

HMAS ASSAULT RAN SHORE ESTABLISHMENT PORT STEPHENS, NSW DURING WW2

Approval was granted by the Australian War Cabinet to establish "HMAS Assault", an RAN Naval Training Centre, in the Port Stephens area of New South Wales. The site was chosen after an aerial inspection in June 1942 because it was a safe haven from the Japanese Submarine activity occurring off the east coast of Australia and because the locality was mostly a small isolated fishing village.

HMAS Westralia arrived on 3 September 1942 to provide interim accommodation until "HMAS Assault" was completed.

The Allied Works Council erected numerous buildings including the Sick Bay, which now houses the Port Stephens Community Arts Centre at Shoal Bay Road, Nelson Bay near Port Stephens. The Naval Training Center at "HMAS Assault" was used to train landing craft crews, beach parties and signal teams.

Between September 1942 and October 1943 the following Naval personnel were trained at "HMAS Assault":-

- 100 officers
- 100 coxswains
- 120 beach commanders
- 453 boat crews
- 250 stokers
- 40 signalmen

There is a file in National Archives of Australia regarding the Amphibious training facilities at Tomaree Head. The Joint Overseas Operational Training School (JOOTS) at Nelson Bay was set up to handle courses for officers and men of the U.S. and Australian Armed Forces using HMAS Assault as its base. The bays and beaches of Port Stephens provided training for 2000 Australian and 20,000 U.S. ship-to-shore invasion specialists. It was in this area that the three armed services co-ordinated their training efforts. As the front line moved closer to Japan, the Amphibious Training Centre was closed on 12 October 1943.

The Tomaree and Shoal Bay area was the first combined operations Australia/United States Amphibious Landing Training Establishment in the south-west Pacific theatre.

RAN landing ships infantry (LSI), HMAS Westralia, HMAS Manoora, HMAS Kanimbla and the US Navy ship USS Henry T Allen were involved in landings under simulated invasion conditions on Zenith Beach, Wreck Beach and Box Beach in readiness for the amphibious invasions of Dutch New Guinea, Tarakan, Balikpapan, as well as the Leyte and Lingayan invasions in the Philippines.

In October 1943, there were 141 ships and landing craft (including thirteen Australian built) based at Port Stephens. 36 of these ships were controlled by HMAS Assault and 105 by the US Navy.



Via Russell Webb

Christmas 1943 Menu for HMAS Assault

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The United States Army Services of Supply (USASOS) installed a Private telephone line from their headquarters at Grace Brothers Building in Sydney to the Joint Overseas Operational Training School (JOOTS) at Port Stephens. (File held in NAA). The US Army established an [Amphibious Training Centre at Gan Gan near Port Stephens](#) in New South Wales during WWII which was co-located with HMAS Assault. This may have been the same organisation as JOOTS.

"HMAS Assault" was scaled back to care and maintenance activities only from August 1944 until the British Pacific Fleet occupied "HMAS Assault" from April 1945. The site then became a Royal Marine Commando Depot. In June 1945 the current day Arts Centre building (Sick Centre) was turned into a small hospital ward of about 10 beds.

In 1949 it was announced that the Commonwealth Employment Service would take over the old Naval Depot to house European migrant workers.

The initial intake of 49 migrants helped to set up the new migrant hostel. The Nissen huts were subdivided into six rooms and the other buildings were used to house larger families. The ex Sick Bay (Arts Centre) building was reopened as a hospital at the migrant hostel and the first baby was born there in December 1949. The migrant hostel was closed in mid 1953.

The Sick Bay building served again as a hospital in April 1956 when it became the hospital for the local community. The hospital eventually closed in 1981.

The buildings were handed over to the Port Stephens Society of the Arts on 10 August 1981 to become the "Port Stephens Community Arts Centre".

The "Port Stephens Community Arts Centre" is located at:-

Shoal Bay Road,
Nelson Bay,
NSW 2317

(At the rear of Neil Carroll Park near the RSL)

P O Box 227,
Nelson Bay,
NSW 2317

Phone 02 4981 3604

Fax 02 4984 3286

artcentre@hunterlink.net.au

**Please contact me
if you can assist with more information
on "HMAS Assault"**

REFERENCES

[The Port Stephens Community Arts Centre](#)

"History of Port Stephens Community Arts Centre Buildings" 1992
by Beatrice Bordiss

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank Cameron Alexander for his assistance with this web page.

I'd like to thank Russell Webb whose father Walter John Alfred Webb PM4875 was trained at HMAS Assault before he moved to Cairns.

Can anyone help me with more information?



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