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## The Royal Australian Navy in World War II,

Dale Stephens

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without a controllable merchant marine, a nation may be at risk.

Herman rightly celebrates the daring and enterprise of British naval officers and their willingness to use the means at hand to achieve their goals. A fleet in being is useless if not backed up by the commitment to use it. The problem was, as always, how to pay for the navy, which Herman cites as the major cause of Britain's civil war in 1642. The same issue faces us in 2005.

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Stevens, David, ed. *The Royal Australian Navy in World War II*. 2d ed. Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2005. 336pp. AUD\$39.95

Australia is quintessentially a maritime nation. From the arrival of Lieutenant James Cook, RN, in Botany Bay in 1770, navies have featured heavily in the historical experience of Australia, and for this naval officer, the navy is rightfully regarded as “the senior service.” Given this background, it seems surprising that there is not more written about this naval tradition and especially about the triumphs and tragedies of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) in wartime. The recent publication of a second edition of David Stevens’s *Royal Australian Navy in World War II* fills a very important gap. First published in 1996, the book has been augmented significantly in this new edition.

David Stevens is a former naval officer, a graduate of the University of New South Wales and Australian National University, and currently director of Strategic and Historical Studies within the Sea Power Centre–Australia. He

brings a critical and experienced eye to his editorship, and this is reflected in the many changes made in this edition. This book has a new cover, new photographs, six new chapters, and substantial updates to all preexisting chapters, with an increase of over a hundred pages. This work eschews any single theme but rather seeks to encapsulate an eclectic array of approaches to the general topic. While initially disconcerting, this methodology is skillfully used and provides a holistic account of the RAN wartime experience.

The chapters deal with, inter alia, matters of grand policy concerning Australian naval strategizing in the lead-up to the war, interesting accounts of battles experienced by former crew members, an outline of regional confrontation with Vichy French representatives, social assessments of the officer corps and female participation in the naval service, and a description of industrial reorganization within Australia, as well as accounts of naval operational thinking and planning during the course of the war. By any measure, the achievements of the RAN during the conflict were astonishing. At the war’s close, the RAN comprised 337 ships and over forty thousand mobilized personnel. The navy served in almost every theater of that global war and earned its fair share of battle glory. As James Goldrick notes in chapter 1, the RAN had been involved in the sinking of numerous enemy capital ships and submarines, the destruction of over a hundred enemy aircraft and over 150,000 tons of axis merchant shipping. Perhaps the RAN’s most significant achievement was its ability to keep open sea lines of communication to Australia at a

time when Japan had conquered vast swaths of South East Asia and the South West Pacific.

There are chapters devoted to a number of distinguished wartime Australian senior naval officers, and others that (re)address some of the perennial mysteries, such as the complete loss (and vanishing) of the cruiser HMAS *Sydney* on the eve of the Japanese entry into the war. The book also devotes a significant amount of attention to the Australian-U.S. alliance. Indeed, such concentration is not surprising. World War II represented a sea change for Australian security thinking, with attention diverted away from the United Kingdom and toward the United States as strategic partner within the region. Indeed, American readers will surely find interesting the accounts in chapter 7 (“The Pacific War: A Strategic Overview”) and chapter 8 (“Forging an Alliance? The American Naval Commitment to the South Pacific, 1940–42”) of the Australian-U.S. military partnership within the Pacific campaign. Particularly enlightening are the conclusions drawn of the essential correctness of prewar U.S. strategic naval thinking and the thorough testing of naval war plans at the Naval War College. On the other side, I am sure that American interest will also be piqued by the chapter by Commodore Loxton (retired), giving his account of postwar American revisionism concerning the battle of Savo Island. In this chapter he notes his attendance as a student at the Naval War College’s newly founded Naval Command Course (as the Naval Command College, today the senior of the school’s two international programs, was then known), and in 1959, his participation in a study that emphasized U.S. virtue

and Australian failings in that battle. Having been a badly wounded participant in the battle, he observes, “My arguments against some of those hypotheses were therefore largely based on an innate belief that we Australians and our Royal Navy Admiral could not have done as badly as we were led to believe. At the time I thought that I had not made much of an impression, but the following year Savo was not studied.”

David Stevens has produced a book that is both highly readable and engaging. He provides a much needed public face for the Royal Australian Navy wartime experience, and he effectively preserves the legacy of the period. Since the Second World War, the RAN has continued to fight alongside its U.S. Navy allies in conflicts ranging from Korea and Vietnam through Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

For the American reader, this book provides rare insight into the historical events that formed the genesis of the modern Royal Australian Navy identity and thus has allowed an inside understanding of the impulses that continue to drive it. The RAN is a steadfast and reliable partner to the USN; gaining this appreciation of it is reason enough to read this valuable book.

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Ellis, Joseph J. *His Excellency: George Washington*. New York: Knopf, 2004. 320pp. \$26.95

Fischer, David Hackett. *Washington’s Crossing*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004. 564pp. \$35