

HMAS Perth (I) Memorial Foundation

Exhibition Opening

**Address by the Honourable Kim Beazley AC
Governor of Western Australia**

Saturday 27th February 2021

**** Check against delivery***

I would firstly like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Whadjuk Noongar people – and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

Thank you so much for inviting me to open this commemorative exhibition to the HMAS Perth. I am an avid fan of military history so it was a great delight for me to attend this afternoon.

The HMAS Perth, and remembering her crew, was a big part of my childhood. I vividly recall accompanying my father as a young child and teenager to the annual commemoration service at St John's Church in Fremantle, and being fascinated by meeting survivors and their family members who attended those services. You could say I effectively watched them grow old as the years passed.

The HMAS Perth was a great ship. In her wartime career she saw action in the Atlantic, Mediterranean, the Java Sea and finally the Sunda Strait. She supported the Royal Navy, allied ground forces in North Africa, Greece and Crete and the American, British, Dutch and Australian combined fleet in South East Asia.

The fight in the Sunda Strait drew enormous credit on them. Hopelessly outnumbered, they were absolutely determined, under Captain Waller, to proceed east as per their instructions, despite receiving air intelligence of enemy forces sighted.

HMAS Perth was terribly conscious that the Japanese were advancing directly towards Australia. They sold themselves dearly, understanding that their actions would materially affect the time that Australians had to prepare for a potential attack.

HMAS Perth, the first of 3 RAN vessels to bear the name, was sunk on 1st March 1942, together with the American heavy cruiser USS Houston, off the coast of Java by greatly superior Japanese forces. More than half the crew of 681, together with 700 American sailors were killed in action and the survivors endured terrible conditions on the Thai-Burma railway. Some sailors even survived a second sinking when their transport ships were torpedoed by US submarines, not knowing they carried POWs. Reports indicate that some were in the water for 6 days before rescue arrived.

Less than one third of Perth's crew returned to Australia and now there is just one survivor, aged 101, living in NSW.

The HMAS Perth (I) Memorial Foundation has been established to build a fitting memorial to the ship and her courageous crew, and we are privileged to be the first people to see it.

This exhibition captures the extraordinary spirit and resilience of the sailors and is designed to honour them, remember them and celebrate

them - today and always. There are artefacts, models, memorabilia and lots of historic information incorporated into this exhibition that I'm sure will keep you fascinated for hours – I can't wait to have another look.

Before I officially open this exhibition, I would like to pay my respects and give a special welcome to Cdr Antony Nagle, commanding officer of the present HMAS Perth (TBC), and to the US Consul, David Gainer (TBC) in remembering the loss of USS Houston but also reminding us of the close ties between our countries.

Thank you, once again, for my invitation here this morning. I would now like to declare the HMAS Perth Exhibition officially open.

I hope you enjoy your time this afternoon honouring this fine ship and her crew.