

Farewell to Chief of Navy

By Tony Underwood

The retiring Chief of Navy (CN) has paid resounding tribute to the men and women of the Service.

"I have always said and I still believe that the men and women of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) are world class," Vice Admiral (VADM) Russ Shalders said at the ceremony where he officially handed command to his successor.

"My strongest and most enduring memory of my time in the Navy will be our sailors. They are professional, committed, dedicated, enthusiastic and great fun and that will be my longest and strongest memory of my time in the Navy.

"To all the sailors in the Navy, I offer my most profound and sincere appreciation for your great support."

VADM Shalders was addressing guests and an immaculately turned-out guard and RAN Band at HMAS *Harman* on July 3 in the lead up to the formal 'passing of the weight' to his successor, VADM Russ Crane, who became CN at a minute past midnight on July 4.

The wife of the late VADM Rod Taylor, Mrs Judy Taylor, and three CNs who succeeded him, VADM Don Chalmers, David Shackleton and Chris Ritchie witnessed the handover.

"VADM Taylor was a role model to many of us in the Navy – for generations of Navy officers," VADM Shalders said.

He also said he was leaving a Service that was "in very good shape".

"I inherited a Navy that was in very good shape and I hope to leave to my successor a Navy that is in equally good shape. I think I do.

"We are operationally focussed. I think we are operationally seasoned and I think we have very strong and robust plans in place which will develop an even more capable Navy in the future."

This, VADM Shalders said, was attributable to the work of his predecessors. He said in his more than 41 years in the Navy that most of the changes he had witnessed had been for the good.

"On a personal note, I've never, ever had a bad job. Every posting has been enjoyable, rewarding and great fun. I've truly had a great ride."

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VADM Shalders said he and VADM Crane had developed the habit in recent times when he had been proceeding overseas or going on leave of formally handing over with the words: "I have the ship".

"No doubt we'll do that again tonight," he said. "I'll feel a touch of sadness, of course, as I hear him say: 'I have the ship', but it'll be my pleasure and privilege to hand it on to a man I know will do a great job."

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In close to 42 years in the Service, I have seen a multitude of changes and the Navy I have had the privilege to command for the last three years is very different to the one which I joined.

My period as Chief of Navy (CN) has been busy and stimulating, with our operational tempo continuing at an unprecedented rate in modern times.

As I reflect on my time as CN, I am particularly pleased with the new capabilities being introduced. Our new ships all bring something special to the Navy; the Air Warfare Destroyers will provide us with a fighting capability unseen since the decommissioning of the Guided Missile Destroyers; the Landing Helicopter Docks will provide a true strategic lift capacity for the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) for the first time in our history. And the Armidale Class Patrol Boats, with their multi-crewing, are already providing a high level of operational capability with new levels of comfort and respite for the small boat sailors of our fleet.

I am very proud of the RAN, but particularly the superb men and women who make everything we do possible.

The sailors of the RAN enjoy a well deserved reputation amongst the world's navies. Australian sailors are acknowledged world wide as being exceptionally well trained, possessing a healthy work ethic, being adaptable and innovative, and having the ability to work very well together through mateship and teamwork.

These are the attributes that provide the winning edge, in a business where coming second is not an option. I have always believed our sailors are second to none, and I thank you all for your time, effort and dedication during my command.

I will always fondly remember my years of service, and as my career draws to a close, I hope that fair winds and following seas will help you through yours.

- Vice Admiral Russ Shalders AO, CSC, RAN



ABOVE Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Russ Shalders, and Able Seaman Aircraft Technical Airframes Paul Geutjes, cut the cake at the Decommissioning Ceremony for 805 Squadron at HMAS Albatross on 26 June 2008.

BELOW Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Russ Shalders, inspects sailors on parade at HMAS Stirling. Photos provided by Public Affairs.

