

HMAS Wagga – J315/M183



Namesake: City of Wagga Wagga, NSW
Builder: Morts Dock
Laid down: 8 March 1942
Launched: 25 July 1942
Commissioned: 18 December 1942
Decommissioned: 28 November 1945
Recommissioned: 12 December 1951
Decommissioned: 28 October 1960
Reclassified: Training ship 12 Dec 1951
Motto: "Uppermost ever"

Battle honours:
 Pacific 1943–45
 New Guinea 1943–44

Fate: Sold for scrap in 1962



Displacement: 815 tons (standard)
Length: 189 ft (58 m)
Beam: 32 ft (9.8 m)
Draught: 8 ft 4 in (2.54 m)
Propulsion: triple expansion engine, 2 shafts

Speed: 15.5 knots (28.7 km/h; 17.8 mph)
Complement: 85
Armament: 1 × 4-inch gun
 3 × 20 mm

Oerlikons
 machine guns
 depth charge
 chutes and throwers

Training ship:
 1 × 4-inch gun
 1 × 40 mm Bofors

HMAS *Wagga* was laid down on 8 March 1942 at Mort's Dock and Engineering Co Ltd, Sydney. She was launched on 25 July 1942 by Mrs HE Gissing, Mayoress of Wagga, and commissioned at Sydney on 18 December 1942 under the command of Lieutenant Donald Knight Cracknell RANR(S).

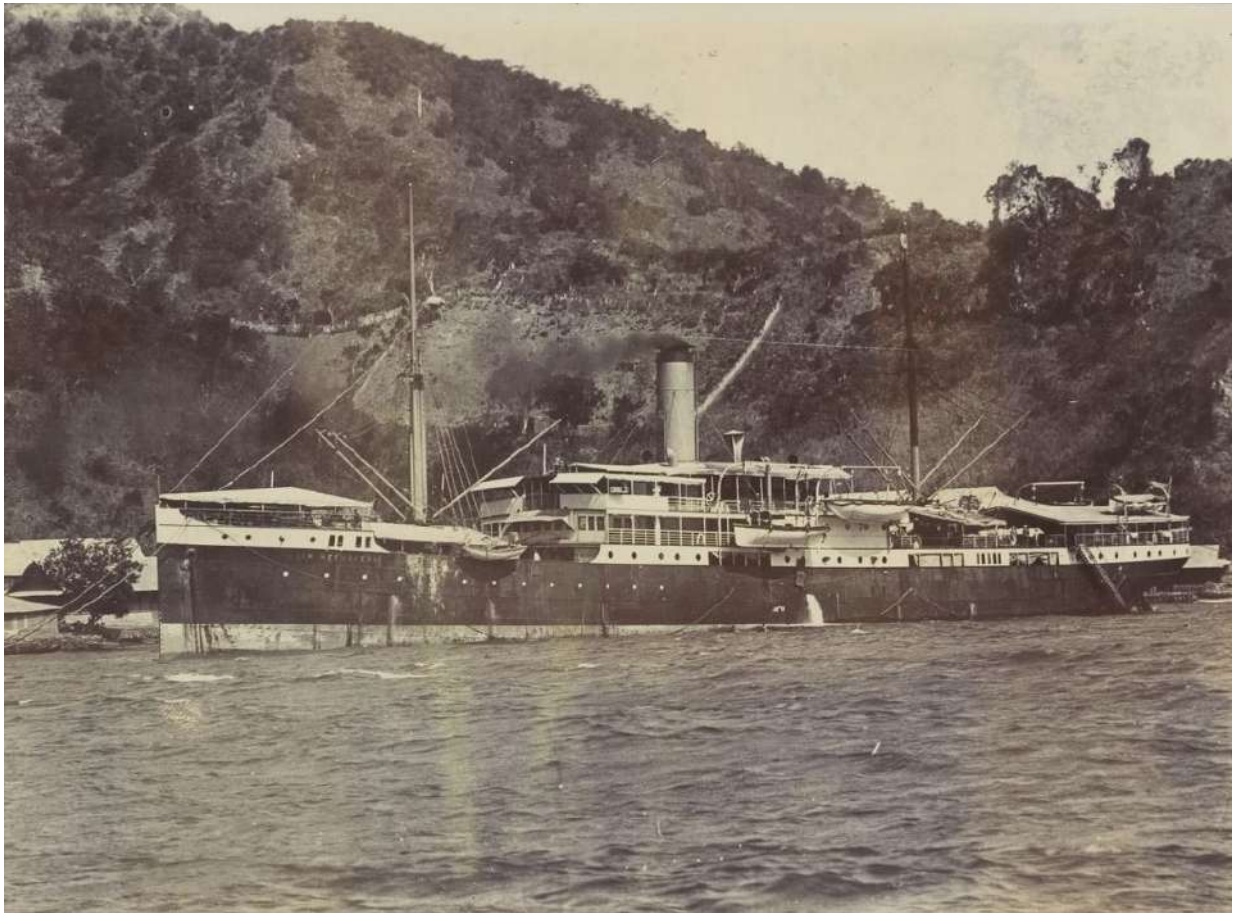


HMAS Wagga wearing her wartime pennant number J315.

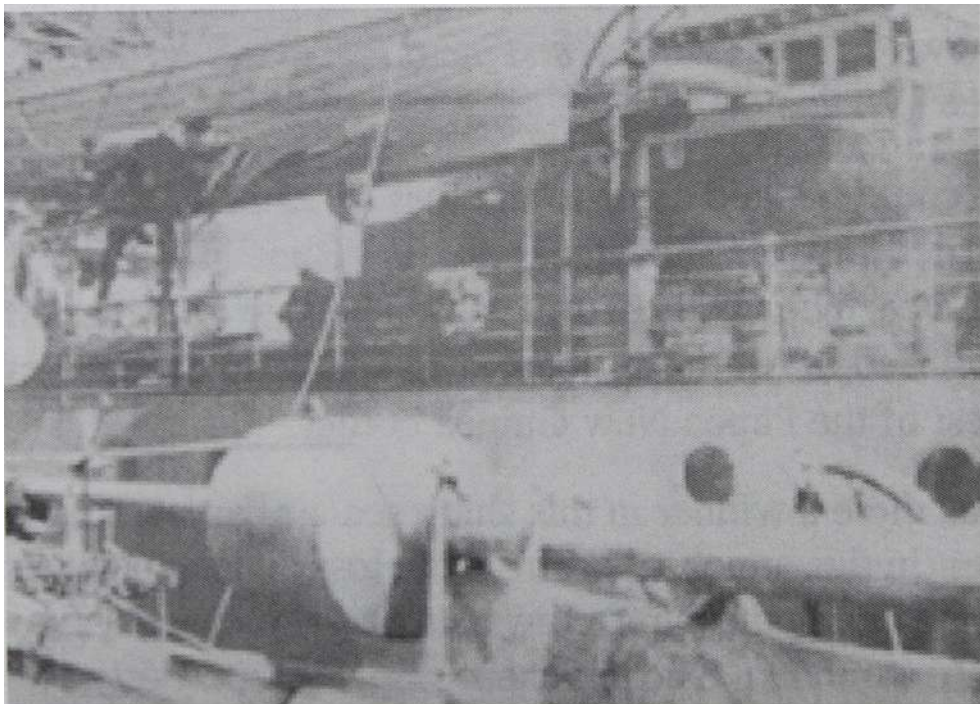
Wagga began her seagoing career in January 1943, escorting convoys on the east coast of Australia. In mid-January she unsuccessfully searched for survivors of the steamer *Kalingo* which had been sunk by a Japanese submarine off the New South Wales coast on 18 January.

In March 1943 *Wagga* transferred to Queensland waters. Later that month she extended her escort duties to the forward areas in New Guinea. There she supported Operation LILLIPUT, which involved the transshipment of troops and supplies to Oro Bay for the reinforcement and development of the Buna-Gona area. Operation LILLIPUT began in December 1942 and concluded in June 1943.

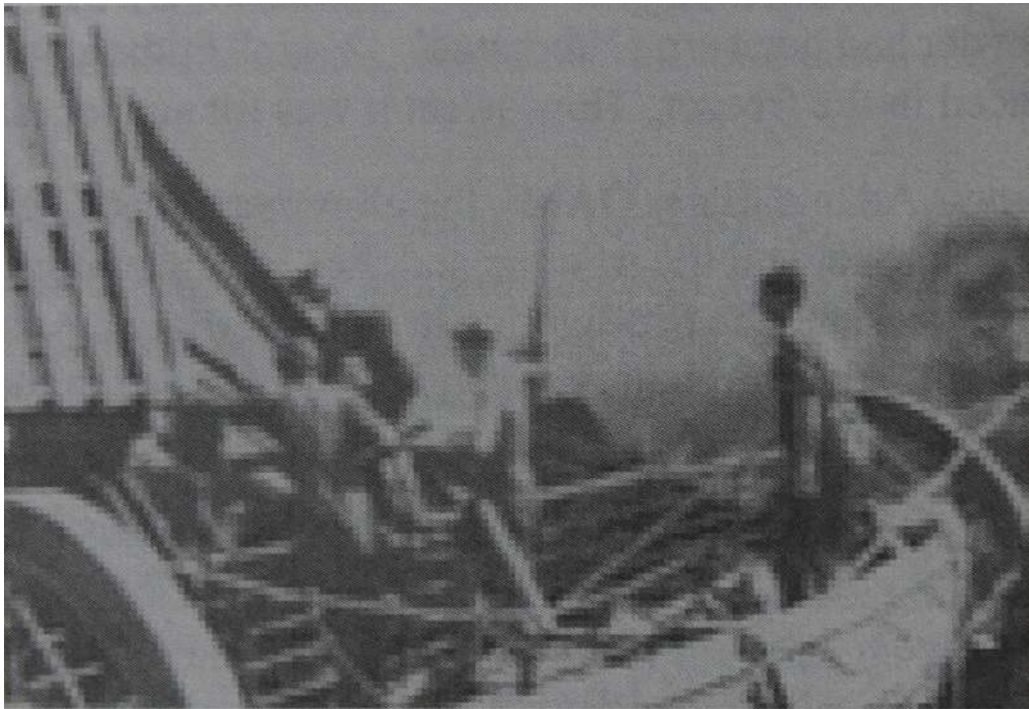
On 14 April 1943, at Milne Bay, *Wagga* came under intense air attack from Japanese dive bombers. There were several near misses but she was not hit and escaped serious damage, although the British ship *Gorgon* was hit a number of times and set on fire, and the Dutch ship *Van Outhoorn* was damaged from near misses. Another Dutch ship, the *Van Heemskerk*, was also hit by several bombs and set on fire. A party of men from *Wagga* endeavoured to extinguish the flames, but the fire had too greater hold on the ship which was later beached. Four Allied servicemen and 12 merchant seaman were killed in the air raid, with many more injured.



Van Heemskerk



HMAS Wagga lying alongside the crippled ship. Note the splintered hole in Van Heemskerk's lifeboat.



Fire parties from HMAS Wagga board the burning merchantman.



Surviving crew of Van Heemskerk and fire fighters from HMAS Wagga on the sweep deck of the corvette.

Convoy escort duties between north Queensland ports and New Guinea occupied *Wagga* through to the close of 1943. Following a month at Williamstown over December 1943 and January 1944, *Wagga* returned to the New Guinea area in February 1944.

CONFIDENTIAL

REPORT OF ATTACK BY ENEMY AIRCRAFT.

Object of Report.
 (a) To enable the Staff to obtain a complete picture of Air Attacks on ships, and to obtain early information about any new tactics employed by the enemy.
 (b) To enable correct information to be promulgated, and the necessary steps to be taken to improve our A.A. defences.
 (c) To enable the Naval Board to assess the relative value of the various A.A. devices.

Note. It may not be possible to provide answers to all the questions asked, and personnel are not to be expected just to tick answers. Many sections do not apply to small ships. Every bit of information is of value, and the amount it supplies the Naval Board, the better.

Import of Reports. One copy to Administrative Authority, two copies direct to the Naval Board, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne. Reports are to be forwarded by Administrative Authority to Naval Board only when it is desired to comment.

Contents of Reports.
 (a) By the ship, whenever an air attack is made, or attempted, the ship, or passing formations are engaged.
 (b) By the commanding officer only, or whenever an air attack is made on a convoy, (c) whenever our fighters obtain contact with the enemy as a result of "Stand" or "Help" signals or R/T.

A - GENERAL.

Name of Ship: H.M.A.S. WAGGA Squadron and Station: Lead 50 - 268 H
 Date of attack: 14.4.43 Time: 1240 Ocean: Various Speed: 15 knots
 Weather: C7 Light (strength): Good Sea: 00 Wind: West Cloud: High
 Other H.M. Ships in Company: _____ Length of Convoy: _____ Visibility: Good
 Convoy Number and Date: _____

B - PARTICULARS OF ATTACK.

- Form of attack (H.L.B., L.L.B., D.H., Torpedo or Dive Bombing) H/LB
- Length of warning Yellow 1102 Red 1220 Attacked 1240.
- Number and types of aircraft attacking 6 Single Engine Dive Bombers.
- Description of attack relative to ship's head 45° attacked from starboard 20° attacked from port quarter.
- Number of bombs or torpedoes dropped 8 Bombs
- Approximate height of aircraft in approach _____
- Approximate angle of dive 45 Degrees
- Approximate height and range of release of bombs 400 - 600 feet range 250 yds. (torpedoes) _____
- Whether aircraft passed over ship, and height _____
- Type and size of bombs, nature of fuse (Impact or Delay) _____
- Approximate position in which bombs fell 2 Port Bow 2 Starboard Port Quir 1 Starboard Quir.
- Number of hits (4) misses within 20 feet 2 Near Misses.
- Accuracy of enemy machine gun or cannon fire Burst Machine Gun Fire - Missions to
- Damage to ship or convoy (Dent in hull by bomb splinter, _____)
- Casualties to personnel Nil (1 Dent in Hull and hole in bridge structure caused by bomb splinter.)
- Damage to or loss of aircraft or ship Nil Loss of Wireless Machine
- _____
- _____
- _____

C - PARTICULARS OF DEFENCE (include all weapons whether fired or not).

Weapon	No. Fired	Range at which fired	Effect	Remarks
4" O.P., Mk XVI	1	2500 yds	O.P.O. using Long and Short Barrage	
3" Oerlikon	3	285	Gunlayers	
2" Vickers	2	198	Gunlayers.	
1" V.	2	1		

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A - GENERAL.

Name of Ship: _____ Squadron and Station: _____
 Date of attack: _____ Time: _____ Ocean: _____ Speed: _____
 Weather: _____ Light (strength): _____ Sea: _____ Wind: _____ Cloud: _____
 Other H.M. Ships in Company: _____ Length of Convoy: _____ Visibility: _____
 Convoy Number and Date: _____

B - PARTICULARS OF ATTACK.

- Form of attack (H.L.B., L.L.B., D.H., Torpedo or Dive Bombing) _____
- Length of warning _____ Attacked _____.
- Number and types of aircraft attacking _____
- Description of attack relative to ship's head _____
- Number of bombs or torpedoes dropped _____
- Approximate height of aircraft in approach _____
- Approximate angle of dive _____
- Approximate height and range of release of bombs _____ (torpedoes) _____
- Whether aircraft passed over ship, and height _____
- Type and size of bombs, nature of fuse (Impact or Delay) _____
- Approximate position in which bombs fell _____
- Number of hits (4) misses within 20 feet _____
- Accuracy of enemy machine gun or cannon fire _____
- Damage to ship or convoy _____
- Casualties to personnel _____
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C - PARTICULARS OF DEFENCE (include all weapons whether fired or not).

Weapon	No. Fired	Range at which fired	Effect	Remarks
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3" Oerlikon	3	285	Gunlayers	
2" Vickers	2	198	Gunlayers.	
1" V.	2	1		

D - R.D.F.

Warning given by R.D.F. _____
 Type of set _____
 Time, range, and altitude bearings of direction _____
 Remarks (If no warning, give reasons) _____

E - FIGHTER CO-OPERATION (attach copies of relevant signals).

- Number and position of fighters encountered _____
- When fighters arrived and were fired off _____
- Time of "Stand" or "Help" message sent out _____
- How were fighters directed? _____
- Was R.T. communication satisfactory? _____
- Number of enemy aircraft intercepted by fighters (a) shot down _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

F - GENERAL REMARKS (attach photo if possible).

Attack was made by Twin Engine High Level Bombers and Single Engine Dive Bombers on shipping and harbour installations at Milne Bay.

A 90° alteration of course with maximum helm & speed was made at commencement of each attack, as attacking aircraft started dive, in order to offer beam of ship, rather than full length, so length. Submitted these tactics quite successful.

Donnell
 Lieut Comdr

The official report lodged by Wagga's captain following the 14 April 1943 enemy air attacks.



At the time of the air attack on *Wagga*, war artist Dennis Adams was on board. He later reproduced the incident on canvas and his works may be seen in the collection of the Australian War Memorial. (AWM ART 22824 22326)

Wagga was constantly employed in the New Guinea area throughout the whole of 1944, only returning to Australia for a brief period in August 1944 when she visited Cairns. She escorted convoys, conducted anti-submarine patrols, transported troops and provided naval gunfire support to Allied military forces by bombarding selected targets ashore. On 16 May 1944 she bombarded Japanese positions in the Bunabun Harbour, Neptune Point and Uligan Harbour areas, all north west of Madang.

Wagga continued her service in the New Guinea area in 1945. She visited Darwin in August 1945 and was en route from Darwin to Morotai on the last day of the Pacific War. From Morotai she proceeded to Subic Bay and then to Hong Kong, where she arrived on 29 August 1945.

Wagga was based at Hong Kong until October 1945, conducting local minesweeping operations and anti-piracy patrols. On 11 October she departed Hong Kong in company with a number of her sister ships for the long passage to Australia via Morotai. She arrived in Sydney on 2 November and Melbourne on 7 November.

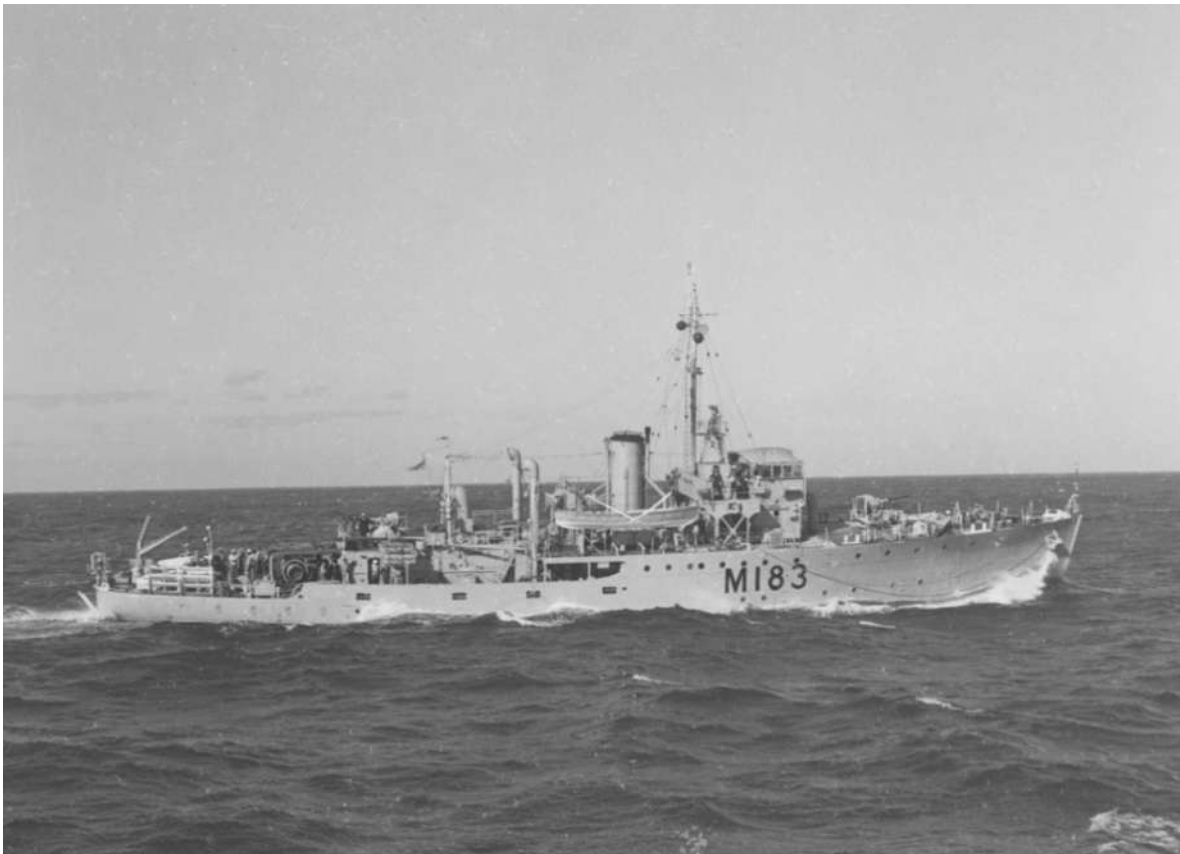


HMAS Wagga in Melbourne following her return to Australia in 1945. Note that she is riding high in the water, having been defueled, as preparations are made to place her in Reserve status.

Wagga paid off into the Reserve Fleet at Melbourne on 28 November 1945, having steamed 105,000 miles on active service. Placed into E Class Reserve at Geelong.

Following a period of six years in the Reserve Fleet *Wagga* recommissioned at Melbourne on 12 December 1951 under the command of Lieutenant Commander Alwyn J Ford RAN.

During the following six years *Wagga* was employed as a training ship providing seagoing instruction for naval reservists and National Service trainees on the Australian east coast. During this period she steamed a further 78,000 miles on training cruises, naval exercises, northern patrol and oceanographic survey duties.



Wagga at sea wearing her post-war pennant number M183.

In August 1952 *Wagga* assisted with the tow of the cruiser HMAS Hobart from Sydney to Newcastle:

Kalgoorlie Miner (WA) Wed 3 Sep 1952

CORVETTE WITH CRUISER IN TOW DRIFTING IN HEADWIND

Sydney Tug Sent to Give Assistance.

Sydney, Sept. 3.—The cruiser H.M.A.S. *Hobart* and the corvette H.M.A.S. *Wagga* were drifting 20 miles off Sydney early to-day. The *Hobart*, which has been out of commission for four years, was being sent to the Newcastle State dockyard for a refit and superstructure alterations and left Sydney yesterday towed by the *Wagga*.

Soon after the two vessels reached the ocean they ran into strong headwinds and the *Wagga* was unable to make any headway with the cruiser. Another corvette, HMAS

Cootamundra which was to have put a second towline aboard the *Hobart* outside the Heads, could not do so.

Early in the night the *Wagga* could not even hold the *Hobart* steady in the face of the strong northerly and the two vessels started to drift south past the Sydney Heads. Later in the night when the position became alarming and the drift continued at a steady rate the *Wagga* radioed to Sydney for assistance.

Early to-day the oceangoing tug St. Giles left Sydney but is not expected to reach *Cootamundra* vessel until about 4 a.m. The tug unable to assist in stopping the drift, is returning to port. Twice before she cleared the Heads the *Hobart* struck *Wagga* glancing blows.

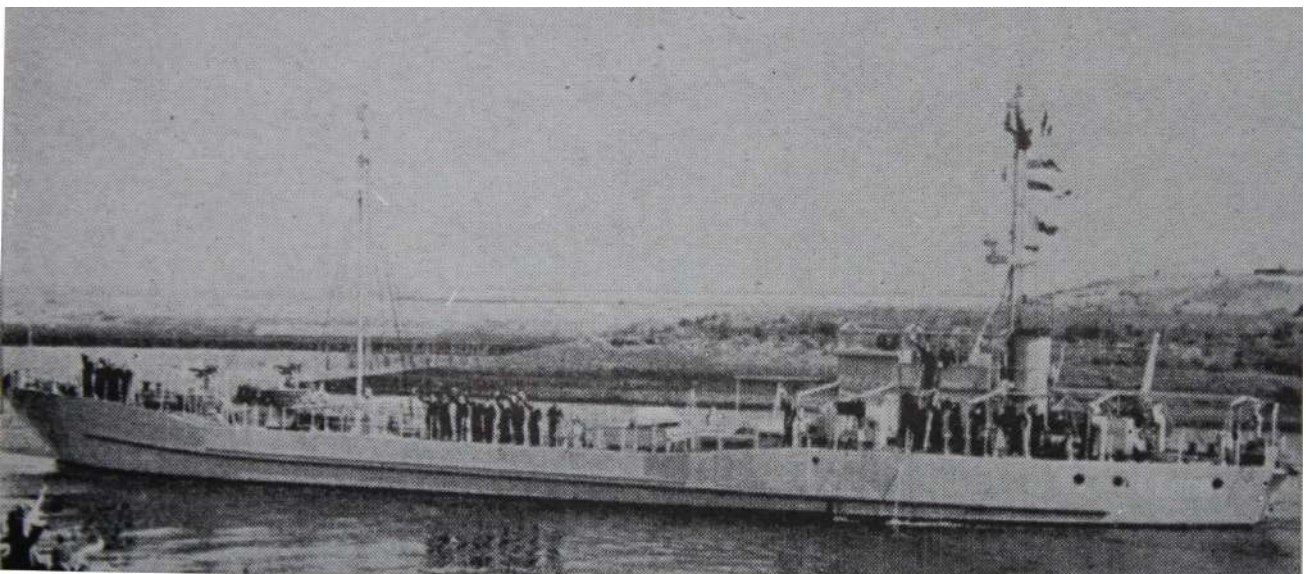


Wagga under the command of Lieutenant Commander James Hume. 1954 (Photo courtesy of Prof David Hume)

Following a three month refit in Sydney in late 1954, *Wagga* proceeded to New Guinea in December 1954 for a two month patrol in northern waters. She returned to Sydney on 25 February 1955 for refit and modernisation which was completed in June.

On the 28 May 1954 at Jervis Bay with National Serviceman on-board for training, *Wagga* was ordered to proceed to Mackay and standby the Netherlands Navy Ship LCT 9607 which had broken down.

Wagga had to call in at Newcastle to land a sick national serviceman suffering acute appendicitis before continuing to Queensland. The Dutch ship LCT 9607 was found anchored with unreliable engines and taken in tow. On 4 June, both ships anchored in Moreton Bay.



HMNS LCT 9607

The Central Queensland Herald (Rockhampton) Thu 3 Jun 1954:

DUTCH CRAFT AGAIN IN TROUBLE

BRISBANE, June 1.-A Dutch tank landing craft coming down the Queensland coast has had to seek assistance for the second time. The Australian minesweeper, HMAS *Wagga* left Brisbane at 1 p.m. to assist the Dutch craft, which was sheltering from rough seas near South Island. 460 miles north of Brisbane.

The landing craft radioed today that two of her fuel tanks had been contaminated by water. She feared that if rough weather continued she would not have sufficient fuel to reach Brisbane.

It is believed she has been sheltering close to land each night of her voyage south from Cairns, to conserve fuel. The *Wagga* is expected to reach the landing craft tomorrow evening and escort her to Brisbane. The *Wagga* will take the craft in tow if necessary. The Dutch vessel was first rescued in Coral Sea on May 13 by HMAS *Australia*. It had developed engine trouble coming from Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea.

Courier Mail (Brisbane) Fri 4 Jun 1954:

Navy to the rescue

Navy minesweepers are speeding through rain on 'mercy' errands off the Queensland coast.

At dawn yesterday minesweeper HMAS *Wagga* met a disabled Dutch tank landing ship at Clinton Point, 60 miles north of Rockhampton, and took her in tow for a 400-mile voyage to Brisbane.

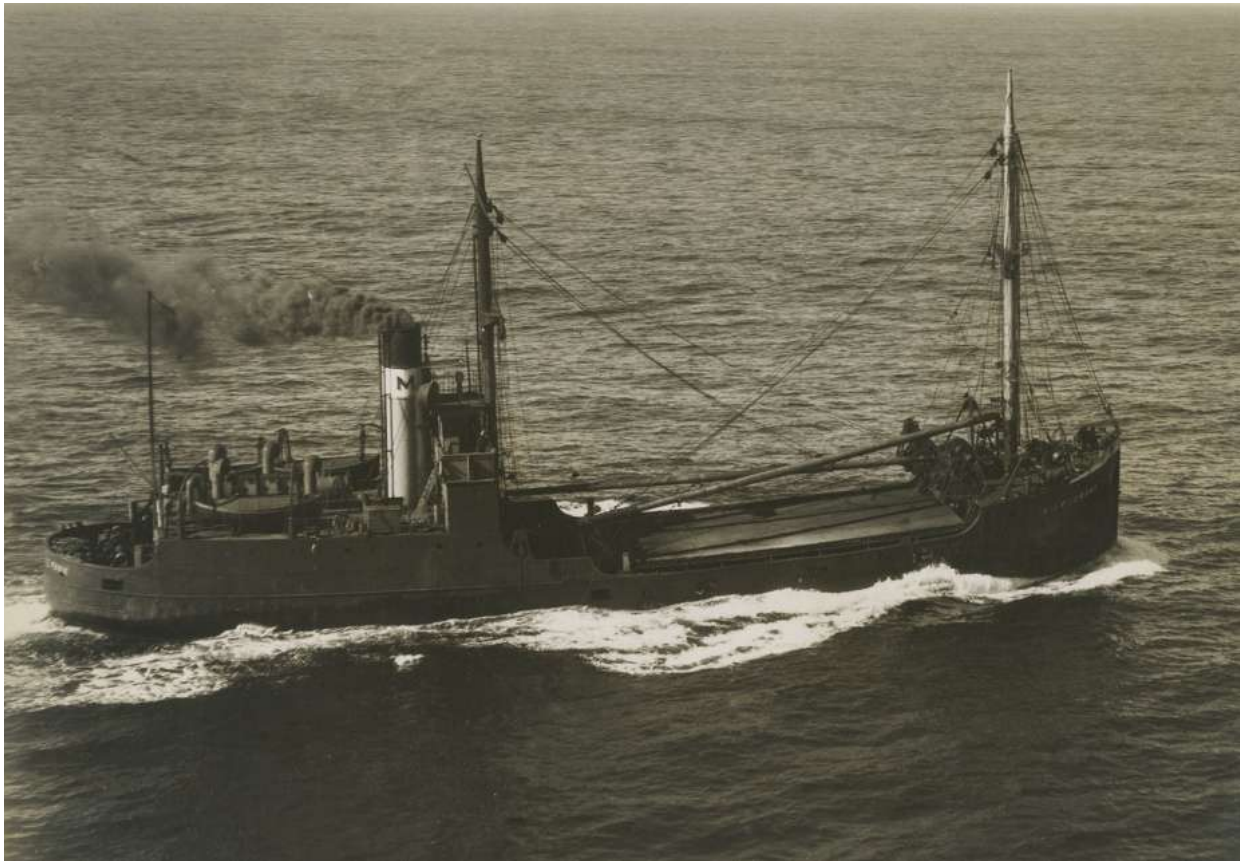
At 1.45 pm on 1 August 1956, *Birchgrove Park* left Newcastle, with a crew of 14, under the command of her master; Laurence Lynch. The vessel had a slight list to port but the weather was fine and sea conditions were calm. No weather change was predicted for more than twelve hours; however soon after leaving Newcastle a southerly buster struck.

Waves began washing over the deck and the cargo holds, covered only by tarpaulins, began to fill with water. Despite efforts by her crew to stop the ingress of water, the holds continued to fill and the list to port became more pronounced. By midnight *Birchgrove Park* was off Broken Bay and waves were still crashing over her deck. Rather than seek the relative shelter of Broken Bay, Lynch decided to push on to Sydney despite the fact that water was now also entering the ship via corroded steampipes and forecastle vents. At 2 am her engine room crew advised the master that the boiler room was filling with water and that it would soon flood the boilers and disable the ship.

Captain Lynch ordered the crew on deck and began preparing the lifeboats for launching but this was impossible due to the colliers list to port. An SOS was sent by signal lamp to the South Head Signal Station but the collier's wireless messages were not received. At 2.45 am *Birchgrove Park* rolled over and sank. The crew were now in the water, at night in bad weather and their prospects for survival were slim. One of the ships lifeboats was found and three men clambered on board although one later died from exhaustion and exposure.

Several vessels, including the corvette HMAS *Wagga* and the British submarine HMS *Thorough* (based in Sydney) were soon searching the area off the coast where *Birchgrove Park* had sunk. Two RAAF Neptune maritime patrol aircraft also joined the search and later spotted wreckage in the water and dropped flares to alert the searching ships. *Wagga* responded to one of the flares and found Able Seaman Kenneth Fabian barely alive clinging to wreckage. HMS *Thorough* later found 2nd Engineer Joseph Butler, also clinging to wreckage, and close to death. The lifeboat with its two survivors (Leading Fireman Erl Olsen and Able Seaman Neil Stuart) was washed ashore south of Sydney later in the day.

Ten of the crew of *Birchgrove Park* perished as a result of her sinking, but only eight bodies were eventually recovered. In 1965 the wreck of *Birchgrove Park* was located in 51 metres of water eight kilometres South-East of Barrenjoey Head (Broken Bay).



Birchgrove Park

Wagga continued to operate in Australian waters until December 1956 when she undertook another northern waters patrol in the New Guinea area. In December 1954, *Wagga* was ordered to tow the TB No.11 to Manus Island. After departing Darwin the tug was found to be unseaworthy and making water, so was brought alongside and pumped out. *Wagga* returned to Darwin with tug in tow before proceeding to Manus without a tow.



Wagga returned to Sydney in March 1957 for another short refit and further seagoing service on the Australian east coast, then paid off into Reserve at Sydney on 25 October 1957.



Reserve Fleet Sydney

Wagga returned to seagoing service a year later, when she recommissioned on 31 October 1958 for two weeks to resume service as a Royal Australian Navy Reserve training ship for naval reservists and cadets, under the Command of Captain Stanley Darling RANR.



Wagga leaving Sydney in her role as a training ship.

Paying off again on 12 November 1958, *Wagga* spent several further short periods in commission as required to conduct training cruises.



Recommissioned 6 Feb 1959 for training purposes under the command of Commander John D'Arcy Shelley RANR, then paid off again into reserve 18 February 1959.

Recommissioned 29 May 1959 under the Command of Lt Commander Norman Henderson RANR, then paid off 10 June 1959.

Recommissioned 4 June 1960 at Kuttabul Dolphins, under the command of Lt Commander Herbert McWilliam RANR, paid off 16 June 1960.

Recommissioned 15 Oct 1960 at Kuttabul Dolphins under the command of Lt Commander Ray Williams RANR.

During her final commission in October 1960, *Wagga* paid a three day visit to Noumea.

When *Wagga* paid off for the final time on 28 October 1960, she had steamed some 190,000 miles since she first commissioned in December 1942.

She was the last of the Bathurst Class in seagoing commission in the Royal Australian Navy.

Wagga was declared for disposal on 31 May 1961 and sold out of service in March 1962, when she was purchased by the South Australian Carrying Co. and broken up in Sydney.

