

## **Two Ships**

John Waller



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World War II started in Europe with Germany attacking Poland on 1 September 1939. Britain and France gave Germany two days to withdraw from Poland, but she did not. The two countries then declared war on Germany. For a while not much happened till Germany launched a blitzkrieg against the west of Europe, with France, Netherlands, and other countries capitulating. Britain had her back to the wall, while Germany unleashed unrestricted submarine warfare. The USA remained neutral but supported Britain through Atlantic convoys. Meanwhile, Western countries were watching Japan. Negotiations between Japan and the USA broke down with US supplies of fuel oil to Japan embargoed. Japan shocked the world by a sneak attack on Pearl Harbor 7 December 1941. The avowed intention was to obtain fuel oil from the Netherlands East Indies. In a massive southward campaign, Japan swept almost to the shores of Australia. The USA agreed to use Australia as a springboard for a campaign to stop the Japanese, as well as a major role defending Australia. Britain, with her back to the wall, could not do this. But before the above could be put into place the Japanese had overrun the Netherlands East Indies, who surrendered on 9 March 1942. Many Allied assets were lost in this process, including our two ships, USS Houston (CA-30) and HMAS Perth I, who were sunk together at the north end of Sunda Strait, with great loss of life, including the two captains. Our story describes the events leading up to this sinking, and the subsequent events whereby the Netherlands East Indies became the Republic of Indonesia after the Japanese surrender.



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