
Queenscliff H.M.A.S Goorangai Memorial



Queen 11.jpg



Queen 10.jpg



Queen 12.jpg



Queen 13.jpg

Location

Esplanade QUEENSCLIFF, QUEENSCLIFFE BOROUGH

Municipality

QUEENSCLIFFE BOROUGH

Level of significance

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Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

Veterans Description for Public

The Queenscliff H.M.A.S Goorangai Memorial commemorates the loss of the ship in November 1940. Sunk in a collision with the loss of the entire crew of 24, the 223 ton gross minesweeper HMAS Goorangai has the tragic distinction of being all at once Australia's first naval loss of World War II, the first Royal Australian Navy surface vessel lost in a war, and the first Royal Australian Navy surface vessel lost with all hands. It had just returned from its minesweeping operations in Bass Strait including recovering wreck debris from the City of Rayville with Lieut-Commander Gordon Boyle on board as minesweeping adviser and was enjoying a respite from bad weather while reprovisioning in Port Phillip.

Originally built as a 'Castle' type steam trawler based on a North Sea design, it was intended to assist develop a trawl fishing industry to create jobs in NSW in Depression years but was then requisitioned by the RAN in the Second World War. Following the sinking of the SS Cambridge and MV City of Rayville in Bass Strait by German mines on 7th and 8th November 1940 respectively, three minesweepers including the HMAS Goorangai were ordered to sweep the shipping lanes and approaches to Port Phillip, and within a fortnight were able to locate and destroy forty mines. Prime Minister Menzies also called for Australian war vessels in the Mediterranean to be returned to Australian waters, and the fated HMAS Sydney (to be later sunk by the German raider Kormoran off Western Australia with the loss of all 645 crew) was one of these vessels, returning in April 1941.

At night in wartime 'brown-out' (minimal lights exhibited) conditions the HMAS Goorangai was bound from Queenscliff to anchor at Portsea, while steaming outwards at full speed through the South Channel was the dark silhouette of the 10,400 ton outward bound passenger liner Duntroon bound from Melbourne to Sydney. The HMAS Goorangai was seen at the last minute by those on the bridge of the Duntroon, but it was too late to avert a collision. At 8.45pm the diminutive HMAS Goorangai had no chance as it was struck almost amidships by the huge bow of the fast moving liner and sank immediately. Rescue efforts were hampered as searchlights were forbidden and the Queenscliff lifeboat got stuck on a bank in attempting to attend the rescue. Lifejackets were thrown in the direction of cries of men by those on board the Duntroon but in the strong ebb tide no survivors were ever found and only six bodies recovered afterwards.

The Court of Marine Inquiry initially blamed both vessels with Capt.Lloyd of the Duntroon found guilty of misconduct. However he was later exonerated by the Court with faulty positioning of lights on the Goorangai cited as the prime cause of the accident. A censorship ban was invoked by Naval Board until the next-of-kin were informed, setting a precedent for similar cases and for casualties in action. The ship wreck was reportedly demolished by explosives in January 1941 but still buoyed until March 1942, with its Registration Certificate recorded as cancelled on 2nd November 1942.

Numerous calls were made over the years by relatives of the deceased servicemen to protect the wreck in 15 metres depth as a war grave and a national memorial. Items such as gas masks were known to have been found by divers, as well as distressing rumours that human bones and a skull had been removed from the site by divers in the 1970s and 1980s. However the Commonwealth Veterans Affairs Department and Australian Office for War Graves have no power to declare sunken vessels as war graves. There was no protection of the site until the Victorian Historic Shipwrecks Act (1981) was introduced. The HMAS Goorangai is now protected under the Victorian Heritage Act (1995) and it is an offence to disturb or remove any material from the site.

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>