

IN MEMORY OF H.M.A.S. CANBERRA

DURING April and May, 1952, H.M.A.S. *Australia* carried out a cruise in the South Pacific, in the course of which she visited the Solomon Islands. On this, as on previous occasions, she visited Guadalcanal. The opportunity was again taken of holding a memorial service over the spot where, on the morning of the 9th August, 1942, H.M.A.S. *Canberra* was sunk by Allied forces after having earlier been heavily damaged by torpedo and gun-fire in a night attack by a powerful Japanese force of cruisers and destroyers. In the Australian Broadcasting Commission's "News Review" of the 22nd May, 1952, the following brief description of the loss of *Canberra* was given by Commander G. Hermon Gill, R.A.N.V.R., Official Historian of the R.A.N. in World War II.

"It was the night of the 8th-9th August, 1942. A hot night, dark and oppressive, with passing rain squalls. Two days earlier the American marines had landed on Guadalcanal and the nearby island of Florida to the north. Their landings had been supported by a naval force including three Australian cruisers, *Australia*, *Canberra*, and *Hobart*. For two days the ships had been under air attack, had carried out bombardments, had patrolled guarding the transports against surface attack by the Japanese, and with gunfire against air attack. Their ships' companies were weary after hours with no rest.

"At midnight on the 8th, *Canberra*, with the American cruiser *Chicago* and destroyers, was patrol-

ling to the south-east of Savo Island, a small island athwart the western entrance to the channel between Guadalcanal and Florida. To the north-east of the island patrolled the American cruisers *Vincennes*, *Quincy*, and *Astoria*, with destroyers. To the eastward of them were the landing beaches and the transports. All was quiet.

"Just before a quarter to two in the morning of August 9th, an American destroyer to seaward sighted a strange ship some two miles ahead of her. She broadcast an immediate alarm: 'Warning! Strange ships entering harbour!' But almost simultaneously Japanese float planes dropped flares over the transports to the eastward, and *Canberra* and *Chicago* were silhouetted against their glare; and the enemy vessels were upon them. Before any action could be taken, *Canberra* was shattered by torpedoes and gun-fire; her commanding officer, Captain Frank Getting, was mortally wounded and many of her crew were wounded and killed. *Chicago* was torpedoed, but survived.

"The Japanese force, a powerful group of cruisers and destroyers, swept past, rounded Savo Island to the eastward, and destroyed the three American cruisers before retiring to sea via the northern channel between Savo and Florida Islands. *Canberra*, her survivors rescued, remained afloat and was sunk by our own forces later in the morning of the 9th. It was above her grave that her sister ship recently conducted a service to her memory."



Veterans of the two World Wars marching past the Stone of Remembrance at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Anzac Day, 1952.

(Block by courtesy of "The Canberra Times")