

His life for his country



by PAULYNE POGORELSKE



● Margaret Hutton and Olive Kellet reminisce about Lindsay (right). Picture: GEOFF FOLETTA 422GF502

THE late Lindsay Gordon Findlay was working in an ordnance factory in Maribyrnong when war broke out in 1939.

Employed in a vital industry, he could have avoided going to war, but volunteered to join the navy.

"He wasn't keen on war but he felt it was his duty to go as a single man with no ties," his sister Mrs Olive Kellett, 87, recalled last week.

"He felt it was better to fight than us losing our country or being overrun and murdered.

"He didn't have a gung-ho attitude to war, but went because he felt he should."

Mrs Kellett, a resident of Lionsville Lodge in Essendon, was remembering a time when her brother, then 26, left his family home in Moonee Ponds with sadness but a commitment to the Allied cause.

"I was 34 at the time and I wasn't scared for him, just upset," she said.

"Our mother was worried all the time, but that was the way things were then. We were at war."

Acting Ordnance Artificer Fourth Class Lindsay Gordon Findlay joined the HMAS *Sydney* and was stationed in the Mediterranean near Italy and the Middle East.

The ship was on its way back to Australia in 1941 when it disappeared.

A telegram arrived at the Findlay home on a Friday night while the family had gathered for dinner. It informed them that Lindsay was missing, presumed dead.

Mrs Kellett's daughter Margaret (now Mrs Hutton) was only four at

the time but can recall the night as clearly as if it was yesterday.

"I didn't want to eat my dinner and was crying. It was a very emotional time for us," Mrs Hutton, 57, of Strathmore, said.

"I kept repeating 'he'll come back' but only my grandmother believed that.

"We knew he had seen action and that was part and parcel of war, but it wasn't in our wildest imaginings that he'd be killed."

It was later revealed that the HMAS *Sydney* went down after a battle with disguised German raider the *Kormoran* on November 19, 1941, off the coast of Western Australia.

The entire crew of 645 men was lost in Australia's greatest wartime naval tragedy.

Mrs Kellett said their mother did not want to believe Lindsay was dead.

"She kept saying he was taken as a prisoner of war and that's what she lived on till the end of the war. She thought, or kept hoping, he'd come back," Mrs Kellett said.

"But we knew and tried to tell her he was gone. It was hard for her as we were a small close-knit family and he had loved life."

Mrs Hutton cherishes a letter he wrote to her from the HMAS *Sydney* in May, 1941.

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"He wrote especially to me and did drawings on it. What man would do that? Most would tag on a message at the end of a letter to the whole family, but he took a lot of care to write to me," she said.

"He played a part in my life and I'll always remember him.

"As a kid, all I ever wanted was an umbrella and a pair of kid gloves. All the other children just had woollen ones, but Peter bought me an umbrella and a pair of brown kid gloves.

"I was the only little girl in Essendon with an umbrella and a pair of genuine kid gloves. That was the sort of man he was."

Mrs Kellett fondly related how as brother and sister, she and Lindsay used to fight a lot.

"We used to fight over every-

thing and anything and he was the biggest ragamuffin," she said.

"I wouldn't walk home with him from school (Ascot Vale primary) because his socks were always over his boots and he looked a mess."

As they got older, their fights abated.

Mrs Kellett remembers how he liked to have parties when their parents were out.

"He loved life, and never had a penny to bless himself with," she said.

"He was paid one day and broke the next."

Mrs Hutton said it was important to realise that many people gave their lives for Australia.

"It's vital they know what others did so we could live here like we do now," she said.