

PRESENTATION TO H.M.A.S. HOBART OF U.S.
NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION

SYDNEY, N.S.W.

21 APRIL 1969

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Admiral Baumberger, Admiral Crabbe, Parliamentary Colleagues
and Distinguished Guests and Officers and Men of the Royal
Australian Navy:-

This is a proud day for the Royal Australian Navy
and for the officers and men of HMAS Hobart in particular, all of
those who have served in her in the past or who are now serving in
her.

To you, Admiral Baumberger, I say thank you for all
you have said, thank you for the honour you do the Australian Navy,
and, through it, the Australian people, by the presentation of this
Unit Commendation from the United States Navy.

I take this opportunity of personally congratulating
Commodore Griffiths and those who served with him when this
Commendation was won. The job they did was in the best and finest
traditions of the Australian Navy.

This, too, I think, is a day we will all remember as
one more demonstration of the friendship between the Australian
and the American people, a day when our comradeship in arms with
the United States receives special recognition. I say with great
conviction that our two countries are not "fair-weather friends".
We have stayed together, we stay together and we stick together
whether the going is rough or smooth.

Hobart's service with the Seventh Fleet as "an eager,
aggressive and dauntless member" (to quote from the Commendation)
is an example of that spirit. It's been like that for a long time now,
and that's how I believe it will continue.

This is the first Unit Commendation from the United
States Navy to be awarded to a ship of the Australian Fleet and it will
have a special place in the battle honours of our Navy. For myself,
I feel particularly gratified because I like to feel, in a way, that
Hobart was one of my ships. She was the second of the three guided
missile destroyers ordered from the United States during my time
as Minister for the Navy and she was the first Australian warship to
serve in Vietnam.

I say to you all - officers and men of the Navy here today - that though the conflict in Vietnam is long, and though our naval ships are engaged on faraway seas, the Australian public and Government do not forget you.

They admire and respect you for the way you are doing your job. They are grateful to you for what you are contributing. They support you. And these, of course, are sentiments that apply to all our servicemen who are performing with such distinction. Indeed, it was less than a year ago in Washington that I had the privilege of accepting a Presidential citation on behalf of the Sixth Battalion Royal Australian Regiment.

Hobart has done two tours of duty with the Seventh Fleet off Vietnam and, as you know, is just across the way at Garden Island refitting. She is being given even sharper teeth by the fitting of an Australian-made, Australian-designed anti-submarine missile system, Ikara, and I have no doubt that she will continue to give a good account of herself, wherever she is engaged.

Today there is change all round and the Australian Navy, along with our other Armed Forces, will have continuing commitments in Pacific and Asian waters even when the conflict in Vietnam is over. It must be the best-equipped and the strongest Navy our resources can allow, and that's the responsibility of the Government and its advisers. But it must also be the best-led and the best-manned fleet. And that is up to the officers and men who man it, and if they continue to man it in the way in which they have, then there is no doubt it will be the best-officered and best-led fleet.

I thank you, Sir, for being here today. I thank the United States Navy for Hobart's commendation and all that it means to us, to the officers and men who have served or are serving in Hobart and to the Australian people from which they come.