

**The Yachties
Book Launch
19 October 2023**

VADM Peter Jones AO DSC RAN (Rtd)

Good Morning again everyone,

As we have heard this morning, and we will hear further this afternoon, there are many strands that make up a nation's seapower. One of those strands is its Navy's people. In 2000 Rear Admiral James Goldrick wrote in *Australian Maritime Doctrine* that the Australian Navy's people is the most important factor in generating naval capability. He went on to say that "life at sea is unlike any other. The maritime environment is tiring, demanding and unforgiving."

Not too long after James wrote these, all too true words, Jan Roberts Billet commenced her labours chronicling the history of the Dominion Yachtsmen Scheme, first as a Master of Arts thesis, and then onto what would culminate, in today, her outstanding book *The Yachties*.

For those of you unfamiliar with the Dominion Yachtsmen Scheme, it was established in 1940 at a most perilous time for Britain and the world. The Admiralty asked the dominions to recruit sorely needed volunteers to be trained as naval officers in the UK, where they could help man the growing number of escorts and small craft critically needed for the Battle of the Atlantic and in home waters. The men were initially recruited through yacht clubs, hence the name.

Jan set about her task by trying to interview every surviving Australian member of the Dominion Yachtsmen Scheme or their surviving relatives. This mammoth task occupied her for many years and the oral histories of these men is a priceless treasure for our Navy.

Jan's book sheds a light on the wide range of service the Yachties actually undertook. They seemed to be everywhere. Besides the Battle of the Atlantic they took part in the Dieppe and St Nazaire raids, defused mines and unexploded bombs, were in the Mediterranean, on gunboats in the English Channel, in the Persian Gulf, at the D-Day landings at Normandy, and finally, in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.

James Goldrick's words that life at sea is unlike any other, rings through the 200 pages of Jan's book. It is a fascinating story. The remarkable service of the Yachties came at great personal cost both during the war and in later years. While there are no surviving yachties alive to be with us for the launch of their book, I am delighted that some of their descendants have been able to make the journey to be here today. Welcome.

At the beginning of her book Jan has a quote which says,

May the high tide be high enough that the memory of these people
Shall not be washed away and be lost from their families and the nation they so
proudly served.

Jan, through your great labours you have ensured that their memory will burn brightly for perpetuity.

We owe you a great debt. Congratulations. I now launch the *The Yachties* and ask you to come up and say a few words.