 2, the small ships and landing craft of the water transport groups of the Royal Australian Engineers provided essential support for troops in combat. They ferried troops to areas that the larger Navy ships could not reach, evacuated wounded, delivered food and ammunition and took part in amphibious landings. Water transport units initially operated in the Middle East and Malaya and later supported Australian operations from 1942 to 1946 in Papua, New Guinea, Bougainville, New Britain and Borneo.

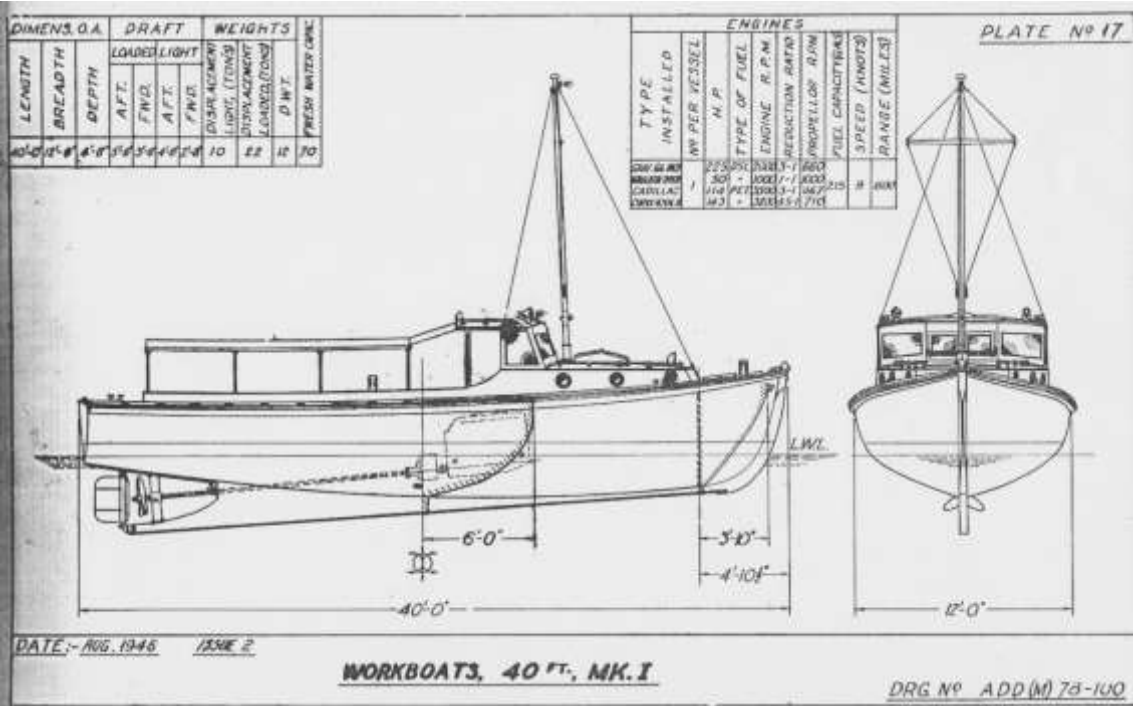
There is a strong Western Australian connection with the Army's small boats. It could be argued that this dates back to the arming of the SS *Georgette* with a 12 pounder cannon and Pensioner Guards to intercept the *Catalpa* and its escaping Fenians. The Army also made considerable use of small boats during the Prison and internment regimes on Rottneest as well as obtaining the services of several barges during the construction of Rottneest Island fortifications.

The firm of AT Brine and Company (also known as AT Brine and Sons) was a major WA construction and contracting company. Among its projects were the WA State War Memorial, UWA’s Hackett Hall, Boan’s Wellington Street building and St Mary’s Cathedral. The company also had experience in wooden construction and was one of several Western Australian companies contracted to build vessels for the war effort.



Army 40 foot Workboat

Brine’s built 40 foot army workboats and 45 foot towboats. Arcus Limited built 45 foot towboats, 300 ton Swan class coasters and 60 foot Air Sea Rescue (ASR) crashboats. Bunnings and Millars Karri and Jarrah Company built 60 and 72 foot GPVs.



For a future exhibit, the Army Museum is seeking photos of Western Australian vessels built for the Australian Army by Western Australian companies.

AV 1356 (Ashburton) / Later HMAS Woomera



AV 1356 (Ashburton) / Later HMAS Woomera

HMAS *Woomera* was an Australian vessel operated initially by the Australian Army and later the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). Built in Fremantle, she was one of a class of 32 wooden motor vessels built for the Army and entered service in late 1945 as AV 1356 (*Ashburton*). She was transferred to the RAN on 23 January 1946 and commissioned as *HMAS Woomera*. The ship's main role was carrying stores and later dumping obsolete ammunition at sea. On 11 October 1960, an accidental explosion occurred onboard *HMAS Woomera* while she was dumping ammunition into the sea off Sydney. As a result of the explosion the ship burst into flames and sank, killing two of her crew members.

http://www.boatregister.net/WW2_ArmyWorkBoats.html

<https://www.atbrine.com.au/history?pgid=k6fujgp6-51fd59a1-4bae-11ea-8c85-12879e2400f0>

http://www.pastmasters.net/uploads/2/6/7/5/26751978/air_sea_rescue.pdf

<https://theforge.defence.gov.au/publications/moving-tanks-water-short-history-australias-tank-capable-amphibious-capability>

http://www.32smallshipsqn.org.au/assets/Forgotten%20Fleet/1_Forgotten%20Fleet%20Introduction.pdf

Major General Sir Clive Selwyn Steele, KBE, DSO, MC, VD (1892 –1955)



General Steele was an engineer and a senior officer of the Australian Army who served in both World Wars. He was instrumental in the expansion of the Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) in preparation for the war against Japan. He established the RAE Training Centre at Kapooka, New South Wales and increased the size of the School of Military Engineering at Liverpool. The School trained sappers who disarmed mines, demolished obstacles, provided water supplies and other services to military camps, cut and milled timber, built huts, roads, bridges, railways, airfields and wharves, and operated the army's water-transport vessels.

With the reorganisation of Land Headquarters in October 1943, fortifications, works, engineer stores and transport were added to Steele's responsibilities. During 1944, he personally designed the Army heavy lift ship *Crusader*.



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/australian_army_ship_crusader_\(av_2767\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/australian_army_ship_crusader_(av_2767))

