

JENKINS, Alan William (PA3431)

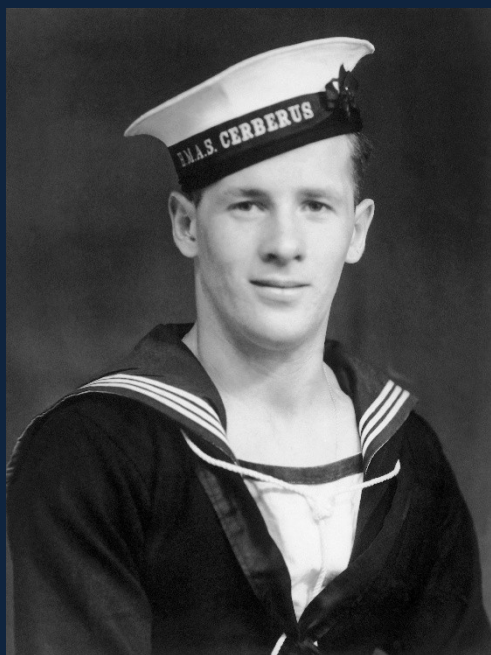


Image 1 © Peter Jenkins family collection.
Studio portrait, circa March 1943.

Name	JENKINS, Alan William Able Seaman
Service Number	PA3431
Date of Birth	4th December 1924
Died	31st May 2006
Place of Birth	Victor Harbor SA
Resident	Victor Harbor SA
Cemetery	Victor Harbor Cemetery SA

Alan William Jenkins was born at Victor Harbor on 4 December 1924, the second of six children of Alec John Jenkins and Matilda May Jenkins (nee Tilley). He was educated at Victor Harbor Primary and High Schools and on leaving school at the age of 14, Alan was employed by local greengrocer Herschell Inglis. After 12 months, Alan was required to re-enrol at high school and complete his Intermediate Certificate in order to be eligible for an apprenticeship at the Islington Railway Workshops. He didn't pass his exams at the end of the year, but managed to sit for the apprenticeship test. However he was offered a job as a painter. With the coming of war, Alan was keen to enlist but was not yet 18 and his father wouldn't sign parental consent until then.

Five days after his 18th birthday Alan signed on as a member of the Royal Australian Naval Reserve on 9 December 1942. His service number prefix of PA denotes his home port as Port Adelaide which entitled personnel to have their transport paid by the Navy back to Adelaide for periods of long leave. He followed the familiar trail of other Navy recruits to the Navy's training establishment HMAS Cerberus (Flinders Naval Depot) in Victoria. There he completed his recruit course followed by torpedo and gunnery category training on 5 March 1943 with a pass mark of 69% to be an Ordinary Seaman.

Alan was fortunate to be drafted to join the cruiser HMAS Shropshire in Britain. It would be an unexpected experience for someone just over 18 years of age. Returning to South Australia for departure leave between 12 – 28 April he then travelled to Sydney waiting at the depot HMAS Penguin until he was allocated travel to Brisbane on 5 May 1943 on board the USAT troopship Willard H. Holbrook. The Holbrook carried about 1,000 servicemen most of which were US soldiers on leave, or wounded men being returned stateside, and RAAF aircrew travelling to Canada for training.

With a destroyer escort, the Holbrook made good time across the Pacific and berthed at San Francisco, where Alan entrained to New York. On arrival there, the men were billeted at the Brooklyn Naval Dockyards for four weeks waiting for a ship bound for England.

The men were drafted to HMS Striker, an aircraft carrier that formed part of a 79-ship convoy to the United Kingdom. The convoy travelled in thick fog for seven days, which gave them comparative safety from U-boats. They berthed at Liverpool and entrained for Thurso in Scotland finally joining HMAS Shropshire on 17 July 1943 at the Royal Navy's remote northern fleet anchorage at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Island group.

The former Royal Navy 8-inch gunned cruiser was a gift from Britain to replace the similar Australian ship HMAS Canberra, sunk on 9 August 1942 during the fierce Battle of Savo Island immediately north of Guadalcanal by a Japanese task force attempting to attack Allied shipping, supporting the Guadalcanal landings. Four hours of confused fighting in the early morning dark of 9th August resulted in the loss of three American cruisers and the badly damaged Canberra being deliberately sunk later that morning.

Having been first commissioned in the Royal Navy in September 1929, HMS Shropshire had already seen four years of war service prior to being given to Australia. Consequently, it completed a full refit and installation of the most modern available equipment. It was the first RAN ship to have the far more efficient cafeteria style messing where the crew ate in the cafeteria rather than take their food back to where they slept. The former HMS Shropshire officially became HMAS Shropshire on 17 April 1943. It had a full loaded displacement of 12,700 tons. It was Australia's biggest warship of the Second World War. These cruisers were designed in the 1920s to project British naval power and protect seaborne commerce around the globe. A crew of around 1000 manned the ship, with its main armament of 8 x 8 inch guns supported by 8 x 4 inch dual-purpose guns and 28 anti-aircraft guns. Steam turbines powered 4 propellers providing over 80,000 shaft horsepower, which produced a maximum speed of over 32 knots (59 km/h). Extensive trials and exercises followed to prepare both the ship and its crew for the rigors of war at sea. The crew were fortunate to be commanded by the experienced Captain J. Collins Ran who, on 19 July 1940, commanded HMAS Sydney (II) when it sank the Italian cruiser Bartolomeo Colleoni and damaged another.

When Alan joined the Shropshire at Scapa Flow in mid-July, it was nearly ready to return to operations at sea. Alan would have fallen in with the ship's company when the ship was inspected by HM King George VI on 12 August prior to beginning its passage to Australia the next day.

At Greenock, Shropshire joined the escort of troop convoy KMF-22 destined for the invasion of Sicily. Sailing on 19 August 1943, Shropshire detached from the convoy as it passed Gibraltar, continuing southwards to South Africa then berthing at Fremantle on 24 September, and finally at Sydney on 4 October.

Sailing on 29 October 1943, Shropshire, with her three advanced radars, was an important asset when it joined the Allied Task Force 74 at Milne Bay. She began final training as a member of the naval gunfire bombardment group for the coming Operation Dexterity landings on New Britain. The first and smaller landing was made at Arawe on 15 December, followed by a brief respite at Milne Bay before the second and major landing at Cape Gloucester on 26 December 1943. Shropshire was one of the four most powerful of the 105 ships in Operation Dexterity. Her air warning radar provided timely warnings of approaching Japanese aircraft. However not all were detected and destroyed by Allied fighters, as some still managed to sink an American destroyer. Christmas Day was belatedly celebrated at Milne Bay on 3 January 1944, with the ship remaining in the Milne Bay area until it returned to Sydney on 30 January.

Shropshire sailed northwards on 7 February to Milne Bay for further training and preparations to provide gun fire support at the Admiralty Islands landings over 4-7 March. These landings cleared Seealder Harbour and its surrounds of Japanese to allow construction of the Manus Island naval facilities, to provide an important base to launch future Pacific operations. Back at Milne Bay, the ship's routine was broken with the welcome visit of a US concert party.

On 19 April 1944, the ship left Manus Island with Task Force 74 for the landing at Hollandia on the north coast of New Guinea. At 0600, Shropshire, while steaming slowly at 2 knots commenced firing 285 eight-inch shells at its allocated targets without receiving any return fire. On 23 April, the ship hit a floating log, which damaged the port outer of its four propellers causing some vibration, but continued patrolling.

On 4 May 1944, at Seealder Harbour on Manus, Captain Collins RAN, who commissioned the ship in Britain, was succeeded by Captain Showers RAN. Shortly afterwards at sea, Shropshire suffered one of her only two wartime deaths when a sailor was lost overboard and drowned. Later that month the ship supported further landings in Dutch New Guinea at Wakde and Biak on 22 and 27 May respectively, firing 260 eight-inch shells at shore targets. Sent south for repairs, Shropshire reached Sydney on 3 June 1944, where Alan was drafted ashore.

A former officer, Lieutenant Guy Griffiths (later Rear Admiral Griffiths AO, DSO, DSC, RAN) who served in Shropshire between November 1943 and January 1945, provided an insight into ship board conditions in the Pacific.

With its crew now increased to over 1,200 sailors, Griffiths later recalled *"life in the non-air-conditioned ship was cramped and uncomfortable in the relentless tropical heat. The standard of food bordered on the deplorable. It was uninteresting and lacked nutrition, being mostly tinned or dehydrated, and fresh vegetables were virtually non-existent. On return to Manus after a long no vegetable period, the Captain reported 'We had hoped ample vegetables would be available on our return, but only sufficient for three meals in each ship were received'. The mail service to RAN ships was also deplorable, being consistently irregular with long gaps between deliveries. Once despatched from Australia, it seemed delivery was "purely by chance."*

Alan spent June and early July 1944 at the Sydney Naval Depot HMAS Rushcutter. Drafted to HMAS Leeuwin, the Fremantle Naval Depot, he arrived there on 21 July 1944. Billeted at Leeuwin, he qualified on Type A272 and A286Q Radars at the nearby Fremantle Radar Instructional Centre becoming a RP 3 (P), that is, a Radar Plotter 3 (Provisional), on 16 October 1944. His report showed him as *"an ambitious and energetic radar operator and seaman"*.

Alan joined the Brisbane built corvette HMAS Parkes at Fremantle on 29 October 1944 as a radar plotter. Radar Plotters provided a continual visual plot (display) for the ship's command while the ship was under way, thus depicting the relative position of other ships in a formation or convoy. They also maintained information state boards about ships and aircraft working with them including their call signs, the degree of readiness in relation to anticipated threats, then plotted the extent, direction and movement of immediate threats from enemy ships, submarines and aircraft. The plot would also be used as an aid to navigation for the ship when in confined waters close to land or during poor visibility and at night.

HMAS Parkes was much smaller than Alan's previous ship. Lieutenant Commander Vidgen, RANR, who commissioned the ship when it entered the RAN on 25 May 1944 continued as Captain throughout Alan's service in Parkes. With a crew of around 85, at 650 tons its single 2000 horsepower steam engine provided a maximum speed of 15 knots (27.8 kmh). The largest of their four guns was 4-inch. These small warships were officially described as Bathurst Class Australian Minesweepers, but widely known as corvettes. The 60 ships of this class became the main stay of

the Royal Australian Navy in Pacific where they performed all manner of tasks, but mostly spent their service on patrol and escort duties.

Parkes soon headed north, arriving in Darwin on 7 November where it was based for escort, and patrol duties in the Arafura Sea until the end of the war. On 20 December she rescued six former Dutch prisoners of war who had escaped from the Japanese in an outrigger canoe. Parkes was attached to the 24th Minesweeping Flotilla, comprising corvettes based at Darwin. However at that later stage of the war, they rarely performed minesweeping.

On 22 July 1945 while playing in his ship's Rugby team against HMAS Echuca, Alan's left ankle was fractured. He was drafted ashore the next day to the Darwin Depot HMAS Melville for ongoing medical treatment. Sent south to South Australia for rehabilitation, he was admitted as a patient at the 105th Australian General Hospital at Daws Road, on 27 August until released to HMAS Torrens on 19 November. Drafted to the Sydney area from mid December 1945 he spent short periods at the depots HMAS Penguin and HMAS Watson, before returning to South Australia in early March.

Alan was discharged from the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) on 20 March 1946. He was awarded the 1939-1945 Star, the Pacific Star, the War Medal 1939-1945 and the Australia Service Medal 1939-1945.

On discharge, a serviceman was offered ten pounds to purchase tools-of-trade, but Alan chose not to claim the money. His father, upon learning this, declared Alan "mad" as he could have purchased some fishing nets with the money. Alan resumed fishing with his father, and later with other local skippers. After a stint working for local builder Ivan Bartel, Alan joined local building supply firm Wool Bay Lime where he remained for 23 years, rising to the position of Manager.

On 25 September 1948, Alan married Patricia Ellen Walters and they had three children. Alan William Jenkins died on 31 May 2006, age 81. He is buried in the Victor Harbor Cemetery.

References:

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Compiled by the Victor Harbor RSL History Research Team, July 2011. Updated by T.Young & M.Young 02/09/2025

Appendix



Image 2 © Peter Jenkins family collection 2011
The HMAS Shropshire is shown here in its camouflage colours.

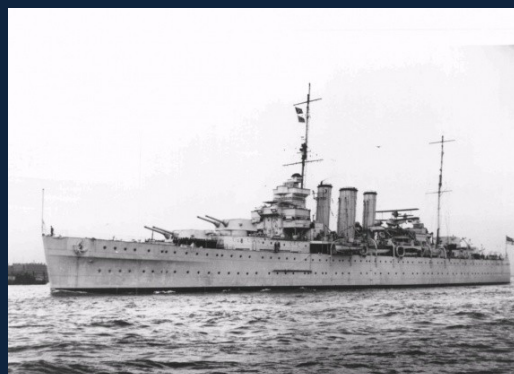


Image 3 © navy.gov.au
HMS Shropshire prior to its transfer to the RAN circa 1939



Image 4 © navy.gov.au
The HMAS Parkes Minesweeper circa 1944.



Image 5 © Iam Milne 2011
Grave of Alan Jenkins in the Victor Harbor Cemetery.