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Call the Hands

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Tasmania and the Navy from Colonial Days until Today

By Dennis J Weatherall JP TM AFAITT(L) LSM – Volunteer Researcher

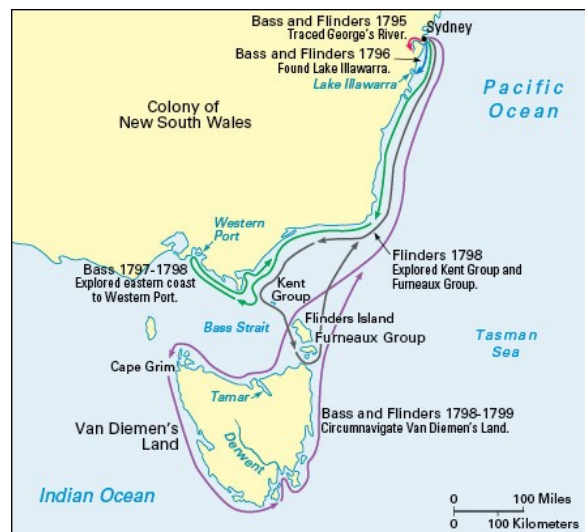
The first reported sighting of the land mass south of the Australian mainland (then referred to as “Terra Australis Incognita” by a European) was on 24th November 1642 when the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman landed at what today is Blackman Bay and a southern suburb of city of Hobart.

Some 130 years later, in 1772, a French expedition led by Marc-Joseph Marion du Fresne landed nearby Blackman’s Bay. In the following year, 1773 the first Englishman to land on the island, Tobias Furneaux, arrived at what became Adventure Bay, named after his ship “HMS Adventure”. Captain James Cook also came ashore at Adventure Bay in 1777 from “HMS Discovery”. However, Abel Tasman had already named it “Storm Bay”¹ and it was then considered possibly part of New Holland, the mainland.

It wasn’t until 1798-1799 that Matthew Flinders and George Bass determined that Tasmania was in fact an island with a Strait to its north that separated it from the continent’s southern coast line.

The British Army garrisoned in then Van Diemen’s Land in 1803 when NSW Governor Philip King sent Lt. John Bowen south to establish a small military outpost on the eastern shore of the Derwent River to keep discourage French explorers who had been active on the southern coastline of the mainland. Lt. Bowen had an initial party of 49, including 21 male and 3 female convicts. The outpost was named “Risdon”.

A few months later (November 1803), a second outpost was established by Capt. (Royal Marines) David Collins with 308 convicts, approximately three miles south of “Risdon” on the western side of the Derwent at “Sullivan’s Cove” where fresh water was more plentiful. This settlement was named after the Colonial Secretary, Lord Hobart and became known as Hobart Town or Hobarton, later cut short to Hobart.



Exploration Voyages of Bass and Flinders, 1795 to 1799

¹ The name ‘Storm Bay’ prevailed and is used today. Storm Bay is south of Hobart lying between the Tasman Peninsular and Bruny Island.

The “Risdon” settlement was abandoned, and by 1806 even “Sullivan’s Cove” suffered severe food shortages.

The UK Parliament in 1850 passed the “Australian Constitutions Act” granting the right of legislative power to all Australian colonies. The Legislative Council of Van Diemen’s Land then drafted a new Constitution which they (the Council) passed in 1854. It was given assent by Queen Victoria in 1855 and in the following year the Privy Council approved the name change to Tasmania.

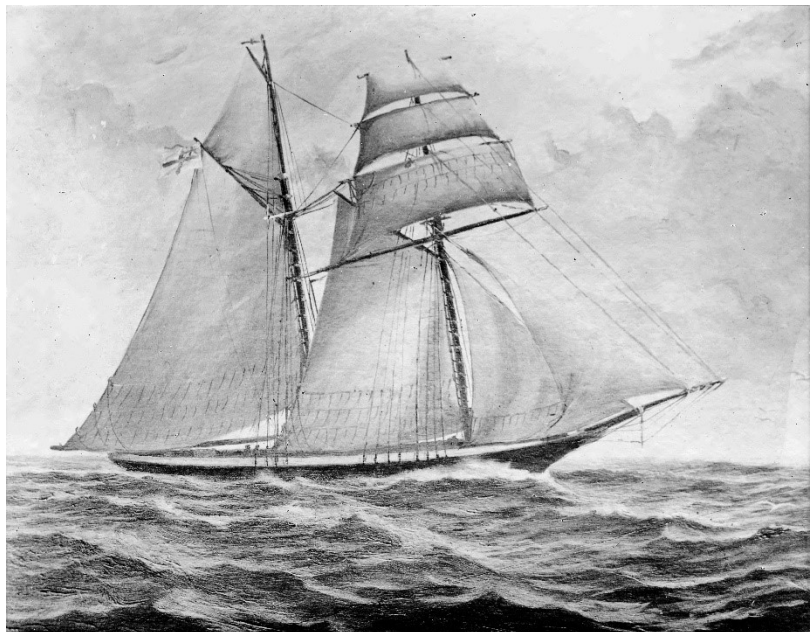
Around 1857 Secretary for War, Edward Cardwell, began a successful programme of reforms known as the Cardwell reforms. Cardwell lost his post when his government lost the following election.

His replacement was Hugh Childers who carried on with one of Cardwell’s proposals which was to withdraw British garrisons from self-governing colonies and be replaced by locally-raised units. This would save money and allow for more troops to be available for deployment in any time of war – which he announced in 1869. By 1870 the troops were being withdrawn and by 1871 more than 26,000 men had returned to Great Britain from around the British Empire.

This meant, at quite short notice, the Government of Tasmania was given responsibility for raising its own defences, both for Army and Naval personnel.

The arrival of three Imperial Russian Naval warships in 1872, “Africa”, “Plastun” and “Vestnik”, caused a great deal of alarm in the colony and led to vigorous discussion(s) about the colony’s defences. The threat of war with Russia in 1876 accelerated the establishment of both locally-raised defence forces and the modernisation of coastal defences. In 1878, the “Volunteer Act” was passed which established the Tasmanian Volunteer Force.

Taking a step back in time, the first vessel owned and operated by the Colonial Service of the then Van Diemen’s Land – later to be name-changed to Tasmania in 1856 – was the wooden sailing schooner “Eliza”, built for the Convict Marine Service. It was designated as a “Patrol & Examination Vessel” and launched at Port Arthur by boat builder David Hoy. It became the first “Australian” warship, as she was mounted with two guns (of unknown calibre), and was tasked to protect trade as well as prevent prisoners attempting to escape. Her first commander was a Lt. Corbett RN. “Eliza” was paid off in June 1844.



Convict Marine Service sloop *Eliza*, State Library of Tasmania image

In 1882, an order was placed by Tasmania for a Torpedo Boat similar to what NSW was operating. Rather than build their own as NSW had done, they elected to buy out of the catalogues presented by John Thornycroft of Chiswick and Yarrow of Poplar UK. There were four boats ordered: one each for Tasmania and Queensland and two for Victoria. The orders were placed by their respective governments via their Agent-Generals in

London. The catalogue cost was 3,300 pounds per vessel for what was known as a “2nd Class Torpedo Boat”. Victoria also placed an order for a “1st Class Torpedo Boat” from Thornycroft at a cost of 11,157 pounds and a much larger vessel than the 2nd Class Torpedo Boats.

In 1885, the strength of the Tasmanian Military Forces was 1200 men, the maximum permitted by law in peace time. In 1883 the “Tasmanian Engineers” were formed and some were detailed off to be trained as a Torpedo Boat crew for the newly-ordered vessel.

In 1884 with delivery of the boats imminent preparations were made for the Torpedo Boats to be transported as deck cargo. The boat destined for Tasmania was never named, unlike the other colonies’ boats, but bore the number TB191², and was delivered to Tasmania onboard the “SS Abingdon”, arriving in Hobart on 1 May 1884.



Torpedo Boat 191 in Hobart late 1880s, AWM image

Torpedo Boat Specifications

Builder:	John T. Thornycroft & Company of Chiswick
Vessel type:	2 nd Class Torpedo Boat
Tonnage:	12.5 tons (12.3 long tons and 13.8 short tons)
Length:	67 feet or 20 metres
Draught:	3.25 feet or 0.99 metres
Speed:	17 knots or 20 mph/31 kmph, steam-driven
Armament:	1 x Whitehead-Fiume torpedo, 1 x 1” Nordenfeldt gun
Crew:	Between 7 and 10

The final cost of TB191 was approximately 4,500 pounds. Originally fitted to carry the McEvoy torpedo, the “Tasmanian Torpedo Corps” opted for the Whitehead-Fiume replacement and modifications were carried out in 1885.

When the new equipment was installed it resulted in the torpedo spar being removed along with the port funnel. The starboard funnel was moved further forward whilst the twin-barrelled Nordenfeldt machine gun was moved closer to the conning tower. TB191 was infrequently used and laid up in 1894 through lack of funding. So ended the Naval Defence Unit of the Colony of Tasmania.

In 1895, just a year after being laid up, TB191 was brought back into service, but whilst on its slipway, the latter collapsed and the damage necessitated repairs to the slipway and TB191.

² Although the other colonies gave their torpedo boats names, Tasmania stayed with the manufacturer’s production line number, i.e. 191.

In 1900 it was decided TB191 would be disposed of, but it took until 1905 to find a new owner, the Government of South Australia.

The Commonwealth Naval Force vessel "Protector" (ex HMCS and later HMAS) was tasked with towing TB191 from Hobart to Adelaide. "Protector" took TB191 under tow, but had only reached Port Arthur, when the boat capsized in heavy weather. As TB191 had been well secured and battened down, the boat was righted and the tow restarted. TB191 arrived in Adelaide on 3rd May, 1905.

In South Australia the boat suffer a similar fate, lack of funds, to its service in the Colony of Tasmania, "more show than go". Consequently, she was paid off in 1910 for the last time and broken up by the Adelaide Harbour Board Dockyard.

A District Naval Office was established in Hobart during 1911 with Captain Walton Drake as DNO (District Naval Officer). The DNO office was re-designated as a Drill Hall until 1st July 1917 and then commissioned as "HMAS Derwent". However, the commissioning did not occur until 1 August 1940, 23 years later.

In the interim the DNO occupied space in the Customs House from 1 July 1917 and debate about shore depot naming ensued. It had been recommended that all State shore depots have names selected in 1935. The intention being that the chosen names be applied at the outbreak of war. The original name suggested for Hobart was Cerberus V although the Captain Superintendent suggested names that were of historical importance to Tasmania, such as Huon, Heemskerk and Zeehan. As a London shore depot was already designated 'Cerberus II'. It was then proposed the Melbourne depot be known as Cerberus III and the Hobart depot as Cerberus VI. These names were to be borne by the depots in the event of mobilisation. They were officially announced on 27 August 1939 and the Hobart depot provisionally named Cerberus VI.



HMAS HUON on the Derwent River, Hobart, Tasmania. RAN image

This name was initiated at the outbreak of WWII on 3 September 1939. In 1940, the Assistant Chief of Naval Staff suggested renaming shore establishments with the proposed new name for Cerberus VI being "Derwent". In putting the suggested new name to the Minister the Secretary for the Navy reasoned that the Depot stood beside the Derwent River on which Hobart itself stands. The Minister approved the name on 25 July 1940 and promulgated it on 1 August 1940.

On 1 March 1942 the Depot was once again renamed "Huon", due to the Royal Navy commissioning HMS Derwent. HMS Derwent was launched on 22nd August 1942. She was a Hunt Class Type III Destroyer Escort.

HMAS Huon was located as previously mentioned on the Derwent River, Queens Domain, Hobart. The site itself was purchased by the Commonwealth in 1911 and remained the principal RAN establishment in Tasmania until decommissioned in 1994. It was the second oldest naval shore establishment after Garden Island in Sydney.

The Drill Hall, built in 1912 was used to train Reserve Naval Officers and sailors until 1939.

From 1924 to 1928 the destroyer “HMAS Huon” was based alongside for Reserve training purposes. Post WWII, the base was reduced to care and maintenance from 1946 until January 1960.

HMAS Huon’s operational status was then upgraded and, once again, it was used for training Naval Reservists and Cadets. Unfortunately, in 1993, the then Federal Government took recommendations from Defence to close three Naval shore establishments. Huon was one of them. Despite petitions and lobbying in Canberra, the Keating Government did not reverse its decision. Although the Senate voted to keep Huon open, in November 1993 the final decision was still closure.

In 1994, HMAS Ardent (Attack Class Patrol Boat) which had been attached to Huon for crew training and fishery patrols, was withdrawn on 4 January 1994. *Ardent* was not immediately decommissioned, but used for navigation training.

In October 1993 Huon’s buildings were listed on the National Estate Register and the people of Tasmania, to the last, endeavoured to keep their Naval presence. However, at 10:30 am on 17 June 1994 the White Ensign was lowered and the personnel manning HMAS Huon marched ashore. The base was officially decommissioned and so ended almost eighty-three years of Naval presence in Tasmania.

With a change of Federal Government in 1996 Tasmanians lobbied to have Huon re-opened but the Howard Government decided to keep the base closed and the property was listed for disposal.

Not only was the land valuable waterfront property, it was sold with workshops, offices and wharf space. Fortunately, the Hobart Marine Board became the new owners in September 1996.

A Naval Support Office, established in June 1994 and designated NSO-TAS was relocated in Derwent Hall in Anglesea Barracks central Hobart. As the Navy Headquarters in Tasmania it continues to this day.



Naval Headquarters - Tasmania

Historically, Tasmania has fared well with many vessels of the Royal Australian Navy being named for her towns and rivers. These include;

HMAS Huon – River Class torpedo boat destroyer D50; originally named HMAS Derwent but renamed before commissioning on 14 December 1915, decommissioned 7 June 1928.

HMAS Tasmania – “S” Class torpedo boat destroyer H25, commissioned 27 January 1920, decommissioned 9 January 1928

HMAS Hobart (1) – Modified Leander Class light cruiser D63, she was formerly HMS Apollo, commissioned into RAN 28 September 1928, decommissioned 20 December 1947.

HMAS Burnie – Bathurst Class Corvette J198, commissioned 15 April 1941, was transferred to the Royal Netherlands Navy on 5 July 1946. It once flew the pennant of Tasmania's most senior Naval Officer, Commodore John Collins then commanding the China Force as a HMAS ship.

HMAS Strahan – Bathurst Class Corvette J363, commissioned 14 March 1944, decommissioned 25 January 1946.

HMAS Derwent – River Class destroyer escort DE49, commissioned 30 April 1964, decommissioned 8 August 1994.

HMAS Hobart (II) – Charles F Adams Class guided missile destroyer D39, commissioned 18 December 1965, saw service during the Vietnam War, decommissioned 12th May 2000.

HMAS Launceston (I) – Bathurst Class Corvette J179, commissioned 9 April 1942, decommissioned 23 March 1946.

HMAS Launceston (II) – Fremantle Class patrol boat P207, commissioned 1 March 1982, decommissioned 8 September 2006.

HMAS Launceston (III) - Armidale class patrol boat, P94, commissioned 22 September 2007.

HMAS Collins – Lead boat of the Collins Class submarines, named after Vice Admiral Sir John Collins, the first Australian born (Tasmanian) Chief of Naval Staff.

HMAS Sheean (1) – Collins Class submarine, named after Ordinary Seaman Edward 'Teddy' Sheean who distinguished himself in action during World War II and was lost when HMAS Armidale (I) was sunk on 1 December 1942.

HMAS Dechaineux (I) - Collins Class submarine, named after Captain Emile Dechaineux, Commanding Officer, HMAS Australia (II) killed whilst supporting the landings in Leyte Gulf commissioned 22 February 2001.

HMAS Huon (II) – Huon class mine counter measures vessel H82, commissioned 15 May 1999, decommissioned.

HMAS Hobart (III) – Lead of her Class, DDG destroyer D39, air warfare, commissioned 23 September 2017.

During my time as a sailor two boats were based at HMAS Huon and locally referred to as the "Tasmanian Navy". HMAS Bass, GPV 902 of the Explorer Class, a general purpose vessel from commissioning on 15 November 1960, until 1994. The other vessel was HMAS Ardent an Attack Class Patrol Boat. Ardent decommissioned 6 January 1994 and reclassified as a training vessel, she was withdrawn from service in December 1998, sold into civilian service and in-turn to the Indonesian Navy and commissioned as KRI Tenggiri.

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