

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 07/10/24

HMAS GOORANGAI



S294 Goorangai
PortPhillipBaySouthChannel
HistoricPhotoSideView



S294 Goorangai
PortPhillipBaySouthChannel
HistoricPhotoAerialView



S294 Goorangai
PortPhillipBaySouthChannel
Detail



S294 Goorangai
PortPhillipBaySouthChannel
SideView

Location

South Channel, Port Phillip Bay

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S294

Date lost

20/11/1940

Official number

151982

Construction material

Steel

Propulsion

Steam - Screw

Engine specification

Triple expansion single screw; 3 cy. 12", 19", 32"; 78 HP; speed 1-1/2 knots

Length/Breadth/Depth

117.00 Feet / 22.10 Feet / 13.80 Feet

Builder

NSW Government Dockyard

Year of construction

1919

Built port

Newcastle, NSW

Built country

Australia

Registration Number

13 of 1923

Registration Port

Sydney

Date lost

20/11/1940

Departure

Queenscliff

Destination

Portsea

Cargo

Minesweeping gear

Owner

Cam & Sons Ltd Pty Ltd, requisitioned by RAN 8/9/1939

Master

Warrant Officer David McGregor, RANR

Weather conditions

Night, brownout conditions

Cause of loss

Collision with Duntroon in South Channel . Struck amidships, the Goorangai sank in less than 1 minute.
 Had been showing a minimum of lights. The Duntroon was completely blacked out

Number of crew

24

Crew comments

Lost with all hands. G. Boyle, A. Carter, J. Dungey, H. Gilroy, F. Hack, W. Johnston, A. Ladlow, D. McGregor, M. Madden, K. Matheson, R. Redman, F. Wadds, B. Buchanan, C. Cox, N. Farquharson, C. Green, H. Johnson, A. Kemp, A. MacDonell, E. McLaughlan, L. Mainsbridge, J. Moxey, J. Sanders, R. Wardrop

Statement of significance

<p>The HMAS Goorangai is historically significant as the first Royal Australian Navy surface vessel lost with all hands, Australia's first naval loss of World War II, and the first Royal Australian Navy surface vessel lost in a war.</p>

VHR history

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, then was requisitioned by the RAN in WWII.
 Following the sinking of the SS Cambridge and MV City of Rayville in Bass Strait by German mines on 7 and 8 November 1940 respectively, three minesweepers including the HMAS Goorangai were ordered to the 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.

 Sunk in a collision with the loss of the entire crew of 24, the 223 ton gross minesweeper HMAS Goorangai (1919-20 November 1940) 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.

 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 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.

 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, and there were 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 and it is an offence to disturb or remove any material from the site.
 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 next-of-kin informed, setting a precedent for similar cases and for casualties in action. Registration Certificate cancelled 2 Nov. 1942. Reportedly demolished by explosives Jan. 1941 but still buoyed until March 1942. Only six bodies were recovered at the time.