

SHIPWRECKS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

PAM

The *Pam*, formerly the 3-masted barque (originally ship-rigged) *Lady Palmerston*, was built in 1864 by R. Steele of Greenock. The iron-hulled vessel measured 213.5 feet (65.1m) length, 35.4 feet (10.8m) breadth, 22.5 feet (6.9m) depth and was 1,247 gross tons.

In 1909 the *Lady Palmerston* was registered in Port Adelaide by the Adelaide Steam Ship Company. It was hulked, renamed *Pam* and for many years lightered coal around the port. From 1930 the vessel lay idle at the Ethelton wharf.

In 1934 the hulk was given to the Australian Navy to be used by HMAS *Canberra* and HMAS *Australia* as a target for gunnery practice. It was towed by the tug *Wato* to a position seven miles south-west of Cape Hart, off the coast of Kangaroo Island, arriving early on the morning of 20 March 1934. When the cruisers were sighted, the *Wato* towed the *Pam* a further three to four miles south-west. Large pieces of lead were attached to the tow cable and the hawser set adrift, with the weights serving to anchor the *Pam*. Using eight inch guns, the naval vessels fired a total of twenty broadsides, with the majority finding the target. Once the exercise was complete, a crew from the *Canberra* placed a depth charge in the battered hulk and blew it up.

An Advertiser staff representative, on board HMAS *Australia* reported the scene by radio:

... About 7 a.m. the cruisers came upon the intended victim in Backstairs Passage. The Canberra took up a post about 1,000 yards from the Pam in order to report on the firing from the Australia, which had the first shots at the target, just visible to the naked eye under the grey sky and occasional mist. At such a distance the firing seemed most effective and confirmation of this came later, when Rear- Admiral Dalglish wirelessly his congratulations to the Australia from the flagship. When the Australia had completed the firing, she took up a position similar to that the Canberra had assumed at the outset. Accordingly we were afforded an unexcelled view of the Canberra's firing. The dull boom from the just visible Canberra was followed seconds later by the ear-splitting crack of the meeting of the shell with the objective, followed by fountains of spray 100 feet high. The Pam did not sink under this fire, but only because high explosive shells were not used. Several direct hits were recorded, the immediate evidence of which was a cloud of rusty dust which arose from the iron hulk when struck. The marksmanship was reported to be excellent, and the gunners' sole regret was that there was only a remote chance that their non explosive shells could sink the Pam. This duty was left to a demolition party from the Canberra.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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