



The Royal Australian Navy in 15 Objects

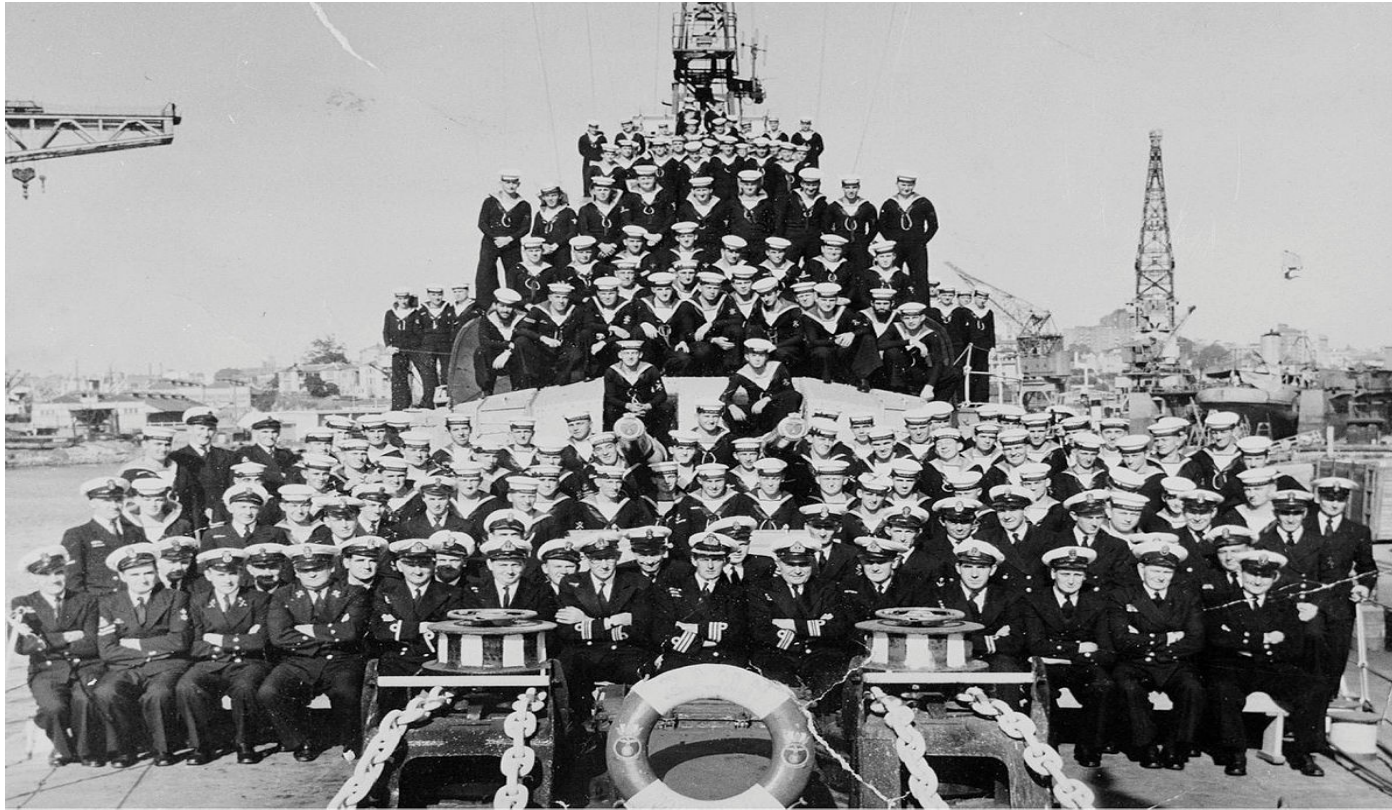
Object 9 Japanese Flag from HMAS *Bataan*



Object 9 is a Japanese flag. It was signed by 55 members of the ship's company of HMAS *Bataan* on 2 September 1945. *Bataan* had only commissioned a few months earlier, in May 1945. This was too late to participate in active hostilities in the Pacific, but it should be remembered that her crew was made up of experienced sailors who had been very active in the Pacific campaign prior. *Bataan* proceeded north very soon after commissioning and was one of several Australian ships present in Tokyo Bay for the official surrender ceremony aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* on 2 September. There is also a Japanese naval ensign signed by 90 members of *Bataan's* ship's company that was signed on 31 August 1945. It is held by the Seapower Centre Australia.

It was a popular practice among Allied forces to obtain Japanese flags and ensigns and sign it to say that they were there. But the symbolism of the flag, that it represents the conclusion of one the most brutal and horrific periods in human history, is quite striking. It's a reminder that Australian forces were involved in actions right across the Pacific and South East Asia. There are quite a few episodes in the *Australian Naval History* series that tell the story of RAN operations during World War II.

This flag recognises the extraordinary effort of naval personnel during World War II. At its peak strength the RAN numbered nearly 40,000 personnel serving in around 350 ships and shore establishments. Australian manufacturing was expanded especially Australian shipbuilding and maintenance; three destroyers, twelve frigates and 60 corvettes, as we've already touched on, were built in Australian shipyards, employing thousands of civilian workers. It saw the foundation of the Womens' Royal Australian Naval Service so women served in uniform for the first time and made a significant contribution to the war effort, especially in the intelligence world. And the Australian mainland came under attack in Darwin and other centres across Australia's Top End, and in Sydney and in Newcastle, as well as the loss of Australian warships such *Armidale*, *Sydney*, *Perth* and *Yarra*, among others, and the attacks on Australian commercial shipping which lead to the massive escort and convoy effort to protect merchant vessels. And most of all around 2,000 naval personnel, in the Pacific and elsewhere, made the ultimate sacrifice.





But beyond that, it's also representative of what has happened in the near 80 years since the end of the war. The tragedy of the war in the Pacific is undeniable and should never be forgotten, but the relationship between Australia and Japan since has developed and evolved to a point where Japan is now one of our closest friends and closest allies. That's quite a bit to be symbolised in one piece of cloth. And just as a little postscript to this story; although *Bataan* had commissioned too late to actively participate in the Pacific campaign, she did play a significant role in operations in the Korean theatre half a decade later.

Location: The Australian War Memorial.