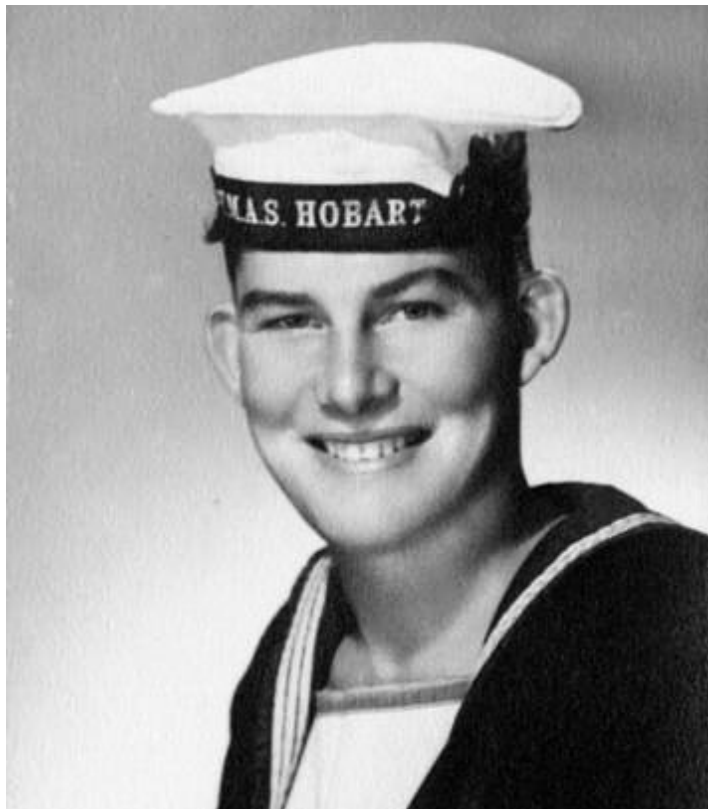


The 81st Battle of the Coral Sea Commemorative Service and Dinner remembers Derek Holyoake



This Commemorative Dinner is dedicated to Derek Holyoake, the last surviving Canberran veteran of the Battle of the Coral Sea. Derek was considered part of the "greatest generation" having lived through the Depression and the defeat of German and Japanese aggression in WWII.

Derek Holyoake was born in England in 1924. He migrated to Australia with his parents where he was later placed in an orphanage at the age of 10 following his mother's death. He stayed in the orphanage until he turned 14, when he was required to leave because he had reached working age, and his father was asked to collect him.

A passage from a 2021 tribute to Derek Holyoake's incredible life by Jon Stanhope in the CityNews column describes how Derek's father, a World War I veteran, reassured Derek that he would be safe in the Navy after enlisting during World War II. Consequently, Derek joined the Australian navy at 16 where he served for 13 years supporting operations in North Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies. He survived the torpedoing of HMAS Hobart on July 20, 1943 recalling the terrible experience in perspective that he was lucky to have survived it.

Holyoake recalled: "I'd done a course on the ship and I was taken out of the gun's crew and I was on the torpedo tubes ... All the guys that were in my gun's crew were all killed, all four of them..." Derek also served in the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of the Solomon Islands. He later served on the aircraft carrier HMAS Sydney during the Korean War.

Derek lived life to the full after the Navy. He was a nature lover, and voiced concerns of the state of the environment left for future generations, recognising the importance of supporting climate change policy. He and his wife Valda relocated to Queanbeyan in the 1990s where he remained an active amateur radio 'ham' operator and a volunteer at school wreath-laying ceremonies at the Australian War Memorial. Many of you may have seen him proudly ride his Vespa 300 with the Ulysses Motor Cycle Club on Wednesdays. Derek was also an honorary member of the AAA.



On Thursday 9th February, Derek passed away peacefully aged 98. He will be sadly missed.

We bid our final farewell to Derek Holyoake and reflect on the stripes of his national pride during and after service. The battle may be over but his bravery and sacrifice will never be forgotten.

Fare winds and Following Seas Derek.