

Surgeon 4 - Eric Mortimer Tymms (1906-1942), was born in Rockhampton, Queensland, on 28 March 1906, the son of Herbert George and Helen Therese Tymms; later husband of Louisa Marion Tymms of Elsternwick, Glen Eira, Victoria. Tymms was educated at the prestigious Hale School, an Anglican day and boarding school for boys, at Wembley Downs, Western Australia, as a ten-year-old in 1915. His father conducted a medical practice in West Perth. After leaving Hale School in 1924, Tymms moved to Melbourne to study medicine at Ormond College, University of Melbourne. Tymms received First Class Honours in Public Health in both 1926 and 1927, and subsequently obtained a Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree and a Bachelor of Surgery (BS) degree. He was Superintendent of the Children's Hospital, Melbourne for three years, and Senior Surgical Registrar of the Royal Melbourne Hospital for four years. In December 1934, Tymms volunteered for service with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). On 1 January 1935, he was appointed Surgeon Lieutenant RANR. On 13 May, Tymms was appointed to HMAS Cerberus for thirteen days' annual continuous training (ACT). On 6 June 1936, he was appointed to the County-class heavy cruiser HMAS Canberra for a period of thirteen days ACT. On 31 May 1937, Tymms was appointed to HMAS Cerberus for an extended period of ACT. On 30 June 1939, he was appointed to HMAS Canberra for a further extended period of training. On 27 August 1940, Tymms was mobilised by proclamation, then appointed to HMAS Lonsdale (additional). Two days later, he was appointed to HMAS Canberra. On or about 27 November 1940, Tymms was appointed to the Leander-class light cruiser, HMAS Perth. On 1 January 1941, he was promoted Surgeon Lieutenant Commander, RANR. Tymms was then re-appointed to Perth, on promotion.

During the month of November 1940, Perth made passage to New Zealand to join as the escort of a military convoy. She then joined convoy US7. This convoy was composed of the Polish former passenger liner, SS Batory, and three British former passenger liners, Orion, Stratheden, and Strathmore. These four ships had been converted to troop transports and were now transporting a total of ten thousand six hundred and twenty-nine New Zealand troops, destined for the Middle East. On 22 November, Perth detached from US7 in the Tasman Sea to carry out a search for the German Raider Pinguin. On 28 November, Perth rejoined US7 at Fremantle as ocean escort. On the 29th, Perth departed Fremantle with Convoy US7, arriving at Colombo on 4 December. It was here that the ship received orders to depart the next day for Aden. Perth was headed for the Mediterranean, where the Royal Navy was facing mounting tensions. She passed Aden on 6 December, and escorted convoy US7 through the Red Sea. Perth transferred US7 to ships of the RN, and returned to Aden on 17 December, to rendezvous with convoy BS10B of thirteen ships, closely followed by another convoy of thirty-seven ships. On the morning of 23 December, Perth entered the Suez Canal, and on Christmas Eve she arrived in Alexandria. It was not much of a Christmas for anyone serving in the Middle East in 1940.

Perth, in company with six destroyers, sailed into the Mediterranean to stand off Tobruk during an Allied air raid, a precursor to the British and Australian land force attack on the Italian stronghold of Tobruk. After returning to Alexandria on 30 December, Perth, in company with the light cruiser HMS Ajax, sailed the next day for Crete, to embark soldiers for service in the Adriatic. Perth reached Suda Bay on the north coast of Crete on New Year's Day 1941. Over the previous two months Suda Bay had been established as a British naval base. The one hundred- and sixty-mile-long island provided an advanced base for the RN Fleet, as well as a useful air base for bombing the Romanian oilfields, upon which the German forces were very dependent. The ships were welcomed by Italian aircraft overhead, although no bombs were dropped. Perth, Ajax, and the resident shore batteries opened up on the aircraft but without success. More aircraft returned a short while later, but no hits were registered. The next evening, Perth left Suda Bay for Piraeus, the main seaport of Athens, where she remained for three days before returning to Suda Bay with Ajax. While at Piraeus there had been two air raids, so Perth had gone back to sea to clear the harbour confines. Perth arrived back in port the next day, only to experience two more air raids. Perth left port again and joined up with HM cruisers Orion and York supporting a convoy south of Italy, headed for the RN Naval Base at Malta. While in transit, they exchanged identities with the aircraft carrier *Illustrious*, the battleships *Warspite* and *Malaya*, and eight destroyers. The following day, they carried out the same routine with HMA Ships *Sydney* and *Stuart* heading east. On 9 January, Perth came under two air attacks. By now the anti-aircraft gunnery crews were well practiced. Signals received in Perth indicated that *Illustrious* had been bombed and had suffered damage but was still afloat. On the 10th, the three cruisers fought off two more air attacks before they met a convoy of six ships from Malta and escorted them until darkness fell. On 11 January, Perth was escorting a convoy of six ships when, at 15:30, she was ordered to proceed at best speed to assist HM cruiser *Southampton*, which had been heavily bombed, and was ablaze from stem to stern. Perth was steaming to the position given in company with cruisers *Orion* and *Gloucester*, and three destroyers. At 20:00, they sighted the burnt-out, derelict, *Southampton*. She was abandoned at 21:00, then sunk by two torpedoes from HMS *Diamond* soon thereafter.

On 12 January, Perth and *Orion* proceeded at their best speed to Suda Bay, arriving there at 15:00 to pick up Royal Air Force personnel and take them to Piraeus. Upon their arrival at Piraeus at 03:00, they disembarked their passengers. They then embarked two hundred Royal Army Medical Corps personnel, and at 05:00 the two cruisers departed at their best speed for Malta. They arrived at Malta on the morning of 14 January and berthed alongside the wharf at Valetta. *Illustrious*, with the merchant ship, *SS Essex*, close astern, were in dry dock, opposite Perth. From 21:45 until 00:15, they fought off a night air raid. On the 16th, there was a series of air raids. The first of these was made by six aircraft which released their bombs from about four thousand

feet, scoring a direct hit on Essex. Some twenty minutes later, twenty dive bombers attacked, with *Illustrious* sustaining a direct hit on her port quarter. Twenty-four men were killed in the engine room of Essex. She was also on fire, which threatened to ignite the four thousand tons of ammunition still on board. Volunteers from Perth helped in retrieving the dead, as well as fighting the fires. It was later speculated that the men from Perth saved Malta, as well as saving their own ship and shipmates. If the ammunition in Essex had exploded, it would have flattened a fair portion of Malta as well. At the same time, a one-thousand-pound bomb had lodged between Perth and a pontoon holding her clear of the wharf. If it had not been for the pontoon, it would have been a direct hit. Even so, the bomb blast was devastating. It had put a large indentation in Perth's underwater hull on the starboard side, sheering rivets and springing her shell plating. It had also blacked out the ship, except for the emergency lighting.

Enemy pilots, knowing they had damaged *Illustrious*, came back a second time to attack the docked and damaged aircraft carrier. Sixty aircraft took part in this attack, and for twenty-six of them it was their last mission. The *Illustrious* anti-aircraft gunners were deadly accurate, especially from the stable platform on which they found themselves. However, one dive bomber still managed to lob a one-thousand-pound bomb into the carrier's hangar deck, causing death and destruction amongst the carrier's crew. Even so, *Illustrious* gunners still managed to drive off the remaining aircraft, but not without considerable cost. Casualties incurred on *Illustrious* that night amounted to something like two hundred killed, with many more wounded or injured. Perth went back to sea that same night with a noticeable list to starboard. Due to a serious scarcity of ships, she had been instructed to go out on patrol with quick drying cement in a cofferdam covering the section of damaged hull keeping the water out. Perth then set sail for Alexandria where she arrived on the afternoon of 18 January. Four days later, Perth was heading back to Malta in company with HM battleships, *Barham* and *Valiant*, and eight HM destroyers to escort *Illustrious* to Alexandria. On 25 January, Perth arrived back at Alexandria with the escort for *Illustrious*. The next day, Perth sailed to Suda Bay, and for several days was deployed for patrol and escort of convoys to Piraeus. On the last day of January, Perth received a signal reporting the torpedoing of the Greek tanker, *SS Desmoulea*. She proceeded to close the stricken tanker and made preparations to take her in tow. *Desmoulea* had very little freeboard, and her engine room was flooded. Perth stood by until a tug more suited to the task arrived, then left to continue her patrol. After further convoy escort work, in early February, Perth was ordered to return to Alexandria to undergo a refit. On the 9th, she had all her ammunition discharged to lighters before entering a floating dock for survey of the damage incurred at Malta during the 16th of January air raid. That same day, Prime Minister Robert Menzies visited the ship.

On completion of the hull survey, Perth was in dry dock for ten days, undergoing repairs and refit, during which a two-pounder pom-pom gun was fitted to improve her air defences. During her time in dry dock, there were air raids on five of these days. On 24 February, Perth was deployed with HM destroyers Mohawk and Nubian to escort HM monitor Terror, which was under tow to Alexandria after being badly damaged by air attacks. On the 27th, Perth was deployed with HM cruiser Bonaventure, and HM destroyers Decoy, Hasty, Hero and Jaguar to take troops to the remote island of Kastelorizo in support of a landing by commando units. (Operation Abstention). After the troops were landed, Perth carried out a patrol north of the island. The next day, Perth was called upon to provide cover for the evacuation of these troops after the operation was abandoned. On 1 March, Perth made passage to Alexandria with the destroyers Decoy and Hasty after calling in at Suda Bay. On 7 March, Perth embarked six hundred and fifty troops at Alexandria for passage to Piraeus (Operation Lustre). Perth was accompanied by Ajax and Orion, with both cruisers carrying a similar number of troops. On 17 March, Perth was again deployed with Ajax and Orion for the transport of more Allied troops to Greece, this time with five hundred Australian and New Zealand troops in Perth. After disembarking these troops at Piraeus on 19 March, Perth escorted the six ships of Convoy AG 7, in company with HMA destroyer Vampire. On 20 March, Perth joined with HM cruisers Ajax, Orion, Gloucester and York, HM aircraft carrier Formidable, HM battleships Barham, Valiant and Warspite, with a destroyer screen, to protect a convoy of four ships; SS City of Lincoln, SS City of Manchester, SS Clan Ferguson and SS Perthshire, with vital supplies for Malta. On 26 March, Perth sailed from Piraeus with cruisers Orion, Ajax and Gloucester, and destroyers Hereward and Vendetta as Force 'B': The plan was to meet with units of Mediterranean Fleet on passage from Alexandria to intercept a major Italian Fleet, known to be intent on attacking military convoys in the Aegean. There were more aerial attacks suffered by Perth, and she increased her score of victories by bringing down at least one, probably two dive bombers.

The Battle of Matapan.

On 27 March 1941, after a few more days of convoy and supporting activities between Malta, Suda Bay and Piraeus, Perth departed Piraeus with orders to make contact with the Italian Fleet, which was believed to be coming out to sea. Allied intelligence had indicated the enemy was about to attack poorly protected convoys to Greece, as a precursor to a German invasion. The British fleet would be waiting at a prearranged position at dawn on the 28th. At 07:50 that day, Perth, in company with Ajax, Orion and Gloucester, sighted Italian warships off the coast of Sicily, consisting of two eight-inch cruisers and two six-inch cruisers. Perth immediately went from defence stations to action stations. At 08:00, the Italians opened fire, thereby commencing the Battle of Matapan. The battle itself lasted for twelve hours. It covered almost two hundred

nautical miles of sea, and took place between Sicily and Cape Matapan, the most southerly point of the Greek Peninsula. The British battle fleet, with the battleship Warspite wearing the flag of C-in-C Mediterranean, had left Alexandria at their best speed as soon as the Italians were sighted, and Orion had sent a sighting signal giving the enemy's position. Orion then reversed course to draw the Italian fleet towards the approaching British forces, managing at the same time to dodge fifteen-inch shells at sixteen miles distant throughout the forenoon. Perth and Ajax and the other two cruisers managed to do the same. Their hound and hare tactics drew the Italian fleet towards the slower moving British battleships, Warspite, Valiant and Barham, and the aircraft carrier Formidable. Several of the Italian cruisers opened fire with eight-inch guns at extreme range as the four decoys raced towards their fleet. For all that, their shooting was not accurate. Contact with the Italian fleet was then lost until dusk when Allied reconnaissance aircraft discovered that major units of the Italian fleet were in full retreat, sailing for their home bases. Although, at 22:10, several enemy cruisers and destroyers were sighted by a British destroyer, which lit them up with searchlights and opened fire at four thousand yards. One of the first Commonwealth ships to join the battle was the Australian destroyer, HMAS Stuart, under the command of Captain H M L Waller, RAN, who would later take command of Perth. Stuart managed to fire on three Italian cruisers, and assisted in sinking two enemy destroyers, Vincenzo Gioberti and Maestrale.

Even though the Italian force had three reasonably modern (1934) battleships, eleven cruisers, and fourteen destroyers, they chose to beat a tactical retreat rather than encounter the Allied fleet. Be that as it may, it still cost them dearly. Their losses included the heavy cruisers Zara, Fiume and Pola, each of ten thousand tons, which were sunk by British battleships' fire from less than five thousand yards. Other losses included the destroyers mentioned above. Cruiser Giovanni Della Bado Nere and destroyer Vittorio Alfieri were also believed to have been destroyed. The battleship Vittorio Veneto was hit several times with aerial torpedoes and was last sighted making for Taranto at eight knots. When overtaken by ships of her own force, she had opened fire on them, mistaking them for pursuing British ships. The Allied Mediterranean fleet suffered no losses or damage to ships. The only losses incurred were five Fleet Air Arm aircraft; the crew of one of these were rescued. At close of battle, C-in-C Mediterranean, Sir Andrew Cunningham radioed Italian Naval HQ to send a hospital ships to pick up Italian survivors clinging to rafts and floating wreckage. The next morning, more than one thousand Italians were rescued by British ships. Attacks by Luftwaffe Stukas prevented the rescue of hundreds more. Perth was ordered to Piraeus, arriving there at 13:30 on 30 March. She departed at 09:00 the next day, escorting another convoy.

During the first four days of April 1941, Perth continued to carry out convoy escort operations between Suda Bay and Piraeus. There was increasing enemy action, particularly from the air. One ship, MV Northern Prince, was bombed and set on fire by Stukas, blowing up early on the 4th. On 5 April, the Germans invaded Greece. They declared war on the Greek nation the next day, launching a merciless aerial attack on the port of Piraeus, dropping bombs and magnetic mines. SS Cyprian Prince blew up and sank within five minutes by a bomb dropped one hundred and fifty yards away from Perth. SS Clan Fraser was also hit and set on fire after being bombed. She was loaded with two hundred and fifty tons of TNT, and a lighter alongside her held another one hundred tons. In all, fifteen ships were sunk, and many more were set on fire. All through the night, explosions could be seen everywhere as ammunition and petrol dumps were set ablaze. Next morning the wharves and sheds were in flames, and the port was covered in a haze of smoke. For the next two weeks, Perth carried out escort and other duties between Piraeus and Suda Bay. On 24 April, Perth deployed with HM cruiser Phoebe to escort Convoy AG13, comprised of HM Landing Ships Infantry (LSI(L) Glenearn, Glengyle and Glenroy, from Alexandria to Suda Bay, then carried out a patrol in Kythera Channel. On the 26th, Perth, in company with Orion, Phoebe, and HM destroyer Defender, carried out an offensive sweep off Nauplia, Greece, then embarked troops at Nauplia. The next day, Perth, in company with Phoebe and HM destroyers Hasty and Decoy, escorted evacuation Convoy GA14, comprised of requisitioned troopships SS City of London, SS Costa Rica, HMS Glengyle, SS Khedive Ismail, and SS Salween. On 28 April, Perth was involved in the evacuation of Allied troops at Kalamata in company with Phoebe and HM destroyers Decoy, Hasty, Kandahar, Kimberley and Kingston. When fires ashore silhouetted the evacuation ships it forced them to depart, leaving many soldiers behind at the mercy of the invading forces. The next day, Perth was part of the escort of the final evacuation convoy during its passage through Kasos Strait to Alexandria, in company with the anti-aircraft cruiser, HMS Carlisle, HM sloop Auckland, and HM destroyers Kandahar, Kingston, Decoy and Defender.

At 08:00 on 1 May 1941, the evacuation fleet arrived at Alexandria. For the next few days, Perth was alongside at Alexandria, having multiple pom-pom quick firing anti-aircraft guns fitted. While they were in port, there were more air raids, including a night raid on 4 May. On 6 May, Perth sailed from Alexandria with Formidable, Barham, Valiant, Warspite, Ajax, Orion, the minelaying cruiser HMS Abdiel, and the requisitioned logistic/troop transport ship, HMS Breconshire, as covering escort to Convoy MW7A, comprised of four fast supply ships, MV Amerika, SS Settler, MS Talabot and MS Thermopylae, heading for the beleaguered island of Malta. On 9 May, Perth remained off Malta with Fleet units and Joined Tiger Convoy. This convoy was bringing tanks and supplies to the Eighth Army in Egypt from Britain. On 10 May, Perth took up station to the north of Tiger Convoy to provide cover during its passage to

Alexandria. On the 14th, Perth was deployed with HM cruisers Naiad and Phoebe and HM destroyers Greyhound and Hasty as Force 'D' to cover the passage of a reinforcement convoy to Crete.

The Battle of Crete

On 16 May 1941, Perth received orders to proceed to Crete and block any attempted German landing by sea at Canae. The German bombing of Suda Bay and the airstrip intensified from the 15th, and by the 18th, the Royal Air Force presence on Crete was eliminated. The Luftwaffe Air Fleet IV, given the task of taking Crete, consisted of some one thousand, three hundred and thirty aircraft, comprising of six hundred Junkers troop carriers, two hundred and eighty bombers, one hundred and fifty Stukas, two hundred fighters, and sixty reconnaissance aircraft. Early on 20 May, these aircraft descended on Crete and dropped the Storm Regiment of the German 7th Airborne Division by parachute.

C-in-C Mediterranean, Admiral Cunningham, was given the responsibility of blocking a seaborne invasion. On the nights of both the 20th and 21st two cruiser forces - one of which included Perth, Calcutta, Naiad and Carlisle, and four destroyers, Nubian, Juno, Kandahar and Kingston, commanded by Rear Admiral E L S King, RN - patrolled the northern approaches to Crete. No invasion force was sighted, and at dawn the cruiser forces withdrew to the south. However, just after midnight of the 22nd, a fleet of twenty-five large caiques and small steamers escorted by Italian Spica-class torpedo-boat Lupo and E-boats were sighted about seven miles off Suda Bay. The British ships switched on their searchlights and opened fire. For almost three hours it was carnage. The German landing convoy was decimated by the naval firepower. The next day saw hundreds of dead German troops scattered over the waters of the Aegean Sea. At 10:00, the main German troop-carrying armada was sighted. This convoy of about four thousand troops decided to turn back, escorted by the Italian Spica-class torpedo-boat, Sagittario. At this point in time Rear Admiral King decided to withdraw rather than annihilate the retreating German force, because he was concerned more about aerial attack. King was later criticised at length by Cunningham - and then replaced - for not attacking the invasion force. Four thousand more dead Germans as well as the five thousand killed or drowned the night before, may have been too high a price to pay in human lives at that stage of the war. As it was, on the first day of the Battle of Crete, the Germans lost more men than they had in the first nineteen months of the war. King's withdrawal also proved rather pointless, as his ships still came under heavy aerial attack.

It was later reported that the Germans had committed at least five hundred bombers into the continual fifteen-hour aerial attack. They came in waves, taking terrible punishment from the fierce anti-aircraft fire as they bombed and strafed the ships

below. The superstructure of Perth and the ship's side were riddled with holes. Following the sinking of a fishing boat laden with enemy troops, the Stukas directed their attention on two HM cruisers, Fiji and Gloucester. They were taking a great deal of punishment, and both were badly damaged. When Perth arrived, she was able to draw off the attacking aircraft, and by rapid changes of course and nimble manoeuvring, Perth was able to escape the fate of Fiji and Gloucester, and HM destroyer Greyhound, which, at the end of the day, were all considered total losses. Much the same was afforded two HM destroyers in Kelly and Kashmir. Both were sunk, with the survivors being rescued by HMS Kipling, along with many other men from other sunken ships.

On 28 May, Perth proceeded to sea from Alexandria in company with Phoebe, Calcutta, Coventry and destroyers Hasty, Janus and Jervis, as well as HM Auxiliary Glengyle, to evacuate troops from Crete. After repulsing the German sea invasion, the Navy had to return and assist in getting the Allied Army out, after the German paratroop forces had surged across the island from Suda Bay to Spakia. Perth moved stealthily into Spakia on the south coast just after midnight, and was back at sea, enroute to Alexandria, at 03:00. Over two nights, Perth embarked over one thousand three hundred troops, and took them to safety in Alexandria. All embarkations were carried out in darkness, on unknown coasts, using charts of dubious accuracy and reliability. They were also difficult because of the uncertainty as to the exact location of German forces, and any mines which may have been laid by Allied forces. The total number of troops evacuated by all ships involved on this occasion was estimated at between ten and twelve thousand. On 29 May, air raids were resumed, and this time Perth suffered a near miss on the port side, which smashed the 6-inch and 4-inch gunnery control systems, and both master gyro compasses. As a consequence, Perth returned to Alexandria for quick repairs, and then went back out again that same night to Spakia to evacuate more troops. On this return voyage out of Crete, Perth had almost twelve hundred soldiers on board when she took a direct hit by a bomb between the bridge and the forward funnel. It was fortunate that it landed where it did, as it just missed the flag deck. Had it exploded there, the casualties might have been horrendous. As it was, it pierced the upper deck, exploding in 'A' boiler room beneath the galley. It put the forward boiler room out of action., and the explosion killed two cooks, two stokers and seven rescued soldiers. It was during these trying times that Surgeon Lieutenant Commander Eric Mortimer Tymms, RANR, was recognised for his service to others, and to the ship in which he served. The recommendation for the award of the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), reads thus:

'For outstanding gallantry, fortitude and resolution in HMAS Perth, during the Battle of Crete. This officer showed untiring energy and conspicuous devotion to duty in his care of wounded troops embarked at Spakia on the night of 29/30 May 1941, although he might easily have left them for attention later in hospital. He personally re-dressed or

supervised the re-dressing of the wounds of every soldier on board in addition to attending to the casualties resulting from the ship herself being hit by a bomb. Although quite exhausted, his action considerably increased the chance of recovery of the wounded and constituted conspicuous devotion to duty.'

The London Gazette of Thursday 8 January 1942 has recorded the following: 'The King has been graciously pleased to give orders for the following Appointments to the Distinguished Service Order and to approve the following Rewards and Awards for outstanding gallantry, fortitude and resolution during the Battle of Crete': The Distinguished Service Cross. Surgeon Lieutenant-Commander Eric Mortimer Tymms, MD, BS, RANR, HMAS Perth.

Due to circumstances beyond his control, Tymms would never receive this award in person. At the request of his wife, Mrs Marion Tymms, the DSC was presented to his son, Master Anthony Mortimer Tymms, aged six, on 21 April 1944, by the Governor of Victoria, His Excellency Major General Sir Winston Dugan, KCMG, CB, DSO, at Government House, Melbourne.

On 2 June 1941, Perth was taken in hand for repairs at Alexandria. On completion of these repairs, on 25 June, Perth took passage to join support operations with Fleet units of the Syrian coast under the broad auspices of Operation Exporter. On the 26th, Perth relieved HM cruiser Leander and took part in an offensive sweep to intercept Vichy warships. The entire operation was supported in the air by Allied fighter and bomber squadrons, focused on destroying Vichy air bases, and at sea by the 15th Cruiser Squadron, Royal Navy, which prevented Vichy French reinforcement, and bombarded Vichy coastal areas. The fighting ended with a ceasefire on 12 July. Operation Exporter was an Allied victory. On 12 July, while in Alexandria, Perth was nominated for return to RAN service following Japanese threat of attacks. On 18 July, Perth sailed from Alexandria and made passage back to Sydney, Australia. On 12 August 1941, Perth rejoined the RAN, and was immediately taken in hand at Garden Island dockyard for an extensive refit. However, between 18 August until 24 September 1941, Perth was at Cockatoo Island dockyard for repairs to her tanks, and shaft alignment due to bomb damage.

In early December 1941, Perth undertook a series of post refit trials and tilt-testing before rejoining the fleet. On 8 December, Perth was deployed with the County-class heavy cruiser, HMAS Canberra, for patrol duties in the Tasman Sea. On 12 December, Perth escorted a US troop convoy in company with Canberra, for the final part of its voyage to Australia. On 19 December, Perth escorted a US troop convoy to New Caledonia in company with Canberra and the New Zealand light cruiser HMNZS Achillies, and on 22 December returned to Sydney with Canberra and Achillies. On 29 December, Perth escorted military convoy ZK5, comprising of requisitioned ships SS

Aquitania, SS Herstein, and SS Sarpedon, from Sydney to Port Moresby, New Guinea, in company with HMA County-class cruisers Australia and Canberra, HMNZS Achillies, and HMA sloops Swan and Warrego. The convoy was carrying four thousand troops, including Citizen Military Forces (CMF) men, who thought they were going on manoeuvres for their training. Instead, they and their equipment were landed in Port Moresby.

In January 1942, Perth was nominated for service with the newly formed American, British, Dutch and Australian (ABDA) Naval force, for convoy defence duties. On 13 January, Perth, in company with Achillies, escorted TEV Rangatira, transporting B Section of B Force Extension, of the 2nd New Zealand Army Expeditionary Force, embarked at Auckland on Rangatira, TSS Monowai, TSS Wahine, and the Port cargo-liner MV Port Montreal, then headed for Fiji. On 29 January, Perth transferred to ANZAC force with RAN cruisers, Australia, Adelaide, Canberra and Hobart, under overall command of US Naval Command. On 31 January, Perth took passage to Fremantle for convoy defence duties. On 15 February, Perth escorted military convoy MS4 for passage to Singapore. On 21 February, after the fall of Singapore, Perth and MS4 were ordered to return to Fremantle. Shortly thereafter, Perth refuelled and took passage to join the Western Striking force of ABDA Command in the East Indies. On 24 February, Perth joined with HM cruiser Exeter, Hobart, and HM destroyers Jupiter, Electra and Encounter at Tanjong Priok. The next day, Perth and the ships mentioned above, were transferred to the Eastern Striking force at Surabaya, with the exception of Hobart, which had been damaged by air attacks. On 27 February, Perth joined Combined Striking force comprising of Dutch cruisers De Ruyter and Java, HMS Exeter, US cruiser Houston, HM destroyers Electra, Encounter and Jupiter, Dutch destroyers De-Witte and Kortenaer, US destroyers John D Edwards, Alden and John D F Ford. Action was taken against Japanese warships, covering the passage of invasion convoys to Java, during which the flagship De Ruyter and destroyer Kortenaer were sunk. Both USS Houston and HMS Exeter were badly damaged and unable to contribute to further action. Waller in Perth took over command of Allied ships after the loss of De Ruyter. He then ordered a withdrawal from the action and took passage to Java. On 1 March 1942, Perth was in action with Japanese cruisers Mogami and Mikuma escorting an invasion fleet with destroyers. Two Japanese ships were sunk in this encounter.

During the action at first there was nothing either Tymms or Stening could do but wait. But things soon began to change. It started as a trickle, then a rush of men with ghastly wounds arrived. Those who were slightly wounded were still at their action station, fighting as best they could. Tymms and Surgeon Lieutenant Sam Stening were soon all but overwhelmed; treating men as best they could who had arms and legs missing; riddled with shrapnel; burned beyond recognition. The few available Sick Berth Attendants made rapid judgement calls; men who could be saved; others who just had

to be left to die in comfort, consigned to a section of the passageway where bodies were waiting for eventual burial.

Perth was disabled by surface gunfire and three torpedoes. A fourth torpedo struck Perth while she was being abandoned and then sunk. Over three hundred of the ship's company went down with the ship, and three hundred and seven became prisoners of war. Tymms went down with Perth, while Stening would spend the next three and a half years as a prisoner of war. Surgeon Lieutenant Commander Eric Mortimer Tymms, DSC, MD, BS, RANR, is Commemorated in Perpetuity at the Plymouth Naval Memorial, Panel 75, Column 2.