

# Death Railway



## Cruiser

**By Mike Carlton (2010)**

This is one well-written novel, a true holistic masterpiece of naval history and adventure. We know that HMAS Perth is a mighty ship of the Australian Light Cruiser group who fights well under the tight, early and competent command of Commander Charles 'Pricky' Reid. With adept skill at the bridge she dodged torpedoes, Junkers Dive-Bombers and other seaborne attack from both the Keigsmarine and the Luftwaffe. With multiple fights and battles in support of operations in the Mediterranean against the tyrants of the time: the Fascist Germans, Italians and Vichy French; escaping many scrapes with several bruises she stops in many ports where the men can relax and unwind.

She does suffer one direct hit in those turbulent times in the Med where several Sailors are killed; a time when the Sailor and ship's company become one, to fight a future foe that will require all the skill, strength, effort and courage of every man on board.

The writing style is easy to read, very descriptive with statements from the Sailors themselves that follow the history of the ship in chronological order, from her re-naming through to her final fighting hours. A real page turner.

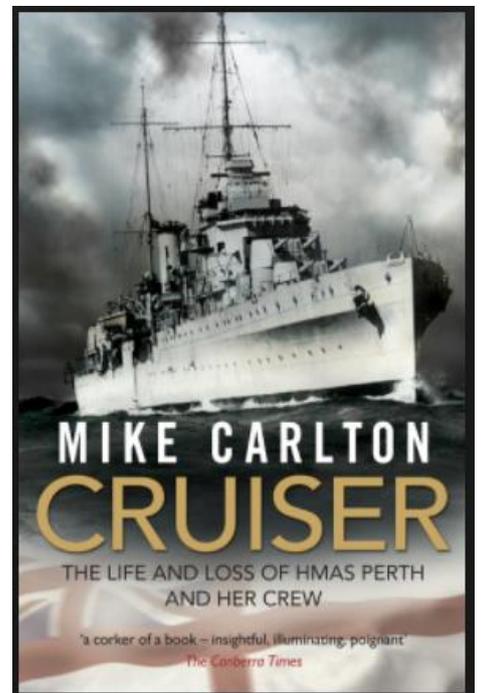
She encountered a time of poor logistical command across multi-nationals at war as one; with various ships under independent command of Americans, Australian, British and Dutch – the might of those countries on the sea needed cohesive planning, command and structure – this was yet to be foreseen in battles involving the Perth. She would suffer consequently due to deficient *fleet* command of the day – who oversaw strategy among *multiple* ships.

It's great to follow a young Ray Parkin painting on the shores of various Ports with his watercolours of the day; he will become a great friend and confidant of the late great Weary Dunlop in the prison camps of Hintok and beyond. The book touches on the rise and fall of the Japanese military; delves into Japanese politics of the day and what led the men of Nippon into the long and costly war that stretched thousands of kilometers across the Pacific.

The 'Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', the 'Asians for the Asiatics' was the resounding premise of the Japanese propaganda war years.

Perth would fight a battle with her mate the USS Houston in the Sunda Strait in the waters around Java – she would fight with a new Captain and many new hands since the days of the Med. Well drilled she would go down firing star shells and practice rounds because she had spent all her ammo. The Japanese would fire 80+ torpedoes at her; landing seven; some of their torpedoes hitting their own Japanese transports carrying Nippon Troops.

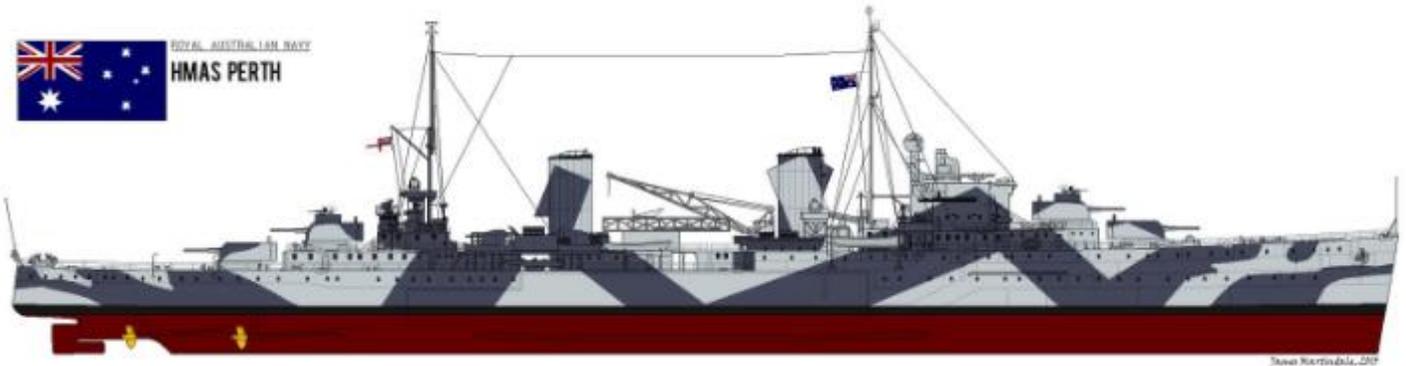
A classic story of 'David and Goliath' with our Aussie lads fighting to the death against an



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enemy six times the strength – the same valiant fighting spirit shown by the Americans on the Houston under Captain Albert Rooks (who received the US Medal of Honour posthumously as he went down with his ship).



The story continues to the survivors, their story on the Railway; transports to various work camps across Japan, the sinking of the Montevideo and Rakuyo Maru's to the USS Pampanito and their subsequent rescue of some of the Railway lads sunk (by Pampanito) on their way to Japan. Little Boy and Fat Man turned the tide, the two Atomic Bombs that woke Hirohito from his stupendous hibernation.

A fantastic book about 600+ fantastic men – only 200 of them would return home to Australia – many believing their Captain 'Hard Over' Hec Waller should have received a Victoria Cross (VC), the highest military award the Commonwealth can bestow – the equivalent of the Medal of Honour.

It should be noted no Royal Australian Naval personnel received the VC in those days because of the bureaucratic red tape of the time – all submissions had to go via the Royal Navy.

Grab it, read it – enjoy it. Terrific book – well researched and in three words: 'Hard Over Holistic'.

Discussion on Perth by Mike Carlton – **click here:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zey6nyl2SM0>

