

CALL THE HANDS

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HMAS Cerberus - Early History and Observations

This paper was developed after locating a 1970 HMAS Cerberus Wardroom mess dinner menu. The menu included observations by prominent citizens about HMAS Cerberus and its location at Westernport amongst others. These are reproduced in this paper along with the menu for the curious. For more detailed reading on the history of HMAS Cerberus, visit the Society's website [heritage page on HMAS Cerberus](#).

The site for HMAS *Cerberus* was recommended by Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson KCB RN after an extensive search of the Australian coastline for suitable locations for major Naval bases. He proposed that a base be established on Hann's Inlet between Sandy Point and Stony Point on Westernport Bay.



Historic Gates



Historic Gangway

The base was to include a Torpedo School, a Destroyer Base and a Submarine Base, and be capable of accommodating up to 2000 personnel. The site, covering over 1500 hectares (nearly 3600 acres), was purchased in 1911. The first sod was turned in 1913. The old wharf and hospital were erected first, followed by A, B and C Blocks. The Wardroom, Warrant Officers' Mess, Captain's and other Officers' residences were built between 1915 and 1917. The Drill Hall, Gunnery School and Torpedo School (now part of the Technical Training Centre) were established in 1917 at the height of building activity. The power house and other residences were built between 1918 and 1920.

The base was officially opened in September, 1920, under the command of Commander FC Darley RN. The idea of using it as a Fleet Base was soon abandoned and it became known as Flinders Naval Depot in 1921. The Depot was commissioned HMAS *Cerberus* on 1 April that year.

HMAS *Cerberus*: Quotes

The Henderson Report — 1911:

“In addition to its use as a Destroyer Base and also as a Submarine Base, Port Western will be the training base for the Western Fleet.”

Rear Admiral Creswell, 1917:

“One great advantage of the Flinders Naval Base is the climate. Of course, we can get willing work anywhere, but I have in the course of my work experienced every climate in Australia.....and I think there is no place where you can stand so much drill without fatigue as in a bracing climate like that down here.”

Rear Admiral Creswell - (First Naval Member) 21st February 1917:

“Generally speaking, my view of the place is, and always has been, that it should be the main place for the producing of trained human war material for the Navy in Australia.....One of the most important features to be realized in connection with the establishment of FNB is the suitability of the climate for the purpose for which the Base is chiefly proposed. I consider that we can get 50% more work out of a man, and with less fatigue, at Westernport, that we would get from the same men in almost any other locality that might be selected. Climatic conditions at Jervis bay are good.....but the climatic conditions at Westernport are pre-eminently fine and bracing. At Jervis Bay, during a portion of the year, the climate is rather relaxing.

“If you have a good Naval officer, you should provide him with the best house you can possibly give him. The Naval officer has practically no home life, and the positions filled by the officers at the Naval Base should be regarded as prizes given to those who have risen to eminence and shown special capacity. They deserve to be generously treated in the matter of the houses provided for them.”

Rear Admiral Clarkson CMG - (Third Naval member) 5th February 1918:

“The place has already been spoilt, to a certain extent, by the erection of towers Babel (B and C blocks). Our idea was to keep all the buildings low on account of the aviation school, and it is altogether against our proposals to have three-storey buildings. We opposed them very strongly We have always had the idea that there would be an Aviation School at the base. That is why we laid out a huge parade ground. These things are not made public as a rule.”



Mr Gregory - (Minister for the Navy) 3 December 1918

“When the work started, I do not believe that it was ever intended that it should be in Hann’s Inlet.....I believe that work was started.....just before an election, for the purpose of gaining favour, and it has just kept on.”

The Argus, 2nd September 1920 - On the day after commissioning:

“The depot will be used as a training establishment for training in torpedo, gunnery and other exercises, and its further development with a view to putting it on similar lines to its great contemporary, HMS *Excellent*, the training school for naval gunnery, is receiving the consideration of the Naval Board.”

Dr Earle Page (MP — later knighted) 18th November 1921:

“Unfortunately, there is at Flinders Naval Base, one of the most striking object lessons of the way in which public money can be wasted when it is badly handled and the works are not properly planned.”

Captain G F Hyde, RAN - (Second Naval Member) 5th March 1924:

“I have never been able to discover any particular reason for the selection of Flinders as a naval training depot, but so much money has already been spent there that there would be no justification for shifting the Depot. The buildings are not suitable for any other purpose and, of course, we hope that twenty years hence, when a township has sprung up in the vicinity, the Flinders Settlement will have become a national asset.

“The existing instructional staff at Flinders is reduced to such an extent that it is impossible to cut it down further without destroying the efficiency of the establishment.”

Mr Marks (M.P. - Federal) 15th May 1924:

“It is a pity that the Admiral who recommended that Flinders should be a sub-naval base did not, on the way down, slip on a piece of orange peel or a banana skin, because Flinders is the worst place in Australia for such a purpose.”

Captain Hyde (Second Naval Member) 1924 — about Flinders Naval Depot:

“The existing and proposed buildings provide as much provision for recreation as the Board can afford. We provide rooms for reading and smoking, concerts, lectures and billiards. Of course, gymnastic training is part of the instruction course. Generally speaking, we are very much worse off in respect to recreational facilities than are similar establishments in England, where the Admiralty is exceedingly generous in the provision it makes for recreation and amusements.”



Mr Crouch (MP Federal) 1929:

“The position at the Naval base at Westernport is even more unsatisfactory than the position of Duntroon. Everything possible is done to anglicize the staff there. The men who play Australian Football are seriously prejudiced in regard to advancement. The English officers are doing their utmost to encourage English customs and English games. Soccer and Rugby are played in preference to the Australian Rules game.”

Senator O’Sullivan (Qld) - (Minister for the Navy) 13 June 1956:

“What is wrong with Flinders as a site for a naval college? The fact of the matter is there is nothing right with it.....whoever bought the site.....must have done so when the tide was in, because one can scarcely see the sea from the shore when the tide is out. It is altogether unsuitable as a site for a naval college.”



Drill Hall 1939 RAN image

Wardroom Dinner
50th Anniversary of the Commissioning
Of H.M.A.s Cerberus
Tuesday 1st September 1970

Wines

Menu

Mildara
 Supreme Dry Sherry
 *

Leo Buring
 Chateau Leonay Hock
 *

Wynns Coonawarra
 Estate Hermitage 1967
 *

Yaldara Champagne
 *

Hardy's Reserve Bin
 Show Port 1943
 *

Yalumba Madeira



Grapefruit Cocktail
 *

Lobster Thermidor
 *

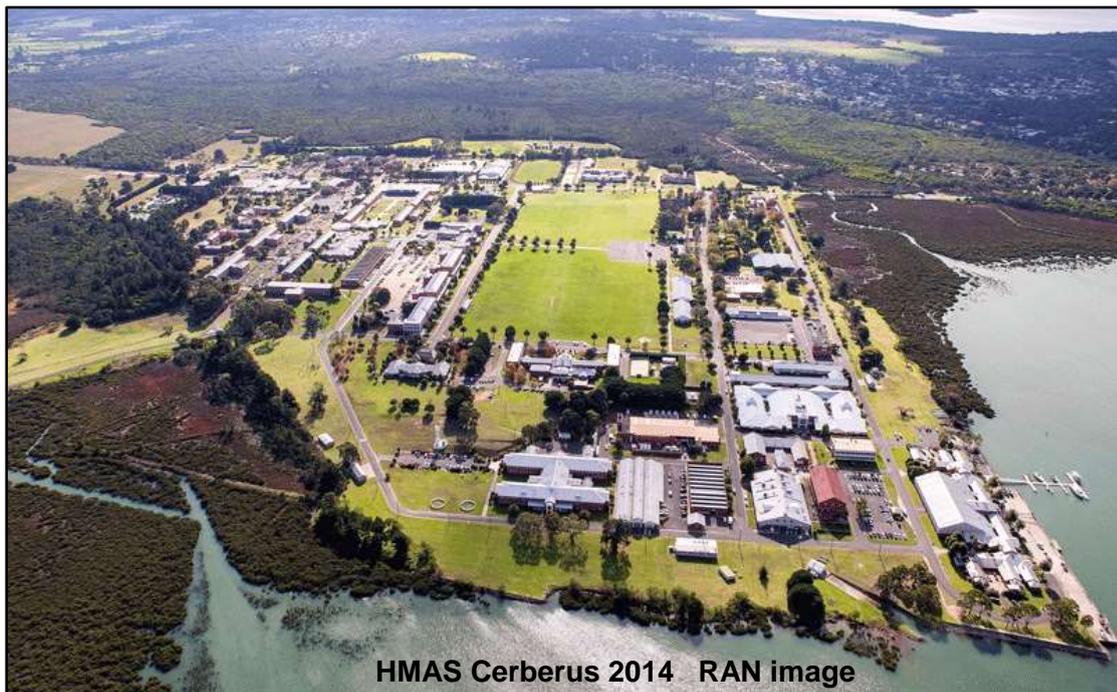
Fillet of Beef - Mushroom Sauce
 *

Minted News Potatoes
 Baby Carrots - Green Peas
 *

Pineapple Bourdalaue
 *

Cheesi - Eggi - Hammi Topside
 *

Dessert Coffee



HMAS Cerberus 2014 RAN image