

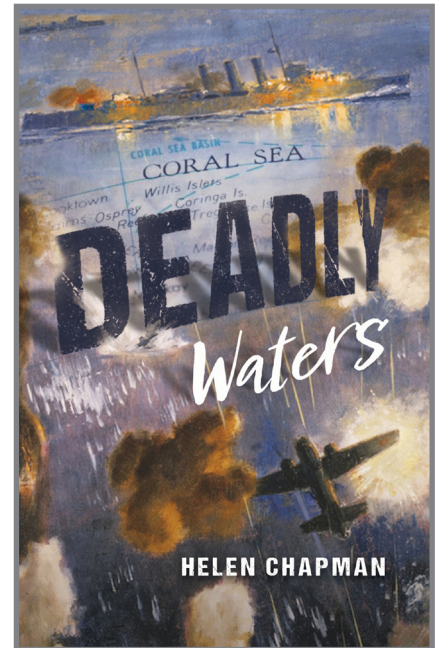
# Australia's Second World War: Deadly Waters

AUTHOR  
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



## SYNOPSIS

*'You could see the pilot as he came past, immobile, seconds to eternity.'*

As a teenager, Cliff dreams that one day he will play cricket for Australia, but when war comes he changes cricket whites for a navy uniform.

Leaving everything he knows behind he faces new horrors every day, from exploding mines and submarine attacks to deliberate suicide attacks by kamikaze pilots, never knowing if he will see his sweetheart, Marie, again.

But amongst all the tragedy of war, Cliff finds something he never thought possible amidst all the fear and devastation . . . hope.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Helen Chapman is a wildly experienced and bestselling children's author with over 96 books published worldwide. So popular are her books that many have been reprinted multiple times. Helen writes both fiction and nonfiction and specialises in educational books for children.

## STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
  - To what do you think the title *Deadly Waters* might be referring?
  - When and where do you think this book might be set? Why do you think this?
  - What can you see in the cover artwork that tells you more about the story?
  - What can you learn about the main character from the cover?
  - After reading the back of the book, what more do you know about what might happen in the novel?
  - What genre do you think this book might be, and why do you think this?
- List all the activities that Cliff and Johnny like to do together. Choose something that they enjoy, and try it yourself. You might like to play a game of cricket, make a simple kite, or go for a walk to a nearby creek to observe the creatures that live there. You might even see a yabby!
- Why does Cliff talk about the distance from Narrandera to Sydney as being in miles? How long is the trip in kilometres, and how long would the drive take today?

- On the journey from Narrandera to Sydney, Cliff sees 'trees, sheep, cows, kangaroos and more sheep.' (p 16) What would he likely see on the same trip today? What has changed in the countryside near where you live since 1931, and why have these changes occurred? What would still be effectively the same as it was in Cliff's day?
- In which war did cousin George's father die? How do we know this? How old would George have likely been when his father died, if he is 16 in 1931?
- How much is Cliff's pay from his first job in today's money? (Note: The Reserve Bank has a currency converter/ inflation calculator online that will tell you the purchasing power in today's money of a past sum from a given year.) What is the value of the shilling and sixpence that he gets to keep from his pay?
  - Why does he give most of his pay to his mother? Do you think this is fair? Why/why not?
- Cliff travels around Sydney on trams for the most part. Research the history of trams in Sydney and see if you can locate a map of the network in 1939. How many different places could you travel to? In 1981, Sydney had no trams, and no light rail. But in 2023 it has a light rail network that is still being expanded. Compare the 2023 light rail and train network to the 1939 network. Why were the trams removed, and why are they now expanding the light rail network?
  - What is the effect of a reliable and widespread public transport system on a city? What is the one key occurrence that prompted the removal of the trams, and what do you think is the defining feature of living in somewhere like Sydney that has prompted the installation and expansion of the light rail?
- Marie complains that Cliff's letters home sound like he is writing a shopping list. Do you think that her complaints are justified? Pretend that you are a sailor aboard Cliff's corvette on minesweeping patrol, and write a one-to-two-page letter home sharing what your daily life is like. You could even design a card or postcard!
- On a map, locate all the different places mentioned in the novel, both at the start of the story, and later on when Cliff is travelling with the navy.
- What is the now world-famous coat hanger bridge that Charles Kingsford Smith flies past?
- What place in Sydney is named after Charles Kingsford Smith? Research Charles Kingsford Smith and why they named this place after him.
- As a class, visit a WWII emplacement site, or other place of military significance. If you live in Sydney, Melbourne, or Newcastle, see if you can visit one of the places Cliff stayed at or travelled between during his time in the Navy.
- While on the corvette patrolling Australian waters, Cliff feels that he and his ship are far from the war. He tells Des "Look around at how remote we are. But the war's here, Des, in these waters. It's hard to make sense of it. We've got merchant ships leaving Hobart with troops and supplies—the poor blokes are headed to hell but it's so peaceful here." (p 89) As a class, discuss the importance of the role that the small ships, minesweepers, and coastal patrols all played in Australian waters during WWII.
  - Individually write a brief piece outlining the importance of keeping Australian supply lines open for the rest of the world, and what the risk of invasion was.
- Look carefully at the annotated map of Australia at the back of the book, and as a class, discuss the scale and type of naval losses in waters surrounding Australia during WWII.
- How much danger did the people in coastal Australia feel that they were in during WWII? Why must they have felt this way?
- What might life have been like for Cliff's parents while he was at sea with the navy? Write a letter from Cliff's mother, or father, to a friend or family member, sharing their thoughts, feelings and fears during this time.
- When Cliff and Marie went on a picnic to Bondi, they found the beach and foreshore covered in barbed wire and anti-invasion measures. How great was the risk of invasion? Look online for a picture of Bondi today, and use photo editing tools to overlay images of barbed wire and defensive emplacements. Try to imagine what life must have been like for people living near there during WWII.
- Cliff served on different types of ships during his time in the Navy. What are some of the differences between a corvette and a destroyer? What other naval ships were there at the time? Why were there so many types and what did they all do? In pairs or small groups, research Australian Naval Ships during the WWII era, and choose one to create a factsheet about. Include the names of some members of this class of ship, what their usual role was, and any image of them that you can find.

- During the war years, joining the navy implied active service. But not for women. Research the role of women in the navy during WWII and compare with their role today.
- Research the life of a sailor in today's navy to see how the role has changed.
- Read the notes at the back of the novel, and discuss what you have learnt from them.
- What have you learnt about WWII and life in Australia during this era? Write three facts that you have learnt from reading Cliff's story.

AUTHOR OF NOTES  
**RAE CARLYLE**