

Donald Erskine Johnston the youngest child of Charles Erskine and Francis Emma Johnston, was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 1921 in Oaklands (Southern Riverina) NSW. He had a sister, Mary Rothney, who is still alive today at age 92, and twin brothers Alastair Dale and Ian Rennie. The twins both joined the RAAF during WWII. Alastair was a member of 467 Sqn when he was shot down and killed over Lille France on the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> May 1944. Ian survived the war, and died in 1992.

Charles Johnston had a varied work history including serving in the merchant navy, and chauffeuring for Dame Nellie Melba. He was a motor mechanic, and moved to Kingaroy Qld in October 1930, where he opened a garage.

Don was 9 when the family moved to Kingaroy. He left school at 14 to work at Penny's Department Store on Kingaroy Street, starting as a potato packer, and moving on to delivery driver then the hardware department. He was also a member of the Kingaroy Hockey team.

Don was 18 when he joined the navy in July 1939. He asked for a day's extension on his starting date so he could go to sister Mary's wedding, which was held in Kingaroy on July 19, 1939.

That was the last time Mary ever saw her brother. Don returned to Kingaroy to visit family and friends in February 1941 after serving in the Mediterranean on the HMAS Sydney, but by that stage Mary had moved away with her husband, to a farm in Oaklands, NSW.

Quoting from the Kingaroy Herald after the news of the loss of HMAS Sydney II.

We in Kingaroy and district have been especially proud of the Sydney's great record as we had a representative on board in Able Seaman Don Johnston.

The loss of the cruiser involuntarily brings to mind Don's visit home after his ship had returned from the Mediterranean with battle honours thick upon her.

Kingaroy gave Don a royal welcome on that occasion, which was heightened by the fact that he was also the first man from the Kingaroy district to return home from active service in the present war.

That was on the night of February 15, 1941,

The returned soldiers also entertained Don, and made him a member of the League, the president (Dr. W. Saxton), handing him the privileged badge at a function in the clubrooms.

Don opened up to the Diggers, and for several hours held their attention with reminiscences of the Sydney's adventures in the Mediterranean.

Kingaroy people took Don to their hearts that week, mainly because they saw that, with all the attention, the speeches and the hero worship, he left to return to the Sydney the same debonair, carefree lad, wearing the same sized cap that he wore to town.

Able Seaman Johnston loved the Navy and was fiercely proud of the Sydney.

When asked by a Digger the night in the Diggers' clubrooms if he was looking forward to rejoining his ship he eloquently replied, "I'll say".

And when questioned if he thought the Sydney would be going back to the Mediterranean he answered, "I don't care where she goes, as long as I'm on her".

Ironically, he was not to know fate would deal him a final resting place with his beloved Sydney.

Memorandum.

From

The Head Teacher,  
State School,  
Kingaroy.

Date 14th February.

To Mr. Don. Johnstone,

Red Hill, Kingaroy.

Dear Mr. Johnstone,

I am given to understand that you are on leave from H.M.A.S. Sydney and that your school days were spent at this school.

You can imagine how the splendid work of you and your shipmates has captured the imagination of the present generation of scholars.

Would it be asking too much of you to visit the school on Monday next, 17th February, and give a brief address to the School. I

know that you will think that you are not a Speaker etc. but I am sure you will receive an enthusiastic welcome.

I also issue to you an invitation to look over your old school and have Morning Tea with me.

*Norman E. Pyle H.T.*



This scroll commemorates  
*Able Seaman D. E. Johnston*  
*Royal Australian Navy*

held in honour as one who  
served King and Country in  
the world war of 1939-1945  
and gave his life to save  
mankind from tyranny. May  
his sacrifice help to bring  
the peace and freedom for  
which he died.

# World War Two Service



**ABLE SEAMAN  
DONALD ERSKINE JOHNSTON  
23394**

<b>SERVICE</b>	ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY
<b>DATE OF BIRTH</b>	17 JANUARY 1921
<b>PLACE OF BIRTH</b>	OAKLANDS, NSW
<b>DATE OF ENLISTMENT</b>	20 JULY 1939
<b>PLACE OF ENLISTMENT</b>	SYDNEY, NSW
<b>NEXT OF KIN</b>	JOHNSTON, CHARLES
<b>DATE OF DEATH</b>	20 NOVEMBER 1941
<b>POSTING ON DEATH</b>	HMAS SYDNEY



COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENT OF  
**VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**In Memory of  
Able Seaman DONALD ERSKINE JOHNSTON**

**23394, H.M.A.S. Sydney, Royal Australian Navy  
who died age 20  
on 20 November 1941**

**Son of Charles Erskine Johnston and Frances Emma  
Johnston, of Dayboro, Queensland, Australia.**

**Remembered with honour  
PLYMOUTH NAVAL MEMORIAL**



**Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission**

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