

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

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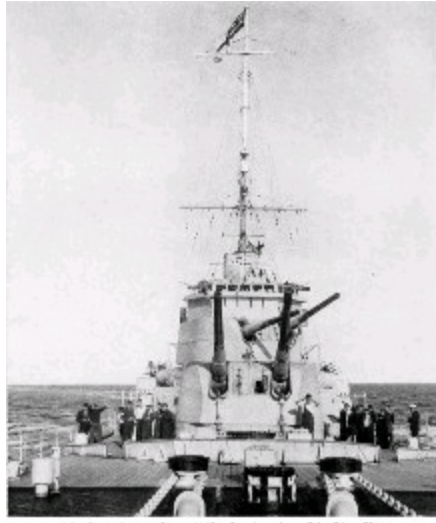
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The Achilles is shadowing the Admiral Graf Spee as she retires towards
Montevideo.

The forward guns of the [Achilles](#) after the action off the [River Plate](#). The [Achilles](#) is shadowing the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) as she retires towards [Montevideo](#)

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

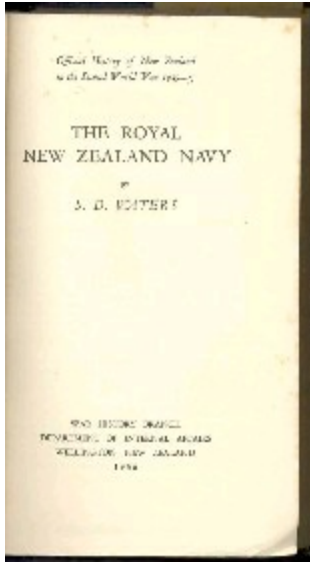
OFFICIAL HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45

Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-45

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Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–45
THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

S. D. WATERS

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

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THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

FOREWORD

Foreword

By Admiral Sir Edward Parry, kcb

ALTHOUGH it was not till 1941 that the 'New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy' reached the status of an independent service and became the 'Royal New Zealand Navy', there has always been a very intimate connection between the personnel of the Royal Navy and the people of New Zealand. This is not altogether surprising, for it was Captain Cook, Royal Navy, who first charted New Zealand and so literally put her 'on the map'; and it was another naval officer, Captain Hobson, who formally annexed New Zealand as a colony and became the first Governor. And, as [Mr Waters](#) describes in his first chapter, New Zealand has always contributed generously, both materially and in manpower, to the Royal Navy.

The expansion of the New Zealand naval forces during the war was unfortunately curtailed by the difficulty of obtaining warships from elsewhere and the lack of a shipbuilding industry in the country. The Government of the [United Kingdom](#) was itself so desperately short of small warships that it wished to retain three anti-submarine vessels ordered by New Zealand and building in the [United Kingdom](#) when the war broke out. Fortunately the [New Zealand Government](#) persuaded it to release these ships, which proved invaluable when the [Pacific](#) war started, owing to the dearth of anti-submarine vessels in the United States Navy. In spite of their small numbers the New Zealand warships played a conspicuous part in the war, and they can justly claim that they were represented in the first and the last battles.

Owing to the shortage of opportunity for naval service in New Zealand ships, the War Cabinet wisely decided to allow a number of her finest young men to join the Royal Navy. From my own personal experience, I can vouch for the remarkable aptitude they showed for service at sea, including naval aviation. [Mr Waters](#) has rightly devoted part of his history to their valuable contribution to the final victory.

Navy Office was fortunate in enlisting the services of [Mr Waters](#) early in the war.

His long experience as a writer on naval questions, combined with his deep knowledge and zest for naval history, make him the ideal author for this book, which cannot fail to appeal to that seagoing sense innate in all New Zealanders.

I cannot end this foreword without expressing my admiration for the wide outlook taken by the New Zealand War Cabinet. It would have been so easy for them to have taken a parochial view and concentrated their effort on local defence. But they realised, even when disaster followed disaster, that the defeat of the enemy could only be attained by fighting with their allies in areas dictated by the general strategy of the war as a whole – e.g., in the [Middle East](#). It was a liberal education for a naval officer, unused to the ways of politicians, to see how they tackled the difficult problems which arose.

Little did I think, when I was appointed to command His Majesty's Ship [Achilles](#) in January 1939, that it would lead to my taking part in such stirring events as to bring my ship and her magnificent New Zealand ship's company into battle, and later, after leaving them with the greatest reluctance, to my becoming the Government's adviser on naval matters during two years of a World War. I feel very proud that my association with New Zealand has been remembered by my being asked to write a foreword to this book.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

PREFACE

Preface

THE story of the Royal New Zealand Navy in the Second World War, the greatest maritime struggle in the annals of naval warfare, has some salutary lessons for the people of New Zealand whose prosperity and very existence as a free people are dependent upon the security of their sea communications.

Some of the greatest and fiercest naval actions of the war were fought in the [Pacific](#), only a few days' steaming from our shores. The Battle of the [River Plate](#), 6000 miles from New Zealand, ended the career of an [Atlantic](#) raider whose victims included New Zealand traders. The exercise of Allied sea power was the decisive factor in the defeat of both [Germany](#) and [Japan](#). It should never be forgotten that three-quarters of the world's surface is sea.

It may be objected that there are sections of this volume that deal at some length with events in which the Royal New Zealand Navy had little or no part, notably in the [Pacific](#). Yet the fortunes of New Zealand were so closely bound up with the general course of the war in that vast ocean that I deemed it essential to give some account of the aggressions of [Japan](#), how she was checked in the Coral Sea, off Midway Island, and in six major naval actions in the Solomon Islands, and of the victorious sweep of mighty [United States](#) forces across the [Pacific](#) from [Tarawa](#) and [New Guinea](#) to [Iwo Jima](#) and the [Philippines](#). From July 1943 until the end of 1944, New Zealand's cruisers were absent from the [Pacific](#). They came back again with the [British Pacific Fleet](#), in which they played a modest but honourable part in the final overthrow of [Japan](#). 'It would be wrong not to lay the lessons of the past before the future.'

I am grateful to Admiral Sir Edward Parry, KCB, who read some chapters of this book, notably those covering the cruise of HMS [Achilles](#) and the Battle of the [River Plate](#), and made many valuable and helpful suggestions. I must acknowledge, too, the valuable services of Messrs J. P. Feeney, H. S. Broadhead, C. J. Colbert, D. V. Dunlop, D. M. Holland and B. E. G. Mason, and of Miss M. White (formerly of the

WRNZS), all of whom worked, from time to time, as my research assistants. My thanks for their unfailing help are due also to Lieutenant-Commander W. W. Brackenridge, RNZNVR, and Lieutenant-Commander R. A. C. Cheyne, [RNZN](#), former Directors of Naval Intelligence; Mr A. Ronan, officer in charge of records at Navy Office, and members of his staff; Lieutenant J. N. Richards, MBE, RNZN, Miss J. Swiney and Mr C. W. Knott, of the confidential books branch, as well as to Mrs G. M. James, librarian at Navy Office. I am indebted, too, to the staff of the [War History Branch](#) of the Department of Internal Affairs for their co-operation, particularly that of [Mr W. A. Glue](#), sub-editor, and Miss J. P. Williams, who compiled the index to this volume.

Sydney D. Waters

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THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 1 – GENESIS OF ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 1

Genesis of Royal New Zealand Navy

NEW ZEALAND is rich in naval traditions that reach back for nearly two centuries. On his first voyage to the Pacific in 1769–70 Captain Cook, RN, in HMS Endeavour, circumnavigated these islands and disproved the belief that the country was part of a fabulous Terra Australis. Seventy years later came Captain William Hobson, RN, whose treaty with the Maoris, signed at Waitangi in February 1840, established British sovereignty in New Zealand. That sovereignty was affirmed in the South Island six months later when Captain Owen Stanley of HMS Britomart hoisted the Union flag at Akaroa. Hobson was New Zealand's first Governor and was succeeded in September 1842 by Captain Robert Fitzroy, RN. In 1848 came Captain J. L. Stokes in HMS Acheron and Commander Byron Drury in HMS Pandora on the first detailed survey of New Zealand's coasts and harbours.

In those times New Zealand and Australia were included in the vast East Indies and China Command of the Royal Navy established in 1816. Even more extensive was the contiguous Pacific Command, established in 1819 under Commodore Sir Thomas Masterman Hardy, who was Nelson's flag captain at Trafalgar. From the eighteen-twenties onward ships of the East Indies Command made occasional visits to New Zealand to show the flag and enforce some semblance of law and order at the Bay of Islands. The Australian Station, which included New Zealand and many of the South Sea Islands, was established as a separate command in March 1859. Ships of the Royal Navy played a notable part in the Maori Wars, especially in the eighteen-sixties when a flotilla of gunboats operated on the Waikato River and landing parties took part in combined operations elsewhere. ¹ Two of the earliest naval Victoria Crosses were won in the fighting of 1860 and 1864.

The Russian 'war scare' of 1885 first compelled serious attention to the defences of New Zealand. During the next four years much money was spent on forts and other coastal defences, including submarine mining equipment and two small steamers to handle it. ² Four second-class torpedo-boats built in England (the first two

¹ See Appendix I.

² These vessels were the [Ellen Ballance](#) and [Janie Seddon](#).

arrived in 1887) were allocated to the four main ports. ¹ These little vessels, as well as the mining organisation, were controlled and operated by the military authorities. In addition to twelve batteries of garrison artillery in the various coastal centres from [Auckland](#) to [Invercargill](#), the New Zealand Naval Volunteer Artillery corps was formed to man the coastal batteries in the forts at the four main ports and at several secondary ports. ²

The problem of naval defence received much attention in [Australia](#) and New Zealand during those years. The New Zealand Premier (Sir Robert Stout) in correspondence with Rear-Admiral Tryon, Commander-in-Chief Australian Station, informed him that 'my Government feel aggrieved that New Zealand should be without direct protection from the Australasian Squadron. ...' The Agent-General in [London](#) was instructed to negotiate with the Admiralty for a first-class cruiser to be stationed in New Zealand waters. The vessel was to 'remain an ordinary Queen's ship' but her disposition was to be 'controlled by the Governor on the advice of his Ministers.' Nothing came of this scheme, but at a conference of colonial premiers in [London](#) in 1887 an agreement was concluded for the better protection of seaborne trade in Australian and New Zealand waters. In addition to the existing squadron, an auxiliary force of five third-class cruisers and two torpedo-gunboats was to be provided by [Britain](#), the Australian colonies and New Zealand paying interest on the cost of building and sharing the cost of maintenance of these ships. Two ships were to be stationed in New Zealand waters. New Zealand's part in this scheme was set out in the Australasian Naval Defence Act 1887, her proportional share of the cost being £20,000 a year for ten years. The five cruisers of the auxiliary force were the [Katoomba](#), [Mildura](#), [Ringarooma](#), [Wallaroo](#), and [Tauranga](#). Successive flagships on the Australian Station from the eighteen-eighties to 1913 were the Nelson, [Orlando](#), [Royal Arthur](#), [Euryalus](#), and [Powerful](#).

An event that was to have an important bearing on New Zealand naval policy in later years was the official opening (in which the Australian squadron took a major part) on 16 February 1888 of the Calliope graving dock constructed by the Auckland Harbour Board at Calliope Point on the [Devonport](#) shore. In 1892 the Admiralty

acquired from the Harbour Board about four acres of reclaimed land adjacent to the dock.

¹ The torpedo-boats, built by Thornycrofts, were 170 feet in length and had a fair turn of speed. They were fitted with 'dropping gear' to discharge their small torpedoes which had a maximum range of 400 to 500 yards at 15 knots.

² Popularly known as the 'Navals', the officers and men wore uniforms of naval pattern, and ranks and ratings were given naval designations. The volunteer ratings were mainly watersiders and other port workers, and nearly all had seafaring experience. The New Zealand Naval Volunteer Artillery, which was remarkable for its esprit de corps, was disbanded in 1911–12 when the Territorial Forces scheme came into effect.

At the Imperial Conference of 1902 a new naval agreement was reached whereby the Admiralty undertook to maintain an Australian squadron of one armoured cruiser, two second-class cruisers, four third-class cruisers and four sloops,¹ to be employed in time of war anywhere within the bounds of the [Australia](#), [China](#), and East Indies stations. The cost of the squadron was to be shared in the proportions of [Britain](#) one-half, [Australia](#) five-twelfths, and New Zealand one-twelfth, with the proviso that the Australian payment should not exceed £200,000 a year and that of New Zealand £40,000 a year. This contribution was authorised in New Zealand by the Australian and New Zealand Defence Act 1903. Provision was also made for recruiting seamen to serve in one of the small cruisers, and two annual nominations for cadetships in the Royal Navy were allotted to New Zealand.

Hitherto British naval policy had proceeded on the basis of the two-Power standard, namely, an adequate superiority over the next two strongest Powers, in those days [France](#) and [Russia](#). The addition of a third European fleet more powerful than either of these two would profoundly affect the security of the British Empire. In 1901 an alliance between [Britain](#) and [Japan](#) was signed. In 1902 the British Government embarked upon the policy of settling its differences with [France](#). The military and naval defeat of [Russia](#) by [Japan](#) produced profound changes in the European situation. [Germany](#) felt herself enormously strengthened by the Russian collapse, and her self-assertion in many spheres became pronounced.

Following the Imperial Conference of 1907 at which [Australia](#) announced her intention to proceed with the development of her own Navy, New Zealand offered to increase her contribution to the Royal Navy to £100,000 a year for ten years from May 1909. This decision was implemented by the Naval Subsidy Act 1908.

At that time the increasing tensions in [Europe](#) and the rapid growth of the German Fleet were causing great uneasiness. The British naval estimates presented on 16 March 1909 were stepped up to provide for the building of eight battleships instead of four. Six days later the [New Zealand Government](#), on the initiative of the Prime Minister, Sir Joseph Ward, made its offer to defray the cost of the immediate building of one first-class battleship and, if necessary, a second ship. This offer was accepted by the British Government with 'gratitude and appreciation.' The Naval Defence Act 1909 authorised the borrowing of £2,000,000 to pay the cost

¹ Australian Squadron, 1904: [Euryalus](#), armoured cruiser, 12,500 tons; two 9.2-inch, twelve 6-inch guns; 21 knots. [Challenger](#), second-class cruiser, 5880 tons; eleven 6-inch guns; 20 knots. [Cambrian](#), second-class cruiser, 4360 tons; two 6-inch, eight 4.7-inch guns; 19 ½ knots. [Pegasus](#), [Pioneer](#), [Prometheus](#), [Psyche](#), and [Pyramus](#), third-class cruisers, 2200 tons; eight 4-inch guns; 19 knots. The [Powerful](#) (14,500 tons; two 9.2-inch, sixteen 6-inch guns) later replaced the [Euryalus](#) and in 1907 the [Encounter](#) (sister to [Challenger](#)) joined the squadron.

of one ship. This was [HMS New Zealand](#), ¹ which was laid down in June 1910, launched in July 1911, and commissioned in November 1912.

At a conference in [London](#) in July 1909 to discuss the problem of Imperial defence it was agreed that there should be a Pacific Fleet, consisting of the Australian unit, an East Indies unit and a [China](#) unit, with [HMS New Zealand](#) as its flagship. Part of the [China](#) unit was to be stationed in New Zealand waters, the ships to be manned as far as possible by New Zealanders. [Australia](#) went ahead with the development of her own unit, which by 1914 consisted of the battle-cruiser [Australia](#), three light cruisers, three destroyers, and two submarines.

The march of events in [Europe](#) and the extraordinary increase in the German Fleet provided for by the Navy Law of 1912 compelled the concentration of British

naval strength in Home waters and precluded the formation of the proposed Pacific Fleet. The New Zealand joined the battle-cruiser force of the Grand Fleet, in which she served throughout the war of 1914–18 and took part in the actions of Heligoland Bight (28 August 1914), Dogger Bank (15 January 1915), and Jutland (31 May 1916).

In 1913 Mr (later Sir) [James Allen](#), Minister of Defence in the Massey Ministry, attended the Imperial Conference in [London](#) at which the problem of naval defence was again discussed. The Admiralty preferred that New Zealand should continue her annual subsidy, but finally agreed to a plan for the establishment of the New Zealand Naval Forces. In a letter to the First Lord of the Admiralty (Mr [Winston Churchill](#)), [Allen](#) said he was guided by the principle of using national sentiment and local patriotism to give the people of New Zealand a personal interest in naval defence which could not be created by the payment of subsidies.

Accordingly, it was decided that New Zealand should train her own men and that the Admiralty should lend her a seagoing training ship ([HMS Philomel](#)) and the necessary complement of officers and ratings. The ship would be under the administration of the New Zealand Government and at the disposal of the Admiralty if needed. It was also arranged that the Admiralty would station in New Zealand waters two small cruisers ([Psyche](#) and [Pyramus](#)) which had formed part of the Australian Squadron.

The Naval Defence Act 1913 authorised the establishment of the New Zealand Naval Forces. They were to be enlisted and maintained on a voluntary basis and required to serve either within or beyond the limits of New Zealand. The strategic principle of unified

¹ [HMS New Zealand](#), battle-cruiser, 18,000 tons; eight 12-inch, sixteen 4-inch guns; two torpedo-tubes; 26 knots. She visited New Zealand in April–June 1913 in the course of a world cruise.

control of the naval forces of the Empire was accepted by the provision that, in the event of hostilities, the New Zealand Naval Forces passed to Admiralty control for the duration of the war. The Act also provided for the establishment of a New Zealand branch of the Royal Naval Reserve.

HMS *Philomel* was commissioned at [Wellington](#) on 15 July 1914 by [Captain Hall-Thompson](#), RN, ¹ who had been appointed Naval Adviser to the [New Zealand Government](#). The old cruiser was manned for the most part by officers and ratings of the Royal Navy who had volunteered for service in New Zealand. It was proposed to enter sixty or seventy New Zealand boys to complete her complement. She sailed with her first entry of recruits at the end of July on a 'shake-down' cruise but was recalled to [Wellington](#) on the eve of the outbreak of war on 4 August 1914.

A few days later the *Philomel*, in company with the *Psyche* and *Pyramus*, sailed from [Auckland](#) escorting two transports carrying the troops who occupied German Samoa on 30 August. The three little cruisers left [Wellington](#) on 16 October as part of the escort for the convoy of ten transports carrying the Main Body of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force for Egypt. From January 1915 the *Philomel* spent some months patrolling the Gulf of [Alexandretta](#) in the eastern [Mediterranean](#). Several landings were made, and in one clash with the Turks the *Philomel's* casualties were three killed and three wounded, one being the first New Zealander killed in the war. The *Philomel* took part in the defence of the [Suez Canal](#), in operations in the Gulf of [Aden](#), and in patrols in the Persian Gulf. She returned to [Wellington](#) in April 1917 and was paid off.

In August 1919 [Admiral of the Fleet Lord Jellicoe](#) arrived in the Dominion in [HMS New Zealand](#) in the course of a world tour to investigate and report on the problems of the naval defence of the Empire. His report dealing with the defence of New Zealand was an exhaustive and remarkably prescient survey in three volumes.

He pointed out that it was not possible to consider the naval requirements of New Zealand without taking account also of the naval requirements of the [Pacific](#) and Indian Oceans as a whole. The total naval forces required for the [Far East](#) were on a considerable scale and no reasonable measure of defence could be given by a smaller force. The Home and Far Eastern theatres were so far apart that correct strategy demanded adequate strength in both quarters.

There were elements of great friction between Japanese policy and the interests of the British Commonwealth, and it was almost

¹ Admiral P. H. Hall-Thompson, CB, CMG; Naval Adviser, NZ, 1914–19; First Naval Member, [Australian Commonwealth Naval Board](#), 1923–26; Vice-Admiral commanding Third Battle Squadron, Atlantic Fleet, 1927–28; commanded Reserve Fleet, 1929–30; retired 1932.

inevitable that their interests would ultimately clash. Nothing less than equality in modern capital ships could be relied upon to give security in the future against war with [Japan](#), and those ships should be close at hand. The first objective of Japanese strategy undoubtedly would be an attack on British naval bases, and it was clear that such an operation could at the present time be carried out with comparative ease. ¹ The importance of safeguarding those vital strategic centres was obvious.

Advocating the establishment of an Eastern Fleet, Jellicoe emphasised that its strength in capital ships should not be less than, and as powerful individually as, the [Japanese Fleet](#). The report apportioned the cost of provision and maintenance of such an Eastern Fleet at Great Britain 75 per cent, [Australia](#) 20 per cent, New Zealand 5 per cent. It was suggested that New Zealand should maintain as her part of the Fleet three light cruisers, six submarines and a depot ship, and a naval air school — the ships to be provided initially by Great Britain but replaced when obsolete by New Zealand. The regular naval forces were to be recruited for service in peace and war and naval reserve forces established to augment them in time of war.

The report stated that provision should also be made for fixed anti-submarine defences, boom defence vessels, and nets and controlled minefields for the principal harbours to be available in the event of war. A reserve of minesweeping vessels should be built up by fostering the fishing industry. The protection of seaborne trade was dealt with in detail and proposals for escorting ships in convoy were set out. The report also stressed the importance of wireless communications, direction-finding stations, and intelligence and coastwatching services. The report was a fair warning of what was needed for the defence of New Zealand, but in 1939 many things were lacking and had to be improvised at great cost.

The Government decided to give effect to the Naval Defence Act 1913 and adopted the more immediate recommendations of Lord Jellicoe, namely, to acquire

and maintain a modern light cruiser, commission HMS Philomel as a training ship, and establish a Naval Board. It was provided by Order in Council dated 20 June 1921 that the force should be designated the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy.

[HMS Chatham](#) ² was commissioned for service on the New Zealand Station and arrived at [Wellington](#) in January 1921. The first draft of recruits joined the [Philomel](#) in May 1921. Captain

¹ The relative naval strengths of the British Commonwealth and [Japan](#) in the [Far East](#) in 1919 were broadly similar to those in December 1941.

² HMS Chatham, light cruiser, 5400 tons; eight 6-inch guns; two torpedo-tubes: speed 25 knots (coal-fired boilers); completed 1912.

Hotham, CMG, RN, ¹ combined the triple duties of commanding officer [HMS Chatham](#), Commodore Commanding New Zealand Station, and Naval Adviser to the Government. Two escort vessels were also stationed in New Zealand, [HMS Veronica](#) arriving in 1920 and [HMS Laburnum](#) in 1922. They were maintained by the Admiralty but were under the operational control of the Chief of Naval Staff, New Zealand. The Veronica and Laburnum were replaced in 1934 and 1935 respectively by the newly built sloops [Leith](#) and Wellington.

The New Zealand Naval Board was constituted by Order in Council of 14 March 1921, with the Minister of Defence as chairman, the Commodore as First Naval Member, and the Chief Staff Officer as Second Naval Member. The secretary to the commodore acted as Naval Secretary to the Board. In 1926 he was appointed permanent head of Navy Office, but was not then a member of the Board. The secretariat at first was not organised on departmental lines but was drawn from the staff of the Department of Internal Affairs. Control of expenditure was exercised by the appointment to Navy Office of an officer directly responsible to the Treasury.

It was found difficult to administer the naval forces effectively while the first naval member of the board had also to carry out his duties as commanding officer of a cruiser. An effort to remedy this was made in 1936 by the appointment of a flag captain to the commodore in order to free the latter to attend meetings of the Naval

Board. In 1938 the administration was reorganised and Navy Office was constituted a Department of State. The Naval Board now consisted of the Minister of Defence as chairman, a Commodore, Second Class, as First Naval Member and Chief of Naval Staff, a Captain RN as Second Naval Member, and a Paymaster Commander RN as member and Naval Secretary.

[HMS Chatham](#) was replaced in May 1924 by [HMS Dunedin](#),² an oil-burning cruiser. Included in her complement was a detachment of [Royal Marines](#) whose arrival marked the beginning of a long association of that famous corps with the New Zealand Naval Forces. The Admiralty tanker *Nucula*, of 6500 tons capacity, was hired to the Government to maintain a regular supply of fuel-oil. Two storage tanks with a capacity of 9280 tons were under construction at [Devonport](#) but were not completed till 1927. [HMS Diomede](#) was commissioned at Portsmouth on 21 October 1925 for service with the New Zealand Division and arrived at [Auckland](#) in January 1926.

¹ Admiral Sir Alan G. Hotham, KCMG, CB; born England, 3 Oct 1876; served World War I; New Zealand, 1921–24; Director of Naval Intelligence, Admiralty, 1924–27; retired 1929; member of Port of London Authority since 1929.

² *Dunedin* and [Diomede](#), light cruisers, 4850 tons; six 6-inch and three 4-inch guns; four triple torpedo-tubes; speed 29 knots. *Dunedin* completed 1919 and *Diomede* 1922.

The cruisers were manned for the greater part by officers and ratings on loan from the Royal Navy. The recruiting of New Zealand boys for continuous service proceeded steadily over the years, but their number increased slowly since for various reasons there was a continuous wastage. With two cruisers in commission it was possible to carry out tactical exercises and competitive training. Periodically, drafts of selected New Zealand ratings were sent to England for more advanced training and wider experience in ships and establishments of the Royal Navy. From time to time the New Zealand cruisers took part in seagoing exercises with ships of the [Royal Australian Navy](#), to the great benefit of fighting efficiency.

Enrolments of officers and men of the Merchant Marine in the New Zealand

branch of the Royal Naval Reserve had started in 1922, but the total number was small. The Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (NZ) was inaugurated at [Auckland](#) in 1925. This service had a strong appeal to sea-minded lads, especially those with experience in yachts and small boats. The Auckland Division of the RNVR expanded quickly, and in 1928 the Wellington, Canterbury, and Otago Divisions were started. At the end of that year there were 405 continuous service ratings in the New Zealand Division and New Zealand reservists numbered 63 officers and 420 ratings.

In January 1925 the chief staff officer recommended to the Naval Board that a trawler fitted with suitable gear and a 4-inch gun be obtained for the purpose of training naval reservists in seamanship, minesweeping, and gunnery. He pointed out that minelaying by enemy raiders would be the greatest threat to shipping in New Zealand waters in war and that the nucleus of a minesweeping organisation, capable of expansion in an emergency, should be formed. The Naval Board accepted this proposal, which was approved by Cabinet in September 1925. A 'Castle type' trawler of 429 tons was purchased from the Admiralty for £5000 and commissioned as [HMS Wakakura](#). By the time she arrived at [Auckland](#) in January 1927, the costs of purchase, repairs, alterations and additions, and delivery amounted to £24,832. From that time onward, hundreds of New Zealand lads of the RNVR were trained in the [Wakakura](#). Many of them as commissioned officers and ratings had notable records of active service during the Second World War.

In 1927 Parliament passed an Act pledging a contribution to the cost of construction of the great naval base at [Singapore](#). This took the form of an annual subsidy to provide for a total contribution of £1,000,000, the last instalment of which was paid during the year ended 31 March 1936. In 1927 also the Government announced that New Zealand would undertake responsibility for the maintenance of two modern cruisers when the [Singapore](#) contribution had been fully paid. From the time the Anglo-Japanese alliance ended in 1922 and the naval centre of gravity moved to the [Far East](#), the establishment of a fleet base at [Singapore](#) became a cardinal point in British strategy. Such a base, it was held, would contribute to the security of New Zealand and [Australia](#) in the event of Japanese aggression. The importance of the [Singapore](#) base was specially emphasised at the Imperial Conference of 1937. But when the testing time came four years later, the Fleet for which the base had been built was not there to hold the ring. Without command of

the sea and the air, the strongest base is of little import.

In 1899 an agreement had been reached between the Admiralty and the Auckland Harbour Board whereby, in consideration of a subsidy of £2950 a year for thirty years, the latter undertook to provide facilities at Calliope Dock for the repair and refitting of HM ships. The machinery and other plant were to be maintained in an efficient state and replaced when obsolete. The Admiralty was to have free use of the dock and its equipment, subject to 'out-of-pocket' expenses, and the right to set up buildings on certain land owned by the Harbour Board. The works cost much more than had been estimated and in 1903 the Admiralty agreed to increase the subsidy to £5000 a year for thirty years. The Board undertook to provide additional equipment and give the Admiralty free use of two acres of land for a coaling depot.

In 1923 the [New Zealand Government](#) agreed to repay the Admiralty the annual subsidy of £5000. This arrangement gave the Government and the Admiralty more or less equal rights to the use of the dock. But by 1927 the machinery in the workshops was obsolete and the dockyard facilities in general were inadequate makeshifts. The cruisers had to be sent to England in turn every two years or so to undergo large refits.

A new agreement was reached at the end of 1935 whereby the Harbour Board transferred to the Crown the area of 8 ½ acres adjacent to the dry-dock occupied by the naval base, together with a section of the seabed in Stanley Bay. The Naval Board was to have the right to extend the wharves and other works by reclamation or other means. Ownership of the dock and its jetty was secured to the Harbour Board. The Calliope wharf was to be extended, the dock lengthened to accommodate cruisers of the [Leander](#) class, and additional docking facilities provided by the Harbour Board, which was to maintain the dock in an efficient state. Priority and free use of the dock were secured to HM ships. It was also agreed that the Government would pay the Harbour Board a capital sum of £101,780 for the property transferred, the works to be carried out by the latter, and the balance of subsidy payments accruing to 1939, as well as an annual maintenance charge of £400. The new agreement, which replaced those of 1899 and 1903 and preserved the Admiralty's rights of user and access, was given statutory effect by the Naval Defence Amendment Act 1936.

A three-year plan provided for the modernising and expansion of the [Devonport](#) naval base, including new stores and facilities for the refitting of ships, a naval armament depot at Kauri Point, a 12,000-ton oil storage tank on reclaimed land at Stanley Bay, and the construction of barracks and a shore training establishment. These works were completed by the middle of 1940 at a cost of more than £200,000. But by that time the urgent and increasing demands of war exceeded the capacity of the dockyard and base and a programme of major works was undertaken that was not completed till after the cessation of hostilities.

During the period of economic depression in the early nineteen-thirties New Zealand's naval expenditure was cut to the minimum needed to maintain existing services. No provision was made for expansion, and recruiting barely kept pace with normal requirements. A radical change in naval policy was recommended by the [National Expenditure Commission](#) set up to 'review and report on public expenditure in all its aspects, to indicate economies that might be effected and generally, to make recommendations for effecting forthwith all possible reductions in public expenditure.' In its report the Commission said that 'if the present arrangements are to be adhered to' the cost of naval defence 'must inevitably increase substantially in the future.'

'We believe,' said the Commission, 'that under Admiralty control the cost to New Zealand would be considerably lessened, but consider that any reduction in the amount of the vote must involve a change in policy. We are of the opinion that the present divided control cannot give the best results and that differentiation in the rates of pay in different divisions of the service is anomalous and expensive. We therefore recommend that negotiations be entered into with HM Government in Great Britain for Admiralty to resume control of the NZ Division of the Royal Navy, without any conditions as to the number of cruisers to be stationed in New Zealand waters, in return for a fixed annual subsidy the amount of which must be determined by the policy adopted by Parliament. We feel that reversion to Admiralty control would result in considerable economies which do not appear possible under the present system. If only one cruiser were maintained in New Zealand waters and the maintenance of the *Wakakura* suspended, a saving of about £200,000 a year might be effected; but the possibility of making the saving would depend upon the policy arrangement entered into between the NZ Government and the Admiralty as,

undoubtedly, relief to New Zealand finance would be at the expense of the British taxpayer.'

Nothing came of the Commission's intrusion into the matter of naval policy. However pressing the economic problems were, it was no time to change horses in the turbid stream of international affairs. Hitler and his Nazis were even then taking control in Germany.

Shortly before the London Naval Conference of 1930 it was arranged that the Dunedin and Diomedes were to be replaced on the New Zealand Station by two light cruisers of the Leander class which were about to be laid down. Up to that time it was Admiralty policy that the Navy's strength in cruisers should be assessed not merely by that of other navies but by the world-wide duties required of them in the protection of seaborne trade. The British delegates at the Washington naval conference had been firm on this point. Yet the London Naval Treaty of 1930 was one of limitation for Great Britain and left the other signatory nations with such margins for expansion as to constitute no real limitation for them. By January 1935 British cruiser strength, including that of Australia and New Zealand, had been reduced to fifty ships; the fleets of the United States, France, Italy, and Japan showed increases in cruisers, those of Italy having doubled; while Germany was completing her three 'pocket battleships', which were essentially large armoured cruisers. Moreover, sixteen of the fifty British cruisers had already passed the age limit and by the end of 1935, in which year six new cruisers were due for completion, six others had reached the age limit.

In June 1931 word was received from the Admiralty that the loan of two Leander class cruisers¹ to New Zealand in 1934 would not be practicable, and it desired that New Zealand should continue to maintain the Dunedin and Diomedes until relieved by the new ships about 1936–37. In October 1935, following representations by the British Government regarding the disturbed international situation caused by the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the Diomedes was sailed from Auckland for service on the East Indies Station. Based on Aden, the cruiser spent some months on patrols in the Red Sea.

The Diomedes then proceeded to England and was paid off on 31 March 1936. The New Zealand members of her crew transferred to HMS Achilles, which was

commissioned on the same day by Captain Glennie, RN,² for service on the New Zealand Station. Because of the situation in the [Mediterranean](#), however, the [Achilles](#) spent about three months there in the Second Cruiser Squadron. She arrived at [Auckland](#) on 6 September 1936. The [Dunedin](#) was replaced by the [Leander](#), which was commissioned on 30 April 1937 and arrived at [Auckland](#) in August of that year. She was commanded by [Captain Rivett-Carnac](#), DSC, RN,³ who succeeded Captain

¹ [Leander](#), 7270 tons; eight 6-inch, eight 4-inch AA guns; eight torpedo-tubes; one aircraft; speed 32 ½ knots. [Achilles](#), 7030 tons; eight 6-inch, four 4-inch AA guns (six 6-inch, eight 4-inch AA guns after 1943); other features as for [Leander](#). Both ships completed 1933.

² Admiral Sir Irvine G. Glennie, KCB; born England, 22 Jul 1892; served in destroyers, World War I; Captain, 1933; commanded HMS [Achilles](#), 1936–39; comd NZ Sqdn Jun–Dec 1938; [HMS Hood](#), 1939–41; Rear-Admiral destroyers, [Mediterranean](#), 1941–42; Home Fleet destroyers, 1943–44; C-in-C [America](#) and West Indies Station, 1945–46; retired 1947.

³ [Vice-Admiral J. W. Rivett-Carnac](#), CB, CBE, DSC; born England, 12 Dec 1891; served World War I (DSC); Captain, 1934; comd NZ Sqdn Dec 1938–Dec 1939; Rear-Admiral, 1943; Flag Officer, British Assault Area, [Normandy](#), 1944; Vice-Admiral (Q), [British Pacific Fleet](#), 1945–47; retired 1947.

Glennie as Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron. The [Achilles](#) went back to England in 1938 for a large refit and was recommissioned on 27 January 1939 by Captain Parry, RN,¹ under whose command she returned to New Zealand about two months later. In June 1938 [Commodore Horan](#), DSC, RN,² was appointed Chief of the Naval Staff and First Naval Member of the Naval Board.

Thus, when war came in September 1939, the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy consisted of two modern cruisers and one minesweeping vessel. Personnel numbered 82 officers and 1257 ratings, of whom New Zealanders comprised 8 officers and 716 continuous service ratings; there were 74 officers and 541 ratings on loan from the Royal Navy. In addition, the New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve numbered 70 officers and 600 ratings. In July 1945 the total strength of the Royal New Zealand Navy attained its wartime peak at 10,649 officers

and ratings (including 518 Wrens), of whom 3790 officers and ratings were serving in the Royal Navy; the total figure included 70 officers and 500 ratings on loan from the Royal Navy. By the end of 1946 demobilisation had reduced the New Zealand personnel to 150 officers and 1480 ratings.

New Zealand's naval forces entered the war as a Division of the Royal Navy; they emerged as a truly national service. In September 1941 the King approved the proposal that the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy should henceforth be known as the Royal New Zealand Navy.

¹ Admiral Sir Edward Parry, KCB; born England, 8 Apr 1893; entered RN Sep 1905; served World War I; Captain, Dec 1934; Chief of Naval Staff, NZ, May 1940–Jun 1942; Rear Admiral, Jan 1944; Director of Naval Intelligence, Admiralty, 1946–48; Chief of Naval Staff and Flag Officer Commanding Royal Indian Navy, 1948–51.

² Rear-Admiral H. E. Horan, DSC; born Ireland, 12 Aug 1890; served World War I; DSC, Aug 1914; Chief of Naval Staff, NZ, Jun 1938–Apr 1940; CO HMS *Leander*, 1940; Combined Operations HQ, 1941–43; Rear-Admiral (ret'd) commanding Combined Operations Bases (Western Approaches) 1943–46.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 2 – OUTBREAK OF WAR: CRUISE OF HMS ACHILLES

CHAPTER 2

Outbreak of War: Cruise of HMS Achilles

THE *Achilles* had returned to *Auckland* on 18 August 1939 from a cruise in the South Sea Islands and spent the following week in company with the *Leander* in exercises in the *Hauraki Gulf*. In the meantime the situation in *Europe* was deteriorating rapidly, and on 24 August the Prime Minister's Office informed the New Zealand Naval Board that the Government had decided to adopt the 'Alert Stage' as prescribed in the War Book, in which was tabulated what every Department of State had to do in the event of war and how and when to do it. Each department had its own chapter arranged on an identical plan in sections, each of which dealt with a successive phase of the preparation for an emergency and for war.

On 23 August a signal was made to HMS Wellington recalling her to *Auckland* from her cruise in the South Sea Islands, and orders were issued to the *Leander* and *Achilles* and the sloops to complete to full war storage. Two days later instructions were received from the Admiralty that the *Leith* and *Wellington* were to proceed from *Auckland* to *Singapore* with the utmost despatch.

The last days of August were a period of intense activity in the naval dockyard at *Devonport*. The exercises of the *Leander* and *Achilles* had been planned to last a fortnight, but they were cut short on 25 August when the ships returned to *Auckland*. The *Leander* entered Calliope Dock that evening for bottom cleaning and painting and the *Achilles* was docked on the following day. The *Leith* sailed for *Townsville* and *Singapore* in the forenoon of 28 August. At five o'clock that evening the cruisers were reported as ready for service, the war complement of the *Achilles* having been completed with active-service ratings from the *Leander* and *Philomel*. Both cruisers were placed at twelve hours' notice for sea.

Meanwhile, many other steps were being taken, in accordance with the plan laid down in the War Book, to bring the naval forces of the Dominion to a state of immediate readiness. The Government was kept fully informed on the measures that were being taken in the armed forces of Great Britain to meet the rapidly worsening situation. For example, general messages outlined the 'preparations being pushed forward to counter immediately submarine and mining attack in the event of the

present critical situation leading to war'. It was suggested that the [New Zealand Government](#) might 'consider the desirability of any possible similar steps for the protection of their own harbours'. Messages were also exchanged between the governments of New Zealand and [Australia](#) outlining the naval preparations in their respective spheres.

An Admiralty message of 25 August informed the New Zealand Naval Board that the 'defensive arming of merchant ships already stiffened is to be proceeded with now'. The Naval Secretary informed the Minister of Defence that, in accordance with Cabinet approval given on 21 June 1939, the Rangatira and Matua of the Union Steam Ship Company had been stiffened to take defensive armament and the Awatea was being similarly prepared at [Sydney](#). The [Maunganui](#) had been stiffened in 1914–18. Preliminary arrangements were being made to mount guns in those ships. The gun crews would be drawn from the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and would be available by the time the ships were ready. ¹

At 6.30 in the morning of 29 August the Governor-General received a telegram from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs stating that 'in view of the critical situation vis-a-vis [Germany](#) and for reasons which will be fully appreciated, including the protection of trade', the Admiralty had requested that ships of the naval forces be held in immediate readiness and, where applicable, should move towards their war stations in accordance with the dispositions previously laid down: one New Zealand cruiser to join the West Indies Force. The message added that similar measures had been taken in respect of ships of the Royal Navy.

Prompt action on this message was taken by Navy Office. The [Achilles](#) received her sailing orders for the [West Indies](#) at nine o'clock that morning, and five hours later she put to sea on her way to Balboa.

It had been long decided that in the event of war a New Zealand military force would be sent to garrison [Fanning Island](#), an important mid- [Pacific](#) link in the submarine cable connecting New Zealand with [Canada](#). Almost exactly twenty-five years before—on 7 September 1914—a landing party from the German light cruiser [Nurnberg](#), a unit of Admiral Graf Spee's Pacific Squadron, had cut the cable and destroyed the equipment of the station on [Fanning Island](#). On 25 August 1939 the Government asked the British authorities whether a preliminary detachment or a full

establishment of troops should be sent to garrison the island and at what date this was most desirable. Four days later a reply was received that the British Government 'would be grateful if the preliminary force

¹ During September 1939 the [Rangatira](#) and [Matua](#) and three overseas ships were fitted at the Devonport Dockyard with one 4-inch gun for defensive purposes. A 4-inch gun was also shipped to [Sydney](#) and mounted in the [Awatea](#).

could move at once to [Fanning Island](#)' and suggesting that 'it might be transported in a cruiser of the New Zealand Naval Forces'.

Accordingly, a detachment of two officers and thirty men embarked in the [Leander](#), which sailed from [Auckland](#) at five o'clock in the afternoon of 30 August and proceeded at 24 knots on the 3000-mile passage to [Fanning Island](#). In a message to the Governor-General of New Zealand, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs said that 'His Majesty's Government in the [United Kingdom](#) much appreciate the action taken and, in particular, the speed with which it was executed'.

The [Wellington](#) arrived at [Auckland](#) from her interrupted cruise to the South Sea Islands early on 30 August. This vessel was docked for cleaning and painting and, after completing full war storage, sailed for [Townsville](#) and [Singapore](#) on Sunday, 3 September. Thus, within the week, the two cruisers and two escort vessels on the New Zealand Station had been brought to a state of complete and instant readiness for action and despatched on their several missions – proof of the efficiency and foresight of the naval administration and dockyard arrangements.

On 1 September the Prime Minister's Department informed the Naval Board that the proclamation of emergency, in terms of the Public Safety Conservation Act 1932, had been signed by the Governor-General. In the early hours of next morning the 'Warning Telegram' was received from [London](#) announcing that the 'Precautionary Stage' had been adopted against [Germany](#) and [Italy](#). This meant that relations with these countries had become so strained that the Government had found it necessary to take precautions against a possible surprise attack and to initiate preparations for war. The State Departments concerned could now take the action prearranged in the War Book.

Officers for naval control-service duties at Navy Office, [Wellington](#), and at [Auckland](#) had already been appointed, as well as the naval officer in charge at [Lyttelton](#) and district intelligence officers at that port and at [Port Chalmers](#). Consequent on the adoption of the 'Precautionary Stage' in New Zealand on 2 September, the examination services were put into operation forthwith at the defended ports of [Wellington](#), [Auckland](#), and [Lyttelton](#). Arrangements were made for publication in the press of the Public Traffic Regulations, which were also issued as Notices to Mariners. The Army Department vessel Janie Seddon was made the examination steamer at [Wellington](#) – a duty she performed almost continuously for nearly six years. The Hauri and John Anderson were requisitioned for service as examination vessels at [Auckland](#) and [Lyttelton](#) respectively. Staffs were mobilised for the examination services, port war signal stations, and wireless stations at [Auckland](#), [Wellington](#), and [Lyttelton](#), as well as for Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve headquarters at [Wellington](#) and to complete the complement of HMS Philomel at [Auckland](#).

Arrangements were also completed for the immediate establishment of approximately sixty coastwatching stations in New Zealand. Armed guards were placed at vital points at the naval base and armament depot at [Auckland](#), as well as on magazines and oil installations at that and other ports. Cabinet approved that Shipping Control Emergency Regulations be made, and a general postal and telegraphic censorship was established.

Authority to mobilise the naval forces of New Zealand as well as the reservists of the Royal Navy in the Dominion was given by Cabinet in the early hours of 3 September 1939. At the same time authority was granted to institute coastwatching in New Zealand. Navy Office took immediate steps, by the issue of Naval Mobilisation Emergency Regulations, to call up officers and ratings of the New Zealand divisions of the Royal Naval Reserve and the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.

The Admiralty signal to all His Majesty's Ships to 'Commence hostilities against [Germany](#)' was made at eleven o'clock on the morning of 3 September. On that day the Prime Minister's Department informed the New Zealand Naval Board that 'war has broken out against [Germany](#)' as from 9.30 p.m. (New Zealand time).

The first consideration of the Admiralty was the security of communications and

shipping at sea. Shipping tonnage was a cardinal factor in the war. On the outbreak of hostilities, instructions were sent to British merchant vessels in all parts of the world to darken ship by night. They were also warned to avoid focal areas and prominent landfalls as far as possible and to make large divergences from the ocean tracks normally followed. A further warning was issued by the Admiralty that it was vital for the safety of individual vessels that wireless silence should be strictly maintained, except in the case of an emergency. On 3 September Cabinet approved that Shipping Control Emergency Regulations be made, enabling control over merchant shipping to be exercised in New Zealand.

At the outbreak of hostilities the New Zealand Naval Forces included one minesweeping vessel, the *Wakakura*, which normally was employed as a training ship for the New Zealand division of the RNVR. When the war started three [Auckland](#) fishing trawlers – James Cosgrove, Thomas Currell, and Humphrey – the first of six proposed minesweeping craft, were requisitioned and fitted out. Each was armed with a 4-inch gun and depth-charges and fitted with wireless telephone and telegraph equipment and minesweeping gear, the work being carried out in the naval dockyard at [Devonport](#). The James Cosgrove was commissioned for service on 10 October 1939 and the Thomas Currell and Humphrey six days later.

The [Achilles](#) had received her sailing orders at nine o'clock in the morning of 29 August. She was instructed to 'proceed at the best available speed to Balboa', where she was expected to arrive on 17 September. In the meantime she was to come under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief America and [West Indies](#). During the morning the ship completed her war complement as far as possible. A draft of ratings from the *Philomel* and two junior naval reserve officers from the [Leander](#) joined the [Achilles](#), which slipped from her berth at the Devonport Naval Dockyard at 1.30 p.m. and went to sea. The ship's company then numbered 567, of whom 26 officers and 220 ratings were from the Royal Navy and 5 officers and 316 ratings were New Zealanders.

The [Achilles](#) was far out in the [Pacific](#) when, at 11.30 p.m. on 2 September, in accordance with orders from the Commander-in-Chief America and [West Indies](#), course was altered for [Valparaiso, Chile](#), and speed increased to 17 knots. She was instructed to consult the British Naval Attaché at [Valparaiso](#) and, 'in the event of hostilities, to take such immediate action as was considered necessary'.

The Admiralty signal 'Commence hostilities against [Germany](#)' was received in the [Achilles](#) at 0.53 a.m. (ship's time) on 3 September. From that time action stations were exercised at dawn and dark and the ship was darkened at night. From 9 September onward, as the [Achilles](#) approached the more frequented waters of the South American coast, the ship's company was kept at cruising stations by night and, during conditions of low visibility, by day. No ships were sighted on the passage across the [Pacific](#).

The [Achilles](#) arrived in [Valparaiso](#) roads at 12.25 p.m. on 12 September. She saluted the country with twenty-one guns and the flag of Rear-Admiral C. K. Garcia in the battleship [Almirante Latorre](#)¹ with thirteen guns. Both salutes were returned. During the afternoon Captain Parry called on Vice-Admiral J. Allard, Director of Naval Services, who returned the call in person – a most unusual honour for a ship commanded by a captain – and was saluted with seventeen guns on leaving the ship.

As in August 1914, the outbreak of war had almost completely halted the considerable German trade in those waters, as it had in most parts of the world. German merchant ships lying in ports on the west coast of South America and capable of being armed were a potential threat to British trade. After consultation with the British Naval Attaché to [Chile](#), [Peru](#), [Ecuador](#), and [Colombia](#), Captain Parry had decided to visit [Talcahuano](#) and Puerto Corral and then

¹ [Almirante Latorre](#), 30,000 tons, ten 14-inch guns; built in England for [Chile](#), 1912–15; served in Royal Navy as HMS Canada, 1915–19; delivered to [Chile](#) 1920.

proceed north to [Callao](#) in [Peru](#), making a call at the Juan Fernandez Islands, about which no reports had been received,¹ when he received from the Commander-in-Chief America and [West Indies](#) a list of ports where German influence was active and German ships were known to call. Parry decided to visit as many of these ports as possible and omit the call at Juan Fernandez. As the arrival of the [Achilles](#) had been reported in the Chilean newspapers, his general policy would be to advertise her presence as much as possible.



South America, showing ports visited by the Achilles

During her brief stay at [Valparaiso](#) the [Achilles](#) took in fresh provisions and 1365 tons of fuel-oil. Parry heard later from the Naval Attaché that the Chilean authorities were impressed by the [Achilles'](#) strict observance of their neutrality laws in sailing within twenty-four hours after a long sea passage and a busy day in harbour. Admiral Allard said that, although his country's neutrality laws allowed a belligerent warship to load only sufficient fuel to reach the nearest port of a neighbouring state, he realised that it might be necessary to proceed at full speed and he allowed the [Achilles](#) to be refuelled accordingly. As there was a shortage of oil fuel in [Chile](#) at that time, this was a particularly friendly action.

During the next six weeks the [Achilles](#) patrolled the rugged coasts of [Chile](#), [Peru](#), [Ecuador](#), and [Colombia](#). She called at many ports and anchorages bearing Spanish names that were well known to British navigators of past centuries. The advent of the [Achilles](#), the sole Allied warship in those waters, sufficed to hold German trade at a standstill and virtually to immobilise seventeen German merchant ships totalling 84,000 tons along a coastline of some 5000 miles from the Panama Canal to Cape Horn. Thus was exemplified the truth of the old saying that nine-tenths of naval warfare is made up of the continuous drudgery and monotony of patrols and the search for enemy ships which are not there but would be if the patrols were not.

After a stay of barely twenty-four hours the [Achilles](#) sailed from [Valparaiso](#) on 13 September and steamed south to [Talcahuano](#) and Puerto Corral. There were three German merchant ships in harbour at [Talcahuano](#) – [Frankfurt](#), 5522 tons, Osorno,

6951 tons, and Tacoma, 8268 tons. They had full crews on board and apparently there was nothing to prevent their sailing at any time when the coast was clear. Returning north on 15 September, the [Achilles](#) looked in at the anchorage of Caleta de la Fragata at the northern end of Isla Mocha, where Drake had spent two days in November 1578. No ships were seen there or at Isla Santa Maria. It was a few miles to

¹ The Juan Fernandez Islands lie about 360 miles west of [Valparaiso](#). In the early months of the war of 1914–18, the cruisers of Admiral Graf Spee's Pacific Squadron flagrantly violated the neutrality of [Chile](#) by using the islands as a coaling and supply base. The cruiser Dresden, which escaped the Battle of the [Falkland Islands](#), was sunk at anchor there by HMS Glasgow on 14 March 1915. Based on the doctrine of 'hot chase', a British apology for this breach of neutrality was accepted by the Chilean Government.

the westward of [Santa Maria](#) that the Battle of Coronel was fought on 1 November 1914, when the cruisers Good Hope and Monmouth were sunk by Admiral Graf Spee's cruiser squadron.

On 16 September the [Achilles](#) intercepted a wireless message from the Norddeutcher Lloyd steamer Lahn, 8498 tons, informing the radio station at [Talcahuano](#) that she was about to enter harbour. At the time the [Achilles](#) was about 70 miles to the northward and a radio direction-finding bearing confirmed the Lahn's position at the entrance to [Talcahuano](#) and thus well within Chilean territorial waters. The Lahn, which was regularly employed in the Australian trade, had been last heard of at [Sydney](#), whence she was to have sailed on 5 September for [Germany](#). Shortly after midnight of 25–26 August, however, she left her anchorage in [Sydney](#) harbour and, without a Customs clearance or a pilot, went to sea. The ship was fully bunkered, but was short of fresh provisions which had been ordered for delivery on 26 August. After clearing [Sydney](#) heads, the Lahn had steamed across the [Pacific](#) to the Chilean coast.

At that time it was officially computed that 237 German merchant ships totalling 1,204,000 tons were either in or on their way to neutral ports or endeavouring to get back to [Germany](#). By the end of December 1939, at least twenty ships totalling

134,250 tons had been scuttled by their crews after interception by British or French cruisers, fifteen others totalling 74,800 tons had been captured, and forty-eight totalling 381,000 tons had arrived in [Germany](#).

Proceeding north during the next five days the [Achilles](#) visited numerous ports and anchorages on the coasts of [Chile](#) and [Peru](#), including Coquimbo, Huasco, Antofagasta, and [Iquique](#). A number of neutral ships were sighted at sea or in harbour and one German ship was found at Coquimbo. For the most part the coast was rugged, barren, and uninteresting.

The [Achilles](#) anchored at [Callao](#), chief port of [Peru](#), early in the morning of 21 September and saluted the country with twenty-one guns. Less than an hour after her arrival the cruiser intercepted a wireless message from the German ship [Leipzig](#), 5898 tons, reporting her approach to the harbour. Captain Parry at once ordered the [Achilles](#) to get under way. The German ship was then seen to be well within territorial waters and it was evident that she could not be captured; she anchored off the entrance to the harbour a few minutes later. Although the departure of the [Leipzig](#) from Guayaquil in Ecuador, some 650 miles to the northward, on 19 September had been reported to [Callao](#) the same day, the [Achilles](#) did not receive this intelligence till after the ship had arrived. 'This episode was therefore most disappointing,' remarked Parry. The arrival of the [Leipzig](#) brought the number of German ships sheltering at [Callao](#) up to five.

The British Minister to [Peru](#) was uneasy about the situation in those waters. The Pacific Steam Navigation Company's liner [Orduna](#), 15,500 tons, carrying a valuable cargo and important passengers, was expected to leave Balboa on 25 September, to arrive at Puerto Payta on the 27th and at [Callao](#) a day later, on her way to [Valparaiso](#). The renewed activity of the German ships which had been trying to obtain fuel, combined with the sudden arrival of the [Leipzig](#), their suspected supply ship, might indicate a project to seize the [Orduna](#). Parry accordingly made a signal to the Commander-in-Chief [America](#) and [West Indies](#) suggesting that the continued presence of the [Achilles](#) in the Peruvian area was desirable and was instructed to remain on the west coast until further orders. After consultation with the British Naval Attaché, who had flown up from Santiago ([Chile](#)), Parry decided that protection of the [Orduna](#) was the most important consideration at the moment.

The [Achilles](#) sailed from [Callao](#) in the afternoon of 21 September and patrolled during the night in search of a ship which had been reported as passing Puerto Payta but which was not sighted. At daybreak course was shaped to the northward at 20 knots in order to arrive before dark off Puerto Chicama, where the British Minister wanted the cruiser to be seen as the town was largely a German colony.

At daybreak on 23 September the [Achilles](#) entered Puerto Payta, where she found the German motor-vessel Friesland, 6310 tons, at anchor. She appeared to be fully loaded but no sign of any armament could be seen. Barely two hours after leaving Puerto Payta the [Achilles](#) arrived at Talara, where she went alongside to take in 900 tons of fuel-oil. Talara, which has a deep-water harbour, derives its importance from considerable exports of oil and motor-spirit. The wells are at Negritos, a few miles to the south, and the crude oil is carried by pipelines to Talara, where it is refined. Later in the war when supplies from normal sources were cut off, New Zealand drew a considerable tonnage of fuel-oil and motor-spirit from Talara. The [Achilles](#) was accorded an enthusiastic welcome by the British community. As few of the ship's company had been ashore since leaving New Zealand, the cruiser spent a night in harbour and shore leave was given freely. A visit to the oilfields, sports, a cinema show, and a dance filled in the brief stay and the generous hospitality was greatly appreciated.

After leaving Talara the [Achilles](#) proceeded north across the approaches to the Gulf of Guayaquil. In the forenoon of 25 September she entered Bahia Santa Elena and anchored off La Libertad, the oil port of Ecuador, where she remained for twenty-four hours but got no oil.

As he was still uncertain of the exact movements of the *Orduna*, Captain Parry decided that on his way north there was only sufficient time to visit Buenaventura, the principal [Pacific](#) port of Colombia. The [Achilles](#) anchored in the morning of 28 September off Punta Soldado, eight miles below Buenaventura, and sailed about four hours later to meet the *Orduna*. Actually that ship did not leave Balboa till the afternoon of 29 September, and the [Achilles](#) had twice to break wireless silence before a rendezvous about 40 miles west of Cape Corrientes could be arranged for ten o'clock next morning. After contacting the *Orduna* the cruiser turned to the northward. As soon as the liner was out of sight, the [Achilles](#) shaped course to keep

within 25 miles of her during the passage south. Both ships arrived at [Callao](#) on the morning of 4 October.

In view of numerous reports and rumours regarding the possible movements of German ships, the [Achilles](#) sailed from [Callao](#) on 5 October about the same time as the *Orduna* in order to give the impression that the latter was being escorted south. The cruiser remained on patrol in the vicinity of [Callao](#) until daybreak on 6 October, when she laid course for [Valparaiso](#).

On 27 September the [Achilles](#) had received a signal informing her that the fleet oil-tanker *Orangeleaf*, 5980 tons, had been placed under her orders, and on 2 October instructions were received from the Admiralty that, after fuelling from her tanker, she was to proceed south about to the South Atlantic. The [Achilles](#) was to show herself at Chilean ports as considered desirable and refuel at the [Falkland Islands](#). The passage was to be made with moderate despatch and on arrival the cruiser was to come under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief Africa.

The [Achilles](#) arrived in [Valparaiso](#) Bay on the morning of 10 October and berthed in the inner harbour. Various urgent engine-room defects were at once taken in hand and repairs were completed by the afternoon of 12 October. The opportunity was taken to give as much shore leave as possible to the ship's company, to take in fresh provisions, and to paint ship. The Chilean naval authorities had given permission for the granting of leave but the Captain of the Port was obviously nervous of possible trouble with the crews of German ships. 'It was therefore most gratifying when he told us at the end of our stay, that he had heard nothing but praise of the behaviour of our libertymen,' reported Captain Parry. There were no official entertainments during the ship's stay in port but officers and men received much private hospitality, both from the British community in [Valparaiso](#) and the Chilean Navy. The British Naval Attaché reported that the naval authorities were showing greater activity in asserting the neutrality of [Chile](#). This was confirmed by the absence of all the destroyers from [Valparaiso](#) and the arrival of one destroyer in company with the *Orduna* which she had escorted from [Iquique](#).

The [Achilles](#) sailed from [Valparaiso](#) in the forenoon of 13 October and met the *Orangeleaf* next morning. They then proceeded into Tongoy Bay, south of Coquimbo, where the [Achilles](#) took in 1300 tons of fuel-oil and forty tons of stores, the work

being delayed by a heavy swell. Both ships sailed on the morning of 15 October and parted company when clear of the land.

After steaming to the southward for two days, the [Achilles](#) entered the Gulf of Coronados at daybreak on 17 October, passed through the narrow channel separating the island of [Chiloe](#) from the mainland and steamed up a land-locked gulf for about 25 miles to Puerto Montt, a provincial capital and terminus of the longitudinal railway of [Chile](#) which runs northward for 2862 miles. Official calls were exchanged during a brief stay of two hours at Puerto Montt, a large proportion of whose population was German. The [Achilles](#) then proceeded south through the Gulf of Ancud and the Gulf of Corcovado. Night was falling when the ship passed out to the open sea between the southern end of Chiloe Island and the northern fringe of the Chonos Archipelago, which comprises a large number of closely packed, rugged islands extending in an unbroken chain for 200 miles to the southward.

The [Achilles](#) ran into a strong north-west gale and high seas during the night and experienced an extremely rough and uncomfortable passage. Visibility was poor, and it was with difficulty that a landfall was made about midday on 18 October off Cape Tres Montes, on the western side of the Gulf of Penas. Once inside, conditions improved and the [Achilles](#) steamed up the Gulf of San Esteban into St. Quintin Bay, which was found to be deserted. The ship's company was much impressed by the grandeur of the scenery, which included a fine view of the Oliqui glacier. St. Quintin Bay was used by Admiral Graf Spee as a coaling base for the five ships of his ill-fated Pacific Squadron which spent five days there in November 1914 before proceeding round Cape Horn to the [Falkland Islands](#).

The [Achilles](#) lost no time in clearing the Gulf of Penas and continued her passage south in heavy weather. The ranges of islands which form the Patagonian Archipelagos extend along the south-west coast of [Chile](#) for some 700 miles to Cape Horn. This inhospitable region is mountainous and cut up by deep and tortuous fjords and narrow channels of a complexity unsurpassed elsewhere in the world and as yet imperfectly surveyed and charted. Heavy rains, varied by sleet and snow, prevail throughout the year and furious westerly gales succeed one another with monotonous rapidity.

The weather had moderated when the [Achilles](#) made her landfall by sighting the

Evanjelistas islets, 19 miles off, in the forenoon of 19 October. Half an hour later Cape Pillar, the northern extremity of Desolation Island, came into view, and at noon the New Zealand cruiser entered the Strait of Magellan. After proceeding for about 120 miles, she anchored for the night in Fortescue Bay, one of the best anchorages in the Strait and known to the early Spanish and other navigators as Bahia de Fuerte Escudo (Bay of Good Shelter). The cruiser got under way at daybreak on 20 October and about two hours later rounded Cape Froward, the headland forming the southern extremity of the Cordilleras of South America and marking the centre of the Strait. Fortunately, the weather was clear and sunny and the ship's company was able to admire the unforgettable scenery of a region where fine days are few. The [Achilles](#) anchored at Magallanes (Punta Arenas), where the customary official calls were exchanged during a stay of three hours.

The presence of a single British cruiser on the west coast of South America had exercised a markedly restraining influence on enemy shipping. The only German merchant ships at sea in the South Pacific when the [Achilles](#) arrived were fugitives such as the Lahn from [Sydney](#) and the Erlangen from New Zealand, which had vanished into the vast spaces of that ocean in the week before the outbreak of war and succeeded in reaching the territorial waters of [Chile](#) undetected. Of those already in harbour only the [Leipzig](#) had moved, and she barely escaped capture mainly because of the delay in obtaining intelligence and passing signals.

The task of the [Achilles](#) in patrolling the western coastline of the continent and keeping watch on German and neutral shipping was the more difficult because she had to be careful not to offend the susceptibilities of four neutral republics. There was no port on the west coast of South America to which she could send any neutral ship for examination and search. On numerous occasions she had had to enter territorial waters to inspect anchorages and ports and such German ships as were found in harbour.

'On leaving the west coast of South America,' remarked Captain Parry in his report of proceedings, 'I do not feel great anxiety regarding the German shipping in this area. Both Chilean and Peruvian navies are anxious to assert their neutrality by every means in their power and I feel that their own feelings are distinctly benevolent to ourselves'. He said that, from Valdivia southwards, [Chile](#) was 'almost a German colony' and he understood that the majority, even those whose families had

been established there for generations, remained German. In view of the nature of the coast, enemy submarines and raiders could easily be supplied by these German-Chileans without the knowledge of the authorities. The German merchant ships in the various ports had not been thoroughly searched and must therefore still be considered as potential raiders or, more probably, supply ships. None of these ships was interned. Captain Parry therefore felt that, when the situation elsewhere permitted, the presence of a warship on this coast was desirable.

After the [Achilles](#) left the west coast a number of the German merchant ships, moving furtively from port to port, contrived to make their way into the [Atlantic](#), where several were intercepted and sunk. In the belief that the coast was clear, one left [Valparaiso](#) northbound after receiving news of the [River Plate](#) action, but was captured two days later by HMS Despatch, which had been sent south on patrol from the Panama Canal. More than two years later, three of the German ships succeeded in reaching [Japan](#), and two others, the [Portland](#) and Dresden, made off into the [Atlantic](#) to act as prison ships for German raiders and ultimately arrived at Bordeaux.

Sailing from Magallanes soon after midday on 20 October, the [Achilles](#) cleared Cape Virgins at the eastern entrance to the Strait of Magellan at dusk. The ship then encountered the full strength of a northerly gale which continued throughout the whole of the following day. Visibility was very poor, but a landfall was made in the late afternoon when Cape Frehel, on the north coast of East Falkland Island, was sighted at a distance of about three miles. When the [Achilles](#) entered Port William it was too dark to see the leading marks for entering Stanley harbour. The gale was at its height and the ship anchored about three-quarters of a mile from Navy Point Light. The anchor dragged immediately and the ship went to sea for the night.

By daybreak next morning the weather had moderated and the [Achilles](#) anchored in Port Stanley shortly after six o'clock. Captain Parry called on the Governor of the [Falkland Islands](#), the call being returned by his aide-de-camp. The cruiser took in fresh provisions and 835 tons of fuel-oil during her stay in harbour. Shore leave was given freely and the ship's company was most hospitably entertained by the residents of Port Stanley. The 22nd October being a Sunday, special arrangements were made to open the public houses but local opinion would not tolerate a cinema show. At the invitation of Captain Parry, the Governor made an

official visit to the ship during the forenoon of 23 October and was saluted with seventeen guns. The [Achilles](#) then unmoored and proceeded for the [River Plate](#) at economical speed.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 3 – THE SEARCH FOR THE ADMIRAL GRAF SPEE

CHAPTER 3

The Search for the Admiral Graf Spee

THE broad lines of British naval policy for the protection of seaborne trade in the event of war with [Germany](#) and [Italy](#) had been laid down in an Admiralty memorandum of January 1939, which also included the dispositions of the British and French naval forces for 1 August 1939. Anticipating attacks by enemy raiders in the [Atlantic](#), the [Red Sea](#), and the [Indian Ocean](#), the memorandum set out the 'traditional and well-proved methods' of protecting trade. These consisted in the dispersal of shipping by evasive routeing, the stationing of naval patrols in areas where cruisers could concentrate in pairs against a superior enemy, and the formation of adequately escorted convoys. Detachments from the main fleet could also be used if required. 'By such means,' said the memorandum, 'we have in the past succeeded in protecting shipping on essential routes, and it is intended to rely on these methods again, adapting them to the problem under review'.

On the outbreak of war, when sufficient forces for escorting ocean convoys would not be available, it was intended to rely on evasive routeing of merchant ships and the patrolling of focal areas. The Admiralty memorandum, however, added that shipping could be escorted if necessary for the first part of the homeward passage. Armed merchant cruisers, when they became available, could escort the convoys the whole way home. If it were absolutely necessary, warships could accompany convoys throughout their passage, though this inevitably would result in a serious slowing down of trade. Though the introduction of general convoy would rest with the Admiralty, commanders-in-chief on foreign stations could institute local convoys. On the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939 this policy was put into effect; but the costly result of the drastic cutting down of British naval strength during the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties soon became evident.

Immediately before the outbreak of war, the designation of Commander-in-Chief Africa Station was changed to Commander-in-Chief South [Atlantic](#), and the Admiral transferred his flag from Simonstown to [Freetown](#), Sierra Leone, and assumed general naval control over British movements in the whole of the South [Atlantic](#) Ocean. At the same time the South [Atlantic](#) Division of the [America](#) and West Indies Squadron, comprising the cruisers [Exeter](#) and [Ajax](#), was transferred to the new South

Atlantic Station. The [Exeter](#) was completing a refit at [Devonport](#) when, on 22 August 1939, she was ordered to return to South American waters. Captain F. S. Bell, RN, assumed command of the ship two days later, but she continued to fly the broad pendant of [Commodore Harwood](#)¹ as Commodore, South America Division. The [Ajax](#), commanded by Captain C. H. L. Woodhouse, RN, was already on patrol off the coast of [Brazil](#) where on 3 September, less than three hours after the British declaration of war, she intercepted and sank the German steamer [Olinda](#), 4576 tons, homeward-bound from [Montevideo](#) with a general cargo. Next day she sank the German steamer [Carl Fritzen](#), 6954 tons. The nearest British territory was more than 1000 miles away and in neither case could the [Ajax](#) spare a prize crew. The destroyers [Hotspur](#) and [Havock](#) sailed from [Freetown](#) on 5 September and the 8-inch cruiser [Cumberland](#) followed three days later to reinforce the South America Division.

The special care and duty of [Commodore Harwood](#) was to protect merchant shipping in the important [River Plate](#) and [Rio de Janeiro](#) areas. As a precaution against the possible conversion of German merchant ships in South American ports into armed raiders, he ordered the [Cumberland](#) to organise and run outward convoys in the [Rio de Janeiro](#) area, with the [Havock](#) as anti-submarine escort. The convoys were to sail at daybreak and be protected till dusk, when the ships were to be dispersed so that they would be far apart by dawn the following day. At the same time [Harwood](#) ordered the [Hotspur](#) to join him in the [River Plate](#) area so that similar convoys could be started from [Montevideo](#). If a German 'pocket battleship' arrived off the coast, the [Cumberland](#) was to abandon the convoy scheme and join the [Exeter](#) and [Ajax](#). The first local convoy outward from [Montevideo](#) on 22 September included the motor-vessel [Sussex](#), homeward-bound with a valuable refrigerated cargo from New Zealand.

[Commodore Harwood](#) was constantly faced with the problem of refuelling his ships. They were operating off the neutral coasts of [Brazil](#), [Uruguay](#) and [Argentina](#), which fringed the [Atlantic](#) for more than 3000 miles. His nearest British base, the [Falkland Islands](#), was 1000 miles to the southward of the [River Plate](#) and the selection of suitable anchorages for refuelling was a difficult matter. The small number of ships available and the limitations on fuelling in neutral waters made it impossible to keep a close watch on German ships in all ports on the coast. The most the Commodore could do was to pay sporadic calls, which would deter the

ships for a time but

¹ [Admiral Sir Henry Harwood](#), KCB; born 19 Jan 1888; entered RN, 1900; Captain, Dec 1934, Rear-Admiral, 13 Dec 1939; Assistant Chief of Naval Staff, 1940–42; C-in-C [Mediterranean](#), 1942; C-in-C [Levant](#), 1943; retired (ill-health) 1945.

could not be expected to lead to their permanent detention and internment.

August 1939 was a month of great activity in the German Navy. The war plans of the High Command for commerce raiding in the [Atlantic](#) were being put into operation. Between 19 and 23 August eighteen U-boats left for their allotted stations; on the 21st the pocket battleship [Admiral Graf Spee](#), with a complement of 1134 officers and men commanded by Captain Hans Langsdorff, sailed from [Wilhelmshaven](#); on the 24th the pocket battleship Deutschland put to sea, her tanker supply ship having sailed two days earlier. She was to remain east of Greenland until war began, when she was to make the North [Atlantic](#) her operational area. The tanker Altmark, carrying three months' supplies for the [Admiral Graf Spee](#), had sailed from [Germany](#) as early as 2 August and, having loaded 9400 tons of fuel-oil at Port Arthur, Texas, left there on 19 August for the [Atlantic](#).

The [Admiral Graf Spee](#) was to cruise in an area north-west of the Cape Verde Islands until hostilities commenced; afterwards she was to operate on the South [Atlantic](#) trade routes. Her orders were to disrupt and damage enemy merchant shipping by all possible means. Engagements with enemy naval forces, 'even if inferior, were only to be undertaken if this furthered the main purpose of the operation'. By frequent changes of operational areas, dislocation and injury would be caused to enemy mercantile traffic, and the appearance of the raider in distant areas would further serve the purpose of increasing the insecurity of shipping and the uncertainty of enemy naval forces.

Captain Langsdorff carried out his orders with comprehending caution. He carefully timed the passage of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) off the Norwegian coast and between [Iceland](#) and the Faeroes, crossed the main North [Atlantic](#) shipping routes by night, and on 1 September arrived undetected in the waiting area where he met and fuelled from the Altmark. On 5 September instructions were received from the

German Naval staff that, 'by order of the Fuehrer', no action was to be taken against passenger ships, even in convoy, and that the pocket battleships were to move well away from their operational areas and maintain wireless silence. Thereupon, Langsdorff decided to move into the South Atlantic. On 8 September the Admiral Graf Spee and the Altmark crossed the Equator at a point midway between West Africa and South America and two days later arrived in the triangular area between Ascension and St. Helena and Trinidad Island, where they cruised and exercised for sixteen days.

It was not until 26 September that Langsdorff received orders to commence raiding operations and the Admiral Graf Spee moved off to the north-westward towards the Brazilian coast. Four days later she intercepted and sank the British steamer Clement, 5051 tons, about 75 miles south-east of Pernambuco, though not before the ship had got off a distress signal. The crew took to the boats and were left to make their way to land, but the master and the chief engineer were taken prisoner. On this occasion, as on several others, the Admiral Graf Spee displayed a name plate of the Admiral Scheer, which accounted for the reports crediting the sinking to that ship. That evening the two prisoners were put on board a Greek steamer which was allowed to proceed on the understanding that her wireless would not be used within 600 miles of her position at that time. The Admiral Graf Spee then headed away to the eastward.

A report that the Clement had been sunk reached the Admiralty the following afternoon and certain preliminary movements of cruisers were ordered immediately. The Achilles was instructed to leave the Pacific and join Commodore Harwood's South America Division. A comprehensive plan to meet the situation was disclosed to the Commander-in-Chief South Atlantic in an Admiralty message of 5 October. In addition to the raider reported off Brazil, others must be expected, including armed merchant ship raiders. Enemy activities might be extended soon to the North Atlantic and the Indian Ocean.

The Admiralty pointed out that it was essential to maintain the flow of trade and such losses as were inevitable must be accepted. A full convoy system in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans would result in unacceptable delay, even if full escorts could be provided. Eight hunting groups 'each of sufficient strength to destroy any

German armoured ship of the Deutschland class or armoured cruiser of the Hipper class' were being formed immediately. The Admiralty stressed that when searching for raiders it was 'essential that wireless silence should be maintained except when it was known that the presence of the hunting group had been disclosed.'¹

Hunting groups were warned to be 'cautious of being lured away from areas where trade is thick, because the raiders must come to these areas to do serious damage'. It was also to be remembered that raiders were vitally dependent on their mobility, being so far from repair facilities. Hence a weaker force, if not able to effect immediate destruction, might by resolute attack cripple an opponent sufficiently to ensure certain subsequent location and destruction by other forces. Furthermore, the location and destruction of enemy supply ships was an important factor in rounding up raiders, which would more probably meet their supply ships on the high seas than attempt to use out-of-the-way anchorages.

¹ The strict observance of wireless silence by HMS Cumberland, which on 5 October was informed by the British steamer Martand that a raider had attacked a ship in a given position, left the Commander-in-Chief South Atlantic and the Admiralty without news of the raider for three weeks.

Far-reaching and prescient as the hunting group plan was, the Admiralty went further. The battleships Resolution and Revenge, the battle-cruiser Repulse, the aircraft-carrier Furious and three cruisers were detailed to escort North Atlantic convoys. The battleship Malaya and the aircraft-carrier Glorious were ordered from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean as an additional hunting force in the Gulf of Aden area.

Thus the appearance of a single enemy raider in the South Atlantic had set in motion numerous naval forces directly involving thirty-one powerful ships. These included, from British resources, three battleships, two battle-cruisers, five aircraft-carriers and fourteen cruisers, as well as a flotilla of destroyers and a submarine. The French contribution consisted of two battle-cruisers, an aircraft-carrier, and five cruisers. These elaborate measures recall the similar widespread dispositions which led to the destruction of Admiral Graf Spee's Pacific Squadron in the Battle of the Falkland Islands on 8 December 1914.

After fuelling from the tanker *Olwen* in the *River Plate* area on 2 October, *Commodore Harwood* in the *Exeter* joined the *Ajax* off the south coast of *Brazil*. When he received an order from the Commander-in-Chief South *Atlantic* to concentrate his division in the *Rio de Janeiro* area, he instructed the destroyers *Hotspur* and *Havock* to join him not later than the morning of 4 October. It was at this stage that the Admiralty informed *Harwood* that the *Achilles* was to reinforce his division. On 3 October the Commander-in-Chief directed that, failing any news of further raider activities in the immediate future, the *Ajax* and *Achilles* and the two destroyers were to protect shipping in the *Rio de Janeiro* and *River Plate* areas. The *Exeter* and *Cumberland* were to carry out their initial sweep as a hunting group as far north as their fuel supplies would allow.

The *Cumberland*, after sweeping for German ships in the *Ascension Island* area, had arrived at *Freetown* on 2 October and, having fuelled, left next day to join *Commodore Harwood* off *Rio de Janeiro*. On 5 October the British steamer *Martand* made contact with the *Cumberland* and informed her that a German raider had attacked an unknown ship – which was in fact the steamer *Newton Beech* – 900 miles away on the Cape- *Freetown* route. At the time the *Cumberland* was about 700 miles to the southward of *Freetown* and Captain *Fallowfield* assumed that the report would be intercepted and passed to the Commander-in-Chief South *Atlantic* by ships on the Cape- *Freetown* route, even if it were not intercepted by a shore station. He also considered wireless silence imperative and decided not to break it. According to the Commander-in-Chief the value of the report, which, if acted upon, might in his opinion have led to the early interception of the *Admiral Graf Spee* and her supply ship, was apparently not appreciated by the *Cumberland*. The Admiralty, too, was strongly of the opinion that the report should have been passed on by the *Cumberland* to the Commander-in-Chief, who heard nothing of it till sixteen days later. ¹

On 9 October the Commander-in-Chief South *Atlantic* informed the Admiralty and *Commodore Harwood* of his intention to coordinate the movements of three hunting groups – Force 'G' (*Cumberland* and *Exeter*), Force 'H' (*Sussex* and *Shropshire*), and Force 'K' (*Ark Royal* and *Renown*). As this would entail long periods of wireless silence in Force 'G', he proposed that *Harwood* should transfer to the *Ajax*, leaving Captain *W. H. G. Fallowfield* of the *Cumberland* as Senior Officer of

Force 'G'. These proposals were approved by the Admiralty.

The Ark Royal (flag of Vice-Admiral L. V. Wells), in company with the Renown, arrived at Freetown on 12 October. They were followed by the destroyers Hardy, Hostile, and Hasty from the Mediterranean. Next day the cruisers Sussex and Shropshire (Force 'H') arrived at Simonstown from the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal, and on 14 October the aircraft-carrier Hermes arrived at Dakar from Plymouth to work with a French hunting group.

When the Cumberland, from Freetown, joined Commodore Harwood's division at daybreak on 9 October, the Exeter, being short of fuel, was unable to carry out the sweep to the northward ordered by the Commander-in-Chief on 3 October. He therefore steamed south and fuelled his ships in San Borombon Bay at the southern entrance to the River Plate estuary. On 16 October Harwood was informed that the German steamer Bahia Laura, 8560 tons, had sailed from Montevideo the previous day. When the signal reached him she was far out to sea and, as the whole area was enveloped in dense fog, her interception was not considered possible. The destroyers Hotspur and Havock were patrolling off Rio Grande do Sul with intent to intercept two German merchant ships if they left that port when, on 20 October, the Admiralty ordered their transfer to the West Indies.

Having steamed up from the Falkland Islands at economical speed, the Achilles sighted and closed the Exeter in the southern approach to the River Plate at 7.30 a.m. on 26 October. On completing a twenty-four hours' patrol in the River Plate focal area, the Achilles joined the Cumberland off Lobos Island in the evening of 27 October, under orders to cover the Rio de Janeiro-Santos area with her as Force 'G'. That morning Commodore Harwood transferred his broad pendant to the Ajax and the Exeter sailed for Port Stanley, Falkland Islands, to carry out some minor repairs.

¹ See ante, p.31.

After sinking the Clement on 30 September, the Admiral Graf Spee made a wide sweep of more than 1800 miles across the Atlantic to the Cape route. On 5 October, about 480 miles east-south-east of Ascension Island, she captured the British steamer Newton Beech, 4651 tons, homeward-bound with a cargo of maize. This

vessel made the SOS distress signal instead of the RRRR (raider) report, and it was taken in by the Martand. Two days later the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) captured the steamer Ashlea, 4222 tons, whose crew was transferred to the Newton Beech. After a small part of her cargo of sugar had been removed, the Ashlea was sunk. On the following day all the prisoners were taken on board the raider and the Newton Beech was sunk. In the afternoon of 10 October the raider captured the steamer Huntsman, 8196 tons, bound for Liverpool with a general cargo from [India](#) and [East Africa](#), and put a prize crew on board. The Graf Spee then proceeded to the south-westward and joined the Altmark, from which she refuelled on 14 October. Two days later they met the Huntsman, which was sunk about 650 miles south-west of St. Helena. All the British seamen were sent on board the Altmark, which then parted company again for ten days. In the absence of distress messages from the sunken ships, suspicion was not aroused till they became overdue at [Freetown](#).

The [Admiral Graf Spee](#) moved off to the south-eastward and on 20 October received a message from [Germany](#) that two supply ships were on their way to meet her. They were the motor-ship Dresden, which had left Coquimbo, [Chile](#), on 19 October, and an oil-tanker from Tampico, Mexico. The raider, however, was never near the rendezvous arranged for the Dresden. The tanker was intercepted by HMS Caradoc soon after leaving Tampico and was scuttled to avoid capture. In the afternoon of 22 October, about midway between St. Helena and the west coast of [Africa](#), the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) captured and sank the British steamer Trevanion, 5299 tons, which was homeward-bound from Port Pirie, [South Australia](#), with a cargo of zinc concentrates.

During the next six days the raider steered to the south-west away from the trade routes and on 28 October met the Altmark in the vicinity of Tristan da Cunha, roughly midway between the Cape of Good Hope and the east coast of South America. After fuelling from the tanker, to which she transhipped the crew of the Trevanion, the Graf Spee shaped course for the [Indian Ocean](#). She passed 400 miles south of Cape Agulhas on 3 November and then worked well to the north-east across the Cape shipping routes.

Nothing was sighted during the next ten days and on 13 November the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) headed towards the Mozambique Channel. Late on the 14th the small Dutch steamer [Holland](#), 893 tons, was sighted, but as boarding was impossible in

the prevailing high seas she was not molested. Next day the Graf Spee sighted another small vessel in the northern approach to Delagoa Bay. This ship, the British tanker Africa Shell, 706 tons, on passage from Quelimane to Lourenço Marques, was sunk, the crew being allowed to get away in the boats though the master was taken prisoner. Next day, when about 350 miles south-west of Madagascar, the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) stopped the Dutch motor-ship Mapia, 9389 tons, but released her. The raider rounded Cape Agulhas at a distance of 300 miles during the night of 20 November and headed out into mid- [Atlantic](#). Six days later she met and refuelled from the Altmark about 600 miles south-west of St. Helena.

The Graf Spee now had more than 2800 tons of fuel in her tanks, enough at a normal rate of consumption to keep her at sea until the end of February 1940. A further 3600 tons was still available in the Altmark. Captain Langsdorff decided that, on completion of minor machinery repairs, he would again operate on the Cape shipping route in the area where he had sunk the Trevanion on 22 October. He parted company with the Altmark on 29 November and proceeded to the eastward.

No news of the South [Atlantic](#) raider had reached the Admiralty or the Commander-in-Chief for a fortnight when Force 'H' ([Sussex](#) and Shropshire) sailed from Simonstown on 14 October to hunt along the Cape- [Freetown](#) route as far north as the latitude of St. Helena. On the same day Force 'K' (Ark Royal and Renown), with the cruiser Neptune and the destroyers Hardy, Hero, and [Hereward](#) in company, left [Freetown](#) to search westward towards St. Paul Rocks. Three weeks' silence was broken on 22 October when the Union-Castle liner Llanstephan Castle reported that she had intercepted a signal from an unknown steamer stating that she was being shelled in a position '16 deg. South, 4 deg. 3 min. East at 1400 G.M.T.' ¹

There was no immediate confirmation of the report, but the Commander-in-Chief decided on another and complete sweep of the Cape- [Freetown](#) route. Force 'H' left [Capetown](#) on 27 October and Force 'K' sailed from [Freetown](#) next day to sweep northward and southward respectively to the latitude of St. Helena. But by that time the raider was far away to the westward in the vicinity of Tristan da Cunha. On 5 November the German steamer Uhenfels, 7603 tons, from Lourenço Marques, was sighted by an aircraft from the Ark Royal and captured by the destroyer [Hereward](#). Both hunting groups returned to their respective bases on 7 November.

¹ This message was probably from the British steamer *Trevanion* which was sunk by the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) in the afternoon of 22 October in position 19 deg. 40 min. South, 4 deg. 2 min. East.

Four days earlier the Admiralty had informed the Commander-in-Chief that 'all German capital ships and cruisers were believed to be in their home waters'. It appeared from this that the pocket battleship raider, which was still thought to be the *Admiral Scheer*, had returned to [Germany](#) and that the enemy ship reported in the message of the *Llanstephan Castle* on 22 October was no more than an armed merchant cruiser. On 4 November the Admiralty issued orders that Force 'G' (*Cumberland* and [Exeter](#)) and Force 'H' ([Sussex](#) and *Shropshire*) should exchange areas, an arrangement that would provide [Commodore Harwood](#) with the hunting group of long-steaming endurance he so greatly desired.

It had been planned that Force 'H' should make a sweep round the Cape of Good Hope towards [Durban](#), arriving there on 16 November. This would have taken the [Sussex](#) and *Shropshire* within 160 miles of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) when she sank the *Africa Shell* off Lourenço Marques on the 15th. But on 5 November, in accordance with Admiralty instructions, the Commander-in-Chief ordered Force 'H' to sail on the 11th and effect, to the westward of St. Helena on the 17th, the exchange of areas with Force 'G'.

On 8 November the Admiralty cancelled the suppositions in its signal of the 3rd regarding German capital ships and cruisers and informed the Commander-in-Chief that the *Admiral Scheer* was believed to be in the [Indian Ocean](#). Force 'H', however, left the Cape as arranged on 11 November. Bad weather and fuelling difficulties in the [River Plate](#) area delayed Force 'G', which did not sail till the 13th. When the Admiralty learned on 17 November that the *Africa Shell* had been sunk by a pocket battleship off Lourenço Marques on the 15th it immediately ordered Force 'H' to return to the Cape and Force 'G' back to South America. It also ordered the despatch of Force 'K' towards the Cape with instructions to carry on, if need be, to *Diego Suarez*, in Madagascar.

That morning the Commander-in-Chief South [Atlantic](#) was informed that the German merchant ships *Adolf Woermann*, 8577 tons, and *Windhuk*, 16,660 tons, had

left Lobito, Portuguese West Africa. He at once ordered Force 'H', which was then west of St. Helena, to spend three days searching for them. On 18 November Force 'K', with the Neptune and three destroyers in company, sailed from [Freetown](#) to sweep west of St. Helena on its way to the Cape. Force 'H' saw nothing of the German liners and returned to [Capetown](#) on the 23rd.

Early on 21 November, however, the Shaw Savill and Albion motor-ship Waimarama, 12,843 tons, commanded by Captain J. Averne, reported having sighted the Adolf Woermann about 250 miles north of St. Helena and boldly took the risk of shadowing her. Force 'K', which was then 150 miles north-east of Ascension Island, altered course to close. The Neptune went ahead at high speed and shortly after eight o'clock next morning intercepted the Adolf Woermann. Despite strenuous efforts to save her, the German ship was scuttled and the Neptune returned to [Freetown](#) three days later with 162 prisoners.

The search for the German ship had taken Force 'K' nearly 200 miles to the eastward and, to save fuel, it proceeded towards the Cape by the route east of St. Helena. The Commander-in-Chief South [Atlantic](#) subsequently expressed the view that this might have been the reason for its missing the Altmark, which was awaiting the return of the Graf Spee in the unfrequented area west of the Cape shipping routes through which Force 'K' would otherwise have passed.

On 27 November the Admiralty ordered Force 'H' and Force 'K' to form a patrol south of the Cape of Good Hope on the meridian of 20 degrees East. The two forces met there early on 1 December. The plan was found unsuitable in practice on account of the weather. This permitted flying from the Ark Royal only once in five or six days, so that the patrol could not be carried far enough to the south to intercept a raider bent on evasion. In any case, the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) had passed that way at least a week before the patrol commenced.

Far away on the other side of the South [Atlantic](#) [Commodore Harwood's](#) cruisers carried on their monotonous round of patrols, safeguarding the passage of Allied merchantmen. The [Achilles](#) remained in company with the Cumberland in the [Rio de Janeiro-Santos](#) area till the night of 5 November, when the latter proceeded to the [River Plate](#) in preparation for the proposed changeover of Forces 'G' and 'H'.

A welcome break in the monotony came on the morning of 10 November when the [Achilles](#) arrived at [Rio de Janeiro](#), saluting the flag of [Brazil](#) with twenty-one guns as she moved to the anchorage. Leave was granted freely, and about 500 of the ship's company landed during her brief stay, many of them being hospitably entertained by members of the British community. 'We paid a very pleasant visit of forty-eight hours to [Rio de Janeiro](#), one of the most beautiful cities in the world,' reported Captain Parry. 'Here we did our Christmas shopping; we danced and lost money in the casinos and we played golf in ideal surroundings....'

The [Achilles](#) went to sea again on the morning of 12 November and resumed her patrol of the shipping routes. In the evening of the 13th she met the French liner [Massilia](#), 15,363 tons, bound from Buenos Aires to [Europe](#) with French reservists, and escorted her to the limit of Brazilian territorial waters off [Rio de Janeiro](#), which she entered early in the morning of 16 November. It was arranged to meet the [Massilia](#) at sea that evening, but, owing to dense fog, the [Achilles](#) failed to find her then or on the following morning.

When the Admiralty cancelled the exchange of areas on 17 November, [Harwood](#) sent Force 'G' ([Cumberland](#) and [Exeter](#)) to patrol the [Rio de Janeiro](#) area and ordered the [Achilles](#) south to refuel. The New Zealand cruiser was off Rouen Bank, in the southern approach to the [River Plate](#), early in the morning of 22 November when she obtained a wireless direction-finding bearing on the German steamer [Lahn](#), which was last reported at [Talcahuano, Chile](#), on 16 September. ¹ Course was at once shaped at 20 knots to close Cape San Antonio with the object of intercepting the fugitive ship. About half an hour later the [Ajax](#) was sighted and the two cruisers spent the day searching for the [Lahn](#) and the motor-ship [Tacoma](#), also from [Talcahuano](#). The search was unsuccessful, and both German ships arrived at [Montevideo](#) during the afternoon.

The [Achilles](#) remained in company with the [Ajax](#) until late that night and then proceeded into San Borombon Bay, where she took in 900 tons of oil and three weeks' supply of victualling stores. She sailed the following night under orders to move up to Pernambuco and show herself off Cabadello and Bahia, as a number of German ships were reported ready to sail to Cabadello to load cotton for [Germany](#). This was the beginning of another long, independent patrol which took the New

Zealand cruiser more than 2000 miles to the northward.

The [Ajax](#) left the [River Plate](#) on 25 November and, after her aircraft had reconnoitred Bahia Blanca, where the German steamer [Ussukumu](#), 7834 tons, was lying loaded and ready for sea, proceeded to the [Falkland Islands](#), arriving on the 27th. By this time both the [Cumberland](#) and the [Exeter](#) were in need of repairs after long periods at sea and [Commodore Harwood](#) ordered the [Exeter](#) to proceed to the Falklands forthwith. She arrived at Port Stanley on 29 November and her defects were taken in hand.

Steaming northward at economical speed, the [Achilles](#) showed herself off [Rio Grande do Sul](#) on 25 November to deter the German ships [Montevideo](#), 6075 tons, and [Rio Grande](#), 6062 tons, from putting to sea. While she was approaching the harbour, a Brazilian aircraft flew low over the cruiser. Later, a complaint was made by the Chief of the Brazilian Naval Staff about the movements of the [Achilles](#) off [Rio Grande](#). In his report of proceedings Captain Parry said the report of the ship being 'close inshore' presumably was made by the aircraft, but if it implied that the [Achilles](#) was inside territorial waters it was incorrect. Particular care was taken not to enter territorial waters about any of the Brazilian ports off which the ship showed herself. In a subsequent memorandum to the

¹ See ante, p. 22.

Admiralty, [Commodore Harwood](#) said that when he ordered the [Achilles](#) to appear off [Rio Grande do Sul](#) he was not aware that the Chief of the Brazilian Naval Staff had complained previously of the appearance of the destroyers [Hotspur](#) and [Havock](#) in sight of that port. He had asked the British Assistant Naval Attaché at [Rio de Janeiro](#) to see the Chief of the Naval Staff and give him a personal message apologising for anything which had been done that caused annoyance to the Brazilian authorities.

After leaving the [Rio Grande do Sul](#) area, the [Achilles](#) shaped course to the north-eastward for the next four days to a position approximately 200 miles west-south-west of Trinidad Island, which lies about 600 miles from the coast of [Brazil](#). Thence she steamed almost due north, stopping from time to time to examine

passing ships. A landfall was made at 8.45 a.m. on 2 December, and about an hour later the New Zealand cruiser arrived off Cabadello, a port in the southern entrance to the Parahyba River, where a German merchant ship identified as the Sao Paolo, 4977 tons, was seen. The [Achilles](#) steamed up the coast, arriving off Natal ¹ during the afternoon. Brazilian aircraft flew over the ship about midday. The cruiser reached the northern limit of her patrol off Cape San Roque, the north-eastern extremity of the Brazilian coast, at 6.15 p.m. when she turned south.

Next morning the [Achilles](#) arrived off Pernambuco and inspected the harbour from seaward, sighting eight vessels in port, including two German ships. The cruiser then proceeded on a south-westerly course for Bahia, but at 6.45 a.m. on 4 December she received orders from [Commodore Harwood](#) to return to [Montevideo](#) by 6 a.m. on the 8th to refuel. Course was shaped accordingly and speed increased to 19 knots. The elusive German raider had been located on the eastern side of the South [Atlantic](#) where she had sunk the Doric Star on 2 December. The timely concentration of the cruisers of the South America Division was now in progress.

The [Achilles](#) arrived at [Montevideo](#) early in the morning of 8 December and berthed alongside the mole. The German merchant ships Lahn and Tacoma were at anchor in the roadstead. For the third time since the cruiser's departure from New Zealand, shore leave was granted to as many of the ship's company as could be spared from duty. About 500 men landed and were most hospitably entertained by members of the British community in [Montevideo](#). Permission for a stay of forty-eight hours in harbour had been given by the Uruguayan authorities, but this had to be curtailed to enable the New Zealand cruiser to keep her rendezvous with the [Ajax](#).

¹ Natal, capital of the Brazilian state of [Rio Grande do Norte](#), was originally settled by the Dutch in the seventeenth century.

For weeks the naval net had been spread far and wide to intercept the German raider. Constantly patrolling and sweeping on both sides of the South [Atlantic](#) were more than twenty British and French warships. They included two aircraft-carriers, and all the cruisers had an aircraft apiece. But even the increased range of observation thus afforded the searching forces represented but tiny circles in the immensity of 10,000,000 square miles of ocean. From the Cape of Good Hope to the

[Falkland Islands](#) is 4000-odd miles, to the [River Plate](#) 3700 miles, and to [Rio de Janeiro](#) 3270 miles. The shortest distance across the South [Atlantic](#) is 1630 miles from [Freetown](#) to Pernambuco and from that line southward to the Cape is 3100 miles.

It is in the immensity of the vast, open common of the sea, devoid of natural features and obstructions such as restrict the movements of armies, that naval operations differ from land warfare. The age-old problem of the naval commander is how to intercept an opponent intent on evasion at sea. The evasive routing of merchant shipping is one of the traditional, well-proved methods for the protection of seaborne trade effectively employed by the Admiralty. Evasive tactics apply equally well in the case of enemy raiders. Provided that they can obtain fuel and other supplies and avoid focal areas, it is possible for them to operate for long periods. Both sides of the picture are seen in the case of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#), which was cruising for nearly four months during which she accounted for only nine ships.

At the beginning of December 1939 no report of the raider had been received since the sinking of the Africa Shell in the [Indian Ocean](#) on 15 November. On 2 December Force 'K' (Ark Royal and Renown) and Force 'H' ([Sussex](#) and Shropshire), after refuelling, were returning to their patrol line south of Cape Agulhas when a reconnaissance aircraft of the [South African Air Force](#) reported a ship south of the Cape of Good Hope. She was intercepted by the [Sussex](#) but her crew set her on fire. She proved to be the German liner Watussi, 9600 tons, and was sunk by gunfire from the Renown, her crew being picked up and taken to Simonstown by the [Sussex](#).

It was on that day that the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) intercepted the Blue Star liner Doric Star, 10,086 tons, homeward-bound from New Zealand, via [Sydney](#) and [Capetown](#), with a full cargo of frozen meat, dairy produce, and wool. The crew was taken off, as well as quantities of meat and dairy produce, after which the Doric Star was sunk by bombs and a torpedo. The destruction of this ship and her valuable cargo was a considerable success for the raider, but it was shortly to prove her undoing.

The Doric Star had transmitted a raider distress signal giving her position at the time of attack and this quickly reached the Com- mander-in-Chief South [Atlantic](#).¹

Knowing that the message had been passed, Captain Langsdorff lost no time in moving away to the westward. Early next morning the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) intercepted the Shaw Savill and Albion Company's steamer Tairoa, 7983 tons, homeward-bound from [Australia](#) with a full cargo of frozen meat, wool, and lead. Captain Langsdorff intended to capture her for use as a tender, but finding that her rudder had been damaged by his gunfire, he sank her with a torpedo after taking off the crew. He then proceeded to the westward with the intention of operating on the South American trade routes.

When he received the Doric Star's distress signal in the afternoon of the 2nd, the Commander-in-Chief South [Atlantic](#) at once decided to abandon the patrol south of the Cape and ordered Force 'H', after refuelling, to proceed north at 20 knots to cover the trade routes between the Cape and St. Helena. His proposal to the Admiralty that Force 'K' should sweep direct from the Cape to a position 600 miles south-west from St. Helena and thence to Free-town was accepted. At the request of Vice-Admiral Wells in the Ark Royal, this was changed to a point about 500 miles further south to place Force 'K' in a more central position for moving to [Freetown](#), to the [Falkland Islands](#), or to [Rio de Janeiro](#). On the morning of 3 December a report reached the Commander-in-Chief that the 'pocket-battleship Admiral Scheer' had been in the approximate position where the Tairoa was sunk, which clearly indicated that the raider was moving westward.

Force 'H' left Simonstown that afternoon and Force 'K' sailed from [Capetown](#) next morning to search for the elusive enemy. When the Sussex and Shropshire reached the area in which the Doric Star had been sunk, the raider was more than 1000 miles away to the westward. The Ark Royal and Renown crossed the line of the raider's track four days too late to intercept her. Once again the evasive tactics of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) had saved her from the hunters.

Although the Commander-in-Chief had been told to assume that the raider would not round the Cape a second time ² and there were clear indications that she was moving towards South America, the Admiralty took no chance and ordered the aircraft-carrier Eagle and the cruisers Cornwall and [Gloucester](#) from the [Indian Ocean](#) to patrol south of the Cape of Good Hope in co-operation with the [South African Air Force](#). In case the raider turned north, the Commander-in-Chief arranged with the Admiral commanding the French Force 'X', based on Dakar, which included HMS

[Hermes](#), to take the Neptune and her four destroyers under his orders and

¹ The Port Line motor-vessel Port Chalmers, commanded by Captain W. G. Higgs, OBE, which was in the vicinity but out of sight, relayed the Doric Star's message, repeating it until it was acknowledged, after which she took drastic evasive action at full speed.

² Admiralty message to Commander-in-Chief South [Atlantic](#), 0144, 3 December 1939.

patrol a line off the north-west coast of [Brazil](#). The submarine Clyde was ordered to patrol an area midway between that coast and Free-town. Force 'H' was between St. Helena and the African coast when, on the morning of 9 December, the German ship Adolf Leonhardt, 3000 tons, was intercepted by the Shropshire's aircraft. The cruiser arrived three hours later, but the Adolf Leonhardt was scuttled by her crew.

The submarine Severn left [Freetown](#) on 11 December at 15 knots for the [Falkland Islands](#) under orders to protect the whaling operations at South Georgia and intercept enemy raiders or supply ships. The cruiser Dorsetshire, which had come down from Colombo, sailed from Simonstown on 13 December for the [Falkland Islands](#) under orders to relieve the Exeter, which was to refit at the South African base.

When the Doric Star reported that she was being attacked by a pocket battleship in the afternoon of 2 December, her position was more than 3000 miles from the South American coast. A similar report was broadcast early the following morning by an unknown ship – it was in fact the Tairoa – 170 miles south-west of that position. From this information [Commodore Harwood](#) correctly anticipated that the raider, knowing that she had been reported, would leave that area and probably cross the South [Atlantic](#). He estimated that at a cruising speed of 15 knots the raider could reach the [Rio de Janeiro](#) focal area by the morning of 12 December, the [River Plate](#) focal area by the evening of 12 December or early on 13 December, and the [Falkland Islands](#) area on 14 December. 'I decided,' he wrote, 'that the Plate, with its large number of ships and its very valuable grain and meat trade, was the vital area to be defended. I therefore arranged to concentrate there my available forces in

advance of the time at which it was anticipated the raider might start operations in that area.'

In order to bring this about, [Commodore Harwood](#) in the early afternoon of 3 December made a signal to his ships amending their previous dispositions. The [Cumberland](#) was to carry out a self-refit at the [Falkland Islands](#) as previously arranged, but was to keep at short notice on two engines. The [Achilles](#) was to arrive at [Montevideo](#) to refuel at 6 a.m. on 8 December. The [Exeter](#) was to leave Port Stanley for the [River Plate](#) area on the morning of 9 December, covering the steamer [Lafonia](#) returning to Buenos Aires the British volunteers who had served in the [Falkland Islands](#) defence forces. The [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) were to meet in the afternoon of 10 December in a position approximately 300 miles east of Cape Santa Maria, and the [Exeter](#) was to pass through a position 150 miles east of Cape Medanos light in the morning of 12 December (thus covering the northern and southern approaches to the [River Plate](#)). The oiler [Olynthus](#) was instructed to remain at her sea rendezvous until the situation cleared, instead of proceeding to the [Falkland Islands](#). All this was contained in a signal of 125 words, after the transmission of which strict wireless silence was kept.

In the early hours of 5 December the British Naval Attaché at Buenos Aires reported that the German merchant ship [Ussukumu](#) had left Bahia Blanca the previous evening. [Commodore Harwood](#) at once ordered the [Cumberland](#), on passage to Port Stanley, to search the southern arcs of the possible course of the [Ussukumu](#). The [Ajax](#) turned south at 22 knots after closing the coast and sighted the smoke of the [Ussukumu](#) in the evening, but the Germans scuttled their ship which, in spite of the efforts of the [Ajax](#) to save her, sank during the night. The [Cumberland](#) arrived early next morning and embarked the German crew. The [Ajax](#) went into San Borombon Bay and refuelled from the [Olynthus](#). Thinking that the enemy might attempt some coup on 8 December, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Battle of the [Falkland Islands](#), [Harwood](#) ordered the [Cumberland](#) to join the [Exeter](#) on the 7th and then to patrol off the islands for two days before entering Port Stanley to refit.

The [Achilles](#) sailed from [Montevideo](#) at 4 p.m. on 9 December and at ten o'clock next morning she joined the [Ajax](#) in a position approximately 230 miles east from English Bank in the approach to the [River Plate](#). They met the [Exeter](#) at six o'clock in the morning of 12 December about 150 miles east of Medanos light. The three ships

then steamed north-east to a position approximately 300 miles east from [Rio Grande do Sul](#). [Harwood](#) chose this position from his shipping plot 'as being at that time the most congested part of the diverted shipping routes, i.e., the point where [it was] estimated that a raider could do most damage to British shipping'.

[Harwood](#) informed his captains by two brief signals of the tactics he intended to use in the event of meeting the German raider. 'My policy with three cruisers in company versus one pocket battleship – attack at once by day or night. By day act as two units, First Division [[Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#)] and Exeter diverged to permit flank marking. First Division will concentrate gunfire. By night ships will normally remain in company in open order. ...' During the day and after dark the cruisers were exercised in these tactics. It was a full-dress rehearsal of the drama that was staged next morning.

On 6 December the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) met the Altmark for what proved to be the last time, most of the raider's prisoners being transferred to the latter and fuel taken in. The tanker parted company next morning and the Graf Spee carried on to the westward. That evening she intercepted and sank the British steamer [Streonshalh](#), 3895 tons, homeward-bound from [Montevideo](#) with a cargo of wheat. This was the raider's last success. In all, she had sunk nine British ships without the loss of a single life. Course was then shaped towards the [River Plate](#).

The [Admiral Graf Spee](#) was classed officially as an armoured ship (panzerschiffe) of 10,000 tons displacement, the maximum tonnage permitted to [Germany](#) by the naval terms of the Treaty of [Versailles](#); but her actual load displacement on her overall length of 609 feet and breadth of 69 ft 6 in was considerably greater, probably about 14,000 tons. She carried a main armament of six 11-inch guns mounted in two triple turrets, one forward and one aft, and a secondary armament of eight 5·9-inch guns, four on each beam. The 11-inch guns had a maximum range of 30,000 yards (15 sea miles) and fired a projectile of 670 pounds. The ship also had eight 21-inch torpedo-tubes in quadruple mountings and carried two aircraft. She was propelled by twin screws driven by eight diesel-oil engines, each of 6750 horsepower at 450 r.p.m. Four engines were geared to each propeller shaft, the gearing reducing the speed of the screws to 250 r.p.m. The full power of the eight engines was 54,000 horsepower for a speed of 26 knots.

HMS [Exeter](#), a light cruiser of 8390 tons displacement, was armed with six 8-inch guns in three turrets, two forward and one aft, each gun firing a projectile of 256 pounds. The [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#), 7030 tons displacement, each mounted eight 6-inch guns in four turrets, two forward and two aft, each firing a projectile of 112 pounds. The secondary guns of the German ship were the equal in weight of the main armament of either the [Ajax](#) or the [Achilles](#). She could fire a total weight of 4830 pounds against 3328 pounds from the three British cruisers, though the rate of her 11-inch guns was slower. The British ships had an advantage in speed of about five knots. But against the material superiority of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) was to be set a vitally important moral factor. British naval doctrine, established by long tradition, laid down that 'war at sea cannot be waged successfully without risking the loss of ships. Should the object to be achieved justify a reasonable loss of ships, the fact that such losses may occur should be no deterrent to the carrying out of the operation'.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 4 – THE BATTLE OF THE RIVER PLATE

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The Battle of the River Plate

AT 5.20 in the morning of 13 December the British cruisers were in a position about 240 miles due east from Cape Santa Maria on the coast of [Uruguay](#) and some 340 miles from [Montevideo](#). While daylight was breaking, the ships carried out the normal routine of dawn action stations and again exercised the tactics to be employed against an enemy raider. The ship's companies fell out from action stations at 5.40 a.m. and reverted to their usual degree of readiness. The squadron then reformed in single line ahead, in the order [Ajax](#), [Achilles](#), Exeter, zigzagging on a mean course of north-east by east at 14 knots. The sun rose at 5.56 a.m. in a cloudless sky, giving extreme visibility. There was a fresh breeze from the south-east, with a low swell and a slight sea from the same quarter.

At 6.14 a.m. smoke was sighted on the north-west horizon and the Exeter was ordered to investigate. Two minutes later she reported: 'I think it is a pocket battleship'. Almost simultaneously, the enemy was sighted by the other cruisers and action stations was sounded off in all three ships. When the alarm rattlers sounded in the [Achilles](#), a signalman with a flag under his arm ran aft shouting: 'Make way for the Digger flag!', and proceeded to hoist a New Zealand ensign to the mainmast head to the accompaniment of loud cheers from the 4-inch gun crews. For the first time a New Zealand cruiser was about to engage the enemy.

While their crews were hurrying to their action stations, the British ships began to act in accordance with the Commodore's plan. The [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) turned together to north-north-west to close the range and the Exeter made a large alteration of course to the westward. These movements were made in order that the enemy would be engaged simultaneously from widely different bearings and compelled either to 'split' his main armament to engage both divisions or to concentrate his fire on one and leave the other unengaged by his 11-inch guns. The enemy's problem was the more difficult because of the wide dispersion of the two targets. According to the German account of the action, the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#), when first sighted, were taken to be destroyers and Captain Langsdorff assumed that the force was escorting a convoy. He decided to 'attack immediately in order to close to effective fighting range before the enemy could work up to full speed, since it

appeared to be out of the question that three shadows could be shaken off'. At 6.18 a.m., only four minutes after her smoke was first seen, the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) opened fire at 19,800 yards, one 11-inch turret at the Exeter and the other at the [Ajax](#), the first salvo of three shells falling about 300 yards short of the former ship.

The British cruisers were rapidly working up to full power and were steaming at more than 25 knots when the Exeter opened fire at 6.20 a.m., with her four forward guns, at 18,700 yards. Her two after guns fired as soon as they would bear, about two and a half minutes later. The [Achilles](#) opened fire at 6.21 a.m. and the [Ajax](#) two minutes later. Both ships immediately developed a high rate of accurate fire, the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) replying with her 5.9-inch guns. The 8-inch salvos of the Exeter appeared to worry the enemy almost from the beginning. After shifting targets rapidly once or twice, the German ship concentrated all six 11-inch guns on the Exeter. At 6.23 a.m. one shell burst short of the Exeter amidships. It killed the crew of the starboard torpedo-tubes, damaged the communications, and riddled the funnels and searchlights with splinters.

One minute later, after she had fired eight salvos, the Exeter received a direct hit from an 11-inch shell on the front of 'B' turret. The shell burst on impact and put the turret and its two 8-inch guns out of action. Splinters swept the bridge, killing or wounding all who were there, with the exception of Captain Bell and two officers; the wheelhouse communications were wrecked. The Exeter was no longer under control from the bridge and Captain Bell at once decided to fight his ship from the after conning position. The lower conning position had taken over when communication with the wheelhouse failed. Even so, the ship had started to swing and there was a probability that the two guns of the after turret would be masked and unable to bear on the target. The torpedo officer, Lieutenant-Commander C. J. Smith, RN, who had been knocked down and momentarily stunned, noticed this and got an order through to the lower conning position which brought the ship back to her westerly course.

When Captain Bell arrived aft he found that all communications had been cut. The steering was therefore changed over to the after steering position, orders to which were conveyed by a chain of messengers. For the next hour the Exeter was conned in this difficult manner, the captain and his staff being fully exposed to the blast from the after pair of 8-inch guns and the heavy fire of the enemy. Both aircraft

were extensively damaged and one was spraying petrol over the after conning position. Owing to the serious risk of fire, both aircraft were manhandled over the ship's side. During this time the Exeter received two more hits forward from 11-inch shells and suffered damage from the splinters of others which burst short.

All this happened during the first ten minutes of the action. In that brief period, however, the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) were making good shooting and, steaming hard, were closing the range and drawing ahead on the [Admiral Graf Spee](#). Clearly, the concentrated fire of their sixteen 6-inch guns was worrying her, for at 6.30 a.m. she again split her main armament and shifted the fire of one 11-inch turret on to them, thus giving some relief to the Exeter. The [Ajax](#) was straddled three times and she and the [Achilles](#) turned away slightly to throw out the enemy's fire. The [Admiral Graf Spee](#) was firing alternately at the two ships with her 5.9-inch guns, but without effect, though some salvoes fell close to them. At 6.32 a.m. the Exeter fired her starboard torpedoes, but these went wide when the German ship made a sudden large alteration of course to port and steered to the north-westward. This drastic turn was made under cover of a smoke screen and was probably dictated by the hot and effective concentrated fire of the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) and the flanking fire of the Exeter, as well as by her torpedoes. The two 6-inch gun cruisers immediately hauled round to close the range and regain bearing. The [Ajax](#) catapulted her aircraft away at 6.37 a.m., under severe blast from her four after guns, and it took up a spotting position.

About a minute later the Exeter, while making a large alteration of course to starboard to bring her port torpedo-tubes to bear, was hit by two 11-inch shells. One struck the foremost turret, putting it and its two 8-inch guns completely out of action. The other burst inside the ship amidships, doing very extensive damage and starting a fierce fire between decks. The observer in the [Ajax](#)'s aircraft reported that the Exeter completely disappeared in smoke and flame and it was feared that she had gone. However, she emerged and re-entered the action.

The Exeter had suffered severely. Both forward turrets were now disabled and only the two after guns were still in action in local control from the after searchlight platform. She was burning fiercely amidships and several compartments were flooded. What little internal communication was possible was being done by

messengers. All the gyro-compass repeaters in the after conning position had been destroyed and Captain Bell had to use a boat's compass to con his ship. Nevertheless, the Exeter was kept resolutely in action. Her port torpedoes were fired as soon as the tubes were bearing on the enemy. A minute or two later she altered course towards the enemy and then hauled round to the westward. This brought her on a course nearly parallel to that of the Graf Spee, which she engaged with her two remaining 8-inch guns. The Exeter now had a list of seven degrees to starboard and was down by the head. She was still being engaged by the [Admiral Graf Spee](#), but the latter's fire at that time appeared to be falling a considerable distance over the [Exeter](#).

The [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) had now worked up to full power and were steaming at 31 knots, firing fast as they went. At 6.40 a.m. an 11-inch shell fell short of the [Achilles](#) in line with her navigating bridge and burst on the water. The flying splinters killed four ratings and seriously wounded two others in the director control tower. The gunnery officer was cut in the scalp and momentarily stunned. On the bridge Chief Yeoman of Signals L. C. Martinson was seriously wounded and Captain Parry hit in the legs and knocked down. When he came to he noticed that the guns were not trained on the enemy. He ordered cease fire and hailed the gunnery officer up the voicepipe. The latter replied rather shakily that he was regaining control and very quickly the director tower got the guns on the enemy and fire was reopened.

'I was only conscious of a hellish noise and a thump on the head which half stunned me,' wrote Lieutenant Washbourn, RN, ¹ gunnery officer of the [Achilles](#), in his report on the action. 'I ordered automatically: "A.C.P. ² take over." Six heavy splinters had entered the D.C.T. ³ The right-hand side of the upper compartment was a shambles. Both W/T ratings were down with multiple injuries. ... A.B. Sherley had dropped off his platform, bleeding copiously from a gash in his face and wounds in both thighs. Sergeant Trimble, RM, the spotting observer, was also severely wounded. ... A.B. Shaw slumped forward on to his instrument, dead, with multiple wounds in his chest. ... The rate officer Mr. Watts, quickly passed me a yard or so of bandage, enabling me to effect running repairs to my slight scalp wounds which were bleeding fairly freely. I then redirected my attention to the business in hand, while Mr Watts clambered round behind me to do what he could for the wounded. Word was passed that the D.C.T. was all right again. A.B. Sherley was removed by a

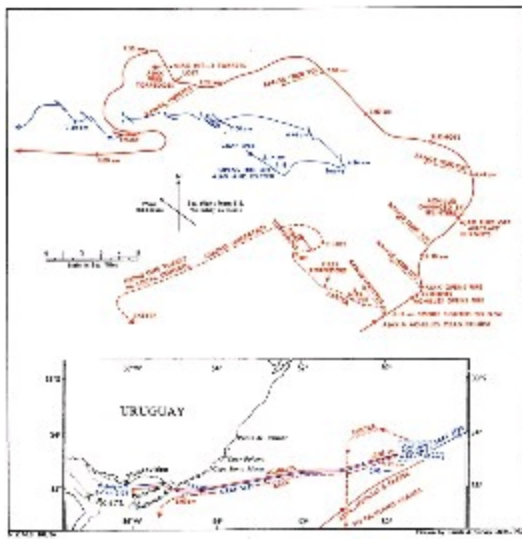
medical party during the action. Considerable difficulty was experienced, the right-hand door of the D.C.T. being jammed by splinter damage. When the medical party arrived to remove the dead, I learned for the first time that both Telegraphist Stennett and Ordinary Telegraphist Milburn had been killed outright. I discovered at the same time that Sergeant Trimble had uncomplainingly and most courageously remained at his post throughout the hour of action that followed the hits on the D.C.T., although seriously wounded. Mr Watts carried out his duties most ably throughout. ... He calmly tended the wounded ... until his rate-keeping was again required.

¹ Captain R. E. Washbourn, DSO, OBE, RN; born [Nelson](#), 14 Feb 1910; entered RN, 1928; lieutenant HMS Diomede, 1933–36; HMNZS [Achilles](#), 1939–42; Commander, 1944; HMNZS Bellona, 1946–48; Commander Superintendent, [Devonport](#) dockyard, 1948–50.

² After Control Position.

³ Director Control Tower.

... Boy Dorset behaved with exemplary coolness, despite the carnage around him. He passed information to the guns and repeated their reports clearly for my information. He was heard at one time most vigorously denying the report of his untimely demise that somehow had spread round the ship. "I'm not dead. It's me on the end of this phone," he said. The director layer, Petty Officer Meyrick, and the trainer, Petty Officer Headon, are also to be commended for keeping up an accurate output for a prolonged action of over 200 broadsides. ... The rangetakers, Chief Petty Officer Boniface and A.B. Gould, maintained a good range plot throughout the action, disregarding the body of a telegraphist who fell through the door on top of them. ...'



BATTLE OF THE RIVER PLATE, 13 DECEMBER 1939

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About twenty more broadsides had been fired after the control tower was hit when wireless communication with the [Ajax](#) failed and the [Achilles](#) reverted to single ship firing for the remainder of the engagement. For some twenty minutes the fire of both cruisers was ineffective owing to difficulties in spotting the fall of shot. The [Admiral Graf Spee](#), however, failed to take any advantage of this and continued her retirement to the westward at high speed. After 6.40 a.m. the action became virtually a chase. The [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) hauled round to the north and then to the west to close the range, accepting the fact that this entailed a temporary inability to bring their after guns to bear on the enemy. They were by now doing 31 knots and still increasing speed. The 6-inch gun cruisers were fine on the starboard quarter of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) and the [Exeter](#) slightly before her port beam, still fighting gamely with her two after guns.

At 6.56 a.m. the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) altered course to starboard to bring all their guns to bear. The increased volume of fire appeared to have an immediate effect on the [Admiral Graf Spee](#), which made frequent alterations of course and from seven o'clock onwards made great use of smoke. Her range from the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) at 7.10 a.m. was still 16,000 yards. [Commodore Harwood](#) then decided to close in as quickly as possible. Accordingly, course was altered to the westward and the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) steamed at their utmost speed.

At 7.16 a.m. the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) made a large alteration of course to port under cover of smoke and headed straight for the [Exeter](#) as though she intended to

finish off that much-damaged ship. The [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) responded with a turn towards the enemy, under ineffective fire from his secondary armament. Their rapid shooting scored a number of hits and started a fire amidships in the [Admiral Graf Spee](#), which turned back to the north-west until all her 11-inch guns were bearing on the two cruisers, on whom she opened fire. The range at that time was 11,000 yards and the [Ajax](#) was immediately straddled three times. The enemy's secondary armament was firing raggedly and appeared to be going consistently over between the two cruisers.

The [Ajax](#) received her first direct hit at 7.25 a.m. when an 11-inch delay-action shell struck her after superstructure. It penetrated 42 feet, passing through several cabins and then the trunk of 'X' turret, wrecking the machinery below the gunhouse and finally exploding in the Commodore's sleeping quarters, doing considerable damage. A part of the base of the shell struck 'Y' barbette ¹ close to the training rack and jammed the turret. Thus, this hit put both the after turrets and their four guns out of action. It also killed four and wounded six of the crew of 'X' turret. The [Ajax](#) retaliated by firing a broadside of torpedoes at a range of 9000 yards. All four broke surface after entering the water and probably were seen by the enemy, who avoided them by turning well away to port for three minutes and then resumed her north-westerly course.

According to the German account of the action the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) attempted to fire a spread salvo of torpedoes a few minutes before this, but only one was actually discharged because at the moment the ship was swinging hard to port. At 7.28 a.m. the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) hauled round to port to close the range still more, and three minutes later the former's aircraft reported: 'Torpedoes approaching. They will pass ahead of you.' [Commodore Harwood](#) was taking no chances and altered course to south, engaging the enemy on the starboard side, with the range closing rapidly. So as to blank the fire of the [Achilles](#) for as short a time as possible, the Commodore ordered her by signal to pass across the stern of the [Ajax](#).

The [Exeter](#) had had to reduce speed owing to damage forward, but continued to fire her two after 8-inch guns in local control until about 7.30 a.m., when power to the turret failed owing to flooding. She could then no longer keep up with the action and about 7.40 a.m. she turned away to the south-east at slow speed, starting to repair damage and make herself seaworthy. She had taken heavy punishment but, in

spite of severe casualties and the almost complete destruction of internal communications, had been kept in action as long as a gun could be fired, while damage control parties laboured to minimise the effects of shellfire and flooding.

The full burden of the engagement now fell upon the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#). At 7.36 a.m. the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) altered course to the south-west in order to bring all her 11-inch guns to bear on the British cruisers. The [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) stood on, however, and by 7.38 the range was down to 8000 yards. The former's aircraft reported that, while the Graf Spee concentrated the fire of her main

¹ The circular steel structure, below the gunhouse, enclosing the lower part of the turret

armament on the [Ajax](#), the [Achilles](#) was making 'beautiful shooting'. The spread of her rapid salvos was very small and frequent hits on the German ship were clearly seen from the air. Captain Wood-house, commanding officer of the [Ajax](#), also praised the good gunnery of the [Achilles](#). Nevertheless, there was disappointingly little apparent damage to the Graf Spee, and [Commodore Harwood](#) remarked to Woodhouse that 'we might as well be bombarding her with snowballs'.

About this time the Commodore received a report that the [Ajax](#) had only one-fifth of her ammunition remaining and only three guns in action, as one of the hoists had failed in 'B' turret and 'X' and 'Y' turrets were disabled. In the circumstances, the prospect of completing a decisive daylight action was not good. [Harwood](#) therefore decided to break off the engagement and to try to close in again after dark. Accordingly, at 7.40 a.m. the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) turned away to the eastward under cover of smoke. While the ships were swinging, a shell from one of the enemy's last salvos cut the main topmast of the [Ajax](#) clean in two, destroyed the wireless aerials, and caused a number of casualties. Jury aerials were soon rigged. It subsequently transpired that the reported shortage of ammunition in the [Ajax](#) referred only to 'A' turret, which had been firing continuously and had expended some 300 rounds out of a total of 823 rounds fired from all turrets.

The action had lasted exactly 82 minutes. In that brief period the [Achilles](#) had fired more than 200 broadsides. All four turrets reported that after firing from sixty to

eighty rounds the guns started failing to run out immediately after their recoil, due to heating up, and had to be pushed out by the rammers. 'The guns' crews,' said one turret officer, 'worked like galley slaves, loving it all, with no time to think of anything but the job. The whole of the turret from top to bottom thought the action lasted about twenty minutes. The rammer numbers were very tired towards the end, but did not appear to notice that till it was all over. ... Men lost all count of time. They spoke later of "about ten minutes after opening fire" when actually more than forty minutes had elapsed.'

'Towards the end of the action,' reported Sergeant F. T. Saunders, ¹ [Royal Marines](#), in charge of 'X' turret, 'the heat in the gunhouse was terrific, even though I had the rear door open and both fans working. The No. 1's of each gun, getting little air from the fans, were sweating streams. Everyone was very dry and thirsty. There wasn't the slightest delay in the supply of shells or cordite, which speaks well for the valiant work of those in the lower compartments. ... I was amused watching various men just tear off a garment as opportunity occurred. Some finished up bare to the waist. One of

¹ Killed in action off [Guadalcanal](#), Solomon Islands, 5 January 1943.

the rammer numbers was completely dressed in only a pair of white silk pyjama trousers, somewhat abbreviated, and a pair of native sandals. Another was clad in a pair of short drawers and his cap, to which he added later a corporal of the gangway's armlet.

'Everything went like clockwork, drill was correctly carried out, orders and reports passed and so on, just as if it was a practice shoot and nothing at all unusual was happening, except that everything seemed to be done at an amazing speed. The loading was absolutely superb. Marine Russell told me that we averaged seven seconds a round right to the end of the action. When we found we had expended 287 rounds, everyone in the turret was amazed: in fact I re-checked to make sure. The men all thought we'd fired about 40 or 50 broadsides and that was my impression too. There was a spirit of grim determination, concentration and cheerfulness during the whole job. Every man seemed bent on keeping this turret going at full speed. For instance, one number who was normally the butt of the

turret's crew, all of whom were somewhat inclined to have a tug at his leg, had that expression that one sees on the face of an athlete going all out. He seemed determined that he wouldn't let his crew down and he really worked like a man possessed. Marine Harrison, having observed the enemy's possibly first fall of shot somewhere in our wake, was heard to say: "Blimey, he's after our heel," which I thought was rather clever. ...'

Not more than one man in ten in the ship's company saw anything of the action. The majority were segregated in groups, and in some cases singly, in gun turrets, in engine- and boiler-rooms and many other compartments below decks where no daylight entered. From the director control tower above the bridge were passed the ranges and much other data from which the calculating machines in the transmitting station, situated in the bowels of the ship and operated by a highly skilled staff, solved the problem of how a ship steaming at up to 31 knots was able to fire accurately, several times a minute, 8 cwt of shells at another ship moving at 24 knots up to nine miles away. The officer in charge of the transmitting station reported that the spirit of his crew was excellent and all were as bright and cheerful as in a practice run. The detonations of the enemy's 11-inch shells were heard distinctly, sounding like the explosions of depth-charges. 'Nutty (chocolate) was a great help. We missed the free cigarettes, but we did hear that the canteen door had been blown off.' Another officer remarked that 'why the entire T.S.'s crew are not ill with bilious attacks, I cannot imagine, as everything edible was grist to the mill regardless of sequence.' The officer of the after control position reported regarding his crew, Marine Cave and Boy Beauchamp, that 'they were perfect, the boy going out at one time into the blast of "X" turret to remove some canvas that was fouling vision.'

A major part in this naval drama was played by the men shut in below decks in the engine- and boiler-rooms of the British cruisers. They had a good idea of what was going on, but they saw nothing of the action. The report of the senior engineer of the [Achilles](#) gives some sidelights on the action as it was fought in the engine-rooms of the cruisers. 'The behaviour of all personnel,' he wrote, 'could not have been better in any way, including general bearing, endurance and efficiency.' The remarks of the officer-in-charge of the boiler-rooms are that he was 'most impressed by the behaviour of the stokers tending the boilers. Many of them were youngsters

who never before had been below during full power steaming. ... As each salvo was fired, the blast caused the flames in the boilers to leap out about a foot from the fronts of the furnaces; yet the stokers never paused in their job of keeping the combustion tubes clean, or moved back from the boilers.'

The main engines of the [Achilles](#), it was recorded, 'were manoeuvred with far greater rapidity than would have been attempted under any conditions but those of emergency. All demands on the machinery were met more than adequately, all material standing up to the strain in such a manner that nothing but confidence was felt during the action. ... The behaviour of both men and machinery left nothing to be desired. When all the machinery of the [Achilles](#) had worked up to full power, readings gave a total of almost exactly 82,000 horse-power, with the four propellers turning at an average of 283 revolutions a minute.' This tribute to the soundness of design and the excellence of British shipyard workmanship is underlined by the statement of Captain Woodhouse of the [Ajax](#) that steam had been shut off the main engines of his ship for only five days since 26 August 1939.

The position in the Exeter was complicated by the extensive damage in the fore part of the ship by enemy gunfire during the first half hour of the action. An 11-inch shell which exploded in the chief petty officers' flat immediately adjacent caused a complete blackout in one boiler-room. Shell splinters came down the air-fan intakes and the starboard air-lock door was jammed. Many important electric power leads were cut, causing a failure of communications, and orders had to be passed to the boiler-room by messengers.

Although the British cruisers had a considerable advantage in speed, the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) showed that she was a handy ship to manoeuvre. 'The rapidity with which the Graf Spee altered course was most striking,' wrote Captain Parry. 'She appeared to turn as quickly as a ship one-half her size and she made the fullest use of her mobility. She appeared to be under helm for the greater part of the time. On several occasions, when her situation was becoming unhealthy, she turned 180 degrees away, using smoke to cover her turn.'

Regarding the enemy's tactics, Captain Parry said the 'outstanding and most satisfactory feature seemed to be a complete absence of the offensive spirit.' He certainly made skilful use of smoke to conceal himself from the 6-inch cruisers when

their fire became effective, while continuing his main engagement with the [Exeter](#). But in the end he retired from the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) behind a smoke screen without attempting to finish off the [Exeter](#), although he appeared from his subsequent reported statements to have known that she was out of action. 'The only possible explanation seems to be that he had been severely handled himself. In confirmation, it was noticed that his after turret was not firing for a long time towards the end of the action and that his 5·9-inch gunfire became increasingly ragged and ineffective.'

Yet, according to the German account of the action, the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) had sustained only two 8-inch and eighteen 6-inch hits. One officer and thirty-five ratings had been killed and sixty wounded. 'The fighting value of the ship had not been destroyed,' the report said. The main armament was 'fully effective', but there remained only 306 rounds of 11-inch ammunition, representing about 40 per cent of the original supply. The secondary armament was effective with the exception of one gun on the port side and the ammunition hoists of the forward 5·9-inch guns. In consequence, only the four ammunition hoists aft were available for use and the forward guns would have to be supplied from aft. More than 50 per cent of the ammunition supply for the secondary armament remained. The engines were available for maximum speed with the exception of defects of long standing in the auxiliary engines.

'The survey of damage showed that all galleys were out of action with the exception of the Admiral's galley. The possibility of repairing them with the ship's own resources was doubtful. Penetration of water into the flour store made the continued supply of bread questionable, while hits in the fore part of the ship rendered her unseaworthy for the North [Atlantic](#) winter. One shell had penetrated the armour belt and the armoured deck had also been torn open in one place. There was also damage in the after part of the ship. ... The ship's resources were considered inadequate for making her seaworthy, and there seemed no prospect of shaking off the shadows.' Captain Langsdorff therefore decided to steer for [Montevideo](#). He signalled his account of the action and his intentions to [Berlin](#). Before the ship had entered [Montevideo](#) harbour he had already received from Admiral Raeder the reply: 'Your intentions understood.'

Almost exactly twenty-five years before – on 8 December 1914 – Admiral Graf Spee's four cruisers Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, Nurnberg, and Leipzig, had fought to

the last against a greatly superior British force, 1100 miles south of the area from which the powerful ship bearing the name of the German admiral was now retreating at speed from two small cruisers, one of which had only half her guns in action.

When the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) turned away, the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) made no attempt to follow them, but steadied on a course almost due west and proceeded at 23 knots direct for the [River Plate](#). Six minutes later the British cruisers hauled round and began to shadow the enemy, the [Ajax](#) to port and the [Achilles](#) to starboard, at a distance of about 15 miles. In the prevailing conditions of extreme visibility, the conspicuous control tower and bridge of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#), as well as her continuous funnel smoke, made it an easy matter to shadow her at long range.

The irregular arc on which the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) had steamed and fought had brought them by eight o'clock to a position barely 20 miles north-west from that in which they had first sighted the enemy. As the [Ajax's](#) wireless aerials were still down, the [Achilles](#) was ordered to broadcast the position, course, and speed of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) to all British merchant ships in the [River Plate](#) area. Similar messages were subsequently broadcast hourly by the [Ajax](#) until the end of the chase.

By 8.14 a.m. the [Exeter](#) was out of sight to the south-eastward and [Commodore Harwood](#) ordered his aircraft to tell her to close. At 9.10 a.m. the aircraft reported: 'Exeter is badly damaged, but is joining you as best she can.' Two minutes later the [Ajax](#) recovered her aircraft, which had been in the air for two hours and 35 minutes. Captain Bell of the [Exeter](#) did his best to rejoin but, having only an inaccurate boat compass to steer by, was unable to make contact. He then decided to steer towards the nearest land, some 200 miles to the westward, and speed was reduced while bulkheads were being shored and the ship's list corrected.

[Harwood's](#) objective was the destruction of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) in close action after nightfall and he had to be prepared to meet the situation that would arise if the enemy succeeded in eluding him. The extent to which the German ship had been damaged was not known, but it was evident that her speed was unaffected and her main armament appeared to be fully effective. It seemed evident that the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#), which had expended approximately 50 per cent of their ammunition, could not, unaided, compass the destruction of the enemy in action.

Accordingly, at 9.45 a.m. [Harwood](#) ordered the [Cumberland](#), which had been refitting at the [Falkland Islands](#) more than 1000 miles away, to proceed at full speed to the [River Plate](#) area. The signal was some time in transmission, for when the [Cumberland](#) sailed from Port Stanley at noon it was on the initiative of her commanding officer, Captain Fallowfield, who, up to that hour, had intercepted only very jumbled messages. When the Commodore's signal reached him, he at once increased to full speed.

Meanwhile, the Admiralty had taken prompt steps to close the widespread net that had been set to trap the [Admiral Graf Spee](#). Immediately it was known that [Commodore Harwood](#)'s division had intercepted the enemy, orders were given for the [Ark Royal](#), [Renown](#), and other ships which had been patrolling some 3000 miles away to proceed at once to the South American coast. Measures were also taken to ensure that adequate supplies of fuel and stores would be available at various strategic points.

The [Achilles](#) had overestimated the speed of the enemy and by 10.5 a.m. had closed to 23,000 yards. The [Admiral Graf Spee](#) then turned and fired two three-gun salvos of 11-inch shell at her. That the enemy altered course sufficiently to bring her forward guns to bear seemed to indicate that the after turret was out of action at the time. The first salvo was very short of its target, but the second fell close alongside the [Achilles](#), which probably would have been hit had she not already started to turn away at full speed. She immediately resumed shadowing at longer range, zigzagging frequently to throw out the enemy's gunnery plot. The enemy ceased fire and continued on his westerly course.

At 11.04 a.m. a merchant ship, apparently stopped since she was blowing off steam, was sighted close to the [Admiral Graf Spee](#), from whom a few minutes later the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) received a wireless signal: 'Please rescue lifeboats of English steamer.' Neither cruiser replied to this message. When they came up with her, the ship was found to be the British steamer [Shakespeare](#), 5029 tons. All her boats were stowed and, in response to a signal from the [Ajax](#), she reported all well and that she did not need any assistance. The [Graf Spee](#)'s signal was apparently a ruse tried out with the object of delaying and evading the shadowing cruisers.

About this time [Commodore Harwood](#) received a message from the [Exeter](#)

reporting that all her turrets were out of action and that she was flooded forward but could steam at 18 knots. She was ordered to proceed to the [Falkland Islands](#) at whatever speed was possible without straining her bulkheads. The Exeter later reported that one gun of her after turret could be fired in local control and that she was making 20 knots. She arrived at Port Stanley at noon on 16 December.

The afternoon passed quietly until 3.43 p.m. when the [Achilles](#) sighted a strange vessel and made the signal: 'Enemy in sight bearing 297 degrees.' 'What is it?' asked [Commodore Harwood](#). 'Suspect 8-inch cruiser, am confirming,' replied the [Achilles](#), who at 3.59 p.m. signalled: 'False alarm.' She had identified the approaching ship as the British motor-vessel Delane, 6054 tons, of the Lamport and Holt Line. The peculiar appearance of this ship, whose funnel was streamlined into the bridge superstructure, gave her at long range a close resemblance to a German cruiser of the Blucher class.

Thereafter the shadowing of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) continued without incident until 7.15 p.m. when she altered course and fired two 11-inch salvos at the [Ajax](#) as that ship turned away under cover of a smoke screen. The [Achilles](#) also turned away on sighting the gun flashes, but quickly resumed her westerly course. These were the first shells fired by the enemy for more than nine hours.

By this time it was clear that the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) intended to enter the estuary of the [River Plate](#), towards which she had been steering for more than twelve hours. Across the entrance to the Plate, on its northern side, there extends for some 16 miles a shallow bank known as English Bank. [Harwood](#) foresaw a possibility that the German ship might attempt to evade his cruisers and get back to the open sea by doubling round English Bank, and took steps to prevent this happening. He ordered the [Achilles](#) to follow the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) if she passed west of Lobos Island, while the [Ajax](#) was to steam to the southward of English Bank to intercept her if she attempted to come out that way. Thus, as soon as the German ship passed Lobos Island, the whole duty of shadowing her devolved upon the [Achilles](#), by whom the Commodore's instructions were 'perfectly carried out.'

The [Admiral Graf Spee](#) made a considerable alteration of course to the north-westward at 7.42 p.m. and, expecting her to open fire, the [Achilles](#) made rapid changes of course. As no firing took place, the latter resumed shadowing and

increased speed to creep up on the enemy before dusk. The [Achilles](#) passed between Lobos Island and the mainland. About 8 p.m., being then off Lobos Island and 50 miles east of English Bank, the [Ajax](#) hauled round to the south-westward.

The sun set at 8.48 p.m., leaving the German ship clearly silhouetted against the western sky, and the [Achilles](#) altered course to north-westward to keep the full advantage of the after-glow while she remained under cover of the land. A few minutes later the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) altered course under cover of dusk and fired three 11-inch salvos at a range of 22,000 yards. The first two fell short and the third dropped close astern, all being accurate for line. The [Achilles](#) replied with five salvos of 6-inch shell while turning away at full speed and making smoke. The enemy ceased firing and the [Achilles](#), which was then just clear of Punta Negra, turned west again at 30 knots to keep touch. This brief engagement was watched from Punta del [Este](#), the seaside resort of [Montevideo](#), by thousands of Uruguayans who had a 'grandstand' view and mistook it for the main action. The Uruguayan gunboat, [Uruguay](#), which appeared to be on patrol duty, closed the [Ajax](#) about 9.15 p.m., but was soon left astern.

Between 9.30 and 9.45 p.m. the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) fired three more 11-inch salvos, all of which fell short, the second and third considerably so. The [Achilles](#) did not return the fire since the flashes of her guns in the twilight would have given away her position. The loom of the land must have made it extremely difficult for the enemy to have seen the [Achilles](#), if at all, and these Parthian shots must have been merely intended to keep the shadowing cruiser at a distance.

They were the last shells fired by the [Admiral Graf Spee](#). Since 7.40 a.m., when she headed for the [River Plate](#), she had fired ten 11-inch salvos, five of them from one turret only. They did not deter the [Achilles](#) which, by ten o'clock, had closed in to 10,000 yards. She could now estimate the enemy's course as taking him north of English Bank and reported accordingly to [Commodore Harwood](#). It was becoming increasingly difficult to see the enemy, owing not only to low clouds northward of the after-glow but also to patches of funnel smoke. Course was altered at 10.13 p.m. to get the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) silhouetted against the lights of [Montevideo](#). At 11.17 p.m. the [Achilles](#) received a signal from the Commodore to withdraw from shadowing and the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) anchored in [Montevideo](#) roads shortly after midnight.

Thus ended the day-long pursuit of the pocket battleship which, after putting the [Exeter](#) out of action and partly disabling the main armament of the [Ajax](#) during the early morning engagement, had avoided further close action and covered some 350 miles in sixteen hours to gain shelter in a neutral harbour, later referred to by her captain as 'the trap of [Montevideo](#)'. Throughout the day and three hours of darkness, the shadowing action of the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) had been entirely successful and they had foiled every effort of the Graf Spee to elude or drive them off. By their discipline, their fighting energy, their readiness to take risk and punishment, the competence and team-play of their captains, their self-assurance and confidence, the [Exeter](#), [Ajax](#), and [Achilles](#) had gained the day in one of the most brilliant cruiser actions in the long annals of the Royal Navy.

From the tactical point of view, one 8-inch and two 6-inch cruisers did not make an ideal force for dealing with a ship such as the [Admiral Graf Spee](#), but the main principles of sea warfare hold good through all ages and the Royal Navy can find precedent or parallel for any situation that may arise. It was Admiral Kempenfelt who wrote to Admiral Charles Middleton (afterwards Lord Barham), Comptroller of the Navy, in July 1779: 'Much, I may say almost all, depends upon this fleet; 'tis an inferior against a superior fleet; therefore the greatest skill and address is requisite to counter the designs of the enemy, to watch and seize the favourable opportunity for action..., to hover near the enemy, keep him at bay, and prevent his attempting to execute anything but at risk and hazard, to command his attention and oblige him to think of nothing but being on his guard against your attack....' ¹

Such was the manner in which the British cruisers fought the Battle of the [River Plate](#). The result of the action was completely satisfactory in the final outcome, but, as was stressed in an Admiralty survey, 'only a tactical blunder of the first magnitude by the enemy and the superiority of our personnel prevented the destruction of one of our ships and our being forced to abandon the action.' The result of that tactical blunder was underlined in [Commodore Harwood](#)'s despatch. The most salient point of the enemy's tactics, he said, was that the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) closed on sighting the British ships and split her main armament, firing one turret at the First Division ([Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#)) and the other at the [Exeter](#). This initial closing of the range had the effect of bringing all three ships into effective gun range at once and so avoided for them the most difficult problem of gaining range in the face of 11-inch gunfire.

It appeared that the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) was heavily handled by the gunfire both of the First Division's concentration and that of the [Exeter](#) in the first phase, the culminating point perhaps being the firing of torpedoes by the latter ship. At this point the German ship turned away under smoke and 'from then onwards her commanding officer displayed little offensive spirit and did not take advantage of the opportunity that was always present either to close the First Division or the [Exeter](#), the latter – and he must have known it – only having one turret in action. Instead, the Graf Spee retired between the two and allowed herself to be fired at from both flanks. Only at one period, at 7.20 a.m., did she again concentrate on the First Division and she immediately abandoned this when the [Ajax](#) fired torpedoes.' The [Admiral Graf Spee](#)'s frequent alterations of course were, from an avoiding point of view, well carried out and undoubtedly threw out much of the gunfire of the British cruisers. She had an exceptionally high degree of manoeuvrability and apparently used full helm for her turns. On many occasions this gave her an apparent list 'which raised our hopes', but she always came upright again on steadying. At no time did she 'steam' at a

¹ The Barham Papers, I, p. 292.

higher speed than 24 knots, and generally her speed was between 19 and 22 knots. ¹

The casualties in the British cruisers during the action were as follows:

	Officers		Ratings	
	Killed	Wounded	Killed	Wounded
Exeter	5	3	56	20
Ajax		1	7	14
Achilles		2	4	7
	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	5	6	67	41

¹ Rear-Admiral Harwood's despatch to Admiralty, 30 December 1939.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 5 – THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ADMIRAL GRAF SPEE

CHAPTER 5

The Destruction of the Admiral Graf Spee

ONCE the *Admiral Graf Spee* had anchored in *Montevideo* roads the main preoccupation of *Commodore Harwood* was how long she intended to remain there. It was of prime importance that the *Ajax* and *Achilles* should keep to seaward of the enemy ship if she came out and at the same time avoid being caught by her against the dawn light. For this reason *Harwood* withdrew his ships from the *River Plate* channels to seaward for the remainder of the night and closed in towards *Montevideo* once the risk of being silhouetted against the dawn had passed.

For the time being the two small cruisers alone stood between the enemy and the open sea. Both were short of fuel after their hard and prolonged steaming the day before. The *Ajax* had expended more than 820 rounds and the *Achilles* 1240 rounds of their 6-inch ammunition. They could not hope to fight another successful action unless they were concentrated, and the geographical factors favoured the enemy rather than them. From the *River Plate* estuary, which is 120 miles wide between Lobos Island to the north-east and Cape San Antonio to the south-west, there emerge three widely separated deep-water channels. The northernmost runs between the English Bank lightship and Cumberland Shoal; the second, whose centre is nearly 30 miles further south, is between English Bank and Rouen Bank; the third is nearly 30 miles wide between the latter bank and Cape San Antonio.

Throughout Thursday, 14 December, the *Ajax* and *Achilles* kept constant watch over as wide an area of the *River Plate* estuary as possible. *Commodore Harwood* requested the British Minister at *Montevideo* to use every possible means of delaying the sailing of the *Admiral Graf Spee* in order to gain time for reinforcements to reach him. He suggested that the Minister should sail British merchant ships and invoke the twenty-four-hour rule to prevent the enemy's leaving harbour. The Naval Attaché, Buenos Aires, Captain H. W. U. McCall, RN, and the British naval intelligence officer kept him 'most adequately supplied' with the latest news of the *Admiral Graf Spee*. *Harwood* also learned that the *Ark Royal*, *Renown*, *Neptune*, *Dorsetshire*, *Shropshire*, and three destroyers were all on their way to the *River Plate*, but none could reach him for at least five days.

The arrival of the Cumberland at ten o'clock that night restored to its narrow balance a doubtful situation. She had made the passage of 1000 miles from the [Falkland Islands](#) in thirty-four hours. Now it was possible for all three deep-water channels to be patrolled. The Cumberland covered the sector between Rouen Bank and English Bank, with the [Achilles](#) to the north of her and the [Ajax](#) to the south. In a policy signal beginning 'my object destruction', [Commodore Harwood](#) ordered that should the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) come out she was to be shadowed, and the three cruisers were to concentrate sufficiently far to seaward to enable a concerted attack to be carried out. He also repeated to the Cumberland his signal of 12 December, substituting her name for the Exeter in the original. The [Ajax](#) took in 200 tons of fuel-oil from the tanker Olynthus in San Borombon Bay on 15 December in weather so bad that the securing hawsers parted.

It was reported to [Commodore Harwood](#) that the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) had landed a funeral party that morning to bury her thirty-six dead and, later, that she had been granted an extension of her stay up to seventy-two hours in order to make her seaworthy. The reports made it appear that she had been damaged far more extensively than had been thought likely and had been hit from sixty to seventy times during the action. The British merchant ship Ashworth was sailed from [Montevideo](#) at seven o'clock that evening and [Harwood](#) was informed that the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) had accepted the edict that she would not be allowed to sail for twenty-four hours after that time. Nevertheless, he could not be sure that she would not break out at any time that suited her.

In accordance with the Commodore's plan the [Ajax](#), [Achilles](#), and [Cumberland](#) assembled 15 miles east of Cape San Antonio at 12.30 a.m. on 16 December. The squadron closed the [River Plate](#) towards dawn and the [Ajax](#) flew off her aircraft for a reconnaissance of [Montevideo](#) harbour, with instructions not to fly over territorial waters. The aircraft returned at 8.30 a.m. and reported that it had been impossible to see anything owing to bad visibility. The aircraft had been fired at in the vicinity of the whistle buoy, which seemed to indicate that the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) was taking advantage of the morning mist to put to sea. The cruisers at once went to action stations, but shortly afterwards it was reported that the enemy was still in harbour. When the Commodore suggested that an inquiry into the firing on the aircraft might be a way of delaying her sailing, the British Minister at [Montevideo](#) replied that it

was definitely not the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) that had fired, but possibly an [Argentine](#) guard gunboat.

That day the Admiralty informed [Commodore Harwood](#) that he was free to engage the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) anywhere outside the three-mile limit. He decided to move his patrol into the area north and east of English Bank, as he considered that an engagement in the very restricted water just outside the three-mile limit off [Montevideo](#) was impracticable owing to lack of sea room and the 'possibility of "overs" landing in Uruguayan territory and causing international complications.'

It was reported during the day that the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) was still making good action damage with assistance from the shore and that she had taken in provisions. It was thought unlikely that she would sail that night, but [Harwood](#) was firm on taking no chances. Again with the prefatory 'my object destruction', he signalled to his ships an appreciation of the situation and the tactical dispositions to be made in the event of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) sailing and being engaged. The British merchant ship Dunster Grange sailed from [Montevideo](#) at five o'clock in the afternoon and a further period of twenty-four hours' delay before the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) could sail was claimed. It was reported, however, that she had made rapid progress with her repairs and might leave harbour at any time.

Late that afternoon [Commodore Harwood](#) received the Admiralty's signal informing him of the honours bestowed by the King upon him (KCB) and the captains of the *Exeter*, [Ajax](#), and *Achilles* (CB), and of his promotion to Rear-Admiral to date 13 December. 'This was a most stimulating tonic to us all,' he wrote in his despatch, 'and I took steps to pass it on to H.M. ships under my command, emphasising the share of all concerned in the honours their senior officers had received.'

Describing the patrol off [Montevideo](#), Captain Parry, wrote:

The next four days and nights, though uneventful, were full of anxiety. Fortunately, the American broadcast service kept our enemy in a blaze of publicity; but naturally we had to remain ready for immediate action for it was always possible that he might slink out unmolested. This entailed keeping all hands at their stations all night and very little sleep could be got by those of us who might be faced with a quick decision. The first twenty-four hours was perhaps the most critical, for it was

not until the evening of 14 December that we were reinforced by the Cumberland and her welcome eight 8-inch guns. During this trying time the splendid spirit of the ship's company was most inspiring. If anyone's spirits had been inclined to droop they could not have failed to be revived by the strains of Maori music and songs, or the shouts of merriment which came from the various quarters. On the last evening the captain decided that the degree of readiness might be slightly relaxed to allow a proportion of the ship's company to sleep in their hammocks; but a few minutes later he received a unanimous request from all quarters that they would prefer to remain all night ready at their stations. Such a gesture is unforgettable.

The British cruisers spent Saturday night, 16 December, patrolling on a north and south line east of English Bank lightbuoy. The [Achilles](#), whose oil was running low, refuelled next morning from the Olynthus off Rouen Bank, the [Ajax](#) and Cumberland acting as lookouts at visibility distance while the operation was in progress. The squadron afterwards cruised south-east of English Bank ready to take up the same patrol as on the previous night.

From the moment she sought shelter in harbour the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) became the subject of a world-wide flood of radio and press publicity which completely overwhelmed the spate of Nazi propaganda and falsities that made shift to gloss over the ignominy of her defeat and flight. Behind the scenes a considerable political and diplomatic struggle was proceeding. After the landing of her wounded and the release of the masters and fifty-four members of the crews of British ships sunk by her, discussions began over the restoration of the [Admiral Graf Spee's](#) seagoing efficiency. A German shipping surveyor from Buenos Aires and the ship's senior engineer officer assessed the period required for repairs as not less than fourteen days in view of the limited local repair facilities. The German Ambassador addressed a note to the Uruguayan Foreign Minister requesting permission for this length of stay.

During the afternoon of 15 December the German Ambassador was informed that the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) would be permitted a stay of seventy-two hours and that any extension was not acceptable. The Uruguayan technical commission had declared seventy-two hours adequate to make the ship seaworthy. The Foreign Minister agreed to recommend to his government that the period should be timed to commence from the return ashore of the technical commission. This would, in fact,

allow the ship nearly ninety-six hours in harbour from the time of her arrival.

On receipt of this decision, Captain Langsdorff signalled to the German Naval High Command as follows:

(1) Renown and Ark Royal, as well as cruisers and destroyers off [Montevideo](#).¹ Close blockade at night. No prospect of breaking out into the open sea and getting through to [Germany](#). (2) Intend to proceed to the limit of neutral waters. If I can fight my way through to Buenos Aires with ammunition still remaining I shall endeavour to do so. (3) As a break through might result in the destruction of Spee without the possibility of causing damage to the enemy, request instructions whether to scuttle the ship (in spite of the inadequate depth of water in the Plate estuary) or submit to internment.

The German Ambassador, in a telegram to the German Foreign Office, endorsed Langsdorff's appreciation and pointed out that a stay of fourteen days would not alter the situation and would merely assist the concentration of enemy forces. He regarded internment of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) as the 'worst possible solution in any circumstances.' It would be preferable, in view of her shortage of ammunition, to blow her up in the shallow waters of the Plate and have her crew interned. The German Foreign Office replied ordering the Ambassador and Captain Langsdorff to seek to prolong the ship's stay and also sent the following telegram:

According to English press reports the Ark Royal is in the Plate area. As you know, we believe that the Ark Royal has already been sunk. By order of the Fuehrer you are to attempt to take photographs of the supposed Ark Royal. Signal results and forward the photographs.

The Germans in [Montevideo](#) noted that this order was impossible to fulfil since the ship had merely been allegedly sighted on the horizon and no aircraft could be got for reconnaissance.

Meanwhile, in [Germany](#), Admiral Raeder was conferring with [Hitler](#), who was opposed to internment 'since there was a possibility that the Graf Spee might score a success against the British ships in a break-through'. The Fuehrer approved the instructions the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy sent to Captain Langsdorff, who

was to 'attempt by all methods to extend the time limit for your stay in neutral waters in order to retain freedom of action as long as possible'. Langsdorff's proposal to proceed to neutral limits and, if possible, fight through to Buenos Aires was approved. He was also told that the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) was not to be interned in [Uruguay](#) and that if the ship was scuttled he was to 'ensure effective destruction.'

Late in the afternoon of 16 December Captain Langsdorff discussed his plans with his senior officers, while the German Ambassador was having an interview with the Uruguayan Foreign Minister, which at times was very heated. The Ambassador finally requested an audience with the President, but the Foreign Minister insisted that this could not be granted unless the Ambassador acknowledged the seventy-two hours' time limit. The Uruguayan government adhered to its decision that the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) must put to sea by 6.45 p.m. on 17 December or be interned. The Ambassador reported the result of his interview to Captain Langsdorff, who thereupon wrote protesting against the time limit imposed and intimating his decision to scuttle his ship.

This was defeat, naked and brutal, and to it was added the sting of a sense of disgrace. All through the midsummer day of 17 December preparations for the self-destruction of the German ship went forward. By mid-afternoon the most important secret equipment and documents had been destroyed. Most of her crew were transferred to the German merchant ship *Tacoma*, Captain Langsdorff with four officers and thirty-eight ratings remaining on board to take the ship out and scuttle her. The *Tacoma* was to follow her, and the whole crew were to be transhipped to [Argentine](#) tugs which were to take them to Buenos Aires for internment.

Out at sea the three British cruisers steamed to and fro south-east of English Bank. 'We all expected that she would break out at any moment,' wrote [Rear-Admiral Harwood](#) in his despatch. '... At this stage the most cheerful optimism pervaded all ships in spite of the fact that this was the fifth night of waiting for the enemy.' The instant that word was received that the German ship was weighing anchor, the squadron assumed the first degree of readiness for action, increased speed to 25 knots, and steamed towards the whistle buoy at the entrance to the five-mile dredged channel leading into [Montevideo](#). The [Ajax](#) flew off her aircraft to observe and report the enemy's movements.

At 6.17 p.m. the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) hoisted a large ensign on her foremast, as well as one at the main, and left the harbour before the eyes of wondering crowds. She steered to the south-westward and stopped about eight miles from the entrance, the Tacoma, which had followed, anchoring about two miles north-east of her. By 7.40 p.m. the fuses of the scuttling charges had been set and Langsdorff and his demolition party left in the ship's boats for the Tacoma, while two tugs and a lighter from Buenos Aires neared the latter vessel.

The first explosion occurred exactly at sunset. All the crew of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) paraded on the deck of the Tacoma, making the Nazi salute. A fierce jet of flame leaped up from the doomed ship, followed by a dense cloud of smoke and the loud rumble of an explosion. Then a gigantic ball of flame burst aft as a second great explosion took place. There ensued a long succession of explosions accompanied by leaping flames and a great pillar of brown smoke rising against the red evening sky. Fires continued to burn in the ship for six days. Her destruction in the shallow waters of the Plate estuary was watched by tens of thousands of awed spectators crowded on the roofs of [Montevideo](#) and along the seafront, while radio broadcasts and press cables flashed their graphic stories round the world.

Passing north of English Bank, the British cruisers were nearing [Montevideo](#) when at 8.45 p.m. the aircraft signalled: 'Graf Spee has blown herself up.' It was almost dark when the [Ajax](#) stopped to make an excellent recovery of her aircraft which had alighted on the water, and as the [Achilles](#) swept past her the ships' companies cheered each other. All three cruisers then switched on their navigation lights and steamed past the whistle buoy about four miles off the flaming wreck. 'It was now dark,' wrote [Rear-Admiral Harwood](#), 'and she was ablaze from end to end, flames reaching almost as high as the top of her control tower – a magnificent and most cheering sight.'

It was an ignominious end for a great ship which bore the name of the German admiral who twenty-five years before had fought his ships to the last against great odds and perished with both his sons in the Battle of the [Falkland Islands](#). Speaking at the launching of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) at [Wilhelmshaven](#) on 30 June 1934, Admiral Raeder had recalled that, off Coronel on 1 November 1914, a German admiral – he whose name she took – 'for the first time in German history went into

battle far from the German fatherland against an enemy of equal rank.' The [Admiral Graf Spee](#) had been chosen to represent the German Navy at the Coronation naval review at Spithead on 20 May 1937 and had carried [Hitler](#) triumphantly to Memel.

The first official German announcement of the end of the ship was in the following terms: 'The time necessary to make the Graf Spee seaworthy was refused by the Government of [Uruguay](#). In the circumstances Captain Langsdorff decided to destroy his ship by blowing her up.' At three o'clock in the morning of 18 December, according to Raeder's diary, the second sentence was altered to read: 'Under the circumstances the Fuehrer ordered Captain Langsdorff to destroy his ship by blowing her up. This order was put into effect outside the territorial waters of [Uruguay](#).'

Captain Langsdorff and his ship's company numbering 1039 officers and ratings arrived at Buenos Aires in the tugs in the afternoon of 18 December, after Uruguayan officials had tried unsuccessfully to get them back to [Montevideo](#). The Tacoma was compelled by a Uruguayan warship to return to harbour. On the following day the Argentine Government decided to intern the crew of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#), despite the German claim that they were shipwrecked seamen.

That night, after the German Ambassador had informed him of this decision, Langsdorff committed suicide by shooting himself in his room in a Buenos Aires hotel, the melodrama of this act being heightened by the fact that he lay on a German naval ensign. In a letter to the Ambassador, written shortly before he died, he recounted the reasons for his decision to scuttle the [Admiral Graf Spee](#). 'I am convinced,' he wrote, 'that under the circumstances, no other course was open to me, once I had taken my ship into the trap of [Montevideo](#). For with the ammunition remaining, any attempt to fight my way back to open and deep water was bound to fail. ... It was clear to me that this decision might be consciously or unwittingly misconstrued by persons ignorant of my motives, as being attributable entirely or partly to personal considerations. Therefore I decided from the beginning to accept the consequences involved in this decision. For a captain with a sense of honour, it goes without saying that his personal fate cannot be separated from that of his ship. ... After to-day's decision of the Argentine Government, I can do no more for my ship's company. Neither shall I any longer be able to take an active part in the present struggle of my country. It only remains to prove by my death that the men of the fighting services of the Third Reich are ready to die for the honour of the flag.'

I alone bear the responsibility for scuttling the Graf Spee. I am happy to pay with my life for any reflection on the honour of the flag. I shall face my fate with firm faith in the cause and the future of the nation and of my Fuehrer. ...'

The burial of Captain Langsdorff's body with full military honours took place in the German cemetery in Buenos Aires. The burnt-out wreck of the Graf Spee was sold some weeks later to a Senor Julio Vega of [Montevideo](#), who employed divers and workmen to salvage fittings and other material as 'scrap iron'.

However we regard his typically German sense of 'honour', it is impossible not to feel a good deal of sympathy for the unhappy man who wrote thus from the 'jaws of measureless tribulation'. The British shipmasters who had been his prisoners spoke well of Captain Langsdorff; and in his official report Captain McCall, British Naval Attaché at Buenos Aires, paid him the tribute that he was 'obviously a man of very high character and he was proud of the fact that he had not been the cause of a single death as the result of any of his various captures' of merchant vessels.

Of the part played in the [River Plate](#) drama by the British cruisers, [Rear-Admiral Harwood](#) wrote in his despatch to the Admiralty: 'I have the greatest pleasure in informing you of the very high standard of efficiency and courage that was displayed by all officers and men throughout the five days of the operation. ... Within my own knowledge and from the reports of the commanding officers, there are many stories of bravery and devotion to duty, and of the utmost efficiency which shows that His Majesty's ships have been forcefully trained and made thoroughly ready to deal with the many and various exigencies of battle. ... The main impression left on my mind is of the adequacy of our peace training. Little that had not been practised occurred, particularly among the repair parties. ...'

In a message to the New Zealand Naval Board, as well as in his despatch to the Admiralty, the Rear-Admiral said he was 'deeply conscious of the honour and pleasure of taking one of His Majesty's ships of the New Zealand Squadron into action. The [Achilles](#) was handled perfectly by her captain and fought magnificently by her captain, officers and ship's company.' In his despatch he said he fully concurred with the remark of Captain Parry that 'New Zealand has every reason to be proud of her seamen during their baptism of fire.'

During the time the cruisers of the South America Division were patrolling the [River Plate](#) estuary strong British naval forces were moving to their support, but after the destruction of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) most of them were recalled for other duties. On Monday, 18 December, the [Cumberland](#) was left on patrol while the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) went to San Borombon Bay, where they fuelled in turn from the tanker [Olynthus](#). [Rear-Admiral Harwood](#) boarded the [Achilles](#) that evening and addressed the ship's company, praising them for their part in the recent action. Later, both ships got under way and shaped course for the [Falkland Islands](#), where they arrived on 21 December.

The following morning the [Achilles](#) discharged her three seriously wounded ratings to the King Edward Memorial Hospital, to which a number of casualties from the [Exeter](#) and [Ajax](#) were also admitted for treatment. The [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) sent a number of men on board the [Exeter](#) to assist in the repair work. After fuelling from a tanker, the [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) sailed that evening.

Both cruisers returned to Port Stanley in the afternoon of 24 December and were joined about four hours later by the [Cumberland](#) and the [Dorsetshire](#). The former had come down from the [River Plate](#) area and the latter arrived from [Simonstown](#), whence she had sailed on 13 December. Christmas Day was observed by all five cruisers with traditional Navy custom. A strong south-west gale with violent hail and rain squalls was experienced from midnight of 26 December till the morning of the 29th, the [Achilles](#) riding with both anchors down and steam for slow speed. Despite the bad weather, the New Zealand cruiser managed to refuel from a tanker and to take in ammunition and stores from lighters. The three wounded ratings from the shore hospital were embarked on 29 December. The [Ajax](#) and [Achilles](#) sailed from Port Stanley in the early hours of 30 December for the [River Plate](#).

At four o'clock in the morning of 3 January 1940 the [Achilles](#) parted company with the [Ajax](#), which proceeded into [Montevideo](#). The former embarked a pilot from the light vessel and steamed up the [River Plate](#) to Buenos Aires. A large crowd on the wharf gave the ship an ovation. The British Ambassador, Sir Esmond Ovey, paid the [Achilles](#) the great compliment of welcoming her personally and insisted on being the first person to board the ship on arrival. The Argentine authorities had agreed to

waive all official calls, but the Minister of Marine and the Chief of the Naval Staff sent their ADCs to meet the [Achilles](#).

In a report to the New Zealand Naval Board Captain Parry said that approximately thirty seriously wounded ratings from the [Exeter](#) and [Ajax](#) and three from the [Achilles](#) were landed at Port Stanley. The only hospital accommodation in the colony was a small cottage hospital of approximately twenty beds, of which five were reserved for maternity cases. The staff consisted of two doctors, a matron, and two trained nurses. This sufficed for the normal requirements of the colony, whose population was about 3000.

Captain Parry said that magnificent efforts were made to meet an unprecedented situation, and all difficulties were overcome so successfully that the patients could not have received better treatment and attention. They had complete confidence in the senior medical officer, Dr Kinnaird, and were full of admiration for the matron, Miss Gowans, and her staff of nurses and voluntary aids. The Governor of the [Falkland Islands](#), Sir H. Henniker Heaton, KCMG, visited the hospital regularly.

No public recognition of their good work had been given to these people owing to the necessity of keeping secret the use made by the Royal Navy of the [Falkland Islands](#), but Captain Parry suggested that a letter from the New Zealand naval authorities would be greatly appreciated. The Naval Secretary, therefore, on 5 March 1940 sent a letter to the Governor of the [Falkland Islands](#), conveying the Naval Board's great appreciation of the efforts of the hospital staff.

Captain Parry also reported that, as soon as the first news of the [River Plate](#) action was received, the British Community Council in Buenos Aires provided at their own expense complete hospital equipment for 100 men and despatched it immediately to the [Falkland Islands](#). A radiologist and fourteen trained nurses, all of whom gave up their own work at short notice, went with the equipment in the steamer [Lafonia](#). Although this assistance did not arrive in time to help the Falkland Islanders during the first week, it relieved the situation enormously. The modern X-ray apparatus was particularly valuable.

During the visit of the [Achilles](#) to Buenos Aires from 3 to 5 January 1940, the hospitality received and the amount of presents given to the ship were incredible,

said Captain Parry. The reception of the ship had been arranged by the British Community Council and the [Australia](#) and New Zealand Association of Buenos Aires. In addition, the following sums of money were presented to the Rear-Admiral, South America Division, as a contribution to the families of men killed or seriously wounded in action off the [River Plate](#): British Community Council, Buenos Aires, £1000; British Community, Rosario Consular District, £93; British Patriotic Funds, [Valparaiso](#) and Santiago ([Chile](#)), £300. This money was divided among the three ships in proportion to the numbers of men. On 5 March 1940 the New Zealand Naval Board sent a letter to the British Ambassador, Buenos Aires, expressing its great appreciation of and thanks for the generosity and good work of the British communities concerned.

Though their attitude was generally friendly, the Argentinians took little part in the reception to the [Achilles](#), probably in order to appear strictly neutral. Leave in Buenos Aires was given only to organised parties from the [Achilles](#), who were the guests of the British Community Council and the [Australia](#) and New Zealand Association. German seamen from the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) were still in uniform in Buenos Aires at that time and appeared to have no restrictions on their movements. Such contacts as they made with the ship's company of the [Achilles](#) were of a friendly nature, drinks and cap ribbons being exchanged. Captain Parry was also informed that two German seamen who were on the pier at sunset saluted as the flag of the [Achilles](#) was hauled down.

HMS [Ajax](#) had a rousing reception in [Montevideo](#). It was remarked that the most striking thing was the spontaneity of the welcome, which could hardly have been greater had [Montevideo](#) been a British community. The Anglo-Uruguayan Trade Association made a presentation of plate to [Rear-Admiral Harwood](#) for 'his services in keeping the sea clear for Uruguayan trade.'

The [Achilles](#) left Buenos Aires on 5 January and rejoined the flagship that afternoon. The Dorsetshire and Shropshire were in company with the [Ajax](#), the Shropshire having recently arrived from the Cape of Good Hope. [Rear-Admiral Harwood](#) then transferred his flag to the [Achilles](#) and the division proceeded to sea in single line ahead. That night the [Ajax](#) left on passage to England. After eight days on patrol, the [Achilles](#) arrived at the [Falkland Islands](#) on 14 January. It was at that time that [Rear-Admiral Harwood](#) proposed to the Admiralty that the [Achilles](#), when relieved by HMS Hawkins, should proceed to New Zealand to refit at [Auckland](#)

instead of [Malta](#) as had been previously intended.

After refuelling and taking in stores, the [Achilles](#) sailed from Port Stanley in the early hours of 16 January and patrolled as far north as the [Rio de Janeiro](#) area. In the afternoon of 26 January she arrived at [Montevideo](#), where unstinted hospitality was accorded the ship's company during her stay of twenty-four hours. The German merchant ships Tacoma and Lahn were still lying in the harbour. The [Achilles](#) refuelled from the Admiralty tanker Olwen off Rouen Bank on 28 January and was at anchor there when the Hawkins arrived next morning. [Rear-Admiral Harwood's](#) flag was then struck in the [Achilles](#) and rehoisted in the Hawkins. The ship's company cheered him as he left the [Achilles](#) and farewelled him by singing 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow' and the Maori goodbye song.

'During the short time his flag was flying at our masthead, he endeared himself to us all,' recorded Captain Parry. 'It was, therefore, very gratifying that, when he left us, he signalled:

My best wishes to you all. I have enjoyed flying my flag in your very happy ship.

Besides the debt we all owe him for his unforgettable example and leadership in the Battle of the [River Plate](#), we are also more than grateful to him for forwarding a proposal that we should refit at [Auckland](#) instead of an Imperial dockyard.'

In the afternoon of 29 January the [Achilles](#) steamed into [Montevideo](#) roads to embark mails. This enabled the ship's company to take a last look at the wreck of the [Admiral Graf Spee](#). 'The ship is now a pathetic sight,' wrote Parry. 'Her hull is no longer visible. Her upper works are rusting rapidly. Her funnel and mainmast lean heavily to starboard. Her fore-turret guns are just awash, while the after-turret, capsized by the explosion of the magazine underneath, lies on its back.'

Proceeding 'in execution of previous orders', the [Achilles](#) arrived in Stanley harbour for the last time in the afternoon of 1 February 1940 and sailed twenty-four hours later on her return to New Zealand. The transit of Magellan Strait was made on 4 February. The passage across the [Pacific](#) was entirely uneventful, and the [Achilles](#) arrived at [Auckland](#) on the morning of 23 February, thus ending a memorable and historic cruise.

During the six months since she left [Auckland](#) in August 1939, the [Achilles](#) had steamed 52,323 miles and spent 168 days at sea and only ten days in harbour. As she had already steamed 21,139 miles from the time she left England for New Zealand in February 1939, the total distance travelled during the twelve months was 73,462 miles.

Since 29 August 1939 leave had been given to the ship's company on nineteen occasions, including several brief periods when the ship was in harbour for only a few hours. Night leave had been granted fifteen times, on seven of which not more than twenty men had found accommodation on shore. Life on board had therefore been very strenuous, for sea time in war means continuous watchkeeping for everybody and the daily ordeal of going to full action stations at dawn. The strain bears particularly on the engine-room staff, who not only keep continuous watch at sea but have to seize every moment in harbour to carry out urgent repairs. That no breakdowns occurred during the cruise was evidence of the soundness of the machinery and the devotion to duty of the men who tended it.

'One thing at least is certain,' wrote Captain Parry in summing up his impressions of the cruise. 'The continued enthusiasm and cheerfulness, both in dull moments and in more exciting ones, of a predominantly New Zealand ship's company has been a revelation, and for four anxious days an inspiration to one who was bred and born in the Old Country. Though many weary and anxious times lie ahead, he feels complete confidence that such men cannot fail to win the final victory.'

The sea instinct and the imagination of the people of New Zealand had been stirred by the Battle of the [River Plate](#). The announcement that the [Achilles](#) was returning to the Dominion was therefore received with much gratification. With the active cooperation of the Government, the civic authorities of [Auckland](#) made elaborate preparations to give the cruiser and her ship's company a fitting welcome. Arrangements were also made for the near relatives of her men from many parts of the country to be present when she arrived. The Governor-General, Lord Galway, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. P. Fraser (the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. M. J. Savage, being seriously ill), and four other Cabinet Ministers travelled to [Auckland](#) to take part in the proceedings. Interpreting the national feeling of thanksgiving and

pride, the names of twenty-seven municipalities, ranging from the far north to the most southerly part of New Zealand, figured on the banners of welcome that were a prominent feature of the lavish decorations in [Queen Street, Auckland](#).

As the [Achilles](#) steamed up Rangitoto Channel in the early morning of 23 February thousands of people watched her from every point of vantage. When she passed the Devonport Naval Base on her way to the city wharf at which she berthed, the [Achilles](#) cheered and was cheered by the [Leander](#) and the [Philomel](#).

A vast crowd, estimated to number more than 100,000, assembled in [Queen Street](#) and its approaches to greet the ship's company, led by Captain Parry, as they marched from the wharf to attend the civic reception and luncheon at the Town Hall. Some 6000 officers and men of the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy, the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, the Royal New Zealand Air Force, and the Merchant Navy took part in the parade, the route being lined by Territorial troops and school cadets. At the civic reception Mr Fraser read a cable message received that morning by the Governor-General from the Secretary of State for the Dominions expressing the British Government's appreciation of the notable part played by the [Achilles](#) and her New Zealanders in the [River Plate](#) action. The message said it was particularly appropriate that the [Achilles](#) should arrive home in New Zealand on the day on which the officers and men of the [Ajax](#) and [Exeter](#) were being reviewed by the King. The Governor-General, in reply, said the Government and people of New Zealand wished to associate themselves with the welcome to those ships' companies, to whom their comrades in the [Achilles](#) sent cordial greetings.

While the [Achilles](#) was undergoing a long refit, a party of about 400 officers and ratings travelled by train to [Wellington](#), where they were given an enthusiastic welcome as they marched through the city streets. The rest of the ship's company visited [Wellington](#) four days later. Requests from many part of the Dominion for similar visits could not be granted. The presence in their home towns of men on long leave from the [Achilles](#) proved of great value to recruiting for the armed forces.

¹ At that time the [Renown](#) and [Ark Royal](#) and the [Neptune](#) and her destroyers were more than 1500 miles away to the northward and approaching [Rio de Janeiro](#).

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 6 – THE CRUISE OF THE LEANDER

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The Cruise of the Leander

ON 8 September 1939 the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, in a telegram to the High Commissioner for the [United Kingdom](#), said that by placing the [Achilles](#) and two escort vessels, [Leith](#) and [Wellington](#), under the orders of Admiralty, the [New Zealand Government](#) had 'made the maximum possible strategic contribution at sea under present circumstances, since HMS [Leander](#) requires to be retained on the New Zealand Station to guard against the threat of attack on shipping by armed raiders.' The message added that the previous suggestion that New Zealand should maintain a third cruiser could not be considered an immediate requirement.

After her tropical cruise to [Fanning Island](#), whence she had returned on 13 September 1939, the [Leander](#) prepared for a visit to sub-Antarctic latitudes. She sailed from [Auckland](#) on 25 September for the uninhabited Auckland Islands and Campbell Island, which were regarded as likely bases for enemy commerce raiders and their supply ships. The cruiser arrived off Campbell Island in the morning of 28 September and made a careful examination of all bays and inlets, but no indications of recent human activity were found. Next morning the [Leander](#) anchored in Port Ross, or Sarah's Bosom-harbour, on the north-east coast of the Auckland Islands. After inspecting this locality she steamed along the east side of the main island and lay-to two miles to seaward of the entrance to Carnley harbour in a gale, with visibility of about six miles between the rain squalls. Nothing suspicious was seen in the eastern end of Carnley harbour or in the inlets further up the coast. The [Leander](#) returned to [Wellington](#) on 1 October and sailed three days later for [Auckland](#), co-operating with reconnaissance aircraft which made sweeps over the Cook Strait, Cuvier Island, and [Hauraki Gulf](#) areas. The [Leander](#) made a second cruise to the Auckland Islands in November. On this occasion Carnley harbour was entered and examined, several inlets being visited by the cruiser's boats. The anchorage at Port Ross was also inspected and other bays and inlets were reconnoitred by the ship's aircraft. Nothing suspicious was seen in any of the places examined.

There is little doubt, however, that the German steamer Erlangen, 6100 tons, was lying in a remote anchorage in Carnley harbour at the time the [Leander](#) made her first visit to the Auckland Islands. This vessel, after loading at New Zealand ports

for [Europe](#), sailed from Dunedin on 28 August 1939, ostensibly for [Port Kembla](#), [New South Wales](#), where she was to have coaled for her homeward passage. It was reported that the Erlangen was sighted two days later 'hove-to off Stewart Island in weather that did not necessitate that precaution.' She was ordered by radio from [Germany](#) not to go to [Australia](#), but she had insufficient coal to steam to the distant neutral waters of South America.

According to published German accounts, the Erlangen went to the Auckland Islands and lay concealed at the head of North Arm, the innermost inlet in Carnley harbour, for five weeks while her crew toiled at cutting rata wood, of which some 400 tons was loaded to eke out her meagre coal supply. A suit of sails was fashioned from hatch covers and spare canvas. The Erlangen put to sea again on 7 October 1939, and after a long passage of five weeks arrived at Puerto Montt, Southern Chile, on 11 November. ¹ In April 1941, when a coastwatching station was being established on the Auckland Islands, it was found that five or six acres of bush had been felled at the head of North Arm.

At about this time the Admiralty thought that the [Leander](#) could be more usefully employed elsewhere than in New Zealand waters and, subject to the concurrence of the [New Zealand Government](#), proposed to replace her on the New Zealand Station by a 'C' class cruiser. ² This proposal was mentioned by the High Commissioner for the [United Kingdom](#) in a letter dated 29 October 1939 to the acting Prime Minister, in which it was pointed out that the change would greatly facilitate the naval dispositions contemplated by the Admiralty.

In a minute by the Staff Officer (Operations) to the Naval Board which was considered at a meeting of the Council of Defence on 31 October, it was pointed out that both cruisers had been placed voluntarily under the operational control of the Admiralty. There was therefore no reason to object to the terms of its request. The Admiralty was the best judge of the probable scale of attack to be expected in New Zealand waters and it seemed that a 'C' class cruiser, though much inferior to the [Leander](#), would have to be accepted. An alternative would be to send out three destroyers.

¹ The Erlangen ultimately made her way into the [Atlantic](#). She sailed

from Mar del Plata, [Argentina](#), on 24 July 1941 and was intercepted by HMS Newcastle. She was set on fire by her own crew. An unsuccessful effort was made to tow her into Uruguayan waters, but she sank.

² Fourteen 'C' class cruisers were built in 1916–18 — Capetown, Cardiff, etc., — 4180 to 4290 tons displacement; 29 knots; five 6-inch guns. Most of them were converted to anti-aircraft ships after 1939.

Attacks might come from a 'pocket battleship', modern 8-inch or 6-inch gun cruisers, armed raiders mounting 6-inch guns, or submarines.

A telegram was sent to the acting Prime Minister, who was then in [London](#), stating that the High Commissioner for the [United Kingdom](#) had been informed that it was fully realised that the Admiralty was best able to estimate the probable scales of attack in various oceans. The Government readily acceded to the request for the transfer of the [Leander](#) and her replacement by another unit, but in view of the limited steaming radius and offensive capability of one 'C' class cruiser, it was suggested for Admiralty consideration that the [Leander](#) should be replaced by three destroyers, preferably modern, and fitted for anti-submarine operations. It was thought that three units would be of more value than one for patrolling the three focal areas of New Zealand trade and searching for raiders.

In a memorandum to the Minister of Defence, dated 2 November 1939, the Naval Secretary said it was assumed that, but for the outbreak of war, the Government would have considered whether to follow the recommendations of the Pacific Defence Conference and undertake responsibility for a third cruiser and two escort vessels. It would now appear, particularly in view of the war, that this policy should be implemented in principle. If New Zealand undertook responsibility for an armed merchant cruiser and three destroyers, in addition to the [Leander](#) and [Achilles](#), the cost would be about £450,000 a year, or about £75,000 more than a third cruiser and two escort vessels.

When the matter was referred to the Minister of Finance, the Secretary of the Treasury said that 'in view of the heavy expenditure necessary on account of increased Air Force and Army activities, it is considered that no further commitment in respect of naval services, over and above the present for the maintenance of the

[Leander](#) and [Achilles](#) and the armed merchant cruiser be entered into at the present time, especially as no request in this connection has been received from the Imperial Government.'

This short-term view of the Treasury appeared to derive support from a telegram received by the Governor-General on 21 November from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, stating that 'the Admiralty had had under consideration certain revised plans for the disposition of cruisers and it was not thought it would be necessary for HMS [Leander](#) to be moved from the New Zealand Station, at any rate for the present. The Admiralty were most appreciative of the readiness of New Zealand to fall in with their wishes.' But the course of the war was yet to involve New Zealand in many further heavy commitments in respect to naval services.

At that time the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) was on her commerce raiding cruise. She had recently entered the [Indian Ocean](#), where she had scant success, and by 21 November had returned to the South [Atlantic](#). This was not known for some time and the possibility of her entering the [Pacific](#) had to be considered. On 29 November 1939 the Chief of the Naval Staff, in a message to Admiralty and the Australian Naval Board, said that in the event of the arrival of an enemy armoured ship in New Zealand waters the Commodore intended that the [Leander](#) would try to locate and shadow the ship. He would avoid action in conditions of high visibility and seek action if a favourable opportunity occurred at night or in low visibility with the intention to cripple the enemy. In deciding whether to attack, consideration would be given to the proximity of reinforcement. In the event, as we have seen, the fortune of war favoured the other New Zealand cruiser in South American waters.

During the month of December 1939 the [Leander](#) remained at [Auckland](#) at twelve hours' notice for steam and gave Christmas leave to her ship's company. By this time arrangements were well advanced for the embarkation and despatch overseas of the First Echelon of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force. It had been decided that the troopship convoy would be escorted from [Wellington](#) by HMS [Ramillies](#), a battleship from the [Mediterranean Fleet](#), HMAS [Canberra](#) (flagship of Rear-Admiral Commanding Australian Squadron), and the [Leander](#) (broad pendant of Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron). The first transport, the [Empress of Canada](#), 21,517 tons, arrived at [Wellington](#) from [Hong Kong](#) on 23 December. She was followed by the [Rangitata](#), 16,737 tons, [Dunera](#), 11,162 tons, [Orion](#), 23,371

tons, [Strathaird](#), 22,281 tons, and the Polish motor-vessel [Sobieski](#), 11,030 tons. The [Dunera](#) and [Sobieski](#) proceeded to [Lyttelton](#) to embark the [South Island](#) troops. When she arrived at [Wellington](#) on 31 December the [Ramillies](#) displayed between her masts a huge banner bearing the words: 'Well done, the [Achilles](#)' – the tribute of her ship's company to the part played by that ship in the [River Plate](#) action.

On 1 January 1940, before the [Leander](#) left [Auckland](#), the broad pendant of [Commodore J. W. Rivett-Carnac](#) was transferred to HMS [Philomel](#) on his relief by [Commodore H. E. Horan](#) as [Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron](#) and [Commanding Officer HMS Leander](#).

On 4 January the [Leander](#) left [Wellington](#) for [Lyttelton](#) to act as escort for the ships carrying the [South Island](#) troops. The [Dunera](#) went south in company with the cruiser, which anchored in [Lyttelton](#) harbour early the following morning. The [Dunera](#) embarked some 1350 troops and the [Sobieski](#) 1150, and both sailed in the afternoon with the [Leander](#). During the forenoon of 6 January they made contact in Cook Strait with the four transports carrying the [North Island](#) troops, numbering some 4000, which had sailed from [Wellington](#) that morning. The convoy, which now consisted of the [Orion](#), [Strathaird](#), [Empress of Canada](#), [Rangitata](#), [Dunera](#), and [Sobieski](#), then proceeded, escorted by the [Canberra](#), [Leander](#), and [Ramillies](#). The six transports, totalling 106,095 tons gross register, were carrying over 6500 troops. It is of interest to recall that the ten ships, totalling 82,300 tons gross register, which transported the Main Body of the 1st New Zealand Expeditionary Force to Egypt in 1914, carried 8499 troops and 3946 horses.

After an uneventful passage across the [Tasman Sea](#), the New Zealand ships met the Australian transports [Empress of Japan](#), [Orcades](#), [Otranto](#), [Orford](#), and [Strathnaver](#), escorted by [HMAS Australia](#), off Sydney Heads on 10 January 1940. The combined convoy then sailed southward and the [Leander](#) went into [Sydney](#).

After her return to New Zealand the [Leander](#) went up to the Bay of Islands and anchored off Russell to represent the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy at the celebration on 6 February of the centenary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi.

[HMS Hector](#), ¹ armed merchant cruiser, commanded by Captain R. Lloyd, RN (ret'd), allocated by the Admiralty to the New Zealand Station, arrived at [Auckland](#)

from [Bombay](#) on 10 February 1940. The Naval Board informed the Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron that the Hector was to be regarded as a vessel of the squadron. She sailed from [Auckland](#) on 27 February with a relief for the garrison troops on [Fanning Island](#), and called at [Apia](#), [Samoa](#), and [Suva](#) on her return passage to [Auckland](#).

Arrangements were now in hand for the transport of the Second Echelon, New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and the second draft of Australian troops, and questions were raised by the [New Zealand Government](#) regarding the adequacy of the escorts proposed by the Admiralty. In order to effect urgent economy in shipping tonnage, the Admiralty stated, it was under consideration to include the Queen Mary, [Aquitania](#), [Mauretania](#), and Empress of [Britain](#) in Convoy US 2. As the speed of some of the transports was below that at which these fast liners could be handled it was necessary to divide the convoy into a fast group and a slow group whose seagoing speeds would be 20 knots and 13 knots respectively. Two escorting forces would therefore be required.

In order to minimise the period during which the Colombo area would be without the protection of a raider hunting group, it was proposed that the slow convoy of five transports should be escorted

¹ Hector, twin-screw passenger steamer of 11,198 tons gross register, owned by A. Holt and Company (Blue Funnel Line) of Liverpool. As an armed merchant cruiser, she was fitted with eight 6-inch guns. She was set on fire and sunk at Colombo in February 1942.

from [Fremantle](#) to Colombo and [Aden](#) by HM Ships [Ramillies](#) and Eagle (aircraft-carrier) and HMAS Sydney. The fast convoy of seven ships would be escorted from [Fremantle](#) to the vicinity of [Cocos Island](#) by HMA Ships Canberra and Australia and thence to Colombo and [Aden](#) by HMS Kent and the French cruiser Suffren. Through the [Red Sea](#) the slow group would be escorted by HMS Ramillies and the fast group by one 6-inch-gun cruiser.

The Australian Commonwealth Naval Board on 17 March proposed that, as the New Zealand transports would not be included in the slow group, the Ramillies should remain at [Sydney](#) until required for the onward escort of that group of Convoy

US 2. In concurring with this proposal the Admiralty said it was regretted that the moral effect of the previously intended visit of the *Ramillies* to New Zealand would now be lost, but it would be realised that the change in plans was inevitable as the battleship had neither the speed nor the endurance to accompany the fast group. It was presumed that the Australian and New Zealand Naval Boards would arrange to escort the New Zealand transports across the [Tasman Sea](#). In a message dated 19 March the Admiralty said the *Eagle*, owing to an accident, would not be able to join the slow group at [Fremantle](#), but it was considered that the *Ramillies* and the *Sydney* would afford adequate protection.

On 18 March the Australian Naval Board proposed to the New Zealand Naval Board that the *Canberra* and *Leander* should escort the New Zealand troopships across the [Tasman Sea](#) to 160 degrees East (about two-thirds of the passage) and that the *Australia* should then relieve the *Leander*. While agreeing to this proposal, the New Zealand Naval Board informed the Admiralty and the Australian Naval Board that the Government was very uneasy as to whether this and the subsequent escorts were sufficiently strong and would be glad to have information of the Admiralty's intention regarding escorting forces for the whole voyage. The matter was clouded further when Admiralty messages announced that reports had been received that a pocket battleship accompanied by a tanker of the *Altmark* class had left [Germany](#) during the first week of March on a commerce-raiding cruise. ¹

Replying to the New Zealand Naval Board, the Admiralty said the responsibility for providing adequate escorts rested with it. It was its considered opinion that the only raider likely to be encountered in the [Tasman Sea](#) was one of armed merchant ship type and, consequently, the escort arrangements proposed for that

¹ The German raider No. 16 ([Atlantis](#)) sailed from [Kiel](#) on 11 March 1940 on a cruise which included the [Atlantic](#), [Indian](#), and [Pacific](#) oceans. Raider No. 36 ([Orion](#)) sailed in April 1940 and arrived on the New Zealand coast in June. No pocket battleship was at sea on raiding operations during March 1940.

area were considered adequate. The question of the adequacy of escorts for all troop convoys was continually under consideration and arrangements would be

modified if there was any reason for doing so.

The views of the Government were set out in a telegram dated 1 April 1940 from the Governor-General to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. The Government appreciated that the Admiralty was responsible for the adequacy of ocean escorts and did not, of course, dispute its judgment in such matters. But it felt bound to point out that it was also its responsibility to ensure that more than 7000 New Zealand troops did not depart from the Dominion unless and until the Government was fully satisfied that the voyage would be made in conditions providing a reasonable maximum of safety. In view of the Admiralty reports, which indicated at least a strong suspicion that a pocket battleship was at large, the Government could not disguise its uneasiness at the prospect of the convoy being protected by only two warships, both practically unarmoured. The Chief of Naval Staff had explained the technical and strategic factors involved, including the safety which the speed of the convoy afforded. Nevertheless, the Government felt that there was an element of risk because an action might well take place in circumstances highly unfavourable to the safety of the convoy. It could not dismiss from its mind the attraction this convoy, so valuable in men and ships, could have for the enemy. It might well be, the Government argued, that a pocket battleship had been sent out for this very purpose.

Having regard to these considerations, the Government proposed that the [Leander](#) should proceed the whole way with the convoy, thereafter being at the disposal of the Admiralty as already arranged. The Admiralty was aware that the Government did not consider it desirable that the [Leander](#) should leave New Zealand until the [Achilles](#) had completed her refit; but the Naval Board had reported that the latter ship could be at forty-eight hours' notice by the middle of May and the [Hector](#) would also be available.

Expressing appreciation of the Government's point of view, the Admiralty agreed that the [Leander](#) would be employed more usefully on escort duty than in the defence of New Zealand interests from attack by an armed merchant raider, against which, it was considered, the presence of the [Hector](#) and [Achilles](#) would afford adequate security. It welcomed the additional security to the convoy which the presence of the [Leander](#) would afford. On conclusion of escort duty, it was intended that the [Leander](#) should join the East Indies Station. ¹

¹ This discussion recalls the events of September–October 1914 when a difference of opinion between the Admiralty and the Governments concerned regarding the adequacy of escorts for troopship convoys resulted in considerable delay in the sailing of the first Australian and New Zealand troops for Egypt.

HMS Hector sailed from [Auckland](#) on 13 April and arrived on the 17th at the entrance to the Brisbane River, where she found the loaded Norwegian tankers Thorshov, 9955 tons, and Solor, 8262 tons, at anchor, each under a naval armed guard. ¹ They sailed for [Wellington](#) on 19 April, escorted by the Hector. Four days later the Hector collided with the Thorshov. Considerable damage was done to both ships. The Hector spent three weeks in the floating dock undergoing repairs, after which she made a cruise to [South Island](#) ports.

The [Leander](#) arrived on 24 April at [Wellington](#), where the ships assigned to transport the Second Echelon had assembled. The first to arrive was the new Royal Mail Line [Andes](#), 25,689 tons; she went on to [Lyttelton](#) to embark the [South Island](#) troops. The Empress of [Japan](#), 26,032 tons, arrived on 1 April, the Empress of [Britain](#), 42,348 tons, on the 14th, and the [Aquitania](#), 44,786 tons, on the 20th. The [Canberra](#) (flagship) and [Australia](#) arrived from [Sydney](#) as escorts, the former proceeding to [Lyttelton](#) on 29 April.

As from 1 May 1940 Captain Horan relinquished the rank of Commodore 2nd class but remained in command of the [Leander](#). Captain Parry assumed the rank of Commodore 2nd class, and took over from Captain Horan the duties of First Naval Member of the New Zealand Naval Board, Chief of the Naval Staff, and Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron, continuing in command of the [Achilles](#).

In addition to the troops numbering some 6800 officers and men, a naval draft of 28 officers and 356 ratings under the command of Commander Newman, RNZNVR, ² embarked at [Wellington](#) in the [Aquitania](#) and Empress of Japan. The draft included 3 officers and 74 ratings from the [Achilles](#) who were reverting to the Royal Navy, 58 tradesmen ratings recruited in New Zealand, and 25 officers and 219 ratings of the New Zealand Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve who had been selected for service in the Royal Navy.

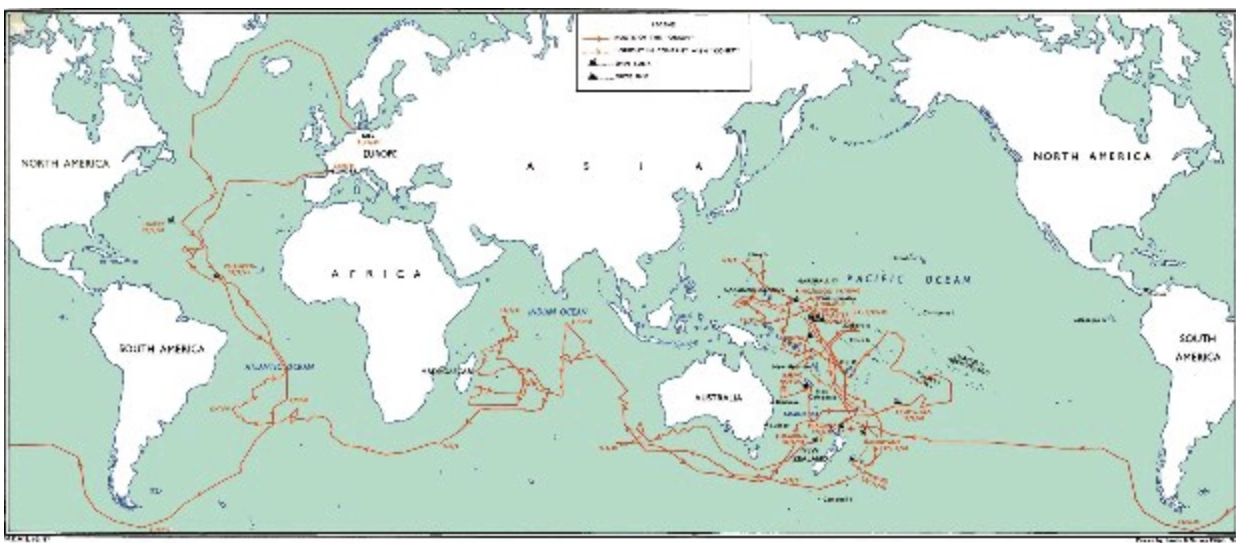
The [Aquitania](#) and the two *Empresses*, in company with the [Leander](#) and [Australia](#), sailed from [Wellington](#) in the forenoon of 2 May 1940 and were joined in Cook Strait by the *Canberra* and the [Andes](#), which had come up from [Lyttelton](#). An interchange of farewell signals included one from the [Achilles](#) to the [Leander](#) expressing the wish that she might have 'as good luck as we had', to which the latter replied: 'We will do our best.'

After an uneventful passage across the [Tasman Sea](#), the *Canberra* and [Leander](#) went into [Sydney](#) harbour on the morning of 5 May and, having refuelled, sailed five hours later to rejoin the convoy.

¹ The German invasion of [Norway](#) and [Denmark](#) had started on 9 April 1940.

² Captain R. Newman, CBE, DSO and bar, VRD, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born England, 28 Jul 1898; master mariner; company director.

The transports [Queen Mary](#), 81,255 tons, and [Mauretania](#), 35,677 tons, carrying Australian troops, joined up at the same time, together with [HMAS Perth](#). On the following afternoon the transport *Empress of Canada*, from [Melbourne](#), joined the convoy in [Bass Strait](#). The convoy, which now numbered seven magnificent liners, totalling 277,284 tons gross register, carried on for [Fremantle](#), escorted by the *Canberra*, *Australia*, and [Leander](#).



TRACK CHART OF GERMAN RAIDER *ORION*

TRACK CHART OF GERMAN RAIDER **ORION**

The New Zealand cruiser arrived at **Fremantle** ahead of the convoy in the forenoon of 10 May – the day on which **Germany** invaded the Low Countries. The disastrous change in the military situation in **Europe** had already foreshadowed an alteration in the movements of the convoy. On 28 April, in accordance with Admiralty instructions, the Australian Naval Board had directed that 'with the exception of mail steamers, all British merchant ships bound through the **Mediterranean** and not working **Mediterranean** ports for cargo, were to be routed via the Cape of Good Hope.' Two days later the Flag Officer Commanding Australian Squadron was informed that 'in view of the Italian situation, Commonwealth Government has decided to postpone temporarily embarkation of Australian troops in U.S. 3 until further advice is received from U.K. Government. It has been proposed to **New Zealand Government** that they should take similar action regarding New Zealand troops.' Early on 2 May, however, the Australian Naval Board informed the New Zealand Naval Board and the Flag Officer Commanding Australian Squadron that the Commonwealth Government had agreed to the embarkation of Australian troops and that Convoy US 3 should proceed as far as **Fremantle** pending a decision regarding their final destination. On 30 April the Admiralty made a signal to the Commander-in-Chief South Atlantic Station at **Freetown** requesting him 'on account of the probable diversion of Australian and New Zealand troop convoys to the Cape route', to sail an 8-inch cruiser for the Cape of Good Hope with all convenient despatch. Early on 1 May HMS Shropshire was instructed to sail from **Freetown** by the shortest route in order to arrive at Simonstown on 7 May.

A further signal from the Admiralty to the Australian and New Zealand Naval Boards and others concerned detailed the intended escorts for Convoys US 2 and US 3 in the event of its being found necessary to divert them to the [United Kingdom](#) via the Cape of Good Hope. It appeared that the fuel endurance of the [Leander](#) would not allow her to make the passage from [Fremantle](#) to the Cape in company with US 3 at 20 knots. It was proposed, therefore, that her future employment should be reviewed. The Admiralty was satisfied that the measures outlined would afford full security to the convoys.

At midday on 12 May 1940 Convoy US 3 sailed from Gage Roads, [Fremantle](#), the [Leander](#) leading the majestic procession through the swept channel. For the next three days the convoy proceeded on its course for Colombo. At 0.42 a.m. on 16 May instructions were received by FOCAS from the Admiralty for US 3 to 'steer towards the Cape of Good Hope'. The [Leander](#) was ordered to proceed independently to Colombo and US 3 carried on for the Cape escorted by the [Canberra](#) and [Australia](#), the former being relieved a few days later by the [Shropshire](#).

The [Leander](#) called at Colombo on 19 May and arrived on the 26th at [Alexandria](#), where she stayed for the rest of the month. It had been arranged that the [Gloucester](#), [Orion](#), [Neptune](#), [Leander](#), and [Sydney](#) were to form the Twentieth Cruiser Squadron in the [Mediterranean Fleet](#), but this was altered and on 1 June the [Leander](#) left [Alexandria](#) for the [Red Sea](#) to join the Fourth Cruiser Squadron, East Indies Station. She passed through the [Suez Canal](#) next day and arrived at [Port Sudan](#) on 4 June.

From about the end of March 1940, owing to the attitude of [Italy](#), the Admiralty had been moving naval forces from the [China](#) and East Indies Stations to the eastern [Mediterranean](#). On 4 April the Admiralty announced its intention to form a Red Sea Force, and on the 19th Rear-Admiral A. J. L. Murray, DSO, OBE, commanding Fourth Cruiser Squadron, transferred his flag to HMS [Liverpool](#) as Senior Officer, [Red Sea](#). On 20 May the Admiralty ordered the aircraft-carrier [Eagle](#) and the [Liverpool](#), [Gloucester](#), and [Sydney](#) to be transferred to the [Mediterranean](#). Two days earlier information had been received of the general mobilisation of the Italian Navy and Army in [East Africa](#), and on 24 May the [Red Sea](#) was closed to all Allied shipping. All northbound tankers west of [Aden](#) were allowed to proceed to [Suez](#), but all other

shipping was ordered to await the starting of convoys. Reinforcements for the Red Sea Force arrived in the shape of the anti-aircraft cruiser [Carlisle](#), three sloops, and one division of destroyers from the [Mediterranean](#). At that time the [Red Sea](#) was part of the East Indies Station.



Leander's cruise in Indian Ocean
Leander's cruise in Indian Ocean

Such was the situation when, on 4 June 1940, nine hours after the arrival of the [Leander](#) at [Port Sudan](#), the [Liverpool](#) entered the harbour. No time was lost, and at sunset Rear-Admiral Murray's flag was struck in the [Liverpool](#) and hoisted in the [New Zealand](#) cruiser. The sudden advent of the Admiral and his six staff officers caused some difficulty regarding accommodation. The problem was arbitrarily solved by the transfer of three officers and several ratings from the [Leander](#) to the [Liverpool](#), which left four hours later for the [Mediterranean](#). The [Leander](#) sailed from [Port Sudan](#) on patrol in the evening of 7 June, and next morning made contact with [HMS Grimsby](#)¹ which was shadowing the Italian liner [Umbria](#).²

On 10 June [Mussolini](#) announced [Italy's](#) declaration of war against Great Britain and [France](#). In the early hours of the 11th the [Leander](#) received a signal from Admiralty ordering her to commence hostilities against [Italy](#). During the afternoon the [Umbria](#), which had been brought in from sea in charge of an armed guard from the [Grimsby](#), scuttled herself in the anchorage outside [Port Sudan](#) harbour. Boats from the [Leander](#) were sent out and the Italian crew and the guard taken off the ship.

Late that night the [Leander](#) sailed from [Port Sudan](#) to commence the protection of Allied shipping in the [Red Sea](#). She arrived at [Aden](#) in the afternoon of 13 June after her aircraft had made an unsuccessful search for a vessel reported as suspicious in the vicinity of [Ras-al-Ara](#), a sandy cape on the Arabian coast. [Aden](#) had been attacked by Italian aircraft which made five raids during the twenty-four hours before the arrival of the [Leander](#). Little damage was done and one aircraft was shot down.

¹ HMS Grimsby, escort vessel, 990 tons; two 4·7-inch guns, one 3-inch high-angle gun.

² Umbria, twin-screw passenger steamer, 10,076 tons; owned by Lloyd Triestino, one of the principal Italian shipping lines.

Three days later the Norwegian tanker [James Stove](#), 8215 tons, was torpedoed and sunk by an Italian submarine about 12 miles south of [Aden](#). The [Leander's](#) aircraft carried out an unsuccessful search for the U-boat, a report by one of HM ships that a conning tower had been sighted failing to reach the [Walrus](#). Anti-submarine patrols were made by the aircraft during the next two days but did not sight anything suspicious. His Majesty's trawler [Moonstone](#) ¹ was more fortunate. While on patrol she sighted the periscope of a submerged U-boat and promptly attacked with two depth-charges which forced it to surface. After a brief engagement the U-boat surrendered and was towed into [Aden](#). It proved to be the Italian submarine [Galileo Galilei](#). ² Its casualties were twelve killed, including the commanding officer, and four wounded. There were no British casualties.

Early in the morning of 27 June the [Leander](#) met the destroyers [Kandahar](#) and [Kingston](#) and proceeded into the [Red Sea](#), acting on a report that the destroyers and the escort ship [Shoreham](#) had made a probably successful attack on an Italian submarine close to the southern coast of [Eritrea](#). After sweeping along the ten-fathom line for two hours, the destroyers sighted the submarine aground and were ordered to attack it with gunfire. An enemy aircraft was then sighted, but it disappeared when fire was opened on it. While the destroyers were firing, four bombs exploded nearby but wide of all ships.

The [Leander](#)'s aircraft was then catapulted off and made an attack on the submarine. Two bombs fell 'over' and one abreast the conning tower, but the fourth bomb failed to leave its carrier. The aircraft was then ordered to keep clear and the [Leander](#) opened fire with 6-inch broadsides, obtaining four straddles. When the ship had ceased fire, the aircraft reported that the submarine was well holed and that an extensive oil patch extended for some distance. Two men were seen swimming and two others, one of whom appeared to be dead, were seen on the beach near a raft which had left the U-boat early in the operation. It was learned subsequently that the submarine was the *Evangelista Torricelli*, of the same class as the captured *Galileo Galilei*. She was the fifth Italian submarine accounted for in eight days. By the end of the month [Italy](#) had lost ten submarines.

Soon after leaving the wrecked submarine the [Leander](#) and her destroyers were attacked by enemy aircraft, not more than three of which were seen at any time. The attacks, which lasted about half an hour, were pressed home resolutely in face of heavy anti-aircraft

¹ HMS Moonstone, anti-submarine and minesweeping trawler; 650 tons; speed 11 knots; one 4-inch gun and one Lewis machine gun.

² *Galileo Galilei*, submarine of Archimede class; displacement 880-1230 tons; surface speed 17 knots; eight 21-inch torpedo-tubes; two 3·9-inch guns and two light AA guns.

fire. There were three near misses close to one destroyer. In the final attack by the one remaining aircraft, a bomb missed abreast the [Leander](#)'s bridge by about twenty-five yards, the column of water and some splinters sweeping inboard. No material damage was done to the ship and there were no casualties. It was learned later from an Italian radio broadcast that two aircraft did not return from this operation; it was also claimed falsely that a cruiser and a destroyer were hit by bombs.

The flag of Rear-Admiral Murray, Senior Officer Red Sea Force, was transferred from the [Leander](#) to HMS Lucia on 29 June, his office being established on shore at [Aden](#).

Control of the [Mediterranean](#) was a decisive factor in the Second World War, and Great Britain maintained that control by the effective use of sea power. For more than three years the main effort of British arms was exercised in the [Mediterranean](#) area, where sea, land, and air operations were sustained by the constant flow of ships carrying men and supplies through the narrow defile of the [Red Sea](#) which, from the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb connecting it with the Gulf of [Aden](#), extends for a length of some 1200 miles to the isthmus of [Suez](#). At its southern end, the [Red Sea](#) was flanked for more than 400 miles on its western side by the hostile coastline of Italian Eritrea, about midway along which was the defended port and naval base of Massawa.

The protection of shipping along this ancient seaway was the monotonous but important duty assigned to the New Zealand cruiser, which for nearly six months was senior ship of the Red Sea Force. Owing to the presence of Italian aircraft, destroyers, submarines, and other potential commerce raiders at Massawa, the [Red Sea](#) had been closed to merchant shipping since 24 May; but, after [Italy's](#) declaration of war, no time was lost in organising a convoy service which began operations during the last days of June 1940.

The [Leander](#), which was generally accompanied by two destroyers and two or more escort vessels and from time to time by an anti-aircraft cruiser, met the northbound convoys from [Bombay](#) well to the eastward of [Aden](#) and escorted them through the Gulf of [Aden](#) and up the [Red Sea](#) to an area about two days' steaming north of [Port Sudan](#). The convoy from [Suez](#) was then picked up and taken south. Ships to or from [Aden](#) and [Port Sudan](#) joined or left the convoys in the vicinity of those ports. Three Australian ships, the cruiser Hobart and the escort vessels Yarra and Parramatta, took part in these operations.

It was monotonous and trying work. The Red Sea and its littoral are one of the hottest regions on earth. Day after day the temperatures recorded in the [Leander's](#) log varied little – from 85 to 90 degrees. Now and then the discomfort of the heat was added to by sandstorms of gale force from the land. Brief periods of shore leave were spent in the heat of [Aden](#).

For the most part the passages of the [Red Sea](#) convoys were uneventful, but the monotony was broken from time to time by the cautious attacks of Italian aircraft.

The enemy's submarines, doubtless because of their earlier losses, showed little enterprise, though one of them on 6 September torpedoed and sank the Greek tanker *Atlas*, 4000 tons, when it was straggling well astern of the northbound convoy, BN 4.

Shortly after daybreak that morning HMS *Auckland* reported an aircraft overhead, probably shadowing the convoy which was then due east of Massawa. At midday six bombs fell close to a small steamer straggling astern of the convoy. About three hours later four or five aircraft dropped from twelve to fifteen bombs which straddled the centre of the convoy, but no ship was damaged. A third attack was made an hour afterwards. Five aircraft were sighted by the *Leander*, which opened fire, the other ships of the escort joining in immediately. Fifteen bombs fell about the *Leander*, none nearer than 100 yards. The enemy formation was broken up by the ships' fire, the *Leander* expending 65 rounds from her 4-inch guns. One aircraft appeared to be out of control as it disappeared to the westward.

When he learned of these attacks the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean sailed the anti-aircraft cruiser *Coventry* from *Alexandria* and she joined the escort of the southbound convoy, BS 4, on 7 September. Just before sunset on 13 September, the convoy being then about 200 miles east of *Aden*, HMAS *Parramatta* reported an asdic contact indicating the possible presence of a submarine and dropped depth-charges. The convoy was dispersed shortly afterwards and the *Leander* shaped course for *Aden*. The *Parramatta* stayed in the vicinity of her contact for four hours, but no trace of a submarine was found.

A northbound convoy, BN 5, of twenty-five ships was attacked north of Perim on 20 September by two aircraft which dropped their bombs in the centre of the ships. A near miss damaged the motor-vessel *Bhima*, 5280 tons, which dropped astern out of control. The *Leander* stood by the damaged ship until she was taken in tow for *Aden*, where she was beached. One man was killed in the *Bhima*, two of whose after holds were flooded. A second attack took place in the afternoon when five aircraft at a great height dropped fifteen bombs which fell well ahead of the convoy. The enemy formation was broken up by the gunfire of the *Leander* and *Auckland* and one aircraft appeared to have been damaged. In the forenoon of 24 September two aircraft attacked the southbound convoy BS 5 and were fired on by the *Leander* and *Parramatta*. Six bombs fell between four ships but no damage was done. In his

report Captain Horan said he was 'agreeably surprised that the enemy, having located the convoy, failed to follow with further attacks next day when it was only some 130 miles from Massawa.' The largest convoy escorted by the [Leander](#) was BN 6 of forty-four ships. It was twice bombed by aircraft after passing Massawa, but no damage was done.

The first attempt by Italian ships based on Massawa to interfere with a convoy was made during the passage of the northbound BN 7. This convoy of thirty ships, escorted by the [Leander](#), a destroyer, two sloops and two minesweepers, was nearing Perim in the afternoon of 19 October when a single aircraft dropped four bombs close astern of a steamer. The [Leander](#) and [Auckland](#) opened fire on the enemy as he made off to the westward. As Captain Horan remarked in his report of proceedings, 'it was unpleasant to realise that the enemy had spotted the convoy so early in its approach.' Shortly before dark a landing wheel of an Italian aircraft was picked up 15 miles south of Perim. Another attack was made next morning when four bombs fell ahead of the convoy and two astern of the French liner Felix Roussel, which was carrying New Zealand troops, but no damage was reported. At dusk the [Leander](#) took station on the port beam of the convoy, so as to be between it and the enemy's base at Massawa which flanked the line of advance. The convoy steamed a zigzag course during the night.

The convoy was about 35 miles north-north-west of Jabal-at-Tair Island at 2.19 a.m. on 21 October when the [Leander](#) sighted two patches of smoke bearing north. Three minutes later gunfire was seen and heard and the [Leander](#) increased to maximum speed. When she received an enemy report of two destroyers from the [Auckland](#), the [Leander](#) altered course to intercept the enemy on the expectation that he would run home by way of the South Massawa Channel. The [Auckland](#) had sighted the destroyers at a distance of four miles. When they failed to answer her challenge she opened fire, whereupon they separated and turned away at full speed, firing their after guns. The destroyers were broad on the port bow of HMAS Yarra when her challenge was answered by the flash of discharge of the torpedo-tubes of the leading destroyer. Two torpedoes were fired, which the Yarra avoided by turning towards them and 'combing' their tracks.

When the gunfire of this engagement ceased, the [Leander](#) altered course to

north-west, deciding that the enemy was making for the Harmil Island passage, and at 2.45 a.m. she opened fire with 6-inch and star shell on a ship that was firing red and green tracer. The range was opening and the ship itself was lost to sight after the first salvos. The New Zealand cruiser then altered course to about west to bring all her guns to bear, thinking that the enemy was now making for the South Massawa Channel. Her searchlights then picked up the second destroyer, on which she opened fire at an estimated range of 4600 yards. At 2.51 a.m. she lost the enemy in the haze and ceased fire. During the action the [Leander](#) had expended a total of 129 rounds of 6-inch shell.

At three o'clock the [Leander](#) sighted and challenged a destroyer which proved to be the [Kimberley](#), also in pursuit of the enemy. Five minutes later the cruiser altered course to east to rejoin the convoy, appreciating that the enemy was drawing away from her at the rate of seven knots and that the convoy might be attacked.

The [Kimberley](#) carried on at top speed and at 3.50 a.m. sighted smoke ahead, believed to be from two ships which retired at full speed. At 5.50 a.m. she sighted one destroyer seven miles off, steaming hard towards Harmil Island. She opened fire on the enemy, who replied, and a quarter of an hour later a shore battery of three 4-inch guns joined in. Nevertheless, the [Kimberley](#) closed the range to 5000 yards and at 6.25 a.m. the enemy destroyer was stopped, on fire and listing. The Italians abandoned their ship, which was sunk by two torpedoes. The destroyer was identified as the Francesco Nullo.¹ The [Kimberley](#) then engaged the shore battery at 10,000 yards until she received a hit in the engine-room. Two guns of the battery were silenced. The [Kimberley](#)'s casualties were three men wounded.

When the [Kimberley](#) reported having been hit and that her speed was reduced to 12 knots, the New Zealand cruiser immediately left the convoy to go to her assistance. At 6.54 a.m. the [Leander](#) increased speed to 26 knots. A minute later the [Kimberley](#) reported that she was stopped for repairs under fire from the shore battery and that the enemy destroyer had been blown up. By 7.34 a.m. the [Leander](#)'s engines were making revolutions for 28.7 knots – a good performance considering that the ship was seven months out of dock. Shortly afterwards, the [Kimberley](#) informed the [Leander](#) that she was steaming to the eastward at 15 knots on one engine.

At 8.25 a.m., when the [Leander](#) was about 16 miles east by north of Harmil South beacon, she eased to 10 knots and circled near the [Kimberley](#). At that time Captain Horan expected that Italian bombers would shortly appear and he preferred to keep the [Leander](#) unfettered by towing. The destroyer informed the cruiser that she had lost water in her boilers and might be able to steam in about ten minutes. The [Leander](#) closed the destroyer and sent a boat across with three shipwrights and an engine-room artificer to assist in the repairs. One wounded rating was transferred to the cruiser for

¹ Francesco Nullo, built 1925; 1058 tons displacement; four 4.7-inch guns; six 21-inch torpedo-tubes; speed 35 knots.

medical attention. About ten o'clock the [Leander](#) took the [Kimberley](#) in tow.

The expected air attack came soon afterwards. The [Leander](#) opened fire on three bombers at 13,000 feet. They dropped fifteen bombs which burst in a line about 200 yards ahead of the [Leander](#) and two others which did not explode. No damage was done. The [Leander](#) and [Kimberley](#) joined the convoy shortly after midday. As they passed the Felix Roussel they were loudly cheered by some 600 New Zealand soldiers of the Third Echelon who were taking passage in that ship from [Bombay](#) to Egypt. In the afternoon the [Leander](#) transferred the tow to the [Kingston](#), both destroyers leaving the convoy next morning for [Port Sudan](#). The southbound convoy BS 7 of twenty ships was met in the afternoon of the 23rd. Two stragglers were ordered by the [Leander](#) to turn back to [Suez](#) and four ships from [Port Sudan](#) joined next morning. After an uneventful passage the convoy was dispersed east of [Aden](#) on 28 October.

During November two northbound and two southbound convoys were escorted safely through the [Red Sea](#) by the [Leander](#) and her consorts. After taking BS 9 to the vicinity of [Aden](#) the New Zealand cruiser was relieved on 26 November by HMAS Hobart. On the following day Captain Bevan, RN, ¹ assumed command of the [Leander](#) at [Aden](#) in succession to Captain Horan.

In less than five months the [Leander](#) had steamed 30,874 miles and escorted eighteen slow convoys totalling 396 ships of some 2,500,000 tons, mostly British, but

including many foreign vessels. The convoys accounted for about one-third of the troops and supplies carried through the [Red Sea](#) during the period. Only one ship, a small Greek tanker torpedoed after she had straggled far astern, was lost from the convoys. The feeble and ineffectual efforts of the Italian naval and air forces based at Massawa against the flow of shipping just over the horizon were the most remarkable feature of the British convoy operations in the [Red Sea](#).

There were indications during November 1940 that, despite the shortage of patrol ships in the East Indies command, the British blockade was having effect on supplies for the enemy forces in Italian Somaliland and [Eritrea](#). When information was received that a factory at [Banda Alula](#)² had completed the manufacture of 1000 cases of canned fish for Italian consumption, the Senior Naval Officer Red Sea Force instructed the [Leander](#) to carry out Operation

canned

to demolish the factory and a wireless direction-finding

¹ Captain R. H. Bevan, RN (ret'd); born England, 26 May 1892; served World War I, 1914–18; captain HMNZS [Leander](#), 1940–42; retired (ill-health) 1942; commanded HMS [Collingwood](#) (training establishment) 1943–45.

² [Banda Alula](#) lies on the coast of Italian Somaliland, on the south side of the Gulf of [Aden](#), about 32 miles from [Cape Guardafui](#) at the extremity of the Horn of [Africa](#).

station without causing casualties among the workers or damage to the native village.

The [Leander](#) sailed from [Aden](#) on 28 November. When she was 22 miles from [Banda Alula](#) at 10.30 next morning, the Walrus aircraft was catapulted off and made two single-bomb dive attacks on the direction-finding huts. One bomb fell 100 yards over and the other missed a hut by ten-yards. Rifle fire was opened against the aircraft during its second dive. The [Leander](#) approached the village at high speed and fired two warning bursts of high-explosive shell. A wireless message to evacuate the factory was made to the shore station. When the aircraft reported no sign of life

in the compound, the [Leander](#) opened fire on the factory at a mean range of 4000 yards. The [Walrus](#) dropped a stick of incendiary bombs while observing the cruiser's fire. On three runs the cruiser fired 98 rounds of 6-inch high-explosive shell and, having recovered her aircraft, retired at high speed. About two hours later the [Walrus](#) was catapulted off to make a second attack on the direction-finding station. Two 250-pound bombs made close misses between the huts. Aerial photographs showed considerable damage in the factory buildings and fierce fires. As no fewer than fifty shells exploded in the compound, internal damage was probably serious and no doubt was felt that the factory had been put out of operation.

Having recovered her aircraft, the [Leander](#) shaped course for [Bombay](#), where she arrived on 2 December. Brief visits to [Aden](#) had been the only breaks in the five months of convoy operations, and a stay of twenty-five days at [Bombay](#) was the first real diversion for the ship's company since she left New Zealand at the beginning of May. While the cruiser was in dry-dock her company were mostly accommodated on shore, a welcome relief from routine on crowded mess decks. 'An elaborate organisation of public and private hospitality was at our service,' wrote one officer. 'We were treated magnificently. There was also a good deal of hockey, and we played Rugby football against a team of the [Welsh Regiment](#).'

The [Leander](#) sailed from [Bombay](#) on 27 December on escort duty with convoy BN 12 of twenty-nine ships. The passage to [Aden](#) and up the [Red Sea](#) was uneventful. Convoy BS 12 was taken over on 6 January 1941 and dispersed beyond [Aden](#) five days later. That ended the [Leander's](#) service with [Red Sea](#) convoys. She sailed from [Aden](#) on 14 January and arrived at Colombo on the 21st.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 7 – HUNTING RAIDERS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

CHAPTER 7

Hunting Raiders in the Indian Ocean

At that time anxiety was felt by the [New Zealand Government](#) concerning the safety of shipping in the South Pacific, and a request was made that the [Leander](#) should be returned to the New Zealand Station. In an appreciation of the situation prepared for the War Cabinet, the Chief of Naval Staff pointed out that, owing to the increased activity of enemy raiders in the South Pacific, special precautions had been taken to protect merchant shipping, particularly vessels carrying troops, valuable refrigerated cargo ships, and those loading phosphates at Nauru and Ocean Islands. The naval vessels available for the purpose were the [Achilles](#) and the [Monowai](#). Valuable help was given by Australian warships, more or less on a quid pro quo basis. After detailing the commitments in the New Zealand Station area, Commodore Parry submitted that at least one more naval unit was urgently needed on the station and that, in view of the strength of the enemy raiders, it should be a 'real warship' and not an armed merchant cruiser. The [Leander](#) seemed to be the obvious solution.

A telegram from the Governor-General to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs dated 13 January 1941 embodied the appreciation of the Chief of the Naval Staff and stated that the [New Zealand Government](#), while 'fully appreciating the very heavy calls which were being made on the Royal Navy', felt bound to ask that the serious situation outlined be given immediate consideration and hoped that arrangements would be made to strengthen the naval force in New Zealand waters. The Government considered that the minimum requirement as far as New Zealand was concerned, and to enable her to co-operate more effectively with [Australia](#), was the addition of one 6-inch cruiser. Clearly, an armed merchant cruiser would be inadequate, and 'they therefore felt obliged, but with great reluctance, to ask that H.M.S. [Leander](#) may return.'

On 5 February 1941 the High Commissioner reported to the Prime Minister that he had seen the First Lord of the Admiralty, who had stated that, owing to the loss of HMS [Southampton](#) ¹ and the return of HMAS [Sydney](#) and the armed merchant cruiser [Westralia](#) to [Australia](#), the [Mediterranean](#) defences had been greatly depleted.

¹ HMS Southampton, twelve 6-inch guns, sunk as a result of air attack on 11 January 1941 while on convoy operation east of [Malta](#).

The invasion danger to [Britain](#) must be met and the position was difficult. The [Leander](#) was at present searching in the [Indian Ocean](#). In these circumstances the First Lord had made a personal and urgent request that the [Leander](#) be allowed to remain for three to four months as at present there was no ship to relieve her. The High Commissioner added that, having regard to the situation which the First Lord had explained, he must support his request.

The Prime Minister replied that, in view of the request of the First Lord, the [New Zealand Government](#) was prepared to agree that the [Leander](#) should remain overseas for another three months. It still considered, however, that in the event of war with [Japan](#), or if the raider situation deteriorated, it was essential that the [Leander](#) should return to New Zealand waters.

Events were soon to prove that the decision of the [New Zealand Government](#) was a sound one. As a matter of fact, though of course it was not known at that time, the immediate danger from enemy raiders in New Zealand waters was past. The [Orion](#) and [Komet](#), which had been operating off the New Zealand coast during November 1940 and about Nauru Island in December, were quitting the South Pacific for the [Indian Ocean](#) where other raiders had been cruising with greater success for some time. In the coming months the cruiser from distant New Zealand was to take an active part in curbing their activities.

The [Leander](#) was in harbour at Colombo from 21 to 24 January, part of the time in company with HMAS [Canberra](#), which sailed on the 23rd. While on a cross-country flight on 24 January, the cruiser's aircraft had to make a forced landing on a small lake and crashed in the jungle when taking off. It caught fire and became a total loss, fortunately with no casualties among the crew. Meanwhile, the ship had sailed, leaving them to procure a new aircraft. Early that afternoon the [Leander](#) had received orders to go to sea, and three hours later she cleared the harbour and proceeded at 25 knots to the southwest.

The cause of the [Leander's](#) sudden departure was the interception of part of a

distress signal from the British steamer *Mandasor*, 5144 tons, reporting that she was being attacked by a raider in a position approximately 330 miles east from the Seychelles Islands. Actually, the raider was No. 16 (*Atlantis*) which had come north after refitting at Kerguelen Island, where she had been in company with raider No. 33 (*Pinguin*). The *Atlantis*, which had been operating in the *Indian Ocean* since May 1940, had laid a minefield off Cape Agulhas and captured or sunk thirteen merchant ships totalling 92,478 tons.

When word of the attack on the *Mandasor* was received the Commander-in-Chief East Indies made the following dispositions of his four available cruisers, known as Force 'V'. The *Sydney* left Mahé in the Seychelles group at 27 knots to search within a radius of 300 miles on an arc from the raider's point of attack to north by west of the Seychelles. The *Canberra* and *Leander* were to cover contiguous areas extending over a wide arc from south-west to west of the Maldivian Islands. The *Colombo* was to patrol along a line from a position about 300 miles west from those islands.

After leaving Colombo the *Leander* steamed to the south-westward at high speed during the night. At 7.45 next morning the smoke of a ship was sighted and course was altered to intercept the vessel, which was identified as a Dutch steamer on passage from *Sabang, Sumatra*, to *Durban*. Carrying on at 25 knots, the *Leander* passed through One and a Half Degree Channel and two hours later eased to 17 knots for the night. At 7 a.m. on 26 January the cruiser again increased speed to 25 knots and for the next twelve hours steamed at that speed on various courses, searching for the raider. She spoke a Greek steamer during the forenoon, but otherwise nothing was sighted throughout the day. The *Leander* continued on patrol at reduced speed until the evening of 27 January, when she shaped course to the south-eastward and proceeded at 23 knots for Addu Atoll, southernmost of the Maldivian Islands. The *Canberra* was in the anchorage when the New Zealand cruiser arrived, and sailed about an hour later. After refuelling from the oiler *Pearleaf*, the *Leander* sailed at dusk for Colombo, where she arrived on the morning of 30 January.

The search for the raider was unsuccessful. In the evening of 24 January the *Sydney* and HMS *Mauritius* obtained wireless bearings of German frequencies, a combination of which indicated a possible position of the raider as about 300 miles

south-east of the Seychelles. The [Sydney](#) searched that area and to the southward on 25 and 26 January, using her aircraft on both days, but nothing was sighted.

The raider had evaded the searching cruisers by proceeding to the north-westward after sinking the *Mandasor*. A few days later she captured the British motor-vessel *Speybank*, 5154 tons, about 350 miles north-east of the Seychelles. No distress signal was received from this ship. The raider then steamed to the south-westward and on 2 February captured the Norwegian tanker *Ketty Brovig*, 7031 tons, approximately 300 miles due west of the Seychelles.

Having refuelled and embarked a new aircraft, the [Leander](#) sailed from Colombo on 31 January. She spent ten days on patrol in the area to the southward of [Ceylon](#), but sighted nothing other than four foreign merchant ships. When about 300 miles to the eastward of [Ceylon](#) she met HMS *Dauntless*, from whom she took over the escorting of the troopship *Narkunda*, 16,630 tons, and arrived at Colombo on 12 February. After a spell of five days the [Leander](#) resumed her patrol south of [Ceylon](#). Numerous merchant ships were sighted and identified during the next two or three days, but nothing suspicious was seen.

At 9 a.m. on 20 February the [Leander](#) met the [Canberra](#) about 150 miles west of [Ceylon](#) and took over from her Convoy US 9, comprising the transports [Aquitania](#) and [Mauretania](#), carrying Australian troops, and the *Nieuw Amsterdam* which had on board some 3700 troops of the third section of the 4th Reinforcements, 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, from [Wellington](#). The passage up the west coast of [India](#) was uneventful, and the convoy arrived at [Bombay](#) in the morning of 22 February. The [Leander](#) refuelled and sailed at dusk on patrol to the southward.

In January 1941 British forces had begun simultaneous advances from the [Sudan](#) and Kenya into [Eritrea](#), [Abyssinia](#), and Italian Somaliland. British warships co-operated by blockading and bombarding the enemy's harbours. The port of Kismayu in Italian Somaliland was occupied on 14 February 1941. All of the sixteen Italian and German ships which had been lying there were sunk or captured, with the exception of one German vessel. When Merka and Mogadishu were occupied on 25 February some hundreds of British and other seamen from merchant ships sunk by German raiders were released from prison camps. On 13 and 21 February aircraft from HMS *Formidable* attacked Massawa in the [Red Sea](#), doing damage to ships and

harbour works.

After sailing from [Bombay](#) on 22 February, the [Leander](#) passed down the west side of the Laccadive and Maldive Islands to a patrol area westward of One and a Half Degree Channel, as directed by the Commander-in-Chief East Indies. At seven o'clock in the morning of 27 February the cruiser, steaming to the eastward, was about 28 miles north of the Equator and 320 miles west of the Maldives. Captain Bevan then decided to make a cast to the northward in order to get his ship on the course from west to One and a Half Degree Channel. He gave as his reason for so doing that as a result of the capture of Mogadishu, of which news had been received by radio on the previous day, there was a possibility that Italian ships which had been lying there would have put to sea and might be making for the [Far East](#) along that route.

At 10.37 a.m. a ship was sighted right ahead, and the [Leander](#) increased speed to 23 knots. As the cruiser gradually neared her, suspicion was aroused. It could be seen that a gun was mounted on the ship's forecastle and her general silhouette resembled that of the Italian RAMB class of fruit carriers. ¹ The [Leander](#) went to action

¹ Four fast motor-vessels built in 1937–38 for the Italian Government (Ministry of Italian Africa, Regia Azienda Monopolio Banane). Ramb I was a twin-screw ship of 3667 tons with a speed of 17 knots. Ramb II, also fitted out as an auxiliary cruiser, escaped from Massawa to [Japan](#). Ramb IV, a hospital ship, was intercepted off [Aden](#) after the fall of Massawa.

stations at 11.15 a.m. Ten minutes later the cruiser ordered the vessel to hoist her colours and she responded by hoisting the British merchant ensign. When ordered to make her signal letters the stranger hoisted four letters which were not listed in British signal books. The [Leander](#) then made the secret challenge, but the ship did not reply and kept her course and speed. An armed boarding party had been standing by and 'it was now decided to board.' At 11.45 a.m. the ship was ordered to 'stop instantly'. No reply was received, but a few minutes later she hoisted the Italian merchant ensign and trained her guns on the [Leander](#).

The cruiser was now broad on the Italian ship's beam and, at a range of 3000

yards, was an excellent target for its guns and possible torpedo attack. It was fortunate for her that the ship was not a German raider. ¹ At 11.53 a.m. the enemy opened fire, and thirty seconds later the [Leander](#) fired her first broadside. The enemy's fire was erratic and short, and it was estimated that not more than three rounds were fired from each gun. A few shell splinters hit the [Leander](#), which got off five salvos in one minute and 'then checked fire to observe results', signalling by flags: 'Do you surrender?' It was then seen that the enemy was abandoning ship and that the Italian flag had been struck. A number of hits had been made, all in the forepart of the ship, and through a large hole in her side it was seen that a fire had broken out.

The [Leander's](#) boarding cutter was lowered with orders to board and, if possible, save the ship. Two lifeboats were leaving the vessel and men were jumping overboard or scrambling down her side. An Italian officer who was swimming hailed the boarding party and warned them not to approach the ship as she was burning fiercely and was heavily loaded with ammunition. The boat, therefore, lay off. As the fire spread aft there was a heavy explosion before the bridge, flames and smoke shooting high above the ship, which was lying head to wind and well down by the bows. At 12.43 p.m. there was a violent explosion, evidently of a magazine. Five minutes later the ship sank under a vast cloud of black smoke from the oil fuel burning on the water. Meanwhile the [Leander](#) had picked up her own and the Italian boats while opening out from the burning ship.

The Italian survivors comprised the captain, ten officers, and ninety-two ratings, of whom one was seriously wounded and four slightly injured. One man had been killed in the ship by shellfire. The seriously wounded rating died while undergoing surgical treatment during the afternoon and was buried with full naval honours at sunset. From interrogation of the captain and other prisoners it

¹ In similar circumstances, HMAS [Sydney](#) was engaged at close range by the German raider [Kormoran](#) off the north-west coast of [Australia](#) on 19 November 1941. The [Sydney](#) sank with all hands, but not before she had damaged the raider, which also sank.

was learned that the ship was [Ramb I](#) which had left [Suez](#) on 10 June 1940 for

Massawa, where her armament of 4·7-inch guns and eight anti-aircraft machine guns was fitted. Except for short cruises along the coast of [Eritrea](#), the ship had been employed on anti-aircraft defence at Massawa.

The *Ramb I* had sailed from Massawa at short notice on 20 February and passed into the Gulf of [Aden](#) during the night of the 21st. She was under orders to raid merchant shipping on her passage towards the Dutch East Indies, pending further instructions as to her ultimate destination. Only one ship had been sighted before the *Leander* was encountered and that was in the vicinity of Socotra, an area considered too dangerous for an attack to be made.

In his report to the Admiralty the Commander-in-Chief East Indies, after referring to the lack of organisation and suitably trained personnel in the ship, said that, in justice to the Italians, he considered they acted gallantly in engaging the *Leander*. He also said that the *Ramb I* 'might well have become a serious menace to our shipping and *Leander* is to be commended for ridding the seas of this potential raider before she had harmed us.' The *Leander* received from the Commander-in-Chief a signal of congratulation on 'getting a scalp' and from the Admiralty a message of 'congratulations on your success and hopes for something bigger next time.'

Leaving the scene of the action, the *Leander* shaped course to the eastward and arrived next morning at Addu Atoll. There she met the oiler *Pearleaf*, to whom the Italian prisoners were transhipped, accompanied by an armed guard of nineteen ratings under the command of Commander (A) B. E. W. Logan, RN. He was relieved as flying officer in the *Leander* by Lieutenant (A) H. A. I. Luard, RN, who had arrived in the tanker. The *Leander* proceeded to the southward on patrol and the *Pearleaf* carried on for Colombo.

Wireless direction-finding bearings of radio signals indicated that enemy ships were in the vicinity of Saya de Malha, a vast coralline bank situated some hundreds of miles to the south-east of the Seychelles Islands. This area was, in fact, much frequented by German raiders and supply ships. The pocket battleship Admiral Scheer met the raider *Atlantis* there about 16 February and fuelled from the captured tanker *Ketty Brovig*. The *Atlantis* was in company with the German ship *Tannenfels* (escaped from Kismayu), the *Ketty Brovig* and *Speybank*, and the tanker *British*

Advocate (captured by the Admiral Scheer) at the same rendezvous position from 26 to 28 February.

The Commander-in-Chief East Indies therefore ordered the [Leander](#) and [Canberra](#) to search the Saya de Malha area. The New Zealand cruiser met the [Canberra](#) in the afternoon of 2 March about 100 miles to the eastward of Addu Atoll. The captain of the Australian cruiser, Captain H. B. Farncomb, RAN, boarded the [Leander](#) for a discussion with Captain Bevan (senior officer), after which both ships carried on to the south-west for Saya de Malha.

The two cruisers separated on 4 March, and during the afternoon catapulted off their aircraft on reconnaissance flights. At 5.42 p.m. the [Canberra](#)'s aircraft reported having sighted a cargo vessel in company with a tanker off the northern end of Saya de Malha. When the [Canberra](#) ordered them to stop, the ships separated, the tanker steering south and the other vessel north, flying no colours. The latter was suspected of being a raider and the [Canberra](#) opened fire on her at 18,000 yards. She did not reply and was subsequently found to be the unarmed German motor-vessel Coburg, 7400 tons, which had left Massawa about 21 February. She was set on fire amidships and the cruiser then ceased fire. The tanker was the Ketty Brovig, 7031 tons, which had been captured by the German raider [Atlantis](#) on 2 February. When she was threatened with near-miss bombs dropped by the [Canberra](#)'s aircraft, her prize crew took scuttling action. An armed party from the cruiser boarded the tanker in the hope of salvaging her, but was unable to stop the inflow of water, the engine-room being completely flooded to the upper deck. The [Canberra](#) fired a few rounds into the ship and left her sinking.

When she received the [Canberra](#)'s enemy report, the [Leander](#) steamed at 28 knots to join her. She arrived on the scene at sunset and picked up from the boats fifteen German officers and thirty-three seamen belonging to the Coburg and five Norwegian officers from the tanker. The [Canberra](#) took on board three German officers and fourteen hands and thirty-three Chinese, the last belonging to the tanker. The Coburg, which was burning fiercely amidships, sank at 5.49 p.m. The [Leander](#) and [Canberra](#) then withdrew from the area owing to the proximity of shoal water dangerous to navigation at night.

The decision of the Commander-in-Chief East Indies to withhold the news for

the time being was justified by the fact that the loss of the *Ketty Brovig* and *Coburg* was not known to the Operations Division of the German Naval Staff until after the sinking of the raider *Pinguin* on 8 May 1941, though it was probably suspected by the raiders operating in the [Indian Ocean](#). In response to representations by the [New Zealand Government](#) through the Naval Board, the Admiralty authorised publication of a brief statement in New Zealand and [Australia](#) on 12 April.

The loss of the *Ketty Brovig* and her cargo of fuel-oil caused some derangement of the enemy's plans for the fuelling of his raiders in the [Indian Ocean](#). There was, of course, always a possibility of the raiders' own supply ships being captured or sunk, and their occasional captures of loaded oil-tankers provided an additional and valuable source of supply.

After she had emptied the tanker *Winnetou*, which had supplied her with fuel on the voyage from [Germany](#) and during her cruise in the [Pacific](#), the raider *Orion* was assigned the tanker *Ole Jacob*. This vessel, loaded with petrol, had been captured by the raider *Atlantis* in the [Indian Ocean](#) on 10 November 1940 and sent in charge of a prize crew to [Kobe](#), where the Japanese naval authorities agreed to take over her cargo in exchange for an aircraft and a cargo of diesel oil. Accordingly, the *Ole Jacob* went to Lamotrek in the Caroline Islands, where she met the *Orion* and a Japanese tanker to which she transhipped her cargo of petrol. Three German ships from [Kobe](#) loaded the *Ole Jacob* with diesel oil and provisions, and for the next four months she acted as supply ship for the *Orion* and other raiders. ¹

At the time of her capture by the *Atlantis*, the *Ketty Brovig* was loaded with 6000 tons of furnace oil and some 4000 tons of diesel oil. After refuelling her captor and the *Admiral Scheer*, she was sent to the north of *Saya de Malha* to meet and supply the *Coburg*. The *Ketty Brovig* was then to have met the *Ole Jacob* in order to take some 3000 tons of diesel oil in exchange for as large a quantity of her 'excellent furnace oil' as possible. It was planned that the *Ketty Brovig* was to be taken over by the raider *Pinguin* – a diesel-engined ship – as supply tanker and auxiliary mining ship.

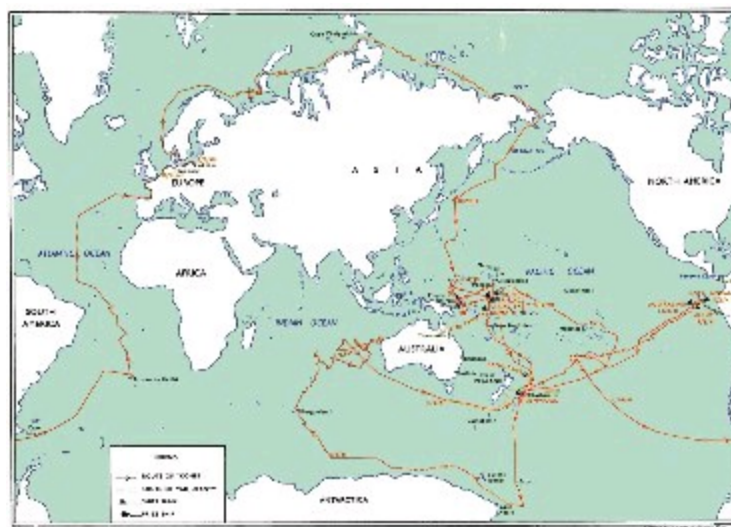
In the meantime the raiders *Orion* and *Komet* had arrived in the [Indian Ocean](#) from the [Pacific](#) – the latter after a cruise to the Ross Sea in the Antarctic. After fuelling the *Orion* on 20–21 March 1941 and the *Komet* three days later, the *Ole*

Jacob looked in vain for the Ketty Brovig. The raider Pinguin, in company with the Adjutant, a captured whale chaser, arrived at their appointed rendezvous on 2 April, but after taking 1340 tons of diesel oil from the Ole Jacob they were obliged to proceed, without the Ketty Brovig, to their operational area in the [Arabian Sea](#). The Ole Jacob, without her expected furnace oil, left the rendezvous on 13 April to meet the [Orion](#) a week later.

From Saya de Malha Bank the [Leander](#) and [Canberra](#) proceeded southward for [Mauritius](#), both ships launching their aircraft morning and afternoon to search for enemy raiders and supply ships. It was known from intelligence reports and from the German prisoners on board that the pocket battleship Admiral Scheer had been operating in the Seychelles-Saya de Malha area during February, and

¹ Admiralty NID 24, 'Information on the German raider No. 36 ([Orion](#))': War Diary of [Orion](#), with comment by Operations Division, German Naval Staff.

it was possible that she or other raiders or their supply ships might be encountered at any time.



TRACK CHART OF GERMAN RAIDER KOMET

On the morning of 22 February, about three hours after sinking a small Dutch steamer, the Admiral Scheer had been sighted by the aircraft of HMS Glasgow,

steering to the south-eastward in a position about midway between the Seychelles and the north end of Madagascar. The German ship was between forty and sixty miles south-south-east from the Glasgow, which altered course to close the enemy, signalling that she would shadow by day and attack by night. Through having to refuel, the aircraft lost touch with the Admiral Scheer, who could not be found again. She returned to the South Atlantic but made no more captures and arrived at Kiel on 1 April 1941.

That the Admiral Scheer had left the Indian Ocean was, of course, not known at the time. Since the sinking of the Ketty Brovig and Coburg, there had been much speculation in the Leander regarding the chances of meeting the Admiral Scheer, and on the lower deck there had been much argument about the possibility of a 'second River Plate'. Consequently, when at 2.59 p.m. on 5 March 1941 the Canberra's aircraft reported having sighted a 'pocket battleship' and the news was broadcast by Captain Bevan to the ship's company, there were 'great expectations'. Action stations was sounded and at 3.10 p.m. the Leander increased speed to 25 knots.

In the event of contacting the Admiral Scheer it had been planned that she would be shadowed during daylight and that the Leander and Canberra would close her in the dark hours with the object of attacking with torpedoes and gunfire. But at 3.25 p.m. the expectation of action was ended by the announcement that the report was a false alarm. Apparently, in the tropical haze and at a distance, the Canberra's aircraft, which had been flying for three hours when it made its report, had mistaken the Leander with her single broad funnel for a 'pocket battleship'.

The cruisers' aircraft carried out a search of Nazareth Bank and the Cargados Carajos group of atolls on 7 March, but nothing of a suspicious nature was sighted. The Leander and Canberra arrived at Mauritius at 9 a.m. on 8 March and refuelled from the Admiralty oiler Olcades. The German prisoners were landed and placed in the custody of the military authorities.

At that time the question of the Leander's remaining overseas was again raised in a series of telegrams between the New Zealand Government and the Admiralty, through the High Commissioner for New Zealand in London. The Australian cruisers Sydney and Hobart, which had been operating in the Middle East, had been ordered

about the end of February to return to [Australia](#). It seemed clear that the Admiral Scheer, which was last reported near Madagascar on 22 February, 'must have moved to another area and the possibility of her appearing in the [Tasman Sea](#) cannot be ruled out'.¹

On 5 March the High Commissioner informed the Prime Minister that 'to meet the danger of a probable raider in the [Pacific](#), the [Australia](#) or the [Canberra](#) [both armed with 8-inch guns] was returning for service in [Australia](#) and New Zealand.' The First Lord of the Admiralty had asked that the [New Zealand Government](#) should not object to the [Leander's](#) not returning. There would then be the [Australia](#) (or [Canberra](#)), [Sydney](#), Hobart, and [Achilles](#) in Australasian waters. If the position necessitated it, the [Leander](#) would return.

The Prime Minister replied that, though the [New Zealand Government](#) was 'not without apprehension as to the position that might develop in local waters in certain contingencies', it was always happy to feel that New Zealand naval vessels were being used to the best advantage. In the present circumstances, it made no objection to the retention of the [Leander](#) abroad, 'always provided, of course, that the matter could be raised for immediate consideration should the local situation deteriorate.'

The [Leander](#) and [Canberra](#) had barely arrived at [Mauritius](#) when a series of messages from the Commander-in-Chief East Indies indicated that an enemy supply ship, possibly with a submarine from Massawa in company, was making for a rendezvous in the southern [Indian Ocean](#). Based on the general instructions of the Commander-in-Chief, Captain Bevan issued orders to the [Leander](#), [Canberra](#), and HMS City of [Durban](#)² for what was designated Operation SUPPLY. This provided for patrols by the three ships based on a point 'P', the assumed rendezvous of the enemy ship, approximately 400 miles south-east of Cape St. Mary, at the southern end of Madagascar.

The City of [Durban](#) sailed from [Mauritius](#) at 8 p.m. on 9 March and the [Leander](#) and [Canberra](#) at six o'clock next morning, the last two ships entering the 80-mile circle from point 'P' at 5.30 a.m. on 12 March. The patrol was uneventful and nothing suspicious was sighted. In accordance with orders from the Commander-in-Chief East Indies, the [Leander](#) withdrew from the area in the early morning of 20 March,

leaving the other ships to carry on the patrol until 23 March. The New Zealand cruiser arrived at [Mauritius](#) on 22 March and, after refuelling, sailed next morning at 20 knots to patrol an area between [Mauritius](#) and Madagascar.

Shortly before sunset on 23 March, a ship was sighted about nine miles off steering about south-east. As the cruiser neared her, the

¹ Admiralty message of 0128 GMT, 6 March 1941, to Australian and New Zealand Naval Boards and other addressees.

² HMS City of [Durban](#), armed merchant cruiser; 5850 tons (Ellerman Lines Ltd.); eight 6-inch guns.

Vichy French markings (French tricolour with yellow surround) were seen on her bows and quarter and the tricolour on a large board aft. The appearance of the ship was not unlike that which might be assumed by the German raider [Atlantis](#), which occasionally disguised herself. The [Leander](#) went into action stations and a boarding party was prepared.

The stranger made no reply to repeated flag and lamp signals asking her name and ordering her to stop. The [Leander](#) then fired two rounds of blank ammunition and, when these produced no effect, at a range of 9500 yards a 4-inch shell was fired across her bows, followed by another two minutes later. The ship, which was the French motor-vessel Charles L.D., ¹ then stopped.

The [Leander](#) sent away a boarding party commanded by Lieutenant J. H. Thompson, RN, accompanied by Lieutenant Saunders, RNZNR, ² as witnessing officer and Lieutenant (E) K. Lee-Richards, RN, as engineer officer. The cruiser signalled the Charles L.D. not to use her radio, but a few minutes later she transmitted 'Vive Angleterre!' – presumably an outburst by her pro-British operator – and then sent a coded message to Majunga Radio, evidently reporting her position. On hearing the transmissions, the [Leander](#) made the signal in plain language 'Defendu Radio', and enforced this by a burst of machine-gun fire over the ship's masthead.

The master of the Charles L.D., who was supported by his first and second

officers, declined to assist in the navigation of the ship and protested strongly against her detention. He said his orders were to sink the ship rather than allow her to be seized. By order of Lieutenant Thompson, the boarding party cut the falls of all the boats and the ship's company was assembled on deck. Lieutenant Lee-Richard's party, aided by the pro-British third officer and third engineer, searched the engine-room and in the propeller-shaft passage found a box of dynamite fitted with fuses which was to have been detonated by the chief engineer. Another scuttling charge which was to have been exploded by the master was found by Lieutenant Saunders and thrown overboard.

There were two passengers in the Charles L.D., one of whom was the senior naval officer at Diego Suarez, going on leave to [France](#); the other, a Mauritian, was making his way home from [France](#). The latter, who was most co-operative as an interpreter, said the ship was bound from Diego Suarez to Reunion to load coffee, cocoa, and sugar for [France](#), of which the greatest part would have gone to [Germany](#).

¹ Charles L.D., 5267 tons gross register; owned by Louis Dreyfus and Company, [Paris](#).

² Lieutenant P. C. Saunders, RNZNR; born [Peterborough](#), England, 8 Feb 1915; mercantile marine officer.

The [Leander](#)'s boarding party was relieved by an armed guard under the command of Lieutenant Stevens, RNZNR, ¹ with Lieutenant Saunders as second-in-command and Lieutenant Lee-Richards and two engine-room artificers for the general charge of the engine-room. With the exception of the master and his first and second officers, the ship's company were prepared to work her on condition that they would receive the agreed rates of pay accruing to them. The Charles L.D. then proceeded for [Mauritius](#), where she arrived in the afternoon of 24 March.

For the next five days the [Leander](#) remained on patrol to the eastward of Madagascar, the search being extended daily by aircraft reconnaissance. Shortly before sunset on 27 March the aircraft reported having sighted a tanker about 150 miles east from Tamatave. The cruiser overtook the ship, which proved to be the

British tanker Trocas, 7406 tons, on passage from [Mauritius](#) to the Persian Gulf. No other ship was sighted during the patrol.

After refuelling at [Mauritius](#) the [Leander](#) sailed to the north-eastward, her aircraft making a search of the main atolls in the Chagos Archipelago during the passage to Colombo, where she arrived on 3 April. The cruiser then proceeded to Madras, whence she sailed on 11 April escorting a convoy of four large transports carrying Indian troops for [Singapore](#). Next day the [Leander](#) turned the convoy over to HMS Ceres and shaped course for Trincomalee, arriving there in the morning of 13 April to refuel. Nine hours later the New Zealand cruiser was ordered to raise steam and sail at once for Colombo, where she arrived the following afternoon.

A situation which for a time was very threatening to British interests in the [Middle East](#) developed when the Government of [Iraq](#) was overthrown on 3 April by a coup d'état engineered by Rashid Ali. It was this disturbance that dictated the movements of the [Leander](#) during the next fortnight. The Commander-in-Chief East Indies (Vice-Admiral R. Leatham, CB) embarked in the New Zealand cruiser on 14 April, and after fuelling she sailed that evening for the Persian Gulf. The flag of Admiral Leatham was hoisted next morning. Proceeding at from 26 to 27 knots, the [Leander](#) arrived at Bahrein at 3 a.m. on 18 April and, after fuelling, sailed six hours later. She anchored off the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab late that night, and at five o'clock next morning the Commander-in-Chief transferred to HMS Seabelle and proceeded to [Basra](#). The [Leander](#) sailed soon afterwards and arrived at Kuwait about midday.

¹ Commander E. M. C. Stevens, VRD, RNZNR; born [Auckland](#), 5 Nov 1910; master mariner; Lieutenant RNZNR, 1 Nov 1938; CO HMNZ Awatere 1943; Commander 30 Jun 1953.

The British Government had accepted an offer by the Indian Government to send troops from [Karachi](#) by sea and to Shaibah by air. It was laid down that no offensive action was to be taken except in retaliation: if the landing of troops was resisted, force was to be used. HMS Emerald arrived at [Basra](#) on 13 April and the [Leander](#) on the 18th, a few hours after the troopships from [India](#). The landing was unopposed and the official attitude friendly for the time being. The [Leander](#) returned

to the Shatt-el-Arab in the evening of 22 April and embarked Admiral Leatham early next morning. She refuelled at Bahrein and then proceeded on her return passage to Colombo, whence, having landed the Commander-in-Chief, she put to sea again in the afternoon of 29 April.

Earlier in the month the Government had again raised the question of the retention of the [Leander](#) overseas. In a telegram dated 12 April to the High Commissioner in [London](#), the Prime Minister said the Government would not, of course, press the matter unduly if the Admiralty, 'on balancing their requirements in all theatres of war', still felt that an extension of the New Zealand cruiser's period of overseas service was desirable. Nevertheless, the need for another cruiser for the protection of shipping in the New Zealand area was still greatly felt and the [Leander](#) 'could very usefully be employed' there.

Replying on 1 May, the High Commissioner reported that the First Lord of the Admiralty had informed him that the [Leander](#) was engaged in most important duties and that HMS Neptune would leave (for New Zealand) in late May or early June.¹ Both the First Lord and the First Sea Lord were grateful for New Zealand's assistance by allowing the [Leander](#) to remain overseas and they hoped that the loan of the Neptune would be satisfactory. The [Leander](#) would be returned later if circumstances warranted.

The Government asked the High Commissioner to convey its thanks for the decision to send the Neptune to New Zealand and to raise for consideration by the Admiralty the exchange of the [Achilles](#) and [Leander](#). It would be unacceptable to be without the services of a 6-inch gun cruiser on the New Zealand station, but the Government would agree to the [Achilles](#) leaving for the East Indies Station prior to the return of the [Leander](#) to New Zealand waters provided the period during which neither ship would be available for service on the New Zealand Station was a short one.

When the [Leander](#) sailed from Colombo on 29 April, she was operating as a unit of Force 'V', under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief East Indies, in search of a German raider which had sunk the British steamer Clan Buchanan, 7266 tons, on the previous day,

¹ See

in a position about 600 miles west from the Maldive Islands. The [Leander](#) was assigned a patrol area to the westward of the Maldives; HMS [Cornwall](#) was to search to the northward of the Seychelles, and the aircraft-carrier Eagle and cruiser Hawkins were to patrol an area between those islands and the coast of [East Africa](#). The ships were ordered in the first place to proceed to the western side of their respective areas, which were to be covered at 12 knots.

The ship they were seeking was the Pinguin, one of the most successful of the German raiders which, during her cruise of eleven months, sank or captured thirty-one vessels totalling 156,910 tons. On 7 October 1940 she captured the Norwegian tanker Storstad off the north-west coast of [Australia](#). This ship, which was given the name of Passat, was used as an auxiliary minelayer and laid mines in [Bass Strait](#) and off Wilson's Promontory and Cape Otway, while the Pinguin herself laid mines between Newcastle and [Sydney](#) and in the approaches to Hobart and Spencer Gulf, [South Australia](#). These minefields caused the loss of the coastal steamer Nimbin, 1052 tons, near Newcastle, the Federal Line steamer Cambridge, 10,855 tons, off Wilson's Promontory, the American steamer City of Rayville, 5883 tons, off Cape Otway, and serious damage to the Federal Line steamer Hertford, 11,785 tons, in Spencer Gulf.

Returning to the [Indian Ocean](#) with the tanker, the Pinguin during November 1940 sank four large refrigerated cargo ships – the Shaw Savill and Albion steamer Maimoa, 10,123 tons, the Port Line vessels Port Brisbane, 8739 tons, and Port Wellington, 10,065 tons, and the British India Company's steamer Nowshera, 7920 tons. The Pinguin then proceeded to the Southern Ocean, where, in January 1941, she captured the whaling ships Ole Wegger, 12,200 tons, Solglimt, 12,246 tons, and Pelagos, 12,383 tons, and eleven whale chasers. With the exception of one chaser which she retained under the name of Adjutant, all these vessels were sent to [France](#) in charge of prize crews. The Pinguin then spent about a fortnight at Kerguelen Island, where she refitted and took in water, stores, and an aircraft from the supply ship Alstertor.

About the middle of March 1941 the Pinguin refuelled from the tanker Ole Jacob

which, in company with the raider [Orion](#), had arrived in the [Indian Ocean](#) from the [Pacific](#). The [Penguin](#) then proceeded to the north-west area of the [Indian Ocean](#) where, on 25 April, she sank the [Empire Light](#), 6950 tons. No distress message was picked up from this ship, whose radio-room was wrecked by gunfire. Three days later the [Penguin](#) sank the [Clan Buchanan](#), and it was a wireless message from that ship that started Force 'V' on the hunt for the raider.

The [Cornwall](#) sailed from Mombasa, Kenya, at midday on 28 April and proceeded at 25 knots for her search area. She was followed from that port by the [Eagle](#) and [Hawkins](#). After leaving Colombo, the [Leander](#) proceeded at 25 knots and passed through [Khardiva Channel](#) in the [Maldivé Islands](#) about seven o'clock in the morning of 30 April. She then eased to 20 knots on a westerly course for her search area. The [Leander](#) launched her aircraft on reconnaissance morning and afternoon during her patrol but nothing suspicious was sighted. The [Penguin](#) had, in fact, made off to the north-west after sinking the [Clan Buchanan](#) and so, for the time being, evaded the searching ships of Force 'V'.

On 1 May the [Leander](#), then about 450 miles west of the [Maldivé Islands](#), turned and shaped course for Colombo, where she arrived in the afternoon of 3 May. Three days later she was called upon to escort a convoy of three big transports, two of which were carrying New Zealand troops to Egypt. The [Mauretania](#) and the Dutch [Nieuw Amsterdam](#) carrying the 5th Reinforcements, 2 NZEF, numbering about 5800, and a draft of 57 naval ratings (including six for the [Leander](#)), had sailed from [Wellington](#) on 7 April 1941 for [Sydney](#), where 1240 Australian troops embarked in the Dutch ship. The two ships then joined up with the [Queen Elizabeth](#), [Queen Mary](#), and [Île de France](#), carrying Australian troops, to form Convoy US 10, which sailed from [Fremantle](#) on 19 April. In the vicinity of [Sunda Strait](#) the [Nieuw Amsterdam](#) left the convoy and proceeded to [Singapore](#), where she landed her Australian troops and transhipped the New Zealanders to the [Aquitania](#). In the meantime the [Queen Elizabeth](#) and [Queen Mary](#) had gone on to [Trincomalee](#) and the [Mauretania](#) and [Île de France](#) to Colombo, where they were joined by the [Aquitania](#). The two Queens went on to [Suez](#) as Convoy US 10A, the three ships at Colombo being designated Convoy US 10B.

The [Leander](#) sailed from Colombo on 6 May 1941, escorting Convoy US 10B for [Suez](#). Proceeding at nearly 25 knots, the ships shaped course for Nine Degree

Channel between the Maldivian and Laccadive Islands. Soon after clearing the channel next morning the [Leander](#) sighted the [Canberra](#). Then, in accordance with wireless orders from the Commander-in-Chief East Indies, the [Canberra](#) took over the convoy, and at noon the [Leander](#) steamed independently at 25 knots to the westward. The hunt for the elusive German raider was on again.

After sinking the *Clan Buchanan* on 28 April, the *Penguin* had proceeded to the north-westward. On 4 May she fuelled and provisioned the *Adjutant*, which was sent away to wait at a rendezvous, probably south of Saya de Malha Bank. Shortly after five o'clock in the morning of 7 May the *Penguin* intercepted and sank the tanker *British Emperor*, 3663 tons, on passage from [Durban](#) in ballast for Abadan, in a position about 375 miles east-south-east from [Cape Guardafui](#). The tanker was able to transmit a wireless distress message when she was attacked.

HMS [Cornwall](#) had just crossed the Equator on her way to refuel at the Seychelles Islands when she intercepted the *British Emperor's* message. She was then about 520 miles south of the indicated position. Altering course to north-north-west, the [Cornwall](#) increased speed to 20 knots. A plan for intercepting the raider with the aid of aircraft was worked out on the principle of closing the enemy's 'furthest on' line and then starting a search to cover the largest possible variations of the raider's speed and course. During the morning the [Cornwall](#) increased speed to 25 ½ knots and headed north to cover the gap between the Seychelles and the Chagos Archipelago.

In accordance with the dispositions made by the Commander-in-Chief East Indies, the [Leander](#) was steaming westward at 25 knots from Nine Degree Channel towards Socotra, while HMS *Liverpool*, from an early morning position due north of [Cape Guardafui](#), proceeded towards Eight Degree Channel on her way to Colombo. HMS *Glasgow*, also from the Gulf of [Aden](#), passed [Cape Guardafui](#) that morning at 23 knots to a position about 100 miles south-east from that headland, and then steamed south-west at 20 knots towards a position on the Equator about 300 miles from the African coast. Farther west, HMS *Hector*, armed merchant cruiser, covered shipping by patrolling from the Equator to a position 300 miles to the southwest.

During the afternoon of 7 May the [Cornwall](#) flew both her aircraft on reconnaissance for three hours and then shaped course to get on the line of the

main Vignot search. This was plotted for a mean speed of 13 knots for one hour after the time of the raider report, on the assumption that the raider would take an hour to deal with the British Emperor and then proceed at full speed until dark. At 9.30 p.m. the [Cornwall](#) altered course to east-south-east and reduced speed to search on this line before the moon set. The direction of search was correct.

At daybreak the [Cornwall](#) launched both aircraft on a search to cover a variation of three knots on either side of the enemy's estimated speed. The cruiser herself altered course to east at 18 knots and was then steaming away from the raider. At 7.7 a.m. one of the aircraft sighted a ship of the suspected type going south-west at 13 knots, about 65 miles west from the [Cornwall](#), but made no report before returning about eight o'clock. At 8.25 a.m. the cruiser altered course to about west by south and increased speed to 23 knots. The second aircraft was launched again at 10.15 a.m., and when it returned at 12.23 it reported that the unknown ship was steaming at 15 knots and had hoisted signal letters. These were identified as those of the Norwegian motor-vessel Tamerlane, which the raider closely resembled but which was not in the [Cornwall](#)'s list of expected ships.

The cruiser accordingly increased speed to 26 knots and at one o'clock to 28 knots. At 1.45 p.m. she catapulted an aircraft to keep her informed by wireless of the bearing, course, and speed of the suspected ship, which was finally sighted from the bridge of the [Cornwall](#) at 4.7 p.m. The stranger then began sending wireless 'raider reports' stating that she was the Tamerlane. Notwithstanding frequent signals ordering her to heave-to and two warning shots from the cruiser, the ship kept her course and speed for more than an hour until the range was inside 12,000 yards. At 5.10 p.m. the [Cornwall](#) turned to port and the stranger, apparently convinced that the former was about to open fire in earnest, made a large alteration of course to port and got in first blow by opening fire with five guns just before 5.15 p.m.

Due to mechanical failures, the [Cornwall](#) was unable to reply for a minute or two and was frequently straddled by rapid and fairly accurate gunfire before getting off two salvos from her forward 8-inch turrets. Her fore steering gear was disabled by a 5.9-inch shell hit, but the after steering gear was quickly brought into use and the ship was out of control for a matter of seconds only. By 5.18 p.m. all the [Cornwall](#)'s turrets were firing, and at 5.26 a salvo hit the enemy ship, which blew up and sank

in a position about 300 miles from where the British Emperor was sunk and about 500 miles north of the Seychelles. The ship, which was, in fact, the raider Pinguin, had a complement of about 350, as well as 180 prisoners from merchant ships sunk by her. The [Cornwall](#) picked up 58 German and 25 British survivors.

While the [Cornwall](#) was carrying on her search the [Leander](#) had been steaming at 25 knots for twenty-four hours on a course of west by north. At 8.30 a.m. on 8 May her aircraft was launched on a reconnaissance flight and, an hour later, the 'hands prepared the ship for battle', though at that time the raider had been sighted by the [Cornwall](#)'s aircraft far to the south-westward. The [Leander](#) carried on to a position about 300 miles east from [Cape Guardafui](#) and then returned to Colombo, where she arrived on 14 May.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 8 – OPERATIONS OFF THE COAST OF SYRIA

CHAPTER 8

Operations off the Coast of Syria

ON 23 May 1941 the Prime Minister, who was in [Cairo](#) on a visit to the [Middle East](#), sent the following cable message to the acting Prime Minister, Mr W. Nash, at [Wellington](#): 'At the special request of First Lord of Admiralty, I have at once agreed in the circumstances to [Leander](#) being despatched to the [Mediterranean](#). Help of [Leander](#) type of cruiser essential to support our men in Crete. ...'

Having replenished ammunition, the New Zealand cruiser sailed from Trincomalee shortly after midday on 23 May and proceeded to [Aden](#), where she arrived at 6 a.m. on the 29th. By that time she was already too late to afford any 'support to our men in [Crete](#)', which was securely in the hands of the Germans and from which New Zealand and other British troops were being evacuated by the Royal Navy in a series of desperate operations. [Crete](#) was captured after a bitter struggle from 20 May to 1 June, in which the Germans were able to exploit their superiority in aircraft and airborne troops to overwhelm the gallant defence.

The losses of the [Mediterranean Fleet](#) in the Battle of [Crete](#) were four cruisers, six destroyers, and thirty small craft. In addition, damage was done to three battleships, an aircraft-carrier, six cruisers, and seven destroyers. Some of these ships were out of service for months undergoing repairs.

The [Leander](#) was therefore a most welcome and useful addition to the [Mediterranean Fleet](#). In a message to the New Zealand Naval Board reporting that she had joined his station, Admiral Cunningham said he was 'very glad to have her.' He also reported that, as a result of fitting her with additional anti-aircraft armament, it was necessary to draft more men to her to man those guns. The cruiser sailed from [Aden](#) on 1 June and five days later arrived at [Alexandria](#), where she joined the Seventh Cruiser Squadron.

By this time hostilities in [Iraq](#) had ceased, but a dangerous situation had developed in [Syria](#). Early in May, concurrently with the arrival in [Syria](#) of a German 'economic mission' and other signs of enemy infiltration, German aircraft began to make use of the Syrian airfields. Three arrived at [Aleppo](#) on 9 May and two were reported to have gone on to Mosul, [Iraq](#), unhampered by the French authorities. On

11 May more aircraft painted in [Iraq](#) colours reached [Damascus](#), intended for the use of the [Iraq](#) insurgents.

On 14 May the Chiefs of Staff in [London](#) informed the Commander-in-Chief Middle East that he was free to act against German aircraft in [Syria](#), notwithstanding the possible effect of such action on British relations with Vichy and the Free French. Next day the Royal Air Force attacked enemy aircraft on the ground at [Palmyra](#). The French authorities in [Syria](#), in making a protest, said that fifteen German aircraft had made 'forced landings' on Syrian airfields and 'in conformity with the Armistice terms' had been assisted to leave. The situation had serious possibilities if the Germans, not yet cleared out of [Iraq](#), should obtain complete possession of [Syria](#). To prevent this it was necessary to occupy the country.

Preparations for naval co-operation were made on 3 June at a conference on board HMS Warspite, flagship of Admiral Cunningham, and on 6 June orders were issued for the campaign (Operation Exporter) to begin two days later. The naval forces to support the advance of the army were commanded by Vice-Admiral E. L. S. King, Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron, in HMS [Phoebe](#), and included the [Ajax](#), [Coventry](#) (anti-aircraft cruiser), [Glengyle](#) (infantry landing ship), and eight destroyers constituting Force 'B'.

The [Phoebe](#), [Ajax](#), and four destroyers sailed from [Alexandria](#) at noon on 7 June and were joined by the [Coventry](#) and two more destroyers at daybreak next morning when British and Free French troops invaded [Syria](#). Some difficulty was experienced by the ships in making contact with the head of the advancing troops, but eventually it was learned that [Tyre](#) had been occupied and the only ship support required was a few salvos against enemy positions about a bridge across the Leontes, three miles north of the city. Early in the morning of 9 June troops were landed from the [Glengyle](#) to seize the bridge, but it had been destroyed.

As the situation on shore during the morning was too confused to permit supporting fire, Admiral King stood out to sea with his cruisers, leaving one destroyer on inshore patrol, while three others carried out an anti-submarine sweep four miles from the coast. In the early afternoon one of the latter, HMS [Janus](#),¹ sighted and engaged two large destroyers of the Guépard class.² The [Janus](#), hit five times, was badly damaged and stopped with severe casualties. She was saved from a most

critical situation by the [Jackal](#), [Isis](#), and [Hotspur](#), which screened her with smoke while they engaged the enemy ships, who retired at high speed to [Beirut](#) and were well out

¹ HMS [Janus](#), 1690 tons; six 4·7-inch guns; speed 36 knots.

² French [Guépard](#) destroyers, 2436 tons; five 5·4-inch guns; speed 39 knots.

of the way when the cruisers came on the scene. The [Janus](#) was towed to [Haifa](#) by the [Kimberley](#).

The [Leander](#) sailed from [Alexandria](#) in the evening of 12 June and next day relieved the [Ajax](#) in Admiral King's force, which was strengthened by six additional destroyers. An inshore squadron carried on a continual bombardment of enemy targets north of a line indicated by the army and assisted its advance to a position on the Zaharani River, about four miles south of [Sidon](#). In the wooded areas thereabouts a number of batteries of 75-millimetre guns held up the advance for three days. Air reconnaissance eventually located the guns, which were silenced by the deliberate fire of the [Jackal](#), [Ilex](#), and [Hero](#). The troops occupied [Sidon](#) on 15 June.

During the first six days of the campaign the ships had to contend with a few attacks by French aircraft. In the afternoon of 13 June, shortly after the [Leander](#) had joined the force, German aircraft made their first appearance offshore. Eight Ju88 bombers attacked the cruisers, but no damage was done to any ship. British fighters which were on their way out on a routine patrol shot down three enemy aircraft and damaged two others.

During the temporary absence of Admiral King while the [Phoebe](#) went to [Haifa](#) to refuel, Captain Bevan in the [Leander](#) was in command of Force 'B'. The New Zealand cruiser and HMS [Coventry](#), screened by four destroyers, were patrolling off Saida in the afternoon of 14 June when Vichy destroyers from [Beirut](#) made another effort to interfere with the inshore squadron. At 4.20 p.m. HMS [Griffin](#) reported two enemy destroyers 15 miles away in a position about six miles west of [Beirut](#), and

steaming south-south-west. The cruiser force was steering to the northward, and fifteen minutes later the [Leander](#) sighted the ships—two of the Guépard or Aigle class. Speed was worked up to 28 knots with the intention to close and engage the enemy. Two destroyers were ordered to concentrate ahead of the [Leander](#) and two to screen the [Coventry](#), whose maximum speed at the time was 24 knots.

At 4.45 p.m., at a range of approximately 20,000 yards, the French ships altered course in succession to the northward, swinging to the westward shortly afterwards. During this movement one ship was seen to drop one and the other three large objects over their sterns. These were thought to be mines. Captain Bevan's intention was to open fire slightly outside the limit of the enemy's gun-range, but the Frenchman's course and speed and the desirability of keeping outside the range of the coastal batteries of [Beirut](#) prevented the [Leander](#) from closing to less than 20,000 yards. Force 'B' worked to the northward of [Beirut](#), keeping the French destroyers under observation until it appeared that they had anchored close inshore. At six o'clock, when the British ships were returning to the southward, French aircraft carried out an attack, a stick of heavy bombs falling 500 yards astern of the destroyer *Hero*. Fighter cover had been called for and three Hurricane aircraft were later seen engaged with French fighters which presumably had escorted the bombers.

Vice-Admiral King in the [Phoebe](#), with three destroyers, rejoined the [Leander](#) about midday on 15 June. He decided to keep the whole of Force 'B' at sea owing to the reported approach of a Cassard class destroyer north of [Cyprus](#). Three destroyers formed the inshore squadron, the others screening the cruisers, who were informed that [Sidon](#) had surrendered. In the late afternoon a determined attack on Force 'B' was made by eight German bombers. The destroyer [Isis](#) was badly damaged by a near miss which caused flooding of her forward boiler-room. Three British fighters drove off half the bombers before they completed their attack, one bomber being shot down.

About an hour later another attack was made by from fourteen to eighteen French and German aircraft. A heavy bomb exploded close alongside the destroyer *Ilex*, blowing a hole in one of her boiler-rooms, which rapidly flooded. Though badly shaken, the *Ilex* was able to steam at 15 knots until her oil fuel became badly contaminated by sea-water. She was then towed to [Haifa](#) by the [Hasty](#). Force 'B'

patrolled north of [Beirut](#) during the night.

At 6.15 p.m. the French destroyer Chevalier Paul ¹ was sighted by air reconnaissance, steering east in a position off the Gulf of Adalia and about 60 miles north-west of [Cyprus](#). As she was suspected to be carrying supplies and ammunition from [France](#) for [Syria](#), No. 815 Squadron Fleet Air Arm, stationed at Nicosia, [Cyprus](#), was ordered to attack her. Six Swordfish aircraft took off at 2.30 a.m. on 16 June and half an hour later sighted the destroyer, which had rounded [Cyprus](#) during the night, about 30 miles from the coast of [Syria](#). A successful attack by the aircraft made one certain and two possible hits on the Chevalier Paul which was sunk. About an hour later the [Kimberley](#) and [Jervis](#) sighted the French destroyers Guépard and Valmy close inshore off [Beirut](#). The British destroyers opened fire before they themselves were sighted and claimed to have hit one of the French ships, which retired under a smoke screen to the cover of shore batteries.

During the afternoon of 18 June the French destroyers Guépard and Valmy made a brief sortie from [Beirut](#), but returned to harbour before they could be engaged. At dawn on 19 June the [Jervis](#) and [Kingston](#) bombarded enemy shore positions for forty minutes, the [Naiad](#) and several destroyers acting in support. That evening the [Leander](#) and four destroyers proceeded on a sweep north of [Beirut](#),

¹ Chevalier Paul, destroyer, 2441 tons; five 5·4-inch guns; seven torpedo-tubes; speed 36 ½ knots.

but nothing was sighted during the night. Three aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm bombed [Beirut](#) harbour, making four hits on a wharf and one on a suspected submarine. The night sweeps north of [Beirut](#) were made with the object of intercepting French destroyers known to be making for that port, but the only one that did arrive made the Syrian coast in daylight, escorted by about twenty aircraft.

Force 'B' had a brief encounter with the enemy in the course of a sweep during the night of 22–23 June. While four destroyers carried out an anti-submarine patrol to seaward, the [Naiad](#) ¹ and [Leander](#), screened by the destroyers [Jaguar](#), [Kingston](#), and [Nizam](#), made an inshore search. At 1.48 a.m. on 23 June, when the force was steaming south about 10 miles north of [Beirut](#), the [Naiad](#) sighted two French

destroyers close inshore and on a northerly course at a range of about 5000 yards. The enemy turned away at high speed behind a smoke screen under cover of a coast-defence battery which opened fire. The French destroyers were engaged by Force 'B' for eleven minutes and several hits were claimed, but it was reported subsequently that the *Guépard* only was hit by a 'blind' 6-inch shell from the *Leander*. Four torpedoes fired by the New Zealand cruiser and two by the *Jaguar* ran ashore and probably exploded on grounding, since the *Kingston*, rear ship of the line, heard several explosions.

This was the last occasion on which the French destroyers were engaged by Force 'B'. Vice-Admiral King asked for and obtained a submarine to patrol off *Beirut* to intercept the destroyers. At midday on 25 June HMS *Parthian* torpedoed and sank the French submarine *Souffler*. From time to time enemy aircraft made high-level bombing attacks on the British ships at Haifa. In one raid during the night of 24 June, one bomb fell fairly close by the *Leander* but did no damage.

On the following night the *Leander*, in company with the destroyers *Decoy*, *Havock*, and *Nizam*, carried out her final sweep to the northward of *Beirut*, but nothing was sighted. Returning south at dawn, the destroyers bombarded enemy positions for half an hour, the shore batteries replying. At 8 a.m. on 26 June the *Leander* and *Coventry* were relieved in Force 'B' by *HMAS Perth* and HMS *Carlisle* (anti-aircraft cruiser) and sailed from *Haifa* for *Alexandria*, where they arrived next morning. Hostilities in *Syria* ceased at mid-night on 11–12 July and the armistice agreement was signed at *Acre* on 14 July.

In his report to Admiralty the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, Admiral Cunningham, said the Syrian campaign had three main features from the naval point of view. Force 'B' provided vital

¹ The *Naiad* had replaced the *Phoebe* as the flagship of Vice-Admiral King.

assistance to the army in its advance along the coast. These operations were generally very satisfactory. On the other hand, the encounters with the enemy's ships were definitely not satisfactory and it must be conceded that the honours

rested with the French destroyers. This comparatively petty campaign absorbed the entire effort of all reconnaissance aircraft available for naval co-operation in the eastern [Mediterranean](#), with the exception of those based on [Malta](#). All reconnaissance to the west of [Alexandria](#) had to be stopped and 'Tobruk left wide open to surprise'. Even so, the available aircraft were insufficient for the Syrian operations. ¹

On 16 July the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean issued orders for Operation guillotine. This involved the movement from [Port Said](#) and [Haifa](#) to [Cyprus](#) of 50 Division and 259 Wing, Royal Air Force, and attached artillery, motor transport, and stores. The ships employed were the [Leander](#), [Neptune](#), [Hobart](#), [Parramatta](#), and [Flamingo](#), units of the 14th Destroyer Flotilla, and a number of merchant ships.

The [Leander](#) and the destroyer [Kingston](#) sailed from [Haifa](#) on the night of 19 July and arrived at [Port Said](#) next morning. There the [Leander](#) embarked one naval officer and nine ratings as a mine-sweeping party, a heavy anti-aircraft battery, and six officers and 163 other ranks of the Royal Air Force. The [Kingston](#) embarked five officers and 152 other ranks. The ships sailed at midday and, proceeding at high speed, arrived at Famagusta, [Cyprus](#), twelve hours later. After landing the troops, the [Leander](#) and [Kingston](#) proceeded at 24 knots to [Haifa](#), arriving there in the morning of 21 July. Next day the Haifa Force, consisting of the [Ajax](#) (flag) and [Leander](#), and destroyers [Jaguar](#), [Jervis](#), [Kandahar](#), and [Kingston](#), put to sea and next morning joined the [Mediterranean Fleet](#) for exercises. During the next two days the fleet carried out a sweep south of Crete.

The [Leander](#) left the fleet on 24 July and arrived next morning at [Port Said](#). After embarking 43 officers and 830 other ranks she sailed at 26 knots in company with the destroyer [Jaguar](#), which was carrying 380 troops. The fast minelayer [Latona](#) followed them with another detachment. The [Jaguar](#) went ahead at 31 knots for Famagusta, and when the [Leander](#) arrived there about midnight her troops were landed by the destroyer and towed lighters. She sailed an hour later and returned at high speed to [Alexandria](#). This ended the [Leander's](#) service in the [Mediterranean](#), orders having been received for her return to New Zealand.

After embarking her aircraft and a draft of RNZNVR officers and ratings from New Zealand, the [Leander](#) left [Port Said](#) on 31 July. She called at [Aden](#) for fuel and

at Colombo, where she was

¹ Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean to Admiralty, Med.
1497/00212/29 of 2 September 1941.

docked for cleaning and painting, and then proceeded to [Fremantle](#). She sailed thence in company with the Shaw Savill liner *Ceramic*, which she escorted to the vicinity of [Adelaide](#), and arrived at [Sydney](#) on 28 August. The *Leander* left [Sydney](#) eight days later with the *Aquitania* which was proceeding to [Wellington](#) to embark troops for Egypt, and arrived on 8 September, thus completing an eventful cruise of sixteen months.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 9 – RAIDER IN NEW ZEALAND WATERS

CHAPTER 9

Raider in New Zealand Waters

BY the beginning of June 1940 the *Achilles* had made good her action damage and completed an extensive refit. From 10 to 14 June she carried out a series of exercises and trials in the *Hauraki Gulf*. During the night of 11 June she anchored in Port Fitzroy, Great Barrier Island, but on the three following nights she returned to *Auckland* and anchored in the harbour.

It is tempting to think that, had she continued to use Port Fitzroy, the *Achilles* might have sighted and intercepted a powerful German raider which, during the night of 13–14 June, laid a minefield across the several approaches to *Hauraki Gulf*. The enemy had made his secret approach to New Zealand by taking a devious route from Cape Horn across the unfrequented South Pacific. Though ships were passing daily in and out of *Hauraki Gulf*, some days elapsed before the mines claimed their first victim, and by that time the raider was far away.

The operations of German raiders extended over a period of about three years and accounted for 182 merchant ships of 1,152,000 tons.¹ The German aim was the 'disruption and destruction of merchant shipping by all possible means', and the orders to the raiders laid down that 'frequent changes of position in the operational areas will create uncertainty and restrict enemy merchant shipping, even without tangible results.' The German Naval Staff exercised a general control over the broad strategy and movements of the raiders but, as in the First World War, a large measure of freedom was left to their commanding officers.

The raider captains interpreted their orders with comprehending caution, but the Admiralty was on the whole fairly well informed about their general movements and, by the evasive routeing of ships and such cruiser patrols as were possible with a great shortage of that class of ship, kept the vital stream of merchant shipping moving steadily and with relatively small losses. The merchant seamen themselves did their part and sailed without hesitation in defiance of the U-boat and raider threat to their safety. The Royal Navy had

¹ Total losses of British, Allied, and neutral shipping during World War

II were 4786 vessels of 21,194,000 tons, of which U-boats sank 2775 ships of 14,573,000 tons, or approximately 69 per cent of the total tonnage. Losses due to German raiders represented slightly more than 5 per cent of the total tonnage.

been 'cut to the bone' during the 'locust years' from 1918 to 1939, and when war came again it had to perform enormous and innumerable duties with a woeful shortage of cruisers. The provision of adequate cruiser strength would have been a small insurance premium to pay in mitigation of losses of ships, cargoes, and seamen at the hands of German raiders.

'The one and only possibility of bringing England to her knees with the forces of our Navy lies in attacking her sea communications,' wrote Admiral Doenitz in a memorandum dated 1 September 1939. 'It is clear what shipping means to the Anglo-Saxon – absolutely everything.' The U-boat was the enemy's principal weapon at sea during the Second World War, but he did not hesitate, at first, to employ also his most powerful warships, whose forays in the [Atlantic](#) were supplemented by the world-wide activities of a number of merchant ships fitted out as auxiliary cruisers.

The cruises of the armed merchant raiders covered the period from April 1940 to February 1943, during which they sank or captured 124 ships totalling 840,000 tons. In all, ten ships were employed, one of them making two cruises. Five were destroyed at sea, one was destroyed by an explosion and fire in harbour at Yokohama, and another was damaged in the [English Channel](#) and returned to [Germany](#). That they were efficient fighting ships of their type was shown by the fact that one raider in three separate actions outranged and damaged two British armed merchant cruisers and sank a third, HMS *Voltaire*. Another raider, the *Kormoran*, was responsible for the loss with all hands of HMAS [Sydney](#), though she herself was sunk by that cruiser.

Three of the raiders were oil-burning steamships; one was a twinscrew, diesel-electric vessel; the others were motor-ships. The largest was of 9400 tons and the smallest of 3287 tons gross register. All were modern general cargo or fruit-carrying ships, with a large radius of action, a fair turn of speed, and a relatively low silhouette. They were officially known by numbers, but these were not allotted consecutively, so that the fact that there was a ship No. 45 did not indicate that

there were forty-five raiders. They were also given what the Germans called 'traditional' names. The raiders were very well equipped and capable of remaining at sea for twelve months or more, with the assistance of fuel tankers and store ships, supplemented by oil and supplies taken from captured vessels. Great use was made of disguise. Dummy ventilators, samson posts, and other deck fittings, as well as false bulwarks and deck-houses, were often set up and repainting was done frequently to change the appearance of the ships. Special workshops and mechanics were carried to make and manipulate these disguises and also to carry out extensive repairs necessitated by long periods at sea.



'Painting the world brown—will our turn come?'—from the cartoon by E. F. Hiscocks in 1904



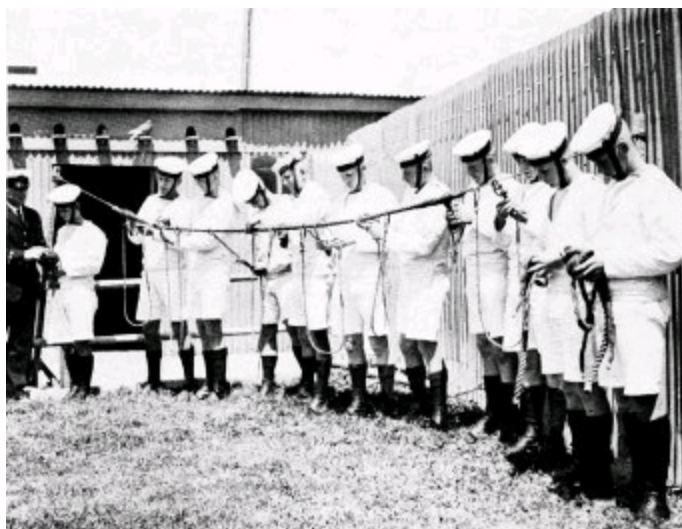
The Calliope Dock at Devonport, Auckland, at its opening in February 1888. The warships are the corvettes *Calliope* and *Diamond*

The Calliope Dock at [Devonport](#), [Auckland](#), at its opening in February 1888. The warships are the corvettes *Calliope* and *Diamond*

Devonport in 1929. The New Zealand Squadron, as shown, was HMS *Dunedin* and HMS *Diomedé*, with the two Imperial sloops *Veronica* and *Laburnum* astern. *Philomel* and *Wakakura* are at the training jetty, with the battle-practice target and the cable ship *Recorder* in the background



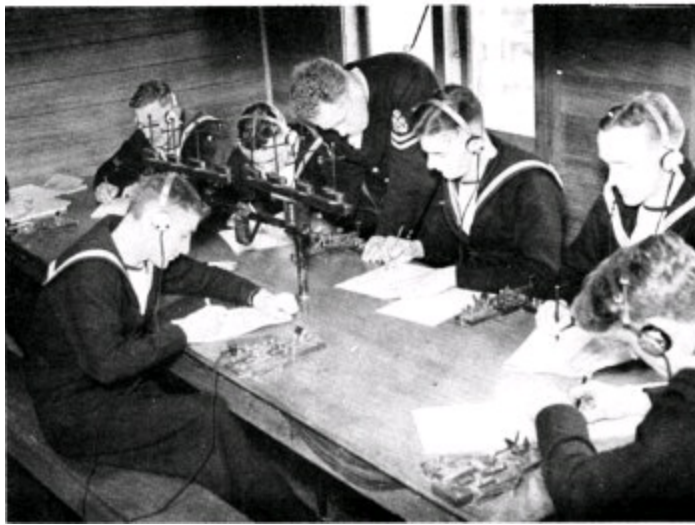
Devonport in 1929. The New Zealand Squadron, as shown, was HMS *Dunedin* and HMS *Diomedé*, with the two Imperial sloops *Veronica* and *Laburnum* astern. *Philomel* and *Wakakura* are at the training jetty, with the battle-practice target and the cable ship *Recorder* in the background



Naval ratings learning to make bends and hitches, HMS *Philomel*, 1934

Naval ratings learning to make bends and hitches, HMS *Philomel*, 1934

Training in wireless telegraphy, HMS *Philomel*, 1940



Training in wireless telegraphy, HMS *Philomel*, 1940



HMS *Achilles* at Auckland

HMS *Achilles* at Auckland



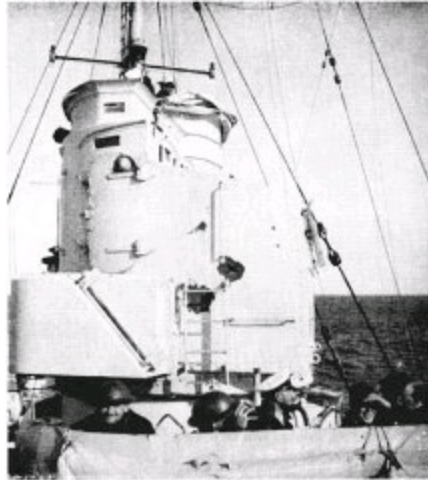
The *Achilles* in the Strait of Magellan on her way to the Falkland Islands

The *Achilles* in the Strait of Magellan on her way to the Falkland Islands



The *Admiral Graf Spee*, with six 11-inch guns in two triple turrets

The **Admiral Graf Spee**, with six 11-inch guns in two triple turrets



The director control tower of the *Achilles*, showing splinter holes above the signal platform

The director control tower of the **Achilles**, showing splinter holes above the signal platform



The *Ajax* passing between the *Achilles* and the *Admiral Graf Spee* while turning to avoid a torpedo

The **Ajax** passing between the **Achilles** and the **Admiral Graf Spee** while turning to avoid a torpedo



Captain W. E. Parry of the *Achilles* dresses his leg wounds. Behind him is the navigating officer, Lieutenant G. G. Cowburn

Captain W. E. Parry of the *Achilles* dresses his leg wounds. Behind him is the navigating officer, Lieutenant G. G. Cowburn



Damaged woodwork on the starboard upper deck of the *Achilles*

Damaged woodwork on the starboard upper deck of the *Achilles*



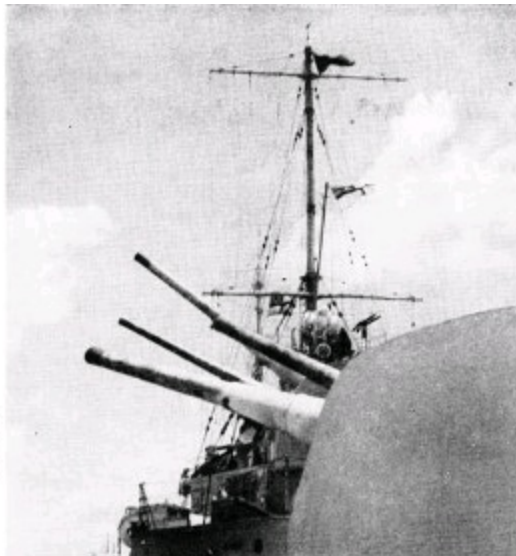
'A' turret's crew relax during the shadowing of the Admiral Graf Spee

'A' turret's crew relax during the shadowing of the Admiral Graf Spee



The Ajax (left), minus her main topmast, and the Achilles steam towards Montevideo at full speed

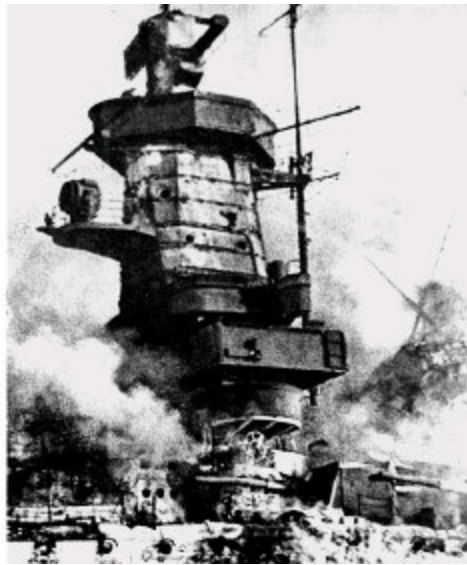
The Ajax (left), minus her main topmast, and the Achilles steam towards Montevideo at full speed



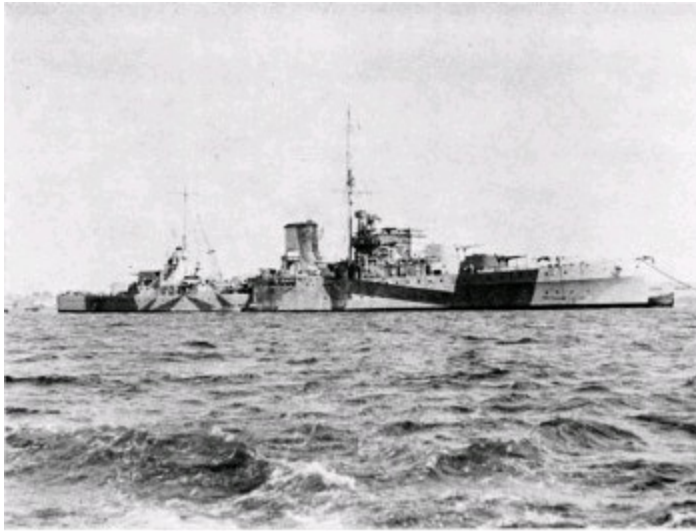
after 6-inch guns of Achilles showing the paint blistered by the heat of rapid firing

The after 6-inch guns of the Achilles showing the paint blistered by the heat of rapid firing

The end of the
Admiral Graf Spee



The end of the **Admiral Graf Spee**



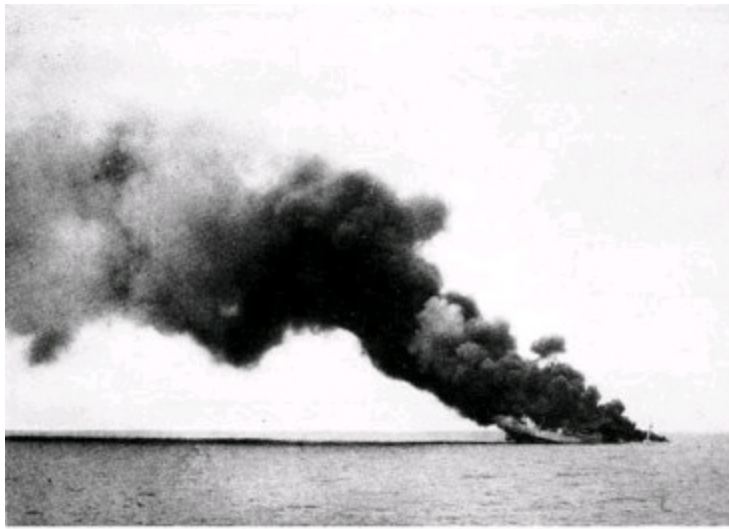
HMS *Leander* at anchor at Alexandria in 1941

HMS Leander at anchor at **Alexandria** in 1941



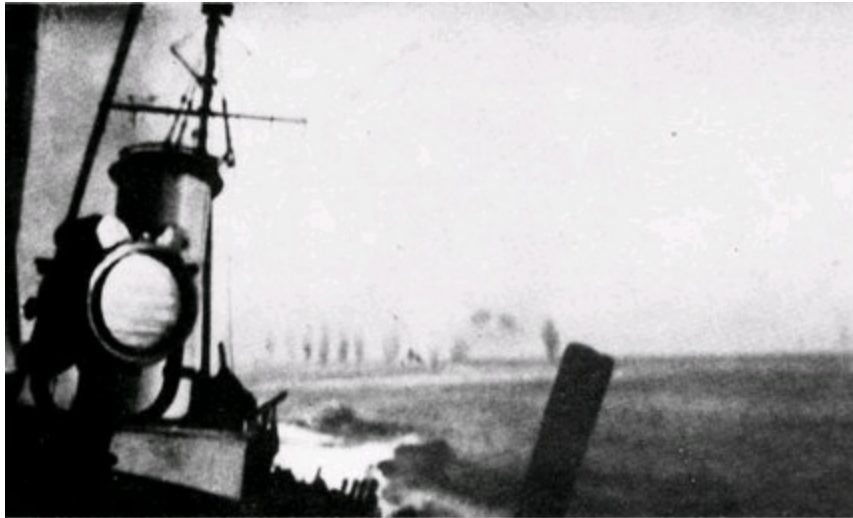
A tug-of-war in the *Leander* in the Indian Ocean

A tug-of-war in the **Leander** in the **Indian Ocean**



The last of the Italian raider *Ramb I*

The last of the Italian raider Ramb I



The *Leander* bombed off Syria, as seen from HMS *Phoebe*

The *Leander* bombed off Syria, as seen from HMS *Phoebe*



This reproduction of the Orion's chart of her course across the approaches to the Hauraki Gulf shows also the position of ships sighted while her minelaying was in progress. The numbers added in black give a key to translations of the notes on the map:

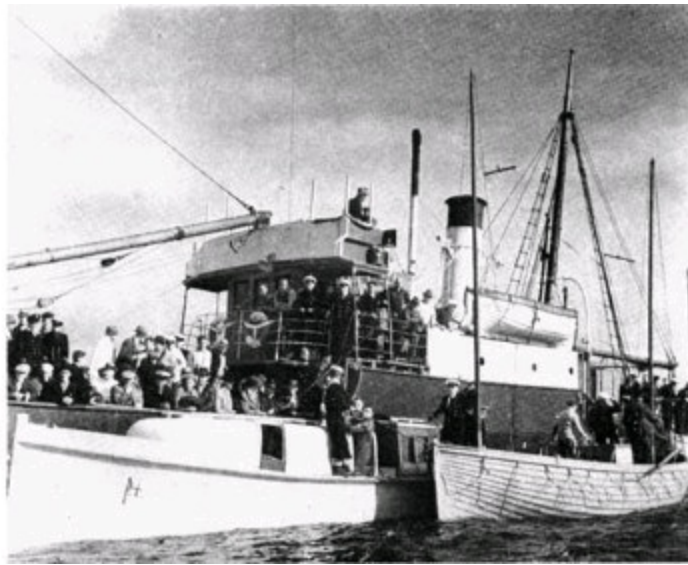
(1) Vessel in sight	(6) Moko Hinua light
(2) Steamer in sight	(7) Blacked-out vessel
(3) Steamer in sight	(8) Vessel
(4) Position of sinking of Niagara	(9) Moon bearing at 2100 hours
(5) Steamer in sight	

This reproduction of the Orion's chart of her course across the approaches to the Hauraki Gulf shows also the position of ships sighted while her minelaying was in progress. The numbers added in black give a key to translations of the notes on the map

- (1)** Vessel in sight
- (2)** Steamer in sight
- (3)** Steamer in sight
- (4)** Position of sinking of **Niagara**
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- (7)** Blacked-out vessel
- (8)** Vessel
- (9)** Moon bearing at 2100 hours

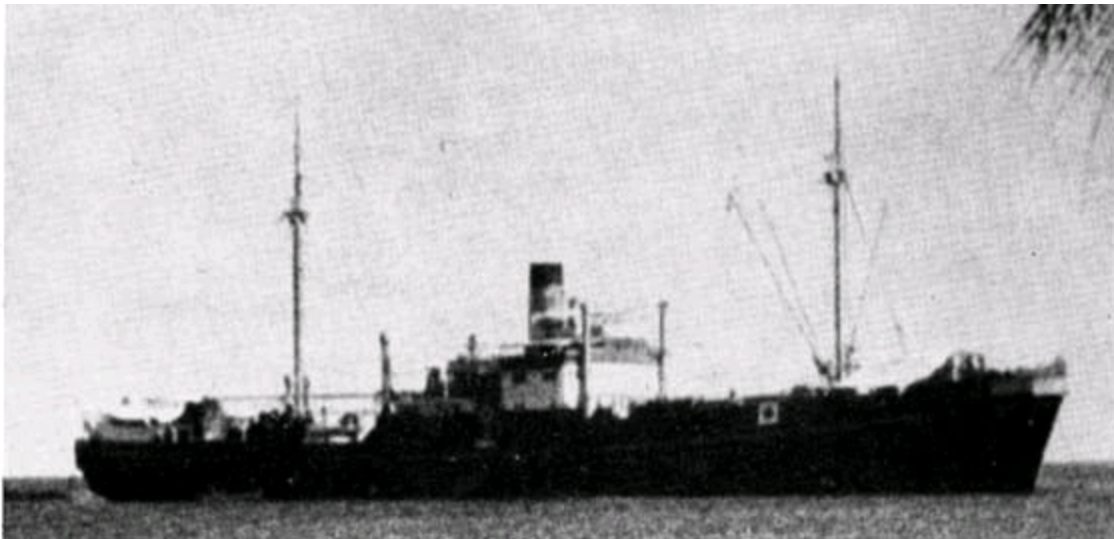
The main heading at the bottom of the map states that it is to be superimposed on British chart 2543, enclosure No. 2 to Report No. 201 of 7 August 1940. The thin line shows the raider's course, the thicker line shows mines about 800 metres apart, and the double lines mines about 400 metres apart. The south-eastern end of the minefield covering the approaches north and south of Cuvier Island is not shown in this copy.

lifeboat from the
Niagara transfers sur-
vivors to the coastal
vessel *Kapiti*



A lifeboat from the **Niagara** transfers survivors to the coastal vessel **Kapiti**

: raider
Komet (Ship
No. 45)



The raider **Komet** (Ship No. 45)



German raiders off Emirau Island. The *Komet* is at the left. The funnel
and one mast of the *Orion* show behind the supply ship *Kulmerland*,
with Japanese markings, on the right

German raiders off **Emirau Island**. The **Komet** is at the left. The funnel and one mast of the **Orion** show behind the supply ship **Kulmerland**.



Fuel-oil tanks on Nauru Island on fire after being shelled by the *Komet* in December 1940

Fuel-oil tanks on Nauru Island on fire after being shelled by the *Komet* in December 1940



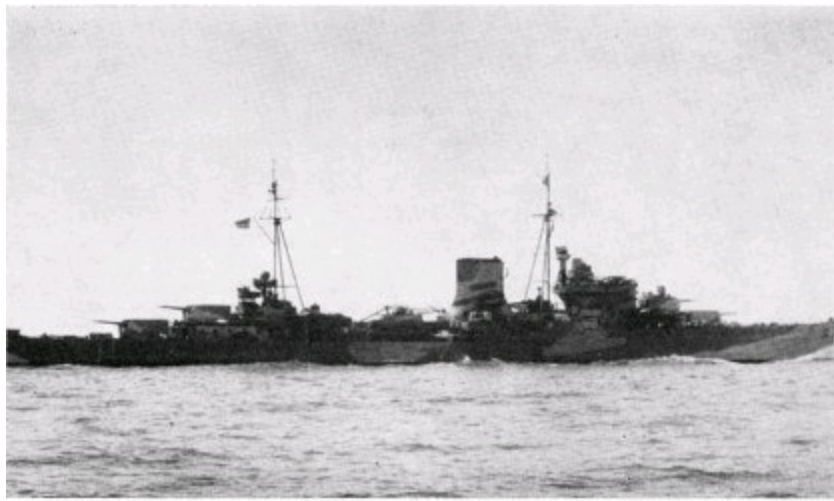
HMNZS *Breeze* minesweeper, in the Hauraki Gulf

HMNZS *Breeze*, minesweeper, in the Hauraki Gulf



A German mine washed up in Manukau Harbour

A German mine washed up in Manukau Harbour



HMS *Neptune* coming out of Alexandria. When she was sunk by a mine on 19 December 1941, 150 New Zealanders were drowned

HMS Neptune coming out of [Alexandria](#). When she was sunk by a mine on 19 December 1941, 150 New Zealanders were drowned



The wreck of a Japanese midget submarine lifted from Sydney Harbour

The wreck of a Japanese midget submarine lifted from [Sydney Harbour](#)



Harbour Defence Motor Launches moored alongside HMNZS *Philomel*, with HMNZS *Inchkeith* moored on the opposite side of the training jetty

Harbour Defence Motor Launches moored alongside HMNZS *Philomel*, with HMNZS *Inchkeith* moored on the opposite side of the training jetty

A Fairmile submarine-chaser in the Hauraki Gulf



A Fairmile submarine-chaser in the [Hauraki Gulf](#)

In general, the raiders' armament comprised five or six 5.9-inch guns, a number of smaller guns, and four or more underwater torpedo-tubes. The ships were fitted with the director system of fire control and elaborate wireless telegraphy plants. Most of them carried a small seaplane, and several were equipped for minelaying. Whatever their tactics in approaching a merchant ship, the attack was always sudden and ruthless, the primary targets being the victim's wireless room, navigating bridge, and defensive gun. No attempt was made to spare the crew until the destruction of these points had been achieved; and in some cases firing continued with main and secondary armament even after it was obvious that no resistance was being made.

The first German raider to operate in the [Pacific](#) and bring the war to the shores of New Zealand was Ship No. 36, otherwise known as the [Orion](#). She was a single-screw cargo steamer of 7021 tons gross register, built at [Hamburg](#) in 1930 as the [Kurmark](#) for the [Hamburg](#)-America Line. Her geared turbine engines gave her a maximum speed, when clean, of about 14 knots. She had a stowage of 4100 tons of oil-fuel, estimated to give her a steaming endurance of 35,000 miles at 10 knots, but this was well beyond her actual capacity in service. Her armament comprised six 5·9-inch guns, one 3-inch gun and six light anti-aircraft guns, and six torpedo-tubes in triple mountings, and she carried an Arado seaplane.

The [Orion](#) was commissioned by Captain Kurt Weyher at [Kiel](#) on 9 December 1939 and sailed from [Germany](#) on 6 April 1940, three days before the German invasion of [Norway](#) and [Denmark](#). She entered the [Atlantic](#) by way of Denmark Strait, between [Iceland](#) and Greenland, and cautiously made her way south. Her first victim was the British steamer [Haxby](#), 5207 tons, which was intercepted east of Bermuda in the early morning of 24 April.¹ When the [Haxby](#) made a distress signal, she was ruthlessly shelled for six minutes, seventeen of her crew being killed. The master and twenty-four others were taken prisoner and the ship was sunk by a torpedo.

Having refuelled from her supply tanker [Winnetou](#) about 660 miles from South Georgia, the [Orion](#) entered the [Pacific](#), passing about 200 miles south of Cape Horn on 21 May. Much bad weather was experienced and the vessel did not arrive in New Zealand waters until the afternoon of 13 June. The raider was carrying 228 mines, and her orders from the German Naval Command were that they should all be laid in the approaches to [Auckland](#). With good visibility, under a cloudless sky, she cautiously approached the land in the early dusk of mid-winter to carry out this operation.

¹ The details of the cruise of the [Orion](#) are taken from the war diary of Captain Weyher, as well as from records supplied by him at [Wilhelmshaven](#) after the war.

Starting at 7.26 p.m., the [Orion](#) laid the first row of mines across the eastern approach to the passage between Great Mercury Island and Cuvier Island. In the

clear weather prevailing, said Captain Weyher in his war diary, it was 'not possible to approach closer than eight German nautical miles to the Cuvier lighthouse without being sighted by the Signal Station.' A second barrage of mines was laid across the approach to Cuvier Island in a zigzag which overlapped the south-east end of Great Barrier Island. A third and much longer barrage was laid across the northern approaches to [Hauraki Gulf](#). It extended from a point off the northern end of Great Barrier in a wide arc 6 ½ miles off Moko Hinau Islands and thence in a straight line to the north-west, passing about six miles outside the Maro Tiri Islands to a point about five miles from the mainland. All the mines were of the moored contact type.

In his war diary Captain Weyher records that during the operation, which lasted seven hours, three outward-bound steamers and one inward-bound vessel were sighted by the [Orion](#), but by eleven o'clock the sky had clouded over and she was not detected. The [Achilles](#) and the Hector arrived at [Auckland](#) between nine o'clock and midnight. The harbourmaster's records show that the coastal vessel [Port Waikato](#) arrived at midnight, the Port Line steamer [Port Nicholson](#) at seven o'clock in the morning, and the Shaw Savill motor-vessel [Waiotira](#) about an hour later. The Norwegian motor-vessel [Nordnes](#) sailed from [Auckland](#) at 9 p.m. and the [Union Company's](#) collier [Kaimiro](#) at 12.45 a.m. The raider dropped her last mine at 2.36 a.m. and then steamed away at full speed to the north-east.

Five days passed, during which a number of vessels (including the Canadian-Australian mail steamer [Niagara](#), 13,415 tons, when she arrived from [Sydney](#)) must have passed close to, if not through, the mine barrier. But the [Niagara](#) was unfortunate when she struck a mine soon after sailing from [Auckland](#) for [Suva](#), [Honolulu](#), and [Vancouver](#) with 136 passengers, general cargo, and a shipment of gold bullion valued at £2,500,000. At 3.44 a.m. on 19 June 1940, Wellington Radio intercepted an alarm signal, followed a minute later by a wireless distress message from the [Niagara](#): 'Explosion in No. 2 hold, Position Maro Tiri, 270 deg., six miles.'

A quarter of an hour later another message was received from the unlucky liner: 'Engines disabled, No. 2 hold full of water. Vessel going down by head. Putting into boats. Heading towards Hen and Chickens. (Maro Tiri).'

These messages were passed promptly to the [Achilles](#), which at 5.23 a.m. weighed anchor and proceeded to sea. The Hector was ordered to remain in harbour

as Commodore Parry did not consider any useful purpose would be served by her going out. At 5.30 a.m. he ordered the minesweepers James Cosgrove and Thomas Currell to carry out a sweeping search in the vicinity of Maro Tiri.

A few minutes after six o'clock the [Achilles](#) streamed her paravanes and at 7.8 a.m. increased speed to 30 knots. Forty minutes later a wireless signal was received from one of the [Niagara's](#) lifeboats, reporting that they were between Moko Hinau and Maro Tiri. The [Achilles](#) maintained her speed and course to keep clear of the main channel, which appeared the most likely position for a minefield. At 8.12 a.m. the [Niagara's](#) boats were sighted on the horizon and two minutes later the Huddart Parker liner [Wanganella](#), inward-bound from [Sydney](#) to [Auckland](#), came into sight. She was requested by wireless to accommodate survivors and assist with a motor-boat, and at once agreed to do so.

The [Achilles](#) arrived in the vicinity of Maro Tiri at 8.17 a.m., when she stopped and recovered her paravanes. A few minutes later two motor-boats and a pinnace were sent away under the general charge of Lieutenant-Commander R. E. Washbourn. The [Wanganella](#) stood by and received the passengers and members of the crew of the [Niagara](#), who were transferred to her by the coastal vessel [Kapiti](#) and the services' speedboat which arrived during the morning. The [Wanganella](#) proceeded for [Auckland](#) at 2.45 p.m. The [Achilles](#) left at four o'clock with the [Niagara's](#) lifeboats in tow.

Commodore Parry commended the services of the [Kapiti](#) and the speedboat, which transhipped some 340 persons from the lifeboats to the [Wanganella](#), and of the launches [Kowhai](#), [Menai](#), and [Meander](#) which assisted in this work and in towing boats. He expressed his gratitude to the master of the [Wanganella](#) for having stood by and received the [Niagara's](#) people, who included a number of women and children, for conveyance to [Auckland](#).

The minesweepers James Cosgrove and Thomas Currell commenced operations in the vicinity of Maro Tiri at 12.25 p.m. and at 2.47 p.m. reported a mine in the sweep. Two hours later the Senior Officer, Minesweepers, reported that two mines had been sunk but not exploded. They appeared to have been newly laid and were identified as German contact mines. In the meantime, Commodore Parry had ordered the minesweepers to break off their sweep at sunset and proceed to [Colville](#)

Channel (the eastern approach to [Hauraki Gulf](#)) to carry out a sweep there, beginning at dawn on 20 June. The minesweepers took over the tow of the [Niagara's](#) lifeboats from the [Achilles](#), which then steamed into [Auckland](#), where she anchored at 10.50 p.m. Off Tiri Tiri the minesweepers were relieved of their tows and proceeded to Colville Channel.

The loss of the [Niagara](#) and the finding of the mines clearly indicated that an enemy ship was operating in the New Zealand area. All sailings from Dominion ports were stopped for the time being and coastwatching stations were warned to keep a specially sharp lookout for suspicious vessels. It was also arranged with the Royal New Zealand Air Force for a daily dawn air reconnaissance of the approaches to [Auckland](#), Cook Strait, [Lyttelton](#), and Otago harbour, of the [North Auckland](#) peninsular area twice a week, and the [West Coast](#) sounds of the [South Island](#) once a week. This arrangement was modified a few days later, the daily air reconnaissance of the Cook Strait, [Lyttelton](#), and Otago harbour areas being discontinued.

On 22 June a signal from the Chief of Intelligence Staff, [Singapore](#), reported that radio direction-finding bearings indicated a German vessel in a position roughly 120 miles south-west of the [Chatham Islands](#) and another in a position far to the eastward. A later bearing indicated a ship in a position north of the Chathams. Auckland Radio reported wireless transmissions on northerly bearings. The former were subsequently diagnosed as 'reciprocals', but at the time they were reported the possibility of a German ship moving north from the [Chatham Islands](#) area could not be disregarded.

The armed merchant cruiser Hector had been allocated temporarily to the New Zealand Station, and at that time the Admiralty wanted to transfer her to the East Indies Command. On 23 June, however, the New Zealand Naval Board informed the Commander-in-Chief East Indies and the Admiralty that, because of the suspected presence of an enemy raider in New Zealand waters, it was intended to retain the Hector for the time being. The ship sailed from [Auckland](#) in the evening of 23 June under orders to patrol the eastern approaches to Cook Strait. Aircraft carried out a dawn reconnaissance of that area next morning.

Commodore Parry decided to search the Kermadec Islands area in the [Achilles](#) in co-operation with the trans-[Tasman](#) flying boat [Awarua](#). Accordingly, the cruiser

sailed from [Auckland](#) on 24 June and arrived off Sunday Island at daybreak on the 26th. When the settlement came into sight the ship flashed by signalling projector towards the wireless station: 'British ship [Achilles](#). Do not report me.' Nevertheless, the wireless station sent a message reporting the arrival of a 'naval vessel'. ¹

It had been intended to fly-off the ship's Walrus aircraft, but conditions were unsuitable owing to a strong south-westerly wind and heavy squalls which raised too much sea outside and fierce down-draughts on the lee side of the island. Reconnaissance by the aircraft was therefore abandoned. After searching the eastern and southern bays of Sunday Island, the [Achilles](#) proceeded to Macauley and Curtis Islands to support the flying-boat search.

¹ [Achilles](#), Report of Proceedings, 28 June 1940.

At 9.40 a.m. the [Achilles](#) intercepted a message from the [Awarua](#) that it had Curtis Island in sight, and at 11.15 a.m. the first nil report was received. In his report of proceedings Commodore Parry remarked that negative reports were not required in a set search scheme. The enemy must deduce that something was afoot if a series of coded messages was intercepted. Wireless silence was essential in an operation of this kind in which success was dependent upon surprise. The [Achilles](#) passed through Stella Passage, Curtis Island, at noon and the flying boat was sighted at 1.45 p.m. Having passed L'Esperance Rock and sighted nothing suspicious, the [Achilles](#) at five o'clock shaped course for [Auckland](#), where she arrived on 28 June.

When it became evident that there was no immediate likelihood of encountering a raider in the vicinity of the [Chatham Islands](#), the Hector returned to [Wellington](#) to top-up with oil fuel. A patrol, first of the western and then of the eastern approaches to [Port Nicholson](#), was arranged in order to keep the ship in the area in which it would be most likely to meet a raider should she be cruising or laying mines in the vicinity. As soon as Parry's signal was received reporting that the Kermadec Islands search had been completed, the Hector was ordered to proceed forthwith for [Fremantle](#), en route to the East Indies Station.

Actually, the raider was far away from New Zealand by that time. After her last mine had been laid in the early hours of 14 June, the [Orion](#) steamed to the north-

eastward until midday and then proceeded on an 'easterly course on the [Australia-Panama](#) route' to meet her supply tanker *Winnetou* in a position about 920 miles to the north-eastward of East Cape. On 17 June, however, the raider ordered the tanker to a rendezvous 500 miles nearer the Equator. ¹

In the morning of 19 June the [Orion](#) captured the Norwegian motor-vessel *Tropic Sea*, 5781 tons, on passage from [Sydney](#) to the [United Kingdom](#) via the Panama Canal with a cargo of 8100 tons of wheat, in a position about 800 miles east of the Kermadec Islands and 400 miles south of [Rarotonga](#). A week later the raider fuelled from her tanker and on 30 June, by which time the ships had worked still further to the eastward, the *Tropic Sea*, in charge of a prize crew, proceeded for [France](#) via Cape Horn. ² For the next three weeks the [Orion](#) cruised in that area of the [Pacific](#).

The sighting of a strange vessel in the vicinity of Curtis Island

¹ War diary of Raider No. 36 ([Orion](#)).

² On 3 September 1940 the *Tropic Sea* was intercepted in the Bay of Biscay by the British submarine *Truant* and was scuttled by the prize crew. The *Truant* took on board the survivors of the *Haxby* and the Norwegian master and his wife, the other Norwegians being rescued next day by a Sunderland flying boat. Lieutenant Steinkraus and his prize crew landed in [Spain](#) and made their way back to [Germany](#). Three months later he arrived in [Japan](#) and took command of the captured Norwegian tanker *Ole Jacob*, which was employed to refuel German raiders in the [Indian Ocean](#).

in the Kermadec Group at 2 p.m. on 14 June had been reported to Navy Office, [Wellington](#), by Captain Boulton of the Government motor-ship *Maui Pomare*, which forwarded a brief description and a sketch of the unknown ship. On his return to New Zealand on 5 July Captain Boulton supplied additional information, and Navy Office thereupon promulgated his description of the ship sighted as that of a probable raider. It is now evident that the ship could not have been the [Orion](#), which did not leave New Zealand waters until the early hours of 14 June. The Kermadecs lie some 600 miles north-east from [Auckland](#), so that it was impossible for the raider to have been in the vicinity of Curtis Island that afternoon. Her war diary and track chart

show that she passed south of the Kermadecs in the evening of 15 June.

Having embarked the Chief of the General Staff, the Chief of the Air Staff, and several of their officers, the [Achilles](#) sailed from [Auckland](#) on 20 July for [Suva](#), where she arrived three days later.

The French steamer *Commissaire Ramel*, 10,061 tons, owned by the Messageries Maritimes, had arrived at [Suva](#) on 18 July in the course of her voyage to [Tahiti](#), [New Hebrides](#), and [New Caledonia](#), with the ultimate intention of reporting to the French Admiral Robert at Martinique in the [West Indies](#). In accordance with instructions from the Colonial Office in [London](#), the vessel had been requisitioned by the Governor of [Fiji](#) and High Commissioner for the Western Pacific.

In the afternoon of 23 July Lieutenant Carlyon, RNZNR, ¹ of the [Achilles](#), with Mr [C. H. J. Stone](#), Warrant Engineer, and an armed guard of eighteen ratings (sufficient to work the ship if necessary), boarded the *Commissaire Ramel*, which sailed three days later for Vila, [New Hebrides](#), where she transhipped passengers and cargo for [Noumea](#). The ship then proceeded to [Sydney](#), where she arrived on 5 August and was taken over by the Shaw Savill and Albion Company. ² In a subsequent report to the Naval Board, Commodore Parry drew attention to the satisfactory way in which Lieutenant Carlyon, Mr Stone, and all members of the armed guard had performed their duties. It was evident that the change in the attitude of the passengers and crew of the *Commissaire Ramel* was due largely to the considerate and tactful behaviour of the guard. The New Zealand Naval Board endorsed this view and directed that Lieutenant Carlyon and the members of his party be informed accordingly.

¹ Commander C. R. Carlyon, VRD, RNZNR; born Waipawa, 14 Feb 1905; master mariner; served Union SS Co., 1928–39; HMNZS [Achilles](#) 1940–43; RN 1943–45; now sheep farmer.

² The *Commissaire Ramel*, manned by British officers and crew, loaded wool and general cargo at Australian ports for the [United Kingdom](#). She was sunk by the German raider [Atlantis](#) in the [Indian Ocean](#) on 20 September 1940.

During the three days the [Achilles](#) was at [Suva](#) discussions of defence problems

took place between the Chiefs of Staff and the Governor of [Fiji](#) and local officers. The cruiser arrived on 28 July at Nukualofa, [Tonga](#), where similar discussions were held. The ship's aircraft was of great value for reconnaissance work at both places. The [Achilles](#) returned to [Auckland](#) on 31 July and sailed a fortnight later for [Wellington](#), where the transports to carry the Third Echelon, 2 NZEF, were about to assemble.

At daybreak on 16 August the [Achilles](#) sighted the [Mauretania](#) in Cook Strait and followed her into harbour. Four days later the Empress of [Japan](#) and [Orcades](#) arrived at [Wellington](#), the latter sailing in the evening for [Lyttelton](#) to embark the [South Island](#) section of the troops. It was at that time that the German raider [Orion](#) struck her second blow at merchant shipping in New Zealand waters by sinking the [Turakina](#) in the [Tasman Sea](#).

After sending away the captured [Tropic Sea](#) on 30 June, the raider spent a completely fruitless three weeks cruising on the [Pacific](#) trade routes from New Zealand to [Tahiti](#), [San Francisco](#), Vancouver, and the Panama Canal. A testimony to the value of evasive routeing is found in Captain Weyher's comment in his war diary that the 'unsuccessful patrols along the previously quoted shipping lanes under conditions of about twenty to twenty-five nautical miles maximum visibility prove that enemy shipping, even in Australian, New Zealand and South Seas waters, no longer steers the peace time routes. Radio interception shows merely the traffic of U.S.A. and Japanese passenger ships which apparently still run on these routes. ...'

Between 21 and 23 July – the [Achilles](#) arrived at [Suva](#) on the latter date – the raider rounded the Fiji Group to the southward, and on 28 July she refuelled from the [Winnetou](#), which then parted company for [Japan](#), arriving at [Kobe](#) on 1 September. The [Orion](#) then proceeded to the south-west and later on a southerly course to search for shipping in the area 'between [New Caledonia](#), [Australia](#) and New Zealand.'

In the morning of 10 August, when 'approaching the latitude of [Brisbane](#)', the raider sighted a steamer, judged to be the Pacific Phosphate Commission's [Triona](#), which took prompt evasive action and was not attacked. In the afternoon of 11 August the [Orion](#) was 120 miles from [Brisbane](#), and for the next four or five days she cruised in the area between that port and [New Caledonia](#). On 14 August her seaplane made a reconnaissance flight over [Noumea](#) and was recovered after making a forced landing due to shortage of fuel.

Steering to the southward in the evening of 16 August, the [Orion](#) intercepted and sank the French steamer [Notou](#), 2489 tons, which was on passage from Newcastle to [Noumea](#) with 3900 tons of coal. On the following night, 17 August, an unsuccessful attempt was made to close a vessel which apparently sighted the raider against the moonlight, promptly switched off her navigation lights, and was lost to sight.

The [Orion](#) then worked her way south into the [Tasman Sea](#) to patrol the routes between New Zealand and [Sydney](#). In the late afternoon of 20 August she intercepted the New Zealand Shipping Company's steamer [Turakina](#), 9691 tons, on passage from [Sydney](#) to [Wellington](#), in a position approximately 290 miles west by north from Cape Egmont and 380 miles from [Wellington](#).

The ships were on reciprocal courses when the [Turakina](#) first sighted the raider, which soon afterwards turned and approached her at full speed. The [Orion](#) then ordered the [Turakina](#) to stop instantly and not to use her wireless. Captain Laird ¹ at once ordered maximum speed, put his ship stern on to the enemy, and instructed the radio office to broadcast the 'raider signal', giving the ship's position and indicating that the [Turakina](#) was being attacked.

Thereupon, the [Orion](#) opened fire with the immediate intention to destroy the [Turakina](#)'s radio and aerials. This was the customary practice of German raiders, all of whom were ruthless in their methods of attack and some of whom were wont to open fire without warning to prevent wireless messages being transmitted. Nevertheless, the [Turakina](#) was able to make her signal several times and it was taken in by stations on both sides of the [Tasman Sea](#), despite the raider's efforts to jam the transmission.

The [Turakina](#) promptly replied to the enemy's fire, and so, in the gathering dusk, began the first engagement ever fought in the [Tasman Sea](#). The odds were heavily in favour of the [Orion](#) with her powerful armament and large, well-trained crew. The [Turakina](#) carried but a single 4·7-inch gun, mounted right aft and manned by her merchant seamen, assisted by one naval gunner. It was a most unequal contest, but Captain Laird had vowed that he would fight his ship to the last if ever he was attacked.

At the close range of less than three miles, the raider's fire quickly wrought havoc in the Turakina. The first salvoes brought down her fore topmast and the lookout man in the crow's nest, who was badly wounded, partly wrecked the bridge, destroyed the range-finder, and put most of the telephones out of action. The officers' quarters and the cook's galley amidships and a deck-house at the foot of the mainmast were wrecked by shells which set the ship badly on fire.

In little more than a quarter of an hour the Turakina was reduced to a battered, blazing wreck and was settling aft; more than half her crew had been killed and others were wounded. At least one of

¹ Captain J. B. Laird; born [Scotland](#), 1893; joined NZ Shipping Company Ltd; third officer Kaikoura, 1919; promoted to command SS Piako, May 1929; Turakina, Jan 1931.

her shells had hit the raider and wounded a number of Germans. To hasten her end the [Orion](#) discharged a torpedo at a range of about a mile, but 'due to the swell it broke surface and hit the steamer on the stern. No visible damage results. The vessel burns like a blazing torch,' wrote Captain Weyher in his report.

Meanwhile, Captain Laird had given the order to abandon ship. The two port lifeboats had been wrecked, but one of the starboard boats got away from the ship with three officers and eleven men, seven of whom were wounded. Other wounded men were put into the remaining boat, but when it was lowered a sea swept it away from the ship's side and it was some time before it could be worked back again.

Captain Laird came down from the bridge to the main deck at this moment. He had a bad gash on one side of his head and another on his face. He wanted to have 'another shot at the—', but the third officer pointed out that only the muzzle of the gun was then above water. As the lifeboat neared the ship, Captain Laird told those left on board to 'jump for it'; but no one moved until the boat came alongside with a crash. The badly wounded first radio officer was put into it as it lifted on a swell. As the others jumped over the side there came a terrific flash and explosion. The raider had fired a torpedo which hit the ship in the engine-room. That was the end of the Turakina, which sank rapidly.

The only survivors of the explosion were the third officer, the seventh engineer, an apprentice, two seamen, a fireman, and a steward. They were picked up by the raider, as were the fourteen men in the other boat. The badly wounded lookout seaman died on board the [Orion](#) and was buried next day. Captain Laird and thirty-four of his officers and men had died in the *Turakina*; twenty survivors were prisoners in German hands.

In refusing to stop when challenged and ordering a wireless message to be transmitted, Captain Laird carried out an obligation that was accepted and performed by thousands of British and Allied shipmasters. The sending of such a message might not save the ship and her company but it pin-pointed the position of the enemy at the time and so materially assisted to save other ships and helped the efforts of the naval authorities to compass the destruction of the enemy. The *Turakina* and her ship's company paid the extreme price, but the raider was compelled to leave the [Tasman Sea](#) and did not sink another ship for two months.

What was Captain Laird's design in engaging so formidable an opponent? The enemy raider was far from any friendly port. If, therefore, he were badly damaged, even though in suffering damage he sank the *Turakina*, his power to harm other merchant ships might be lessened, if not destroyed.

There were precedents that might have influenced Captain Laird. There was the case of his own company's ship [Otaki](#) which, in 1917, fought the German raider *Moewe* and which, in the words of the Admiralty, 'with a little more luck, might have sunk her.' The [Otaki](#) herself was sunk, her gallant fight earning for her master, Captain Bisset Smith, a posthumous Victoria Cross. But, for his equally gallant action, Captain Laird of the *Turakina* was merely officially 'commended for good service.' That indicated a lack of imagination and appreciation on the part of the appropriate authorities in 1940, as did the meagre awards to other members of the *Turakina*'s ship's company.

The *Turakina*'s wireless raider signal, made several times between 6.26 and 6.30 p.m., New Zealand time, was read by [Brisbane](#) (which repeated it to New Zealand), the [Chatham Islands](#), and [Taieri](#) wireless stations. The reception of the nearer stations, such as [Auckland](#), [Napier](#), and [Wellington](#), was effectively interfered with by strong spark signals transmitted by the raider. ¹

When the message was received by her, the [Achilles](#), which was lying at [Wellington](#), raised steam for full speed. Arrangements were made for an air search to be carried out from [Auckland](#) by the flying boat [Awarua](#). It was thought probable that the raider would attempt to escape to the southward. Accordingly, a curve of search was planned to intercept him, assuming that he had left the [Turakina's](#) signalled position at seven o'clock and proceeded on some course between east by south and west-north-west through south. This limited search was decided upon as being the utmost possible with the one flying boat available.

The [Achilles](#) sailed from [Wellington](#) at 9.30 p.m., two and a half hours after receiving the [Turakina's](#) message, and proceeded at 25 knots for the [Tasman Sea](#). The flying boat [Awarua](#), which did not take off from [Auckland](#) until 5.17 a.m. on 21 August, was sighted by the [Achilles](#) at eight o'clock that morning well to the westward of [Cape Farewell](#). The [Awarua](#) flew on her curve of search to a point about midway between New Zealand and [Australia](#) and thence on a direct course approximately east by south to the position given by the [Turakina](#). After steaming west by south, the [Achilles](#) altered course at eleven o'clock towards the point of attack. At 3.47 p.m. she again sighted the flying boat and at 5.10 p.m. she arrived in the vicinity of the position in which the [Turakina](#) had been attacked. The [Achilles](#) made a close search of the area but saw no wreckage or other traces of the [Turakina](#). The flying boat, meanwhile, had returned to [Auckland](#).

¹ Report of Director-General, Post and Telegraph Department.

At the time the [Turakina](#) was attacked, the following other merchant ships were in the [Tasman Sea](#): [Kauri](#), [Sydney](#) to [Lyttelton](#); [Basilea](#), tanker, [East Indies](#) to [Wellington](#); [Piako](#), [Panama](#) to [Sydney](#); [Port Hardy](#), [Sydney](#) to [Panama](#); [Limerick](#), [Sydney](#) to [Suva](#); [Wanganella](#), [Sydney](#) to [Auckland](#); [Kalingo](#), [Sydney](#) to [New Plymouth](#); [Huia](#), auxiliary schooner, [Australia](#) to [Greymouth](#); [Korowai](#), [New Zealand](#) to [Sydney](#). In a general broadcast to merchant ships Navy Office, [Wellington](#), and Navy Office, [Melbourne](#), warned them that an enemy raider was at large in the [Tasman Sea](#). Orders were also issued that merchant ships bound on trans- [Tasman](#) passages either way were not to sail for the time being. The [Kalingo](#) was instructed to return to [Sydney](#), but this instruction was later cancelled.

[HMAS Perth](#) sailed from [Sydney](#) at 10 p.m. on 20 August and steamed at 20 knots to a point south-west of the [Turakina's](#) position when attacked and thence to about 200 miles east of [Gabo Island](#) off the eastern extremity of the coast of [Victoria](#), thus covering the approaches to [Bass Strait](#). Five [Hudson](#) aircraft also carried out a search from [Sydney](#) on 21 August.

Important clues to the whereabouts of the raider were received on 21 and 23 August when radio direction-finding bearings indicated that a German naval unit was in the area to the southward of [New Zealand](#). The relevant messages were passed to [Commodore Parry](#) in the [Achilles](#). Two of them informed him that bearings from [Penang](#) and [Australia](#) passed through [Stewart Island](#). In the evening of 24 August the [Naval Intelligence](#) staff officer at [Wellington](#) informed him that direction-finding bearings that morning from [Awarua](#), [Australia](#), and three stations in the [East Indies](#) gave bearings of a German naval unit whose intersections formed a 'cocked hat' (triangle) with [Campbell Island](#) as its centre. The [Admiralty](#), however, was of the opinion that the message was transmitted by a German vessel operating north of [Scotland](#). A search by aircraft in the area of the [West Coast](#) sounds and [Stewart Island](#) and towards [Campbell Island](#) was made with negative result.

The [Orion](#) had, in fact, steamed south after sinking the [Turakina](#), though she did not approach [Campbell Island](#). She went well to the southward of [Tasmania](#) and thence across the [Australian Bight](#) to the vicinity of [Albany](#), where she laid a number of dummy mines. She was sighted by an aircraft but was not found by six aircraft which came out later. Thereafter the raider kept well off shore and spent some days in fruitless cruising along the shipping routes west and south-west of [Cape Leeuwin](#). On 9 September she started on her return to the [South Pacific](#).

In view of his unsuccessful search on 21 August, the fruitless air search about [Stewart Island](#), and the fact that the radio direction-finding bearings were considered to be 'reciprocals', [Commodore Parry](#) came to the conclusion that the raider possibly had escaped to the northward. The [Achilles](#), therefore, shaped course for the vicinity of [Three Kings Islands](#), in support of a search westward from [Cape Maria van Diemen](#) by the flying boat [Awarua](#) on 22 August. Reviewing the position next morning, [Parry](#) came to the conclusion that, even if the raider was still in that area, there was little danger to shipping, except for two or three vessels approaching [New](#)

Zealand from the eastward. He therefore went into [Auckland](#) that night to refuel, arriving and sailing during the hours of darkness to avoid attracting attention.

Throughout the next day the [Achilles](#) patrolled off the approaches to [Auckland](#) to cover the shipping released from that port. On 25 August Parry received the signal from Navy Intelligence indicating a possibility that the raider might be in the vicinity of Campbell Island. The [Achilles](#), therefore, proceeded to the southward at 20 knots during the night. At six o'clock next morning, however, the Admiralty message indicating a false alarm was received and the cruiser turned to the northward to resume her patrol of the [Auckland](#) approaches.

In the evening two more 'false alarms' were received by the [Achilles](#). The first signal said that a noise that might have been gunfire had been reported from Cape Maria van Diemen. Assuming that Navy Office 'would not pass such a report unless it was reliable', Parry prepared to search that area the following morning. But about two hours later a signal from Navy Office with 'most immediate' priority, reported that a ship was being attacked in a position on a line of bearing north-east from [Napier](#). This decided Commodore Parry to alter course again to the southward and increase speed to 25 knots. On receipt of a later signal 'which showed that this catastrophe was not occurring in New Zealand waters', speed was reduced to 15 knots and the [Achilles](#) shaped course for [Wellington](#), where she arrived early on 27 August.

Commodore Parry in his report of proceedings remarked that lessons to be learned from the search operations were the need for more long-distance reconnaissance aircraft to locate a raider in the [Tasman Sea](#), and the importance of sifting information passed to ships at sea. It would be more helpful, he said, if each report could be accompanied by some indication of its reliability.

After refuelling at [Wellington](#), the [Achilles](#) sailed at midday on 27 August 1940 to meet the transport [Orcades](#), which was embarking the [South Island](#) troops of the Third Echelon at [Lyttelton](#). The [Orcades](#) came out of harbour at midnight and was escorted from Godley Head to Cook Strait where, at ten o'clock next morning, the two ships joined company with the [Mauretania](#) and Empress of [Japan](#) from [Wellington](#). While the convoy was forming up, the Japanese motor-vessel Canberra Maru passed the ships close-to. No wireless transmissions from her were heard by

the [Achilles](#).

The convoy had an uneventful passage across the [Tasman Sea](#) and in the afternoon of 30 August was joined by the [Perth](#), flying the flag of Rear-Admiral J. G. Crace, RN, commanding the Australian Squadron. Early next morning HMAS [Canberra](#) and the [Aquitania](#) carrying Australian troops joined company. The [Canberra](#) proceeded with the convoy and, after Rear-Admiral Crace had transferred to the New Zealand cruiser, the [Perth](#) returned to [Sydney](#). The [Achilles](#) went on to [Melbourne](#), where she arrived in the evening of 31 August. During her brief stay Commodore Parry had discussions with the members of the [Australian Commonwealth Naval Board](#).

In accordance with instructions from the New Zealand Naval Board, the [Achilles](#) sailed from [Melbourne](#) at 6 p.m. on 2 September and proceeded at high speed to [Auckland](#), where she arrived at 10.15 p.m. on 5 September. Next morning Mr C. A. Berendsen, Secretary of External Affairs and Permanent Head of the Prime Minister's Department, who was on a special mission to [Tahiti](#), embarked in the [Achilles](#), which sailed at 20 knots to Papeete, arriving there on 10 September.

The visit of the [Achilles](#) to [Tahiti](#) was arranged after information had been received that a plebiscite had resulted overwhelmingly in favour of General de Gaulle and his Free France movement, that the former Governor of [French Oceania](#) had been deposed, and that a provisional Government had been set up. As the representative of the [New Zealand Government](#), Mr Berendsen was authorised to discuss with the provisional government how best the governments of the British Commonwealth could assist [French Oceania](#) and, in general, any matters that the provisional government might wish to raise.

By the time the [Achilles](#) had entered the harbour, all the vessels in port had dressed ship and a welcoming crowd was assembled at the landing place. After an exchange of official calls, Commodore Parry and Mr Berendsen discussed the situation with the British Consul (Mr Edmonds) and his predecessor and later conferred with the members of the provisional government, confirmation of the new Governor's appointment being announced at this meeting. On the following day Commodore Parry received the Governor (M. Mansard) and French naval and military officers on board the [Achilles](#) and discussed problems of defence in [French Oceania](#)

with them.

At a ceremony in Papeete on 12 September, the Governor and Commodore Parry laid wreaths on the First World War memorial. The [Achilles](#) paraded a party of seamen and a platoon of Royal Marines and their band, in company with local French naval and military detachments. At the conclusion of the ceremony the parade marched past the Governor, who took the salute. During the forenoon fifteen native chiefs visited the [Achilles](#) and were received by Commodore Parry and his officers. At a number of social functions the spirit of the Frenchmen was both cordial and co-operative.

In the afternoon of 14 September the Union Steam Ship Company's motor-vessel Limerick, which had called at Papeete on passage from New Zealand, sailed for Vancouver, having embarked the deposed Governor and three French naval officers and their families for deportation to [Europe](#).

Next morning an armed guard from the [Achilles](#) boarded the Messageries Maritimes steamer Ville d' [Amiens](#), 6975 tons, of which Lieutenant Carlyon had already taken charge at the request of the new Governor, who had requisitioned the vessel. The Ville d' [Amiens](#) was too large and expensive to be operated by the Government of [French Oceania](#) and the attitude of the 'pro-Vichy' officers and crew, who were becoming truculent, made it imperative that she should be removed from Tahitian waters. It was decided that the master and officers could not go in the ship, even as passengers. It therefore became necessary for Lieutenant Carlyon to act as master, and with an armed guard he took the ship to [Auckland](#), where she arrived on 27 September 1940.

In his report of proceedings Commodore Parry remarked: 'It is admitted that the situation in which an officer of the Royal Navy acts as captain of a French ship flying the French flag is probably without precedent, but the situation was also without precedent and I could see no other course in the circumstances. I was careful to do nothing except at the express request of the Colonial Government of [Tahiti](#).'

The [Achilles](#) sailed from Papeete on 15 September, called at [Rarotonga](#) two days later, and arrived at [Auckland](#) on the 23rd. On 15 October Parry was succeeded in command of the [Achilles](#) by Captain Barnes, RN, ¹ of the [Philomel](#). The broad

pendant of Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron was struck in the [Achilles](#) at sunset that day.

In the early hours of 21 October several wireless stations intercepted a distress message from the Union Steam Ship Company's motor-vessel Karitane, on passage from [Melbourne](#) to [Auckland](#), indicating that she was being attacked by a raider in a position in the eastern approach to [Bass Strait](#). The [Achilles](#) immediately raised steam for full speed, but shortly afterwards she was ordered to carry out her previously arranged programme and sailed to patrol the

¹ Captain H. M. Barnes, RN; born England, 21 Mar 1893; entered RN 1906; served World War I; Captain, Jun 1937.

North Cape focal area. On the Australian side HMAS [Adelaide](#) left [Sydney](#) to patrol an area about 120 miles south-east from Gabo Island and searches were made by aircraft. Merchant ships were ordered not to sail from [Melbourne](#) and Hobart, but this instruction was cancelled when no further signal was received from the Karitane.

When that ship arrived at [Auckland](#) some days later her master reported that late at night on 20 October a vessel steering a westerly course and 'showing many deck lights but no navigation lights' had been sighted at a distance of eight miles. The Karitane took avoiding action and afterwards altered to her original course. About two hours later the stranger was sighted about three miles off, showing her side lights. Course was altered to bring the vessel astern, but when she appeared to be gaining, the Karitane made the raider signal. The stranger then dropped astern and out of sight. It is possible that the ship sighted may have been the Norwegian tanker Storstad, captured by the raider Pinguin and renamed Passat. During that week the tanker laid minefields off Wilson's Promontory, in [Bass Strait](#), and off Cape Otway; and in the night of 28 October the Pinguin laid four rows of mines between [Sydney](#) and Newcastle.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 10 – CRUISE OF THE ORION AND KOMET

CHAPTER 10

Cruise of the Orion and Komet

THE [Achilles](#) arrived at [Wellington](#) on 7 November 1940 and sailed next day as ocean escort for Convoy US 7, which comprised the Polish vessel [Batory](#), 14,287 tons, and the Union Steam Ship Company's steamer [Maunganui](#), 7527 tons. They were carrying the first section of the 4th Reinforcements, 2 NZEF, numbering approximately 1500 troops. The convoy crossed the [Tasman Sea](#) at 14 knots and arrived at [Sydney](#) on 12 November.

Four days later the [Achilles](#) sailed from [Sydney](#) under orders to visit the Auckland Islands and Campbell Island, which, it was thought, might be used by enemy raiders as refuelling and refitting bases. After a stormy passage she arrived off the Auckland Islands in the early morning of 20 November. As the weather was too bad for the ship's aircraft to be used, the [Achilles](#) entered Carnley harbour and hoisted out a power boat carrying a forward observation party with a portable wireless set and a section of [Royal Marines](#). The boat was ordered in to reconnoitre the anchorages and, in the event of a hostile ship being present, the forward observation officer was to be landed at a suitable position to spot for the ship's guns. Nothing of a suspicious nature was seen in Carnley harbour or in Port Ross where the ship anchored for four hours. The [Achilles](#) arrived off Campbell Island early next morning and, after reconnoitring Perseverance harbour, sailed for [Port Chalmers](#).

In the afternoon of 21 November the cruiser received orders that, as an enemy raider had been reported by the steamer [Maimoa](#) in the south-east [Indian Ocean](#) on the previous day, she was to proceed direct to [Lyttelton](#). The Naval Board informed the Minister of Defence that the change was made so that the [Achilles](#) could be refuelled and ready for operations should the raider arrive in New Zealand waters from the [Indian Ocean](#).

The raider, which had attacked and sunk the Shaw Savill and Albion Company's steamer [Maimoa](#) in a position about 850 miles west from [Fremantle](#), was the [Penguin](#) (Ship No. 33). Her allotted area of operations was the [Indian Ocean](#), but during October 1940 she and the captured Norwegian tanker [Storstad](#), which had been renamed [Passat](#), had laid minefields in the approaches to [Sydney](#)– Newcastle,

Hobart and [Adelaide](#), and in [Bass Strait](#).¹ Twenty-four hours after sinking the Maimoa, the Pinguin sank the Port Brisbane and, eight days later, the Port Wellington.

But while precautions were being taken against the possible approach of the Pinguin from the [Indian Ocean](#), a German raider operation was actually in progress in New Zealand waters. At the time the [Achilles](#) was on passage from Campbell Island to [Lyttelton](#), two raiders with a supply ship in company were cruising in an area eastward and southward of the [Chatham Islands](#) on the prowl for merchant ships. This enemy force comprised the [Orion](#) (which had laid the [Hauraki Gulf](#) minefield in June and sunk the Turakina in August), the [Komet](#) (Ship No. 45), and the supply ship Kulmerland.

After her return from the [Indian Ocean](#) in September, the [Orion](#) had spent nearly a fortnight cruising in the [Tasman Sea](#) and about the Kermadecs without success. On 1 October she headed north, passing close by the Fiji Group and between Nauru and Ocean Islands on her way to Ailinglapalap, an atoll in the Marshall Islands. There she met a supply ship from [Japan](#) from which she took some 3000 tons of fuel-oil as well as stores and provisions. After leaving the atoll the [Orion](#) captured and sank the Norwegian motor-vessel Ringwood, 7203 tons, on passage from [Shanghai](#) to Ocean Island. Four days later the [Orion](#) and her supply ship arrived at Lamotrek in the Caroline Islands, where they joined company with the raider [Komet](#) and the Kulmerland. The [Komet](#) had left the Baltic in July 1940 and arrived in the [Pacific](#) after an extraordinary passage across the Arctic Ocean and the Bering Sea. She was a relatively small ship of 3287 tons gross register, built in 1937 as the Ems for the Norddeutscher Lloyd. Propelled by two oil-engines geared to a single shaft, she had a speed of about 15 knots. She was armed with six 5·9-inch guns, nine light anti-aircraft guns, six deck and four underwater torpedo-tubes. She carried one Arado seaplane and a high-speed motor-launch.

The captains of the raiders decided to 'operate together in the waters east of New Zealand along the routes leading from there to [Panama](#).' This was an area of good promise as, on an average, eight or nine loaded ships left New Zealand every month for the [United Kingdom](#) via the Panama Canal and an approximately equal number arrived by that route, not counting other ships moving to and from the

Pacific coast.

The [Orion](#) and [Komet](#) with the [Kulmerland](#) in company sailed from Lamotrek on 20 October. Passing close by Nauru Island 'in the rather vain hope of coming upon steamers carrying cargoes from there to [Australia](#)',² the ships proceeded southward between the New

¹ See ante, p. 133.

² War diary of the [Orion](#).

Hebrides and [Fiji](#). In the evening of 3 November the American steamer [City of Elwood](#), 6197 tons, was sighted and stopped by warning shots, but when the raiders' searchlights revealed her name and American markings she was allowed to proceed.

On 7 November, 'having reached the sea lanes Cook Strait- [Tahiti](#)- [Panama](#) and [Auckland](#)- [Panama](#)', the German ships had arrived in their first operational area, about due east of East Cape, and, since they were more than 400 miles from the coast, 'it was by experience outside the range of enemy aerial reconnaissance'. During daylight hours the three ships cruised in line abreast, at masthead visibility distance apart, the [Kulmerland](#) in the centre acting as guide ship. This disposition gave the raiders a range of vision of from 90 to 100 miles in clear weather.

After four days of unsuccessful cruising in poor visibility in the East Cape area the raiders proceeded 300 miles to the southward. This placed them about 530 miles to the eastward of Cape Palliser, 'so as to concentrate activity on the [Wellington](#) route.' There again the raiders failed to sight any ships, 'so, assuming that shipping was following a course south of the Chatham group, reconnaissance was transferred there on 20 November.'¹ This move took the raiders about 200 miles south-east of the Chathams, where they cruised for four days but sighted no ship. On 24 November they rounded the islands with the intention to proceed direct to Nauru Island, which was to be attacked at dawn on 8 December.

That German raiders had already spent nearly three weeks in cruising to the eastward of New Zealand was, of course, not known at that time. The [Achilles](#)

arrived at [Lyttelton](#) from Campbell Island on 23 November in the expectation that, if operations against an enemy ship eventuated in New Zealand waters, they would be concerned with a raider direct from the [Indian Ocean](#).

Moreover, it had been arranged that the *Monowai*² should make a cruise to the islands of the Gilbert and Ellice Groups, which had not been visited by a warship for a considerable time. The *Monowai* was also to visit Ocean Island and, with the concurrence of the [Australian Commonwealth Naval Board](#) in whose area it was situated, Nauru Island, which lies about 160 miles to the westward of the former. Usually, there were a number of ships loading at or lying off those islands. It remains a matter of conjecture as to what would have happened had the *Monowai* encountered two raiders in the vicinity of Nauru Island, especially in view of the unfortunate

¹ War diaries of [Orion](#) and [Komet](#).

² HMS *Monowai*, armed merchant cruiser, 10,850 tons; eight 6-inch guns, two 3-inch AA guns; speed 17 knots.

experiences of three armed merchant cruisers in action at different times with a small, fast, well-armed raider in the [Atlantic](#).¹

At eight o'clock in the morning of 25 November the German raiders happened upon the small steamer *Holmwood* which had left Waitangi, in the [Chatham Islands](#), at 2.30 a.m. bound for [Lyttelton](#). She was stopped by the *Komet*, which was disguised as the Japanese ship *Manyo Maru*. The passengers and crew, numbering twenty-nine in all and including four women and two children, as well as some hundreds of sheep and stores, were taken off the *Holmwood*, after which she was sunk by gunfire. Less than forty-eight hours later, about 450 miles to the northward, the raiders intercepted and sank the New Zealand Shipping Company's motor-liner *Rangitane*, 16,712 tons.

No radio message was transmitted by the *Holmwood* before she was captured and consequently no warning of the presence of enemy raiders east of New Zealand was received. A subsequent commission of inquiry strongly expressed the opinion

that, had the sending of a wireless message been attempted, 'it would probably have reached New Zealand, or if the enemy had attempted to jam the message, this jamming would have been heard in New Zealand. The evidence of Commodore Parry established that the receipt of such a message in New Zealand would have resulted in the recall of the [Rangitane](#) which had left her anchorage off [Rangitoto](#) at about 5.30 a.m. that morning. Having regard to the position then existing, it is also clear that the receipt of a message from the *Holmwood* would have given the Navy certain advantages in searching for the raiders which did not exist at a later date.'

²

'We are fully aware,' said the Commission's report, 'that any attempt to send the message would have brought about the shelling of the *Holmwood*, and that this might have meant heavy loss of life, including the lives of women and children. But, having regard to the methods of warfare with which we are faced, that consideration is irrelevant. Loss of civilian lives must be faced in an effort to locate and destroy raiders. This should be realised by persons who travel by sea, and by the parents of children who travel by sea; and, lest the cool, prompt judgment of masters be hampered at critical moments, there should, we suggest, be no unnecessary passenger traffic.'

The [Rangitane](#) was fully loaded with frozen meat, dairy produce, wool, and other cargo for the [United Kingdom](#). Her crew numbered

¹ On 28 July 1940 the German raider *Thor* (Ship No. 10) was engaged by HMS *Alcantara* in the South [Atlantic](#). The latter was outranged by the *Thor*, which was hit several times and broke off the action after the *Alcantara* had been slowed down by damage in the engine-room. An engagement between HMS *Carnarvon Castle* and the *Thor* on 5 December 1940 resulted similarly. On 4 April 1941 the *Thor* engaged and sank HMS *Voltaire* in the North [Atlantic](#).

² Report of Commission of Inquiry on the Loss of Certain Vessels by Enemy Action, and alleged Leakage of Information.

about 200 and she was carrying 111 passengers, including 36 women. She was about 300 miles to the eastward of East Cape when, at 3.40 in the morning of 27 November, the raiders were sighted by the lookouts.

Captain H. L. Upton, DSC, ADC, RNR, master of the [Rangitane](#), who was promptly on the bridge, at once instructed the wireless office to broadcast the 'suspicious ship' message (QQQQ) and if the raiders opened fire (which he expected would happen, as soon as the wireless was used) to send the 'raider' message (RRRR). He also ordered 'utmost speed' on the engines and warned the engine-room that an attack by raiders was imminent. He made alterations of course to bring his ship stern on to that raider which seemed to be in the best position to open fire. He also ordered the crew of the defensive gun aft to close up and be ready for action. After signalling by morse lamp ordering the [Rangitane](#) to stop and not to use her wireless, the [Orion](#) switched on a searchlight and both she and the [Komet](#) commenced firing.

The [Rangitane's](#) wireless messages were repeated, the first two or three times, and the raider message six or seven times, and all got through to New Zealand. The enemy shelling broke a valve of the main transmitter, and while a new valve was being fitted the chief operator, Mr [N. J. Hallett](#), switched on to the emergency set and then back to the main set when it was repaired.

When Captain Upton was informed that the messages had been transmitted, he stopped his ship. The time was then 3.59 a.m., so that only nineteen minutes had elapsed since the raiders were first sighted. They continued firing after the [Rangitane](#) stopped. Captain Upton signalled that there were women on board and shortly afterwards the firing ceased.

The [Rangitane](#) was badly damaged and well on fire by that time. Five passengers, including three women, were killed and a number wounded, one of the latter, also a woman, dying on board the [Orion](#) the next day. Two stewardesses and three engine-room hands were killed, and five others of the ship's company were wounded. The conduct of the ship's company was exemplary and in keeping with the traditions of the British Merchant Service. They went about their duties calmly and did all that was possible for those in their charge.

After the firing had ceased, a German boarding party arrived in a motor-launch and ordered the immediate abandonment of the ship. The sea-cocks were opened and, as soon as the passengers and crew had been taken on board, the [Komet](#) sank the [Rangitane](#) by a torpedo. The raiders and their supply ship then steamed away at

full speed to the north-east. That evening, when they were 'about 450 miles from the nearest possible air base' in New Zealand, a low-flying aircraft on a westerly course was sighted ahead. The [Orion's](#) war diary recorded that 'as no radio activity followed, however, it was presumed that the aircraft, in spite of good visibility through the light haze, had not seen the ships against the dark surface of the sea.'

When the [Rangitane's](#) radio messages were received in Navy Office, [Wellington](#), the [Achilles](#), which was lying at [Lyttelton](#), was ordered to raise steam with all despatch. The [Monowai](#), which had sailed from [Suva](#) for Nauru Island on 25 November, was instructed to return to [Suva](#) to complete with fuel-oil. All inward-bound merchant ships were warned to avoid the area of attack by at least 200 miles. No merchant vessel was due to sail to the eastward from New Zealand on 27 November. The Tasman Airways flying boats were ordered to be fuelled and ready for reconnaissance duties as soon as possible. Eight aircraft of the Royal Air Force were sent to [Gisborne](#) airfield to be ready at a quarter of an hour's notice as a striking force.

The [Achilles](#) sailed from [Lyttelton](#) at 8 a.m. and steamed at 25 knots towards the point of attack. HMS [Puriri](#),¹ which was at [Auckland](#) undergoing conversion to a minesweeper, was ordered to sea. Though her engines were partly dismantled, she was quickly got ready and sailed that evening.

The flying boat [Aotearoa](#) took off from [Auckland](#) at 11.11 a.m. with orders to carry out a Vignot search up to maximum endurance with the point of attack as centre, assuming that the enemy had left that position at 4 a.m., steaming at 15 knots on courses south-west, through south and east and north. The search started at 2.21 p.m. and ended at 5.51 p.m. when the failing light caused the operation to be abandoned. The aircraft landed at [Auckland](#) at 10.32 p.m. The flying boat [Awarua](#) arrived at [Auckland](#) from [Sydney](#) at 11 a.m. and, after refuelling, took off at 2.18 p.m. with instructions to search on the assumption that the enemy had left the point of attack at 4 a.m. at 15 knots on courses from west-north-west through north to east. The [Awarua](#) arrived at the position at 4.30 p.m. and searched till 7.10 p.m., when darkness set in. The aircraft then returned to [Auckland](#) and landed at 11.37 p.m. It was probably the [Awarua](#) that was sighted by the raiders about 150 miles north-east from the position in which the [Rangitane](#) was sunk.

It was unfortunate that the aircraft did not sight any of the three German ships. Had it done so it would have afforded a definite clue to the approximate position and course of the raiders for the [Achilles](#), which was coming up from [Lyttelton](#) at high speed and which, with the assistance of the flying boats, might well have intercepted the enemy during the following day. As against this it can

¹ Puriri, twin-screw motor-vessel; 927 tons gross register; built in 1938 for the Anchor Shipping and Foundry Co. Ltd., of Nelson.

be said that, had the aircraft sighted any of the German ships and reported the fact by wireless, they might have dispersed, though their relatively low speed would not have taken them beyond the range of the flying boats by the time the [Achilles](#) could arrive in the area.

At 4 a.m. on 28 November the [Achilles](#) catapulted her Walrus aircraft, which made a reconnaissance flight of two hours but sighted nothing. At 10.30 a.m. the cruiser sighted the flying boat [Awarua](#) at extreme range to the north-westward. The [Awarua](#) had left [Auckland](#) shortly after four o'clock and arrived four hours later at the point of attack, where a large patch of oil and several very small floating objects were seen. After reporting to the [Achilles](#), the flying boat carried out a square search for five hours. Nothing further having been seen, the [Awarua](#) returned to [Auckland](#).

The [Achilles](#) arrived at one o'clock in the afternoon at the leeward end of the oil patch which extended for nine miles to the southward from the point of attack. She steamed to the other end of the oil and sighted one red and white lifebuoy and a number of boxes of butter, two of which were recovered. No wreckage or boats were seen. The [Achilles](#) then proceeded to patrol to the north and north-east to give the maximum cover to shipping during the night, returning to the position of attack before daybreak and then searching to the westward. In the forenoon of 29 November the [Achilles](#) met the Puriri, which had nothing to report and was ordered to return to [Auckland](#). The cruiser continued her search for possible survivors of the [Rangitane](#) until dusk, when she steamed towards North Cape, patrolling the approaches to [Auckland](#). By that time the raiders and their supply ship were well away to the northward. Early in the morning of 29 November they arrived off the Kermadec Islands. There, while the commanding officers of the [Orion](#) and [Komet](#)

discussed their proposed attack on Nauru Island, the prisoners were more evenly distributed in the three ships, the thirty-nine women and five children being accommodated in the *Kulmerland*. The *Monowai*, which had left [Suva](#) on 30 November, looked in at the Kermadecs on her way to [Auckland](#) but sighted nothing suspicious. The raiders by that time were well away to the north-westward after crossing the *Monowai's* track.

At that time nothing was known in New Zealand of the fate of the *Holmwood* which, on 29 November, was reported as being forty-eight hours overdue at [Lyttelton](#). HMS *Muritai* sailed from [Wellington](#) to carry out a search. The flying boat *Awarua* made two flights from [Auckland](#) to the [Chatham Islands](#) and two [RNZAF](#) aircraft from [Christchurch](#) flew a parallel track search for a distance of 120 miles to the eastward from [Lyttelton](#). Nothing was sighted by the aircraft or by the *Muritai*, which returned to [Wellington](#) on 1 December.

The sinking of the [Rangitane](#) and *Holmwood*, following at intervals of some months the loss of the [Niagara](#) and *Turakina*, caused much anxiety and misgiving in New Zealand and gave rise to many rumours concerning the raiders and allegations that, by some means, they were being supplied with information about the movements of shipping. When the survivors of ships sunk in New Zealand waters and at Nauru Island returned to [Australia](#) and the Dominion in January 1941, statements made by them to the newspapers intensified the public suspicion that there had been leakages of information to the raiders.

Accordingly, the [New Zealand Government](#) appointed a Commission of Inquiry, presided over by Mr Justice Callan, a Judge of the Supreme Court. The Commission heard voluminous evidence from thirty-one survivors from sunken ships and fifty-nine other witnesses and carefully examined the whole of the numerous written statements made and signed by survivors after they reached New Zealand.

According to Captain Upton, master of the [Rangitane](#), Captain Miller of the *Holmwood*, and other witnesses, the Germans had claimed that they knew the times at which ships left New Zealand and [Australia](#), that they met the [Rangitane](#) by design and not by accident, and that they possessed information which enabled them to intercept her. All this was believed by many of the survivors from the captured ships, including Captains Upton and Miller.

The Commission in its report found that 'having regard to the amount of traffic from New Zealand the actual successes of the raiders in the Pacific over a period of months do not appear consistent with their having had, during that period, any such information as Captains Miller and Upton report the German commander as having claimed. Secondly, if he really had such complete and regular information, it does not seem probable that he would reveal the fact or, alternatively, that he would afterwards release the persons to whom he had made such revelations. The statements attributed to him seem to us to be more likely part of an attempt to impress his captives, and, through them, to disseminate uneasiness and distrust in New Zealand, or they may have been manifestations of boastfulness and of a taste for melodrama. The accounts which Captains Miller and Upton gave of their interviews with this German commander create the impression that he took a good deal of trouble to impress them with his cleverness and his omniscience. ...'

Several witnesses informed the Commission that some twenty-eight Polish seamen and women, discharged from a ship of that nationality, who were passengers in the Rangitane, were interrogated in German and appeared to become friendly with their captors. 'There was thus available to the Germans,' said the Commission's report, 'an obvious source from which they may have obtained information as to the movements of the Rangitane from the time she left the Auckland wharf, even if they did not succeed in getting this from unguarded remarks made by British captives in casual conversation. ...'

In general, the Commission of Inquiry found that, while there had been much careless talk about ships in New Zealand, there was no proof of any leakage of information to the German raiders. Neither was there any evidence that any person had, in fact, acted as an enemy agent, but the Commission did not think it followed that the possibility of such a happening could be dismissed.

Since the war the German records of the cruises of the several raiders have become available. These include the official war diaries of the Orion and Komet, and a very detailed narrative of his operations, compiled in July 1945, by Rear-Admiral Kurt Weyher, who was commanding officer of the Orion. These make it abundantly clear that neither he nor Rear-Admiral Robert Eyssen, commanding officer of the Komet, had any fore-knowledge of the wartime movements of New Zealand shipping

other than that certain general routes were followed; and that the interceptions of the *Turakina*, *Holmwood*, and *Rangitane* were entirely fortuitous.

As has been recounted, the two raiders and their supply ship carried out an intensive patrol of the trade routes east of New Zealand from 6 to 24 November without success. They were actually leaving the area when they happened first upon the *Holmwood* and, two days later, upon the *Rangitane*. Yet, during that period of three weeks, eleven large ships had arrived at *Auckland* and *Wellington* from the Panama Canal and seven had left for Balboa; while seven vessels had arrived from and five had sailed for the South Sea Islands and *North America*. In other words, the raiders intercepted only the *Rangitane* out of thirty overseas ships which passed through the area searched by them.

That the raiders had not the slightest idea of the identity of the *Rangitane* when they met her in the darkness of early morning is clearly shown in Rear-Admiral Weyher's narrative. 'Whether this ship was proceeding to the east or west could not at first be made out,' he wrote. 'The size of the ship made me first suppose I had to do with a bigger warship, which, as was found out later on, had also been the idea on the auxiliary cruiser *Komet*. ... Even under the impression to have come across a much more powerful man-of-war, I could not, on account of low speed, get my auxiliary cruiser [*Orion*] away unseen. It had to be assumed that the supposed warship would have sighted at least one of the three [German] ships. To leave unnoticed and escape was, therefore, on account of the approach of dawn, most improbable. Accordingly I decided to attack, especially because I could reckon on the gunnery of the *Komet* assisting me; so that, even at own loss [sic] I could at least expect to damage the opponent and, by holding him, give one of the other ships the chance to escape.'

After describing the preliminary manoeuvres of the raiders, Weyher says: 'Meanwhile it had been possible to recognise the vessel as a big two-funnel ship, bows to the right, i.e., on an easterly course,' and, further on, 'the searchlight showed that a big two-funnel steamer was concerned. ...' He does not mention the *Rangitane* by name until he gives 'the findings of the prize crews', i.e., the armed parties who boarded the liner.

The *Achilles* arrived at *Auckland* from her patrol at three o'clock in the morning

of 1 December and completed with fuel-oil. During the month of November she had spent twenty-three days at sea and steamed 6161 miles. The cruiser sailed in the afternoon to meet the Vancouver mail ship Aorangi, which was being escorted from Sydney towards North Cape by HMAS Adelaide. The ships met soon after midday on 2 December and the Adelaide turned back for Sydney. At five o'clock next morning the Achilles parted company with the Aorangi and proceeded once more to the Tasman Sea. In the evening of 5 December she met the Shaw Savill motor-liner Dominion Monarch from Sydney and escorted her to Wellington, where they arrived early in the morning of the 7th.

Another raider alarm was given next morning when Auckland wireless station intercepted an RRRR message from the Union Steam Ship Company's motor-vessel Karitane, which gave her position as approximately midway between Tasmania and New Zealand. The flying boat Aotearoa took off from Auckland during the forenoon and the Achilles sailed from Wellington at 2 p.m. to carry out a search for the reported raider. Navy Office, Melbourne, informed Navy Office, Wellington, that the Adelaide was not available, but a search by aircraft had been ordered, with instructions to attack any ship sighted within 200 miles of the Karitane's given position, except the Dutch tanker Nederland, 8150 tons. In reply to a query Navy Office, Wellington, said no other vessel was known to be in the area. At about the time the Achilles left Wellington the master of the Karitane reported that he had sighted a large tanker which was behaving 'very suspiciously' and heading west when last seen. Navy Office, Wellington, informed Melbourne that the vessel sighted resembled the Nederland. The flying boat was recalled to Auckland and the Achilles cancelled her proposed search.

At that time the German raiders were more than 2500 miles away to the northward of New Zealand, after striking a resounding blow at Nauru Island shipping. Leaving the Kermadec Islands at the end of November, they steamed to the north-west and passed between New Caledonia and the New Hebrides and south-east of the Solomon Islands. According to the war diary of the Komet, their intention was 'to destroy the phosphate works, the harbour installations and the wireless station' on Nauru Island. This was to be carried out by a landing party of 185 men from the Orion and Komet, which were also to furnish 'prize detachments to take over any ships lying at the buoys.'

At that time seventeen vessels, including the four steamers owned by the British Phosphates Commission, were regularly employed in carrying phosphates from Nauru and Ocean Islands, mainly to [Australia](#) and New Zealand. The annual exports of well over 1,250,000 tons, including shipments to the [United Kingdom](#), [Japan](#), and elsewhere, involved the loading of more than 150 cargoes in twelve months. During periods of unfavourable weather it was sometimes necessary for the ships to drift for a fortnight or more in the vicinity of the islands until conditions became suitable for mooring and loading. At times there were as many as ten ships waiting to load at Nauru and Ocean Islands, where they were fairly easy prey for enemy raiders. And because of urgent needs elsewhere, it was not considered possible for either New Zealand or [Australia](#) to spare a cruiser to patrol that distant area. The risk of enemy attack had to be accepted.

In the afternoon of 6 December, when they were a day's steaming from Nauru Island, the [Orion](#) and [Komet](#) intercepted and attacked the British Phosphates Commission's steamer Triona, 4413 tons, on passage from [Melbourne](#) and Newcastle. The crew, originally sixty-four men, of whom three were killed, and the passengers, six women and a child, were taken on board the [Orion](#) and Kulmerland. The two raiders sank the Triona with torpedoes.

Next day the chartered Norwegian motor-vessel Vinni, 5181 tons, which had sailed from Dunedin on 21 November and had been drifting for a week in the vicinity of Nauru Island waiting for an opportunity to load, was captured by the [Komet](#), a boarding party from which took prisoner her crew of thirty-two and sank her with demolition charges.

In view of the adverse weather conditions – a strong westerly wind was blowing and a heavy sea running, with considerable surf close inshore – the commanding officers of the raiders decided, after a discussion, that the proposed landing operation was not practicable.

In the forenoon of 8 December the Union Steam Ship Company's steamer Komata, 3900 tons, which had arrived off the island from [Auckland](#) two days earlier, was ruthlessly attacked and sunk by the [Komet](#). When the Komata's wireless officer, Mr [E. H. Ward](#),¹ tried to send the 'suspicious vessel' signal, it was jammed by the enemy and he then attempted to transmit the 'raider' message. The [Komet](#) opened

fire at close range, one shell putting the transmitter out of action and another carrying away the main aerial. The chief officer, Mr [T. A. Mack](#), was killed and the second officer, Mr [J. L. Hughes](#), mortally wounded. Captain W. W. Fish and several of his men were slightly wounded.

In the meantime the [Orion](#) had intercepted and sunk the British Phosphates Commission's motor-vessels [Triadic](#), 6378 tons, and [Triaster](#), 6032 tons, within a few miles of Nauru Island. There were now 675 prisoners in the German ships – 265 in the [Orion](#), 153 in the [Komet](#), and 257, including 52 women and 6 children, in the [Kulmerland](#). The raiders did not visit Ocean Island, 160 miles to the eastward of Nauru, or they might have found the steamer [Silksworth](#) which had been drifting there for some days waiting a chance to load. She and the [Union Company's](#) steamer [Kaikorai](#), which was on passage to Nauru Island, were subsequently ordered by wireless to return to [Suva](#).

The [Komet](#) refuelled from the [Kulmerland](#) at [Ailinglapalap](#) atoll in the Marshall Islands on 12–13 December, while the [Orion](#) cruised in the direction of Ponape, in the Caroline Islands. The three ships reassembled on 15 December about 250 miles north of Nauru Island. A plan to land the prisoners there and shell the phosphates plant was abandoned and the Germans steamed to [Emirau Island](#), in the Bismarck Archipelago, where they arrived on 21 December. While the prisoners were being disembarked there, the [Orion](#) lay alongside the [Kulmerland](#) and took in the 1100 tons of fuel-oil remaining in that ship. The raiders landed 343 Europeans and 171 Chinese and natives. Weyher refused to release any European prisoners from the [Orion](#), as he held that 'trained officers and crews are as much a problem for [Britain](#) as shipping itself.'

Apart from the natives, the only inhabitants of [Emirau Island](#) were two white planters and their families, Mr and Mrs [Collett](#) and Mr and Mrs [Cook](#), who did everything possible for the castaways. They sent some natives in a canoe to [Mussau Island](#), 15 miles away, for a motor-launch in which a party went to [Kavieng](#), [New Ireland](#), for assistance. On 24 December the schooner [Leander](#) arrived with food and other stores and a doctor with medical supplies. The Administrator of [New Britain](#) also arrived from [Rabaul](#) in a flying boat, bringing still more supplies.

Meanwhile the naval authorities had arranged for the steamer [Nellore](#) to

proceed from [Rabaul](#) to [Emirau Island](#), where she

¹ For his good service in the *Komata*, Ward was awarded a mention in despatches and Lloyd's war medal for bravery at sea.

embarked the stranded people on 29 December. The overcrowded ship arrived on 1 January 1941 at Townsville, whence special trains took her passengers on to [Brisbane](#) and [Sydney](#). The Australian and New Zealand Governments had made elaborate arrangements for the well-being and repatriation of all those who had suffered so trying an experience.

After leaving [Emirau Island](#), the German ships parted company. The *Kulmerland* went to [Japan](#), where she arrived on 31 December. The *Orion* steamed north and met the tanker *Ole Jacob*, 8300 tons, and the German motor-ship *Regensburg*, 8000 tons, with supplies of fuel and stores from [Japan](#).¹ The three ships arrived on 31 December at Lamotrek, in the Caroline Islands. The *Orion*, which had been under steam for 268 days and had covered 65,327 miles since leaving [Germany](#), started an overhaul of her engines and boilers.

Both Captain Weyher of the *Orion* and Captain Eyssen of the *Komet* were much perturbed when they learned from wireless reports that their former prisoners had been found and released from [Emirau Island](#). Weyher had all along opposed the landing of prisoners, but had been overruled by Eyssen, who was the senior officer and regarded them as an encumbrance. In his war diary Eyssen recorded that 'had he been able to foresee the repercussions of his putting white prisoners ashore', he 'would have acted differently.' Their early return to [Australia](#) and New Zealand 'meant that the enemy was now in possession of not only a description of the two raiders and the routes and tactics used on previous operations, but also that he was aware that German ships could read the [British] Merchant Navy code.' On 19 February 1941, after a study of the war diaries of the two raiders, the German Naval Staff issued a directive to 'all ships outside home waters' that the practice of putting prisoners ashore 'is not to be condoned', and that 'wherever possible, they should be sent back to [Germany](#) for internment.'

The *Komet* arrived off [Rabaul](#) during the night of 23 December with the

intention of laying mines in the fairway. She hoisted out her fast motor-launch Meteorit which was to have dropped the mines, but, due to the failure of the boat's port engine, the operation was abandoned. The [Komet](#) then steamed to Nauru Island, where, in the early morning of 27 December, she bombarded and wrecked the phosphates plant, including the great cantilever loading structure and the oil storage tanks. The raider then made off in the direction of the [Gilbert Islands](#), north of which she chased a Norwegian ship for four hours on 31 December, but without success.' ²

¹ The Ole Jacob, a Norwegian tanker, was captured by the raider [Atlantis](#) in the [Indian Ocean](#) on 10 November 1940. (See

² War diary of Ship No. 45 ([Komet](#)).

The German Naval Attaché, [Tokyo](#), reported to the naval staff in [Berlin](#) that the 'Japanese Navy were annoyed about the bombardment of Nauru as this has interfered with its phosphates consignments. Collaboration is threatened; possible restriction of Japanese aid'. The Naval Attaché recommended 'avoiding operations of this type near the Mandated area.' The German Naval Staff considered that the bombardment of Nauru Island was outside the scope of the [Komet's](#) operation orders and 'could not, therefore, approve of it, though recognising that, as an isolated case, it had been a success.'¹

According to the reports received by the British Phosphates Commission, about 200 shells had been fired at the shipping plant and fuel-oil storage, besides hundreds of rounds of armour-piercing and incendiary bullets. One of the concrete foundations of the loading cantilever was so damaged that apparently another shell would have brought the whole structure down on the reef. Of the three sets of main moorings holed by armour-piercing bullets, two of the large buoys were saved by the four-watertight-compartment construction. The oil storage tanks and about 13,000 tons of oil were destroyed and the blazing oil spread in all directions. The 12,000-ton shore bin of the cantilever suffered badly as the blazing oil made the heavy steel supporting columns white hot and they collapsed.

The German raiders' attacks on Nauru Island and its shipping were, in effect, their greatest success in the [Pacific](#), since they seriously affected the volume and continuity of the supplies of phosphates to New Zealand and [Australia](#) and, in less degree, to [Britain](#). The sinking of five ships totalling 25,900 tons, including three of the Phosphates Commission's steamers which had been specially designed to meet the peculiar requirements of the trade, was a heavy blow in view of the increasing shortage of tonnage and the consequent difficulty of chartering suitable vessels.

But far worse were the drastic reduction in the available supplies of Nauru phosphates and its ultimate economic effect. The output of phosphates from Nauru and Ocean Islands had reached a peak of nearly 1,500,000 tons in the year ended 30

June 1940, of which the former provided 919,750 tons. It was ten weeks after the bombardment before shipments from Nauru Island were resumed, the loading of the first cargo starting on 6 March 1941.

The British Phosphates Commission estimated that shipments from both islands during 1941 would total 600,000 tons, including 450,000 tons from Nauru, but in the event, because of the bombardment damage and a long period of bad weather, the actual shipments were far short of the estimate. To supplement Nauru and Ocean Islands' shipments of phosphates the British Government refrained from drawing supplies for the [United Kingdom](#) from those islands,

¹ Cruise of Ship 45; captured German document, TR/PG/18554.

and arranged through the Phosphates Commission to give New Zealand and Australian requirements preference up to 120,000 tons from Makatea Island in the [Pacific](#) and 100,000 tons (for [Australia](#)) from Christmas Island in the [Indian Ocean](#). But, again because of the shortage of shipping tonnage, supplies from those sources were relatively small; several ships chartered to bring phosphates from Egypt to New Zealand were requisitioned for urgent war purposes. It was officially stated in July 1941 that New Zealand farmers were on a ration for fertilisers, based on a total annual importation of some 200,000 tons of phosphate rock. Supplies of phosphates from Nauru and Ocean Islands ceased entirely when those islands were occupied by the Japanese in 1942. It was some years after the war ended before the damage done by the enemy had been made good and shipments of phosphates from the two islands reached anything like their former volume.

After six days in harbour, the [Achilles](#) sailed from [Wellington](#) on 20 December 1940, escorting Convoy US 8 carrying the second section of the 4th Reinforcements, [2 NZEF](#), totalling some 2300 troops. The convoy, which comprised the Dominion Monarch and the Empress of [Russia](#), arrived at [Sydney](#) early on 23 December. The [Achilles](#) left [Sydney](#) seven days later escorting Convoy UST 1 – Empress of [Russia](#), [Port Chalmers](#), and [Maunganui](#) – for [Auckland](#). In the evening of 2 January 1941 the cruiser parted company with the convoy off Cape Brett and returned to the [Tasman Sea](#) to meet the Shaw Savill steamer [Akaroa](#) and escort her to [Auckland](#).

For the third time in less than three weeks the [Achilles](#) was called upon to escort the Empress of [Russia](#), which on this occasion was carrying some 450 Australian and New Zealand airmen to Vancouver for advanced training in [Canada](#). Both ships sailed from [Auckland](#) on the night of 6 January and arrived three days later at [Suva](#), where the cruiser refuelled. About nine hours after leaving [Suva](#) on 10 January, the [Achilles](#) sighted a darkened ship which was identified as the southbound Aorangi.

At that time the Australian and New Zealand Governments evinced much anxiety regarding the safety of the drafts of air trainees proceeding regularly to [Canada](#). This was natural in view of the fact that the [Rangitane](#) was carrying naval and air force drafts when she was sunk only 350 miles from the New Zealand coast. Nothing was known of the movements of the German raiders since 27 December when the [Komet](#) had bombarded Nauru Island; but there was, of course, always a possibility that one or other of them might reappear on the [Pacific](#) trade routes at any time. The Empress of [Russia](#) was an elderly, coal-burning steamer and, when steaming at speed, made much smoke which would betray her presence at a distance of many miles.

For these reasons the Government particularly desired that the [Achilles](#) should escort the steamer as far as [Honolulu](#), in which case the cruiser would require to bunker 800 tons of fuel-oil at that port. The Naval Board informed the Admiralty to that effect and asked that permission should be got from the [United States](#) authorities. There was some delay before a reply was received, and in the meantime the [Achilles](#) had parted company with the Empress of [Russia](#) about 350 miles north of the Equator and was on her way back to [Auckland](#).

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 11 – PROTECTION OF SHIPPING

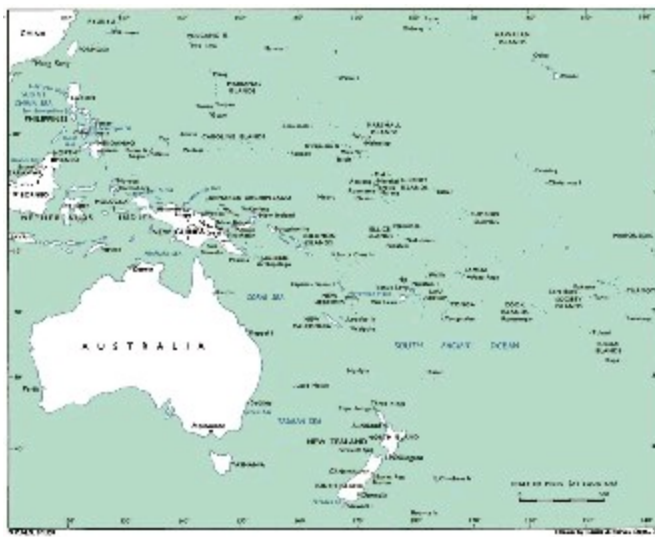
CHAPTER 11

Protection of Shipping

DURING the next ten months the [Achilles](#) was employed almost continuously on convoy escort duties in New Zealand waters and other areas of the South Pacific. In view of the recent depredations of German raiders, whose actual whereabouts were unknown at that time, the policy of the Naval Board was to provide escort not only for the ships carrying Australian and New Zealand air trainees to Vancouver and, later, New Zealand troops to [Fiji](#), but also for the vitally important refrigerated cargo vessels homeward-bound to the [United Kingdom](#) via the Panama Canal or Cape Horn. The latter ships, some of which had loaded in [Australia](#), were escorted from the New Zealand coast to positions about two days' steaming to the eastward. From time to time ships arriving from the Panama Canal were met and escorted into harbour.

The position was stated by Commodore Parry, Chief of Naval Staff, in a letter to Commodore J. Durnford, RN, at Navy Office, [Melbourne](#), in May 1941. Referring to the 'increasing difficulty' of sparing the [Monowai](#) for patrols of the Nauru and Ocean Islands areas, Parry said that the Commander-in-Chief America and [West Indies](#) had withdrawn HMCS Prince Robert, armed merchant cruiser, and 'therefore we must escort the A. V. convoys (Vancouver ships) well out into the [Pacific](#) from [Suva](#), which means that every month one ship is employed in this duty for a fortnight. The average number of insulated ships sailing to the eastward from New Zealand ports is now nine a month.... The New Zealand Government are particularly anxious to give as full protection as possible to these ships because our economy depends very largely on exporting the goods they carry. At the same time, it is most undesirable that they should be delayed unnecessarily in New Zealand ports and therefore I have to use our ship rather uneconomically on this duty....'

The escorting of the homeward-bound refrigerated cargo ships, known as AP convoys, was begun on 22 December 1940 by the [Monowai](#), which by 28 January had seen six vessels clear of New Zealand waters. Thereafter, this duty devolved mainly upon the [Achilles](#). On 30 January the [Monowai](#) met the [Aorangi](#) off Cape Brett and escorted her to [Suva](#) and for three days' steaming farther north.



SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC OCEAN
SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC OCEAN

At that time the German raiders were far away from New Zealand. Captain Weyher, of the [Orion](#), fearing that the secrecy of his base in the Caroline Islands had been compromised, had decided to go still farther north. On 5 January 1941 the German motor ship [Ermland](#), 6528 tons, arrived at Lamotrek and 183 prisoners from seven ships were transferred to her. Two days later the [Orion](#) sailed in company with the tanker [Ole Jacob](#) and the [Ermland](#). On 9 January the [Ermland](#) left for [Europe](#) via Cape Horn. She took on board 148 prisoners from another German ship in the [South Atlantic](#) and arrived at Bordeaux on 3 April. The [Orion](#) and her tanker arrived on 12 January at Maug, the most northerly but one of the Marianas Islands, and there remained for twenty-five days overhauling her engines and boilers. The [Regensburg](#) arrived on 18 January with fresh water from [Japan](#), and on 1 February the [Munsterland](#) came in with stores and a Japanese seaplane to replace the unserviceable German aircraft.

Meanwhile, the [Komet](#) was cruising in mid- [Pacific](#). Captain Eyssen (he was promoted Rear-Admiral on 1 January 1941) had twice been ordered by the naval staff in [Berlin](#) to proceed to the [Indian Ocean](#). His proposal to search for ships about the Galapagos Islands was rejected and he was again ordered to the [Indian Ocean](#). Eyssen considered that 'in view of the disturbances caused by our successes in Australian and New Zealand waters, it is wiser to make a large sweep to reach the [Indian Ocean](#), rather than to take the shortest route ([Tasman Sea](#))'. ¹ Accordingly, during the second half of January, the [Komet](#) passed between the Marquesas Islands and the Tuamotu Archipelago, round Pitcairn Island, and thence to the south-

westward along the [Panama](#)–New Zealand route; but no ships were sighted.

After rounding the [Chatham Islands](#) on 6 February, the [Komet](#) (greatly to the surprise of the German Naval Staff) went due south on the 180th meridian to the Antarctic, where she was held up by pack-ice in the Ross Sea about 250 miles east from Cape Adare, the north-east extremity of Victoria Land. She then headed north-west past the Balleny Islands, on a vain search for whaling ships, until 28 February when she shaped course for Kerguelen Island. There the [Komet](#) met the raider [Pinguin](#) and the [Adjutant](#),² as well as the supply ship [Alstertor](#), and spent some time taking in supplies and ammunition.

Sailing from [Auckland](#) on 7 February 1941, the [Achilles](#) met the Federal liner [Suffolk](#), bound from [Auckland](#) for the Panama Canal,

¹ [Komet's war diary](#).

² On 14–15 January the [Pinguin](#) had captured the Norwegian whaling factory ships [Ole Wegger](#) and [Pelagos](#), the supply ship [Solglimt](#), and eleven whale chasers. The whaling fleet was taken to [France](#) by prize crews, with the exception of one chaser which was renamed [Adjutant](#) and retained by the [Pinguin](#) as a reconnaissance vessel.

early on the 9th and escorted her well to the eastward of the [Chatham Islands](#). The cruiser returned to [Wellington](#) for fuel and sailed thence on 12 February for [Sydney](#), escorting the [Awatea](#). Early on the 14th the convoy (ZT 2) was joined by the Shaw Savill liner [Wairangi](#) from [Auckland](#). The convoy arrived at [Sydney](#) in the afternoon of 16 February and the [Achilles](#) sailed two days later, escorting the Blue Star liner [California Star](#), which was proceeding to New Zealand to load for the [United Kingdom](#). The ships parted company when nearing Cape Maria van Diemen. The [Achilles](#) then proceeded to patrol the north-east approaches to [Hauraki Gulf](#) and arrived at [Auckland](#) on 23 February.

Though it was not known at the time, the raider [Orion](#) was refuelling from the tanker [Ole Jacob](#) on 25 February in a position about 180 miles north-east of the Kermadec Islands. Orders had been received from [Berlin](#) that the [Orion](#) was to operate in the [Indian Ocean](#), and on 6 February she sailed from [Maug](#), in the

Marianas, in company with her tanker. The ships passed through Bougainville Channel in the Solomon Islands during the night of 15 February. It had been Captain Weyher's intention to sail south through the Coral and [Tasman Seas](#), but in the afternoon of 16 February the ships were sighted by a flying boat which circled the [Orion](#) and then reported by wireless to [Port Moresby](#).

The ships separated during the night and the [Orion](#) steamed eastward to the Santa Cruz Islands, whence she steered to the south-east, passing between the [New Hebrides](#) and [Fiji](#) to meet the Ole Jacob at the rendezvous north-east of the Kermadecs. Thereafter the ships steamed in company across the trade routes east of New Zealand, but not a ship was sighted. They passed close by the [Chatham Islands](#) on 2 March 1941, and the Bounty Islands a day later, and rounded New Zealand far to the southward of Stewart Island on 5 March.

The [Achilles](#) sailed from [Auckland](#) on 25 February to rendezvous with the Blue Star liner Dunedin Star, 14,000 tons (AP 13), which she overtook the following afternoon. This ship, which was on passage from [Auckland](#) to the [United Kingdom](#) via the Panama Canal, was escorted to a position approximately 450 miles northeast of the Chathams, where the [Achilles](#) left her. The [Orion](#) and her tanker, proceeding south from the Kermadecs, were not very far away at that time and must have crossed the track of the cruiser, which arrived at [Wellington](#) on 2 March.

After a short refit the Monowai embarked a small detachment of Australian troops and stores for Nauru Island and sailed from [Auckland](#) on 27 February, escorting the Awatea as far as [Suva](#), where they arrived on 2 March. The Monowai, in company with two Norwegian motor-ships, left [Suva](#) next day and arrived off Ocean Island in the morning of 8 March. Leaving the Norwegians there to load phosphates, the Monowai proceeded to Nauru Island, where she found the Panamanian ship [Atlantic](#) loading at the buoys. The Monowai landed her troops and stores and spent the next ten days on patrol between the two islands. She took in fuel-oil and fresh water from the British Phosphates Commission's motor-vessel Trienza at Ocean Island and sailed thence on 19 March for [Suva](#).

In the meantime the [Achilles](#) had been kept busy escorting AP convoys. She left [Wellington](#) on 3 March in company with the Shaw Savill steamer Mahana, 10,950 tons, and the Blue Star steamer Trojan Star, 9037 tons, (Convoy AP 14), both bound

for the [United Kingdom](#). They were dispersed two days later from a position about 300 miles south-east of the [Chatham Islands](#). During the next fortnight the [Achilles](#) escorted the City of [Canberra](#) and the Port Jackson from [Wellington](#) to well beyond the Chathams. After calling at [Auckland](#) to land a rating who had been operated on for appendicitis, the [Achilles](#) went into the [Tasman Sea](#) and took over the Aorangi from HMAS [Adelaide](#) which had escorted her from [Sydney](#). A day after leaving [Auckland](#) the [Achilles](#) passed the Aorangi over to the Monowai and returned to the [Hauraki Gulf](#), whence she escorted the loaded refrigerated cargo ships Port Fairy, Tongariro, and [Kent](#) in two separate convoys to positions about 400 miles beyond East Cape.

The Monowai accompanied the Aorangi to [Suva](#) and thence to [Fanning Island](#), where the latter ship landed relief troops and stores for the garrison before going on to Vancouver. The Monowai returned to [Suva](#) for fuel and then went to [Tahiti](#), where she embarked some 300 local Free French troops for [New Caledonia](#). From Noumea she proceeded to a rendezvous off East Cape where on 6 May she met the Rimutaka, bound from [Wellington](#) to [Panama](#), and escorted her a full day's steaming to the eastward.

The [Achilles](#), in company with the [Australia](#) and Hobart, sailed from [Wellington](#) on 7 April 1941 escorting the transports [Mauretania](#) and Nieuw Amsterdam carrying the 5th Reinforcements, 2 NZEF. After an uneventful passage across the [Tasman Sea](#), the [Achilles](#) left the convoy and went to Jervis Bay to protect the transport [Queen Mary](#), which was anchored there. The cruiser kept steam at thirty minutes' notice and a defence watch closed up. The two ships left on 11 April and joined convoy US 10 from [Sydney](#). Besides the [Queen Mary](#), [Mauretania](#), and Nieuw Amsterdam, the procession of great liners included the [Queen Elizabeth](#) and [Île de France](#), the five ships making a total of 280,383 tons. Escorted by the [Australia](#), the convoy proceeded south and the [Achilles](#) went into [Sydney](#) for fuel before returning to [Auckland](#).

After escorting the Shaw Savill liner Tamaroa from [Auckland](#) to a position about 500 miles south-east of East Cape, the [Achilles](#) took the Awatea about 100 miles north of the Equator on her way to Vancouver. The cruiser returned to [Suva](#) on 10 May and left next day for [Auckland](#). At noon on the 14th, while steaming down the

swept channel in the approach to [Hauraki Gulf](#), she received a report from the *Gale*, about 10 miles away, that the *Puriri* had been sunk by a mine.¹ The *Achilles* at once turned back and sent her surgeon to the *Gale* to attend to the injured men. The uninjured survivors of the *Puriri* were taken on board the cruiser, which then proceeded at 22 knots for [Auckland](#).

From 20 May to the end of the month the *Achilles* was employed as escort for the *Rangatira*, which carried two drafts of troops from [Auckland](#) to [Fiji](#). Both ships returned to [Wellington](#) on 2 June. During the month of May the *Achilles* had been at sea on twenty-six days and had steamed 9575 miles.

For the time being the [Pacific](#) was clear of enemy raiders, but there could be no certainty. As far as their limited resources would allow the New Zealand, Australian, and Canadian naval authorities co-operated in doing everything possible to ensure the safety of merchant shipping. Whenever they could be spared from other duties, Australian cruisers escorted the Vancouver liners and other important ships across the [Tasman](#). The Canadian armed merchant cruiser *Prince Robert* spent three months on escort and patrol duties in the New Zealand Station area.

It was not possible to maintain a continuous patrol of the distant Nauru and Ocean Islands but they were visited, whenever an armed merchant cruiser could be spared, to protect ships loading phosphates. The *Monowai* was there during March, *HMAS Westralia* spent a week there in April, and *HMAS Manoora* patrolled the area for a week in May; the New Zealand ship took her turn again in June.-

On 26 May the *Monowai* sailed from [Auckland](#) in company with the *Aorangi*, which was passed over to the *Prince Robert* at [Suva](#). The *Monowai* then shaped course for Ocean Island, where she arrived on 3 June. She spent the greater part of the month protecting ships loading at Ocean and Nauru Islands. She left Ocean Island on 11 June, escorted the *Trienza* to the vicinity of Abaiang atoll in the Gilbert Group, and patrolled north of the Equator for five days while carrying out an intensive wireless watch on the Marshall Islands. The *Monowai* sailed from Nauru Island on 29 June, arrived at [Suva](#) on 3 July, and left three days later for the Kermadec Group, where she landed stores for the coastwatching station on

¹ See also pp. 179– 80.

Raoul Island. She returned to [Auckland](#) on 10 July and had a welcome spell of ten days in harbour. The Westralia called at Ocean Island on 16 July to supervise the evacuation of women and children in the steamer Kenilworth and the motor-ship Vito and escort them via Nauru Island to [Brisbane](#).

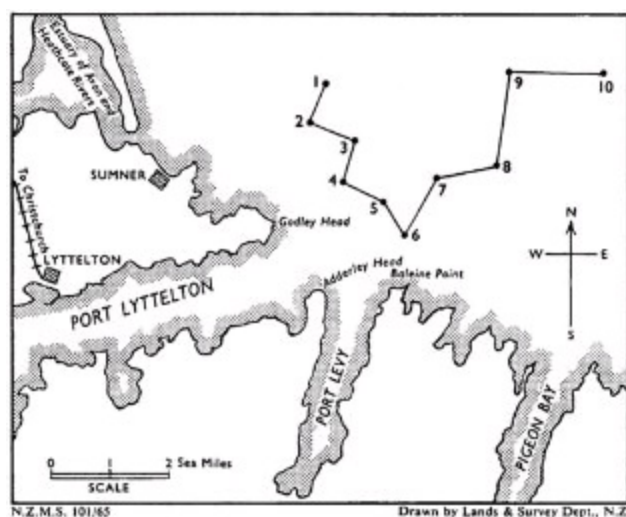
The Prince Robert escorted the Aorangi from [Suva](#) to a position north of the Equator on passage to [Honolulu](#) and Vancouver. She returned direct to [Auckland](#) to meet the Awatea, which arrived from [Sydney](#) on 16 June in company with the [Australia](#), and escorted her to [Suva](#) and thence well on the way to [Honolulu](#). The Awatea was the last of the trans-Pacific AV convoys from New Zealand. Both she and the Aorangi were requisitioned in August by the Ministry of War Transport for use as troopships. The Vancouver mail and passenger service lapsed and was not resumed until August 1948.

Earlier in the month HMAS [Australia](#) had escorted the Largs Bay, 14,182 tons, and Themistocles, 11,231 tons, as Convoy VK 12, from [Sydney](#) to [Wellington](#), where they arrived on 9 June. These ships, carrying 300 servicemen and fully loaded for the [United Kingdom](#), were routed via the Panama Canal. As Convoy AP 41 they sailed from [Wellington](#) on 10 June escorted by the [Achilles](#), which dispersed them three days later from a position about 230 miles east from the [Chatham Islands](#). The cruiser covered the [Port Melbourne](#), 11,652 tons, homeward-bound from [Wellington](#), while returning to the westward to meet the Brisbane Star, 12,791 tons, from [Lyttelton](#), which she escorted about a day's steaming east of the Chathams. The [Achilles](#) then proceeded to cover the Otaio, 10,298 tons, bound from [Napier](#) to [Panama](#), until daybreak on 18 June, when course was shaped for [Auckland](#). In the afternoon of the 19th a floating mine was sighted in a position east of Great Barrier Island. The mine, which doubtless had broken adrift from the German-laid [Hauraki Gulf](#) field, was sunk by machine-gun fire. The [Achilles](#) sailed from [Auckland](#) on 23 June with the Wairangi, 12,436 tons, which was escorted to a position about 100 miles north-east of East Cape. The cruiser then covered the eastward passage of the Wairangi and the Dorset, 13,040 tons, from [Napier](#), until daybreak on 25 June when course was shaped for [Wellington](#), where she arrived next day.

Captured German documents have revealed that at that time the raider [Komet](#)

had returned to New Zealand waters and was cruising in an area 400 to 600 miles east of [Wellington](#) from 21 June to 1 July 1941. As related earlier, the [Komet](#) had gone to the [Indian Ocean](#) in February 1941. There she spent more than two months in fruitless cruising along and across the Australian trade routes. At the end of March she refuelled from the tanker Ole Jacob. On 21 May she was joined by the Adjutant, a captured whale chaser (Pol IX) ¹ which had been acting as a tender to the raider Pinguin, and on 1 June they headed away well south of [Australia](#) for the [Pacific](#). On 11 June the [Komet](#) transhipped to the Adjutant the mines that six months earlier were to have been laid outside [Rabaul](#) harbour.

The [Komet](#) passed south of Stewart Island during the night of 17 June and carried on to a rendezvous area near the [Chatham Islands](#), where she cruised for ten days on the lookout for merchant ships but sighted nothing.



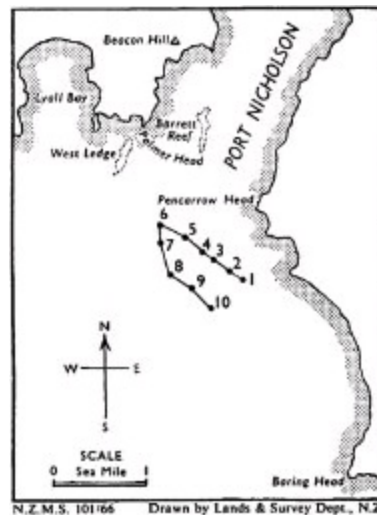
Minefield off Lyttelton Harbour
Minefield off Lyttelton Harbour

The Adjutant, which was experiencing much engine trouble, passed the Auckland Islands on 20 June and shaped course for Banks Peninsula, which was rounded at some distance four days later. Shortly after midnight of 24–25 June the Adjutant laid ten mines close in across the approaches to [Lyttelton](#) harbour. Barely twenty-four hours later she arrived off Pencarrow Head and laid a double row of ten mines across the entrance to [Port Nicholson](#). She

¹ Pol IX, whale chaser of 354 tons, built at Middlesbrough in 1937 for

the Polaris Whaling Company, Ltd. (Melsom and Melsom, managers) of Larvik, [Norway](#).

then made off to the eastward at her best speed to rejoin the [Komet](#). There is no record of any suspicious vessel being seen in the vicinity of either port at that time. The Adjutant was a small vessel closely resembling a minesweeper, several of which were then working between [Lyttelton](#) and [Wellington](#) and for one of which she might have been mistaken had she been seen at night.



Minefield off Wellington Harbour
Minefield off Wellington Harbour

Nothing was known of the minelaying until more than four years later, when it was revealed by captured German documents. Unlike those laid by the raider [Orion](#) in the [Hauraki Gulf](#) area, these were a magnetic type of ground mine. Probably they were defective when laid since they have never given any indication of their presence. Thousands of ships have passed safely over the areas in which they were laid and which, during the war, were subjected to routine sweeping by flotillas fitted to deal with magnetic, acoustic, and moored mines.

In his assessment of the Adjutant's minelaying operation, Rear-Admiral Eyssen, commanding officer of the [Komet](#), remarked that 'at [Wellington](#), all the depths exceeded twenty metres [approximately 65 feet], but a large number of ships of over 10,000 tons put in there, and as this port is very favourably situated in relation to the magnetic zone ... the mines, if they work at all, should, according to the data available, also detonate satisfactorily with vessels of 5,000 to 7,000 tons. I do not

think the Adjutant was seen during the operation, in spite of the searchlight activity.' The award of Iron Cross, First Class, was made to Lieutenant Karsten, 'in recognition of the minelaying operation', and to Lieutenant-Commander Hemmer, 'in recognition of his former service as a member of the crew of the Pinguin and latterly of his command of the Adjutant.'

On 1 July the Adjutant rejoined the [Komet](#) in a position northeast of the [Chatham Islands](#), but as her engines were then 'as good as useless', she was sunk by gunfire after her sea-cocks had been opened. The [Komet](#) then steamed away along the New Zealand– [Panama](#) route and on 14 July 1941, south of the Tubuai Group, she took 690 tons of fuel-oil and other supplies from the [Anneliese Essberger](#), 5173 tons.

In the focal area of the Galapagos Islands, on 14 August, the [Komet](#) intercepted and sank the motor-ship [Australind](#), 5020 tons, a well-known New Zealand trader, which was on passage from [Adelaide](#) to England. The ship was shelled ruthlessly when she transmitted a wireless distress signal. Her master and two engineers were killed and forty-two of the ship's company made prisoners. The [Australind](#) was the first ship sunk by the [Komet](#) for eight months. On 17 August the raider captured the Dutch motor-vessel [Kota Nopan](#), 7322 tons, which, being laden with tin, coffee, tea, and spices from the East Indies for [New York](#), was retained as a prize. Two days later the British India steamer [Devon](#), 9036 tons, formerly of the Federal Line, on passage from Liverpool to New Zealand, was sunk in the same area, her crew being made prisoners. Her presence having been revealed by the distress signals of her victims, the [Komet](#) retraced her course to the south-west.

On 30 August, while transshipping cargo from the [Kota Nopan](#), a ship was sighted steering about south-west. According to the raider's war diary the vessel was 'recognised as a Port Line ship'. Eysen decided to get out of sight and go after her after dark, but the ship was not found again – 'she probably increased speed during the night.'

In the afternoon of 27 June the [Achilles](#) sailed from [Wellington](#) escorting the [Aquitania](#), which had embarked some 4000 troops, the 6th Reinforcements, for Egypt. On 30 June, in the eastern approach to [Bass Strait](#), the [Achilles](#) met the Australian section of Convoy US 11A, which comprised the [Queen Elizabeth](#) and

Queen Mary, escorted by the *Australia*. The New Zealand cruiser then parted company with the *Aquitania* and returned to *Wellington*.

The great amount of sea time spent by the *Achilles* since the outbreak of hostilities was shown in a statistical report furnished to the New Zealand Naval Board. From the time she commissioned in England in January 1939 up to 26 July 1941, the *Achilles* had done 156,151 miles, of which 133,274 miles had been steamed since 3 September 1939. She had steamed 82,679 miles since her last refit in March–June 1940, and 41,937 miles since her last docking in January 1941. From January 1939 to July 1941, the *Achilles* had consumed 47,662 tons of boiler fuel-oil. Since 1 December 1940 she had averaged twenty-four days a month at sea and given close escort to thirty-seven ships.

When the Dominion Monarch sailed from *Auckland* on 22 July she was carrying a full cargo of refrigerated foodstuffs, wool, and other produce for the *United Kingdom*, as well as 1230 officers and men, mostly of the *Royal Australian Air Force*, of whom 440 were air trainees going to *Canada*. They had been brought from *Australia* in the Dutch transport *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt*, 19,423 tons, escorted by the *Adelaide*. As the *Achilles* was not available, ocean escort for the Dominion Monarch was provided by the *Monowai* and *Prince Robert*. They left her well to the eastward of New Zealand at noon on 25 July and were returning in company when the Canadian ship received orders to proceed to *Auckland* 'with despatch'. She arrived at 9.25 a.m. on the 28th, about six hours ahead of the *Monowai*.

The New Zealand Naval Board had received a message from *Ottawa* that a senior United States Navy intelligence officer had reported that the Japanese ship *Heiyo Maru* was carrying spare engine parts for a disabled German raider lying at Easter Island. At the same time a signal from the Commander-in-Chief America and West Indies Station requested the New Zealand Naval Board to send the *Prince Robert* to investigate. After refuelling, the ship left *Auckland* in the evening of 28 July for Easter Island, where she arrived on 8 August. She reported that there was no sign of a raider at the island and that, according to the inhabitants, no ship had arrived there since November 1940. The *Prince Robert* proceeded from Easter Island to Talara, *Peru*, for fuel and thence to Esquimault.

The *Monowai* arrived at *Wellington* from *Auckland* on 3 August and sailed six

days later to meet the Rangatira off Kaikoura Peninsula. That ship, which was carrying troops for the relief of the 'B' Force garrison in [Fiji](#), was escorted by the Monowai on two voyages to [Suva](#), both ships returning to [Auckland](#) on 24 August. In the meantime the [Sydney](#) had escorted the Awatea from [Sydney](#) to [Auckland](#) and thence to a point well beyond [Fiji](#), subsequently returning direct from [Suva](#) to [Sydney](#).

About that time another German raider had arrived in the South Pacific and was cruising across the trade routes to the eastward and northward of New Zealand. This was Ship No. 16, otherwise known as the [Atlantis](#), one of the most successful of the enemy raiders. She was formerly the Hansa Line motor-vessel Goldenfels, 7862 tons gross register. The [Atlantis](#), which was commanded by Captain Bernhard Rogge, sailed from [Germany](#) on 31 March 1940 and about six weeks later laid about a hundred mines off Cape Agulhas, the southernmost point of [Africa](#). The raider operated mainly in the [Indian Ocean](#) and South [Atlantic](#), where she sank or captured twenty-one merchant ships. From time to time she transferred her prisoners to supply ships. She had a narrow escape in the vicinity of St. Helena during the night of 17–18 May 1941, when she sighted HM Ships [Nelson](#) and Eagle on her starboard quarter and managed to alter course away without being seen.

A few weeks later the [Atlantis](#) headed away for the [Pacific](#). She rounded Tristan da Cunha on 8 July 1941 and, after a long and stormy passage across the Southern Ocean, entered the [Pacific](#) about the middle of August. She passed between the Auckland Islands and Campbell Island on 17 August and well to the eastward of the [Chatham Islands](#) and East Cape from the 21st to the 25th.

For the remainder of that month and during the first half of September the [Atlantis](#) cruised at easy speed in an area eastward of the Kermadec Islands. On 10 September she intercepted and captured the Norwegian motor-vessel Silvaplane, 4793 tons gross register, bound from [Singapore](#) and [Batavia](#) with a cargo of 8000 tons of rubber, sago, tin, and spices for [New York](#). The Silvaplane was the raider's last victim and brought her total captures and sinkings up to twenty-two ships totalling 144,384 tons.

The [Komet](#) and her prize, the Dutch ship Kota No pan, returning from the Galapagos Islands, arrived at a mid- [Pacific](#) rendezvous west of Rapa Island on 20

September and met the [Atlantis](#) and the [Silvaplana](#). The supply ship [Munsterland](#) arrived from [Japan](#) next morning. Four days were spent in refuelling and transshipping stores, after which the ships went their several ways. The [Komet](#) and her prize started their homeward passage round Cape Horn on 24 September, the [Silvaplana](#), in charge of a prize crew, following them on the 27th, and the [Munsterland](#) leaving for [Japan](#) next day.

The [Atlantis](#) spent the next fortnight cruising through the [Tubuai Islands](#) and the [Tuamotu Archipelago](#), some of her crew landing on [Banavana Island](#) in the latter group. From 14 to 18 October the raider patrolled the area between [Pitcairn](#) and [Henderson Islands](#), a landing from rubber dinghies being made on the latter island. The raider's seaplane made several reconnaissance flights, but no ships were sighted. On 19 October the [Atlantis](#) headed away to the south-east, [Cape Horn](#) being rounded ten days later. In the South [Atlantic](#) on 13 November the raider supplied fuel to submarine [U.126](#) and on the 22nd was about to fuel [U.68](#) when she was intercepted and sunk by gunfire by [HMS Devonshire](#).

The prize ships [Kota Nopan](#) and [Silvaplana](#) arrived at [Bordeaux](#) about 17 November. The [Komet](#) was met near the [Azores](#) by two U-boats which escorted her to [Cape Finisterre](#); thence she hugged the European coastline all the way to [Hamburg](#), where she arrived on 30 November 1941 after a cruise of 515 days during which she covered 86,988 miles. Eleven months later the [Komet](#), when setting out on a second cruise, was intercepted and sunk by British destroyers off [Cape de la Hague](#), in the [English Channel](#).

The raider [Orion](#), which left the [South Pacific](#) in March 1941, had spent nearly three months in fruitless cruising in the [Indian Ocean](#) when she received orders to return to [Germany](#). Three supply ships, one of which was a tanker, had been sunk in the [Atlantic](#) in June and the [Orion](#), therefore, was compelled to load 500 tons of fuel from the [Atlantis](#), which was met on 1 July, shortly before that raider started on her passage to the [Pacific](#). On 29 July, four days after crossing the [Equator](#), the [Orion](#) sank her last victim, the British steamer [Chaucer](#), 5792 tons. This was the only ship sunk by the raider in the period of eight months since she was off [Nauru Island](#) at the beginning of December 1940. The [Orion](#) arrived at [Bordeaux](#) on 23 August, after a cruise of 510 days, during which she had steamed 112,337 miles.

In the course of their cruises which covered a period of twenty months, the [Orion](#) and [Komet](#) accounted for seventeen ships, totalling 114,118 tons, all but two of which were sunk or captured by them in the [Pacific](#). Only four were sunk by them in New Zealand waters over a period of six months. One ship was captured by the [Atlantis](#) in the South Pacific, and three were sunk and one badly damaged by the Pinguin's mines on the Australian coast. Considering the great volume of valuable shipping at stake in the South Pacific, that was a relatively small toll taken by the enemy raiders. It was also sound evidence of the protective value of evasive routing of merchant shipping in time of war.

Having completed her refit, the [Achilles](#) left [Auckland](#) on 29 August 1941 and off Cape Palliser two days later met the [Rimutaka](#), which was on passage from [Wellington](#) to the Panama Canal. It was not known at that time that the raider [Atlantis](#) was cruising in New Zealand waters. She had passed northward across the [Panama](#) route less than a week earlier. The [Rimutaka](#), which was carrying a full cargo and 180 servicemen to the [United Kingdom](#), was escorted to a position about 250 miles south-east from the [Chatham Islands](#). The [Achilles](#) left her on 2 September and proceeded to cover the Federal liner [Cornwall](#), also homeward-bound from [Wellington](#), which was met the following afternoon and escorted till after dark.

The [Achilles](#) left [Wellington](#) on 15 September as ocean escort to Convoy US 12B, comprising the [Aquitania](#) and the Dutch motor-vessel [Johan van Oldenbarnevelt](#), which were carrying the 7th Reinforcements, [2 NZEF](#). In the morning of 18 September, about 130 miles off the south coast of [New South Wales](#), they met the [Adelaide](#) and the Dutch transport [Sibajak](#), 12,236 tons, on passage from [Sydney](#) to [Bass Strait](#) where the [Sydney](#), escorting the [Marnix van St. Aldegonde](#) from [Melbourne](#), was to take charge of the convoy. Having delivered her charges, the [Achilles](#) proceeded to the northward and off [Sydney](#) that evening met the [United States](#) steamer [Monterey](#), which was 'trailed' to [Auckland](#) and subsequently to [Suva](#) and [Pago Pago](#), and thence as far as the Equator. The [Achilles](#) then returned to [Suva](#), where she arrived on 3 October.

During September and October 1941, while the raiders [Komet](#) and [Atlantis](#) were cruising in mid- [Pacific](#) on or about the Panama Canal route, twenty-four loaded ships sailed from New Zealand ports homeward-bound to the [United Kingdom](#). It was

not possible to provide close escort for more than a few of these ships and this duty devolved upon the Monowai. She sailed from [Auckland](#) on 5 September in company with the Union-Castle liner Capetown Castle, 27,000 tons, which was carrying 152 servicemen and 100 merchant seamen and was escorted to the eastward for three days. The Monowai then returned to [Auckland](#) for the [Akaroa](#), 15,130 tons, which was similarly escorted, 'cover' being given during the period to the Waiwera from [Timaru](#), the Port Sydney from [Wellington](#), and the Port Wyndham from [Gisborne](#). After refuelling at [Wellington](#), the Monowai met the [Sussex](#) off [Napier](#) and escorted her beyond the [Chatham Islands](#). On 24 September the Monowai met the [Athlone Castle](#), 25,564 tons, homeward-bound from [Lyttelton](#), off Cape Palliser, and, after taking her to the eastward of the Chathams, returned to [Auckland](#) on the 29th. The [Adelaide](#) had left [Melbourne](#) on the 25th in company with the Lanarkshire, 9816 tons, which was homeward-bound via the Panama Canal. This ship was escorted south of New Zealand to a position well to the south-eastward of the [Chatham Islands](#). The Australian cruiser arrived at [Wellington](#) on 30 September.

The first inkling of the presence of enemy raiders in the South Pacific at that time came in an Admiralty message of 30 September. It reported a wireless direction-finding 'fix' of a ship at 5.18 a.m. (GMT) on 28 September within 300 miles of position, latitude 40 degrees South, longitude 155 degrees West – about 1300 miles east of [Napier](#). The longitude corresponded closely with that of the position in which the raiders [Komet](#) and [Atlantis](#) and their prizes had been fuelling and storing from the Munsterland from 14 to 28 September, when they were actually about 300 miles north of 40 degrees South. It was a remarkably good 'fix'.

Prompt precautionary measures were taken by Navy Office, [Wellington](#). The Monowai was sailed from [Auckland](#) on 1 October under orders to patrol to the eastward of Cape Brett to a maximum distance of 400 miles. She was informed of the courses and approximate positions of five merchant vessels approaching New Zealand from the Panama Canal and that an enemy raider could have reached a position 50 miles east of East Cape by 4 p.m. on 1 October. Air patrols were being carried out daily at dusk and dawn. Instructions were also issued that minesweepers should patrol the entrances to [Wellington](#) and [Lyttelton](#) harbours at night to detect and report possible minelaying activities. ¹

The [Achilles](#) had sailed from [Suva](#) for [Auckland](#) on 4 October. At 1.30 p.m. the

following day speed was increased to 25 knots, and four hours later course was altered to proceed direct to patrol in the [Tasman Sea](#) in accordance with instructions from Navy Office. The *Achilles*, [Adelaide](#), and *Monowai* were informed that, according to a direction-finding 'fix' at 4.36 p.m. (GMT) on 4 October, a German raider might be within 180 miles of [Awarua](#) wireless station. The *Achilles* passed the Three Kings Group at 12.55 p.m. on 6 October and steamed thence south-west to patrol an area covering the western approaches to Cook Strait, where she relieved the [Adelaide](#), which met the steamer *City of Delhi* from [Wellington](#) and escorted her to [Sydney](#).

Meanwhile the *Matai*, *Gale*, and *Muritai* of the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla were patrolling and sweeping off Farewell Spit and air patrols were being carried out off the west coast of the [South Island](#), over the western approaches to Cook Strait and areas of 100 miles radius from Great Barrier Island, Cape Reinga, Cape Palliser, [Akaroa](#) harbour, and Foveaux Strait. The *Monowai* had returned to [Auckland](#) on 5 October and sailed the following day escorting the homeward-bound ships *Surrey*, *Port Saint John*, and *Melampus*, which were dispersed beyond the Chathams. She then proceeded to 'cover' the Dutch ship *Tjibesar* from [Auckland](#) and the *Columbia Star* on passage from [Sydney](#) to the Panama Canal. After rounding the [Chatham Islands](#), the *Monowai* returned to [Wellington](#) on 15 October.

Nothing suspicious had been sighted in any of the patrol areas, and on 8 October the *Achilles* shaped course for [Auckland](#), where she arrived two days later. On the 14th she sailed for the [Tasman Sea](#) and took over the liner *Stirling Castle*, 25,550 tons, from the [Adelaide](#), which then turned back for [Sydney](#). The convoy arrived at [Auckland](#) on 16 October.

The *Achilles* sailed on the 20th to trail the [United States](#) liner *Mariposa* as far as the Equator. This ship had been accompanied from [Sydney](#) by the [Canberra](#). At 9.30 a.m. on 21 October the *Achilles* intercepted a signal from Navy Office, [Melbourne](#), reporting a possible 'fix' of a German raider some 60 miles west of the *Mariposa's* course. Nothing was sighted by either ship and no

¹ Mines had been laid in both localities in June. See ante, p. 156.

confirmation of the report was received. About twenty-four hours after leaving

[Suva](#) the [Achilles](#) intercepted the cutter [Manukakai](#), of [Nukualofa](#), 60 miles east from [Niuafu](#) Island. The native crew said they were bound for [Keppel Island](#), about 60 miles further to the south-east. Their only requirement was a bottle of whisky, which was not supplied. ¹ A few hours after leaving [Pago Pago](#) on 25 October, the southbound [Monterey](#) was sighted. The [Achilles](#) parted company with the [Mariposa](#) a few miles north of the Equator on 27 October and shaped course for [Suva](#).



New Zealand, showing principal ports and headlands

In the absence of the [Achilles](#), and with the [Leander](#) under refit, the [Monowai](#) was called upon to escort two large homeward-bound liners which were carrying full cargoes and 1150 Australian and New Zealand servicemen. She left [Auckland](#) on 25 October in company with the [Stirling Castle](#) for a rendezvous off [Cape Palliser](#), where they met the [Shaw Savill](#) steamer [Ceramic](#), 18,713 tons, from [Wellington](#). The convoy was dispersed east of the [Chatham Islands](#) on 29 October. The [Monowai](#) returned to [Wellington](#) to pick up the homeward-bound [Dorset](#), 13,040 tons, which was escorted to the eastward for two days.

When the [Achilles](#) arrived at [Suva](#) on 31 October, she had spent twenty-five days at sea and had steamed 8916 miles during the month. She found in harbour the [Free French](#) destroyer [Le Triomphant](#) and armed merchant cruiser [Cap des Palmes](#), ² as well as the [Netherlands](#) cruiser [Java](#), ³ the last-mentioned acting as escort to a convoy of five Dutch merchant vessels and a naval tanker from [Cairns](#), [Queensland](#).

The [Achilles](#) returned to [Auckland](#) on 4 November and sailed four days later for

[Sydney](#), whence she covered the trans-[Tasman](#) passage of the [Monterey](#) which was carrying Air Force trainees to the [United States](#). The [Leander](#), having completed a lengthy refit, went from [Auckland](#) with the [Monterey](#) as far as the Equator and returned south, covering the [Mariposa](#). In the meantime the [Achilles](#) had gone down to [Wellington](#), where she fuelled for the first time from the new naval oil storage installation. On 22 November she met the [Adelaide](#) in Cook Strait and took over Convoy VK 21, consisting of the [Orari](#), 10,350 tons, and [Clan Macaulay](#), 10,492 tons, both on passage from [Sydney](#) to the [United Kingdom](#) via the

¹ [Achilles'](#) war diary.

² [Le Triomphant](#), 2569 tons displacement; five 5·4-inch guns and four light anti-aircraft guns; nine torpedo-tubes; speed 37 knots. [Cap des Palmes](#), motor-vessel, 3082 tons; six 4-inch guns. These ships and the minesweeper and patrol vessel [Chevreuil](#) arrived in the [Pacific](#) in September 1941 to protect French interests. From time to time they worked in loose co-operation with the Allied naval forces, but they spent long periods of inactivity in harbour.

³ [Java](#), 6670 tons displacement; ten 5·9-inch guns and fourteen light AA guns; two aircraft; speed 31 knots. The [Java](#) was sunk in action with a Japanese naval force in the [Battle of the Java Sea](#) on 27 February 1942.

[Panama Canal](#). These ships were dispersed on the 24th, about 250 miles east from the [Chatham Islands](#).

The [Achilles](#) then headed for [Cape Brett](#), off which, at midnight on 27 November, she met the [Wahine](#), carrying troops from [Auckland](#) to [Lautoka](#), [Fiji](#). This ship was escorted to a position 240 miles from [Navula Passage](#), and at daybreak on 30 November the [Achilles](#) joined company with the [Leander](#) which was trailing the [Mariposa](#) from [Suva](#). The [Achilles](#) left [Auckland](#) on 5 December to escort the [Wahine](#) on another voyage to [Fiji](#).

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 12 – MINESWEEPING IN NEW ZEALAND WATERS

CHAPTER 12

Minesweeping in New Zealand Waters

THE experience of the First World War indicated that the most likely danger to shipping in New Zealand waters in the event of another war would be enemy raiders and mines laid by them. In November 1916 the German raider *Wolf* sailed from [Kiel](#) under orders to 'interfere with shipping in distant waters...' During a cruise of fifteen months she sank twelve ships and laid eight minefields in the Indian and Pacific Oceans which caused the loss of eight vessels and damage to others. While in New Zealand waters in June 1917 the *Wolf* laid twenty-five mines off the Three Kings and thirty-five off Farewell Spit. She then crossed the [Tasman Sea](#) and laid thirty mines near Gabo Island on the coast of [New South Wales](#). These minefields caused the loss of three steamers, the *Cumberland*, 9470 tons, off Gabo Island on 6 July 1917, the *Port Kembla*, 4700 tons, off Farewell Spit on 18 September 1917, and the *Wimmera*, 3022 tons, off the Three Kings on 26 June 1918.

The fishing trawlers *Nora Niven* and *Simplon* were requisitioned by the Government and equipped as minesweepers. They swept seventeen mines off Farewell Spit and eighteen in the Three Kings area. Others had probably sunk or broken adrift. The two little fishing boats of 1918 were the forebears of the Royal New Zealand Navy's numerous minesweepers of the Second World War. The *Nora Niven* herself survived to take a small part in their activities.

In 1925 the Naval Board acquired the trawler *Wakakura* for the purpose of training naval reservists in minesweeping, seamanship, and gunnery. In March 1935 the Shipping Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence (New Zealand Section) ¹ began to investigate the problem of providing suitable vessels for converting into minesweepers and naval auxiliaries for local defence in the event of war. It was decided that twenty-eight vessels would be required immediately and sixty at a later stage: but at a meeting of the Transport Board it was revealed that New Zealand's resources could not possibly meet these needs. Since 1929 there had been a marked decline in the number of small ships in the coastal trade

¹ The Shipping Sub-Committee consisted of representatives of Navy Office, [Marine Department](#), Defence Department, and Department of

Industries and Commerce. The Committee of Imperial Defence (NZ Section) was reconstituted in 1936 as the Organisation for National Security.

due to the extended activities of the railways and motor transport. In an island country such as New Zealand an ample and vigorous mercantile shipping is essential to its economy and a source of strength in time of war, when it can be drawn upon to supplement the regular fighting force with the necessary auxiliaries such as minesweepers and patrol craft.

The Naval Board in September 1938 decided that, as there obviously were not sufficient suitable vessels available to provide a minesweeping flotilla for each of the main ports, a single flotilla would be formed and 'operated as a unit in accordance with the demands of the general situation.' For this purpose six vessels would be requisitioned immediately in an emergency and another three would be added 'as soon as possible.' Each vessel would be fitted out for both minesweeping and anti-submarine duties. Performance fell short of this plan in 1939.

In February 1939 it was decided to build three vessels as mine-sweeping, gunnery, and torpedo training ships. Cabinet authority for a total expenditure of £170,000 was given on 2 May 1939. The tender of Henry Robb Ltd., of Leith, [Scotland](#), was accepted on 26 September. The price quoted was £58,000 for each ship, afloat at Leith, subject to any increases in wages and costs of material and exclusive of war risk insurance during construction. The builders' price for each ship subsequently rose to about £80,000. Owing to pressure of Admiralty work in the shipyard, the keels of the ships were not laid until 22 March 1940. Early in April 1940 the Naval Board approved the names of Moa, Kiwi, and Tui for the ships. Many delays occurred in their building and they did not arrive in New Zealand until well on in 1942.

On 2 September 1939 the Shipping Requisitioning Emergency Regulations came into force with the proclamation of an emergency. In the preceding months the naval authorities had inspected and selected fifteen vessels for possible conversion to minesweepers. Of these the [Auckland](#)-owned trawlers James Cosgrove, Thomas Currell, and Humphrey were chosen for immediate conversion. They were quickly fitted out, the James Cosgrove being commissioned for service on 10 October 1939

and the others six days later. The James Cosgrove was manned entirely by officers and ratings of the RNR and RNVR, the others by both merchant marine and naval personnel. The masters of the Thomas Currell and Humphrey were given temporary naval rank and retained in command. ¹

The difference in rates of pay for naval ratings and unionist seamen was considerably in favour of the latter. The Government,

¹ The James Cosgrove was commissioned by Lieutenant-Commander H. W. Jones, RNZNR, the Humphrey by Lieutenant A. G. Nilsson, RNZNR, and the Thomas Currell by Lieutenant J. Holt, RNZNR.

however, was desirous that men should not lose employment when their ships were taken over by the Navy and that those who volunteered for service should be engaged at special rates of pay.

The Shipping Requisitioning Emergency Regulations provided for the hire of vessels at rates agreed upon by the Treasury, the [Marine Department](#), and the owners. Where agreement could not be reached, the matter was to be decided by arbitration. This charter system proved very costly and the regulations were amended on 29 November 1939 to enable the Government to acquire vessels by compulsory sale and purchase. The James Cosgrove, Thomas Currell, and Humphrey accordingly were purchased from Sanford Ltd., of [Auckland](#), at a cost of £22,500.

During the early months of the war the Wakakura intensified her training activities, Lieutenant-Commander Holden, RNZNR, ¹ being appointed to her in November 1939 as officer instructor to the RNZNVR and Senior Officer, New Zealand Minesweeping Flotilla.

In the meantime preparations were made for taking over three additional vessels for minesweeping purposes. The Navy had set its heart on the trawlers South Sea and Futurist, but the Secretary of the [Marine Department](#) informed the Naval Secretary that, as three trawlers had already been taken, the withdrawal of another two would seriously dislocate the fishing industry. The matter was referred to the Fisheries Advisory Committee of the Food Supply Control Commission, which reported to the Minister of Supply that the South Sea and Futurist were practically

indispensable to the fishing industry, because the former was parent ship of the fishing fleet at the [Chatham Islands](#), whose entire catch was exported to [Australia](#) and earned a large fraction of New Zealand's sterling funds, and the Futurist caught 30 per cent of the fish supply for [Wellington](#). It was agreed that the two trawlers should be equipped as minesweepers and then returned to the fishing industry until such time as they might be required for naval service.

On 1 May 1940 Commodore Parry was appointed Chief of the Naval Staff, and a few days later the German raider [Atlantis](#) laid a minefield off Cape Agulhas, South Africa, two unrelated events that were to bring some realism into naval policy in New Zealand. On 29 May Commodore Parry addressed a memorandum to the Minister of Defence drawing attention to the 'serious situation which may result if minelaying should be carried out by the enemy in New Zealand waters, a possibility which has been brought nearer by the fact that mines have very recently been laid near the Cape of Good Hope by a vessel presumed to be an enemy armed raider. As

¹ Captain A. D. Holden, OBE, DSC, RNZNR; born England, 17 Feb 1901; merchant marine officer; chief officer MV Maui Pomare, 1933–39; minesweepers, [RNZN](#), 1939–44, RN 1944–47: Commander, Jun 1940; Captain, Dec 1945.

in the last war, there is nothing to prevent this vessel, or other armed raiders, laying mines off the coasts of New Zealand.'

Commodore Parry said it was his duty to inform the Government that the four minesweepers in commission were 'totally inadequate to ensure even reasonable security from enemy minelaying activities.' The first warning of an enemy minefield was 'likely to be the destruction of one or more ships, except in so far as the present minesweeping flotilla is able to carry out occasional searching sweeps.' It would be evident to Ministers that four minesweepers could not conduct searching sweeps around the coasts of New Zealand to any but a most limited extent; and in the event of mines actually being discovered, the area which could effectively be swept by four vessels was so small that it would take a considerable time to clear a minefield of any size; in the event of more than one minefield being laid it might be days before the second field could be dealt with. The lack of any danlaying vessels ¹ would still

further delay mine clearance operations.

Commodore Parry urged that approval be given to take over the South Sea and Futurist and maintain them in commission, giving a total of six minesweepers; to equip and commission two suitable vessels for danlaying duties and two wooden vessels as anti-magnetic minesweepers. He further suggested that 'minesweeping requirements should take precedence over other considerations at this stage of the war. Every possible safeguard would be imposed to reduce the possibility of vessels being found unsuitable after being taken up.'

In less than three weeks his warning was borne out by the event. Shortly before four o'clock in the morning of 19 June the Canadian-Australasian Royal Mail liner [Niagara](#), 13,415 tons, outward-bound from [Auckland](#) for [Suva](#) on passage to Vancouver, struck a mine six miles east from Maro Tiri Islands (Hen and Chickens) and sank in deep water. Fortunately, there was no loss of life, the passengers numbering 136 and the crew of more than 200 getting away safely in the ship's boats. Included in the [Niagara](#)'s cargo was a shipment comprising one-half of the New Zealand stock of small-arms ammunition which was being sent to England to assist in making good the shortage existing there after the evacuation of [Dunkirk](#). In the ship's strongroom was stowed nearly eight tons of gold ingots, valued at £2,500,000, from South Africa, which had been shipped for the [United States](#).

On the night of 13–14 June the German raider [Orion](#) had laid 228 moored contact mines in three sections covering the eastern and northern approaches to [Hauraki Gulf](#).² During the next five

¹ A danlayer is a small vessel (sometimes a minesweeper) employed in minesweeping operations to lay dan-buoys to mark the limits of the channels swept through a minefield.

² See ante, pp. 119–20.

days a number of vessels, including the [Niagara](#) inward-bound from [Sydney](#), must have narrowly missed the mines, whose presence was first revealed by the disastrous end of that fine ship.

Objections from the Government and the fishing industry to the taking over of certain vessels vanished overnight when the news of the loss of the [Niagara](#) was received. Cabinet approval was given immediately for the requisitioning of the trawlers [South Sea](#) and [Futurist](#) for permanent service as minesweepers, the 50-ton wooden vessel [Coastguard](#) to serve as a danlayer, the trawler [Nora Niven](#) on a temporary basis for sweeping at [Wellington](#) pending the arrival of the [South Sea](#) from the [Chatham Islands](#), and the harbour passenger vessel [Duchess](#), temporarily in the first instance, as an additional sweeper at [Auckland](#). The last-mentioned vessel was unsuitable for sweeping in any but sheltered waters. These four sweepers and the danlayer were to be manned by naval crews, though members of their existing crews who volunteered to train were to be fitted in if possible.

On the morning of 19 June the [Wakakura](#) and [Humphrey](#) were undergoing refits in the dockyard, and only the [James Cosgrove](#) and [Thomas Currell](#) were able to go to sea when the [Niagara's](#) distress signals were received. The Senior Officer Minesweepers, Lieutenant-Commander Holden, embarked in the [James Cosgrove](#) and the two trawlers sailed from [Auckland](#) at 7.20 a.m. Proceeding at full speed, they arrived at 12.50 p.m. close to the position given by the [Niagara](#) and began sweeping on a northerly course. At 2.48 p.m. the [Thomas Currell](#) reported a mine in her sweep and a minute later the [James Cosgrove](#) also swept a mine. Both mines, which were clean and freshly painted, were of the contact type, each with five horns. They were sunk by rifle fire.

Beginning at first light on 20 June, the [James Cosgrove](#) and [Thomas Currell](#), on the orders of Commodore Parry, began a searching sweep of [Colville Channel](#), the eastern approach to [Hauraki Gulf](#), which was to be used by shipping while the [Maro Tiri](#) minefield was being swept. The course of the sweep was from one mile east of [Channel Island](#) light to a position eight miles east of [Cuvier Island](#) and on to the 100-fathoms line.

The loss of the [Niagara](#) and the discovery of the mines were the first indications of the presence of a German raider in the South Pacific. The main ports were closed to shipping while minesweepers carried out searching sweeps in the approach channels to the harbours. When traffic was resumed, the inter-island passenger steamers made the passage between [Wellington](#) and [Lyttelton](#) in daylight.

On 21 June Commodore Parry issued a minesweeping programme to deal with the situation as efficiently and rapidly as the meagre force at his disposal would permit. Briefly, the minesweeping flotilla (Wakakura, James Cosgrove, Thomas Currell, Humphrey, and danlayer Coastguard) was ordered to sweep out of [Auckland](#) at 10 a.m. on 22 June and proceed to [Wellington](#), sweeping off East Cape, Portland Island (Mahia Peninsula), and from Cape Palliser inward to [Wellington](#) by 25 June. There the Futurist and Nora Niven were to join the flotilla, which would sweep the western approach channel on the 26th, before moving south to sweep the approaches to [Lyttelton](#).

In the meantime searching sweeps off [Port Nicholson](#) had begun. The South Sea was at the [Chatham Islands](#) and the Futurist and Nora Niven, though not completely fitted out, were pressed into service. The Futurist swept off [Wellington](#) for eight hours on 21 June, after which the Nora Niven took over and the former sailed for [Lyttelton](#). From 23 June till 2 July the Futurist searched the approaches to [Lyttelton](#), while the Nora Niven did the same at [Wellington](#).

The flotilla from [Auckland](#) was well south of East Cape in the afternoon of 23 June when it was ordered to return immediately. The reason for this sudden change was a signal received by Auckland Radio from the Shaw Savill and Albion motor-vessel Waiotira which reported having sighted a mine, probably cut adrift by her paravane, in a position about nine miles east-south-east from Cuvier Island.

The minesweepers were ordered to search the area and then sweep ahead of a convoy from Channel Island out to the 100-fathoms line. In a rough sea the flotilla began working about seven o'clock on 25 June from a position 12·8 miles east by south from Cuvier light. Two hours later the James Cosgrove swept a mine, which was sunk by rifle fire. Sweeping was stopped for about three hours by unfavourable weather and resumed at midday. No more mines were found and the channel was considered clear for the convoy of seven merchant ships which, preceded by the minesweepers and led by the [Remuera](#), passed through safely next day.

On 28 June the flotilla divided, the James Cosgrove and Thomas Currell remaining in the [Auckland](#) area and the Wakakura and Humphrey sailing for [Wellington](#) and [Lyttelton](#), off which ports during the next fortnight they carried out searching sweeps which established the immediate safety of the approach channels

and the probability that no mines had been laid in those localities. They also made a sweep off Cape Campbell, and from 12 to 15 July searched the vicinity of [Cape Farewell](#), a focal area for shipping bound to or from [Australia](#) and the west coast of the [South Island](#) in which the raider Wolf had laid mines in June 1917. Meanwhile, the James Cosgrove and Thomas Currell working in Colville Channel had swept and sunk three more mines in the northern approach between Great Barrier Island and Cuvier Island. A number of merchant vessels was also 'swept' in or out through the approach south of Cuvier Island.

In a memorandum to the Minister of Defence, dated 5 July 1940, the Chief of Naval Staff set out his revised policy to meet the position arising out of the discovery of the [Hauraki Gulf](#) minefield and the possibility of further minelaying by the enemy. He considered that the minimum minesweeping strength should be a mobile flotilla of at least six sweepers and a pair of sweepers at each of the main ports of [Wellington](#), [Auckland](#), and [Lyttelton](#). Thus the aim was at least twelve sweepers, and two danlayers would also be needed. The scheme which the Government was preparing for building trawlers in New Zealand and purchasing others to be built in [Australia](#) was no solution to the urgent problem of providing minesweepers for immediate service and had no bearing on policy for the time being.

The Nora Niven had proved unsuitable for sweeping, owing to lack of power and inadequate crew accommodation, and would be returned to her owners. In her place the Muritai ¹ was being taken up for permanent service and fitted out at [Wellington](#) with winches from the steamer Port Bowen, stranded near [Wanganui](#), which had been acquired by the Government for breaking up. The Duchess was completing fitting out in the dockyard at [Devonport](#) and, though possibly too small, would be retained in the meantime as a port sweeper at [Auckland](#). Should the policy of maintaining twelve minesweepers be approved, it would be necessary to select four additional vessels from the Matai, Arahura, Rata, Gale, Breeze, and [Rangitoto](#), named in order of probable suitability.

The organisation and broad operational activities of the minesweepers were laid down by the Naval Board on 18 July as follows:

First Group: Wakakura, Futurist, South Sea, James Cosgrove, Thomas Currell, Humphrey and danlayers.

Port Minesweepers:

Auckland – Duchess and one other;

Wellington – Muritai and one other;

Lyttelton – two not yet allocated.

The First Group would operate as a unit for carrying out routine searches, and clearing sweeps if necessary, in the following areas: North Cape, Cape Brett, Maro Tiri–Moko Hinau, Cradock Channel, entrance to Colville Channel, East Cape, Cook Strait western approaches, Lyttelton approaches. The limits of the search area and direction of search were defined in each case. The port minesweepers

¹ Muritai, harbour ferry steamer, 462 tons; built in 1922 for Eastbourne Borough Council; commissioned 25 September 1940.

would be employed in daily searching sweeps of the swept channel to their respective ports.

On 5 August 1940 a message was received by HMS Philomel from an amateur wireless station on Great Mercury Island reporting that Mr D. McKay, skipper of the fishing launch Ahuriri, had found a drifting mine one mile north-west from Richards Rock (two miles north of Red Mercury Island) and towed it into Mercury Island Bay. The Squadron Torpedo Officer, Lieutenant-Commander P. P. M. Green, RN, with a junior officer and three ratings, sailed in the Humphrey for Great Mercury Island, where they found that McKay had stood by the mine all night in his dinghy. He had moored the mine with a boat anchor secured by a line to one of two ringbolts on the side of the mine. He informed Green that he had seen a merchant ship passing close to the spot where he later discovered the mine and, reasoning that other ships would pass that way, he felt it was his duty to do what he did.

The mine was towed inshore and beached in a cove where, at low tide, the work of dismantling it was begun. The mooring wire had been cleanly cut as though by a ship's paravane. When the mechanism plate had been cleared of sand, the switch was found to be at 'A' and the mooring spindle 'in' – a safety pin was inserted

to prevent its coming 'out'. When the large nut securing the detonator carrier was slackened, there was an alarming rush of air and the party withdrew for two minutes. The mechanism plate had to be unbolted and taken off before the primer could be removed. After the explosive charge had been taken out, the empty mine was refloated and towed to the *Humphrey*, which took it to the base at [Devonport](#). Before leaving, Lieutenant-Commander Green detonated the mine charge. He praised the good work of McKay, who had served in minesweepers in the First World War and 'so was fully aware of the risks he was running, without being possessed of the requisite knowledge to safeguard himself.'

The *Duchess*, port sweeper at [Auckland](#), was ordered to sweep in the Colville Channel on 8 August and, on the following day, to sink a drifting mine reported by the fishing launch *Waimana* off Charles Cove, near Cape Colville. The mine was found and sunk on 10 August.

Mr McKay of the *Ahuriri* and Mr [E. G. McCracken](#), skipper of the *Waimana*, who reported the mine and stood by in the area throughout a stormy night to warn shipping, received letters of commendation from the Naval Board, which later rewarded them in accordance with a scale of rewards offered for information of value to the naval authorities.¹ This scale offered a reward not exceeding £1000 for

¹ Mr McCracken was awarded £5. Owing to the special circumstances in his case, Mr McKay was paid £10.

information leading to the destruction or capture of an enemy ship, and not exceeding £50 for accurate information about the movements or other activities of an enemy vessel. For information about the position of a moored or drifting mine the reward was £5; in the case of a mine washed ashore and recovered, from £1 to £5 was to be paid.

At the beginning of August 1940 the *Matai*, *Puriri*, *Rata*, and *Gale* were selected for conversion to make up the required complement of twelve minesweepers, and the *Kaiwaka* was chosen as a danlayer.¹ To meet the objection that withdrawal of the *Puriri*, *Rata*, and *Gale* would cause serious difficulties in the coastal cargo trade, the Minister of Marine, at a conference with the shipowners on 23 August, said a

group of fast minesweepers to carry out clearing sweeps was urgently needed by the Navy. Some means must be found whereby, with the assistance of the railways and road services, the New Zealand shipping industry 'could get together, pool its resources, re-organise its system, and arrange that the sea-borne carrying which is essential, shall be carried out by the ships which remain for commercial purposes after the Navy has taken these three ships.' On the following day the New Zealand Shipowners' Federation reported that the Puriri, Rata, and Gale would be handed over and the necessary arrangements made to carry on the coastal trade without them. The New Zealand Refrigerating Company protested that the Kaiwaka, which had been specially built for lightering meat cargoes at [Wanganui](#), could not be replaced. The loading of overseas vessels in the roadstead of that port had always been a slow business and the withdrawal of the Kaiwaka would make it even slower. In wartime it was vital that the rapid turn-round of ships should be maintained. For that reason, a decision on the taking-over of the Kaiwaka was postponed.

Meanwhile, the minesweeping trawlers in service carried on their searching sweeps at the three main ports of [Auckland](#), [Wellington](#), and [Lyttelton](#). Another mine was swept on 15 August about 11 miles south-east from Cuvier Island. The South Sea was commissioned at [Wellington](#) on 12 August and the Futurist on the 31st.

For the most part the work of the minesweepers was a monotonous round of sweeping in wintry weather, steaming in and out of harbour, and the constant drudgery of coaling, boiler-cleaning, and running repairs while in port. New Zealand was well served by its

¹ Matai, [Marine Department](#) lighthouse tender; 1050 tons; built 1930. Puriri, coastal motor-vessel; Anchor Shipping Co. Ltd.; 938 tons; built 1938. Rata, coastal steamer; Anchor Shipping Co. Ltd.; 974 tons; built 1929. Gale, coastal motor-vessel, Canterbury Steam Shipping Co. Ltd.; 622 tons; built 1935. Kaiwaka, motor-powered cargo lighter; NZ Refrigerating Co. Ltd.; 169 tons; built 1937.

workaday minesweepers and the sturdy lads from farms, factories, and offices who manned them over the years of hostilities. ¹

On 9 September the trawlers began searching sweeps in the passage through

Jellicoe Channel (SCM 11) west of Little Barrier and the Maro Tiri islands, to a point beyond Cape Brett. The Muritai was commissioned as a minesweeper at [Wellington](#) on 25 September. A drifting mine was reported on 8 October by the fishing launch Cobra, three miles south-west of Port Tryphena, at the southern end of Great Barrier Island. It was found next morning by the danlayer Coastguard, which took it in tow and moored it about a mile outside the bay. Later in the day it was again taken in tow until the Duchess was met, when she sank it by rifle fire.

A scheme for building minesweeping trawlers in New Zealand to meet the Navy's stated requirements was discussed at a conference on 31 May 1940, attended by representatives of the Navy, the [Marine Department](#), the Fishing Industry Advisory Committee, the railway workshops, and other Government Departments. It was considered feasible to build six 'Castle' type trawlers within a year under the direction and supervision of the [Marine Department](#). On 1 June Cabinet approved this proposal and some weeks later authorised the construction of another six trawlers. Actually, nearly two years elapsed before the first of these vessels was completed and commissioned for service.

A start was made on 21 October 1940 by an [Auckland](#) firm on the building of the first trawler, which was named Manuka. She was of composite construction, that is, of kauri planking on steel frames. Two similar vessels, named Rimu and Hinau, were laid down at [Auckland](#) soon afterwards.² The engines and boilers for these vessels were supplied from old steamers purchased by the Government from the Northern Steamship Company.

Between October 1940 and the end of hostilities, thirteen minesweeper trawlers, four of which were composite vessels, were built for the Royal New Zealand Navy at a total cost of approximately £780,000. Seven of the steel vessels were built by Stevenson and Cook at [Port Chalmers](#), one by the Wellington Patent Slip Company

¹ When the [Niagara](#) was sunk in June 1940 she was carrying in her strongroom about eight tons of gold ingots from South Africa, packed in 295 boxes and valued at approximately £2,500,000, which had been shipped for the [United States](#). The recovery of the greater part of the gold from the lost liner lying at a depth of 438 feet was one of the most remarkable and

successful salvage operations of its kind ever undertaken. It was carried out in a minefield whose exact limits were unknown and, despite many difficulties and delays due to mines, stormy weather, and other hazards, was completed in barely twelve months. In the course of the operation the divers made more than 300 descents, three of which reached a depth of 528 feet. The New Zealand Navy can justly claim some share in the ultimate success of the project. Its minesweepers cleared the area of mines and much equipment was supplied and assistance given in other ways, notably in solving difficult problems in the use of explosives in record depths of water.

² The Manuka was commissioned on 30 March 1942, the Rimu on 15 July 1942, and the Hinau on 23 July 1942.

at Evans Bay, and four composite vessels and one steel one by Mason Bros., Seager Bros., and the Senior Foundry Company at [Auckland](#). Most of the engines and boilers for these ships were constructed by A. and G. Price, of [Thames](#), John McGregor and Co., of [Port Chalmers](#), and the railway workshops. With the exception of one steel trawler ([Waikato](#)) and one composite vessel (Tawhai) on which fitting-out was suspended, all were commissioned for service between March 1942 and June 1944, the first of the steel vessels going into service on 12 May 1943. ¹

The Chief of Naval Staff had indicated in his first report of 29 May the possibility that magnetic mines might be laid in New Zealand waters. ² On 7 August Cabinet approval was given for the requisitioning of two small, wooden, coastal cargo vessels, Kapuni and [Hawera](#), whenever the special gear required to fit them out as magnetic minesweepers was received from England. The Kapuni was taken over on 16 January 1941 and the [Hawera](#) six months later, but it was a long time before they were fitted out and commissioned. ³

As a second danlayer would be indispensable when clearance sweeps of the [Hauraki Gulf](#) minefields were started, the Navy pressed for the taking over of the Kaiwaka, to which strong objection had been raised by her owners, the New Zealand Refrigerating Company. At the beginning of August 1940 the Minister of Marine reported to the Prime Minister that the Kaiwaka could be spared for naval service provided that a fairly large proportion of [Wanganui](#) refrigerated and other cargo was railed to [Wellington](#) for loading into overseas ships. The question of discontinuing

the loading of ships in [Wanganui](#) roadstead had not been finally settled when, on 7 January 1941, War Cabinet approved the taking over of the Kaiwaka for conversion into a danlayer. She was delivered to the naval authorities on 5 March and commissioned for service on 21 May 1941.

In a Navy order of 14 November 1940 the Naval Board directed that the minesweepers, including those fitting out, were to be organised as follows: First (NZ) Minesweeping Flotilla – mobile: HM Ships Matai (Senior Officer Minesweepers), Muritai, Rata, Gale, Puriri, and Coastguard (danlayer). Port Minesweepers – First M/S Group ([Auckland](#)): HM Ships Wakakura, Humphrey, and Duchess. Second M/S Group ([Wellington](#)): South Sea and Futurist. Third M/S Group: James Cosgrove and Thomas Currell. On 23 December 1940 the Navy Board issued Navy Order 363 stating that the

¹ The steel minesweepers commissioned were Aroha, Awatere, Hautapu, Maimai, Pahau, Waiho, Waima, and Waipu. They measured about 290 tons gross register, on a length of 125 feet, a breadth of 23 feet, and a depth of about 13 feet.

² Magnetic ground mines were laid off the entrances to [Lyttelton](#) and [Wellington](#) harbours by the Adjutant, a tender to the raider [Komet](#), on 24–25 June 1941. See ante, p. 156.

³ The Kapuni was commissioned on 1 June 1942 and the [Hawera](#) on 5 April 1943.

Admiralty had designated the First (NZ) M/S Flotilla the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla. This designation was retained for the duration of the war, though the vessels of the flotilla changed from time to time.

The fishing launch Tuna had reported sighting a mine off Rangipuke Island in the Firth of [Thames](#) on 28 January 1941, and on the following day the military authorities reported that a mine had drifted ashore at Ohakeao Point, on the south-west side of Coromandel harbour. These reports were considered to concern one and the same mine. When a naval party under Lieutenant R. J. Greening, RN, arrived at

the harbour, it found that the mine had been secured on the foreshore with fencing wire. It was close to a house on the Coromandel– [Thames](#) road. It was rendered safe by removing the primer and the explosive charge, which was destroyed. A reward of £5 was paid to the master of the Tuna and letters of commendation were sent to four local residents who helped the naval party to dispose of the mine.

The Wellington-based minesweepers bore the responsibility for searching sweeps off [Cape Farewell](#). No mines were laid there during the Second World War, but the possibility was too strong to be ignored. A channel was swept from a position 10 miles north of Farewell Spit lighthouse and then 10 miles west, and this was widened to two miles by the James Cosgrove in March 1941. The South Sea swept the channel from a position eight miles north of Farewell Spit light about the end of March while the James Cosgrove was sweeping SCM 12 into [Wellington](#).

The Hauraki Gulf minefields by that time had been in existence about nine months – long enough for corrosion and the action of the sea to have done their work on insecure and faulty moorings. Drifting mines were reported from widely separated positions during March 1941. On the 20th the Thomas Currell, port sweeper at [Auckland](#), sighted and destroyed a mine about four and a half miles north by east from Flat Rock, off Kawau Island, that is, well inside [Hauraki Gulf](#). Three days later the motor-ship Maui Pomare reported passing a drifting mine in a position about 120 miles to the northward of East Cape; yet another was sighted on 24 March about 24 miles north-east of Mayor Island in the Bay of Plenty. As a result of these reports the Naval Board broadcast a signal to all British merchant ships in the area of the New Zealand Station warning them that drifting mines might be met between East Cape and the approaches to [Auckland](#) as far out as 200 miles off the coast. All vessels were warned to keep a sharp lookout for mines when rounding East Cape.

The Matai and the Gale were commissioned as fast minesweepers at the beginning of April 1941, the former on the 1st and the latter two days later. During the month sweeps were made in the Cradock Channel (between Great Barrier and Little Barrier) in the course of which a mine was swept in a position about 10 miles south-east from Moko Hinau light. The Puriri was commissioned on 19 April and the Rata on 14 May 1941. The Duchess, which had proved to be unsuitable for minesweeping and was badly in need of a refit, was laid up at [Auckland](#). ¹

On 13 May the naval launch Rawea (Sub-Lieutenant Bruton, RNZNR)² was stopped by the fishing launch Pearline, which reported having fouled a mine when hauling her net. She had marked the position with a flag buoy about nine miles north-east by north from Bream Head. The Rawea found the buoy about eight and a half miles north-east by east from that point. Bruton and a volunteer rating hauled in thirty feet of the Pearline's line before the mine came into view about six feet under water, and in that position it was secured to the buoy. The Gale and Puriri, which were under orders to sweep the Jellicoe Channel, received a signal from [Auckland](#) to get into touch with the Rawea and assist in destroying the mine. The senior officer in the Gale learned from the Rawea that the mine had been buoyed and that the buoy had not shifted all day. As it was nearly dark, he decided to leave the sweeping of the mine till next day and, after fixing the position of the buoy, rejoined the Puriri in Urquhart Bay. He instructed the Puriri to leave at daybreak for a position off Bream Head and sweep to the northward of that point.

At daybreak the Gale left the anchorage and proceeded in a rough sea and poor visibility toward the approximate position of the mine. Her commanding officer noticed that the Puriri was following but did not give her any specific orders. When she failed to sight the buoy the Gale steered two miles to the northward and then turned to the southward, followed by the Puriri right astern. Again the buoy could not be found and the Gale turned to starboard in a circular movement. She had completed about a quarter of the circle when she found by bearings of Maro Tiri that she was in the exact position of the night before.

The Puriri had just taken a four-point bearing which placed her one and a half miles due west of the reported position of the mine. Before following in the wake of the Gale on her turn to starboard, she was taking another bearing of Maro Tiri when there was a violent explosion and she blew up. Her commanding officer,
Lieu-

¹ The Duchess was employed as an examination ship at [Auckland](#) from March 1942 to September 1944 and subsequently as supply ship to HMNZS Tamaki.

² Lieutenant J. E. Bruton, RNZNR; born Bondi, [Australia](#), 17 Nov 1919; RNZN 1941–45; RN 1945–46.

tenant

Blacklaws, ¹ and four ratings – Stoker Petty Officer Mattson, ² Able Seaman Purkin, ³ and Stewards [Richardson](#) ⁴ and [Hobley](#) ⁵ – were killed and one officer and four ratings were injured. The vessel sank so quickly that there was no time to lower boats and the crew were ordered over the side by the first lieutenant. The surviving five officers and twenty-one ratings were picked up by the Gale.

The foregoing narrative was compiled from the minutes of evidence taken by a naval board of inquiry which found, inter alia, that the Puriri was lost by striking a mine previously reported and for which she was searching in company with the Gale. Blame was attributable to the senior officer of the searching ships 'in that he did fail to carry out an organised search and to take proper charge of HMS Puriri.'

Thus, before the sweeping of the [Hauraki Gulf](#) minefields had begun, one of the five fast minesweepers allocated for the task had been lost. The Anchor Shipping and Foundry Company, Ltd., of [Nelson](#), owners of the Puriri, were granted compensation in accordance with the terms of the charter party, amounting to £65,003 8s. 6d. The Navy searched the shipping lists to find a replacement for the Puriri and decided that the motor-vessel [Breeze](#), a sister ship to the Gale, was the most suitable ship. Her owners, the Canterbury Steam Shipping Company Ltd., protested that the requisitioning of the [Breeze](#) would ruin their trade which had been built up over thirty years. They had willingly surrendered one-third of their total tonnage and were strongly opposed to any further loss 'until all other coastal shipping companies have made an equal contribution.' War Cabinet considered the removal of the [Breeze](#) from trade should be avoided if possible, but finally consented to her being requisitioned. She was handed over to the Navy in March 1942, but was not commissioned for service until 24 October 1942, five weeks after the sweeping of the [Hauraki Gulf](#) minefields had been completed.

The 25th Minesweeping Flotilla, comprising the sweepers Matai (Senior Officer), Gale, Rata, and Muritai and the danlayers Coastguard and Kaiwaka, sailed from

[Auckland](#) on 9 June 1941. Before that date some twenty-four mines had been swept or accounted for in other ways. Sweeping operations started on 13 June in an area to the east and north-east of Bream Head on what was actually the north-west end of the minefield. In two days ten mines were swept,

¹ Lieutenant D. W. Blacklaws, RNZNR; born Aberdeen, [Scotland](#), 20 Apr 1903; master mariner; served Union SS Co., 1925–39.

² Stoker Petty Officer B. A. Mattson, RNZNVR; born [Hamilton](#), 11 Aug 1912; merchant seaman.

³ Able Seaman L. Purkin, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 23 Jan 1914; merchant seaman.

⁴ [Steward J. Richardson](#), RNZNVR; born [Sheffield](#), England, 13 Mar 1910; ship's steward.

⁵ [Steward G. E. R. Hoble](#)y, RNZNVR; born Donegal, [Ireland](#), 24 Jul 1913; ship's steward.

all of them well coated with marine growth. Of these, the Matai and Rata swept three each and the Gale and Muritai two each. During the next few days the sweep was carried to south-eastward to a line beyond Maro Tiri light and seventeen mines were swept, making a total of twenty-seven. Progress was retarded by the slow speed of the danlayers, both of which were too small for the efficient handling of gear and for stability in a seaway. A breakdown in the Matai's winch sent her back to [Auckland](#) on 19 June, but sweeping continued with the Muritai as leader until the 23rd, when the flotilla returned to harbour. Back in [Auckland](#) the Muritai was withdrawn for a refit and the installation of asdic.

New Zealand naval local defence policy during the first eighteen months of the war had been concerned mainly with the most urgent requirement, the selection and fitting out of suitable vessels for minesweeping. The Admiralty had recommended that all vessels selected for the dual purpose of minesweeping and anti-submarine

operations should be suitable for asdic installation. Now that asdic equipment had been obtained and suitable vessels for carrying and operating it were in commission, the Naval Board decided to equip them as opportunity offered. By 15 August work on the Muritai was completed and her asdic tested and found satisfactory in all respects.

In the meantime the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla, less the Muritai, had sailed from [Auckland](#) on 3 July, but bad weather forced it to shelter in Urquhart Bay for three days, after which sweeping was resumed outside Maro Tiri light. Next day the Matai steamed over to the east coast of Coromandel Peninsula to deal with a drifting mine reported by the fishing launch Margaret. At daybreak on 8 July the mine was found close inshore off Tepaki Point, whence it was towed by the Matai well clear of the land and sunk in deep water by rifle fire.

More mines were swept outside Maro Tiri during the next few days. On 12 July a ship was sighted to the eastward of the Poor Knights Islands steering a 'most erratic course in the general direction of the flotilla and the centre of the minefield.' She was the Panamanian steamer Nortun. The Matai had some difficulty in persuading the master of his danger, but she was finally directed into the swept channel.

By 18 July the total number of mines swept since 13 June had risen to seventy-one, and the senior officer reported that he considered the area from the mainland to a line running north-by-east from a position approximately four and three-quarter miles northwest from Moko Hinau light to be clear of mines. The Naval Board congratulated the officers and ratings of the flotilla on the excellent manner in which they had carried out their duties during a strenuous fortnight under adverse conditions.

After a welcome spell of one week in harbour the flotilla sailed from [Auckland](#) on 26 July 1941. On the previous day the fishing launch Waimana had reported three drifting mines, which she had marked by dropping a free dan-buoy, between Great Barrier and Little Barrier. These were the first of a crop with which the flotilla had to deal during a week of stormy weather. On the first day out nine drifting mines were sunk in the Cradock Channel. The continuous bad weather prevented sweeping and kept the flotilla searching for drifting mines until 1 August, by which time three more had been found and sunk. Throughout the week radio stations broadcast and the

newspapers printed warnings to shipping and, fortunately, there were no casualties.

When sweeping was resumed on 1 August, the senior officer reported that the line of mines appeared to end as the flotilla approached the western Moko Hinau Islands. Actually the line did not end there, but swung away sharply to the north-eastward in the wide arc round the group on which the raider [Orion](#) had dropped her mines to avoid being sighted from the islands.¹ Sweeping was interrupted again next day while the flotilla went in search of a mine reported off Cuvier Island. The *Matai* found it fouled among the rocks close inshore, took it in tow, and sank it two miles southeast from the island.

The weather prevented anything but searching sweeps to the westward of Great Barrier Island until the 6th, when operations were resumed in the Cradock Channel approach between Great Barrier Island and the Moko Hinau group. The senior officer reported that the flotilla did much steaming before the line of mines in this area was discovered to run exactly northward. This part of the line was, of course, the southeastern end of the arc round Moko Hinau. A start was made with clearance sweeping, but bad weather again set in on 10 August and the flotilla returned to harbour.

The total number of mines swept or destroyed by the flotilla up to that time was ninety-one. In addition, reliable reports indicated that four mines had drifted ashore and exploded on Great Barrier and Cuvier Islands between 26 July and 2 August. A Mr Blackwell, of Great Barrier, found a mine off the southern end of the island on 10 August. He moored it in a small cove, whence it was towed to sea next day and destroyed by HM launch *Pirate*.

Sweeping in the approach to Cradock Channel was resumed on 20 August, but only one mine was raised, a poor result which the senior officer thought was due to the considerable number of drifting mines previously destroyed in that area. Next day the flotilla

¹ The exact location of the [Hauraki Gulf](#) minefields was not known until July 1945, when the Admiralty sent out photostat copies of the [Orion's](#) track chart and mine plan which had been found in the mass of German naval records captured at [Wilhelmshaven](#). See illustrations section following p.

turned its attention to the eastern approaches to Colville Channel. Sweeps south-east of Cuvier Island brought up several widely scattered mines which apparently had been dragged out of line by the strong currents and tidal streams in that area. The Muritai, the first New Zealand minesweeper to be fully equipped as an antisubmarine vessel, rejoined the flotilla on 23 August, and the Rata left for [Auckland](#) and [Lyttelton](#) to be similarly equipped while undergoing a refit.

Stormy weather interrupted sweeping during the next week. The Muritai was sent to [Auckland](#) on the 26th to land a sick rating from the Gale and for repairs to her windlass. The Matai had to return to harbour next day with a case of acute appendicitis for hospital. There was other sickness of a less serious nature in the flotilla. Long clearance and searching sweeps accounted for two mines north of Cuvier Island on 1 September and the hundredth mine swept by the flotilla was found south-east of that island next day.

Reports of drifting mines sighted by ships long distances from the areas in which they had been laid came in from time to time, and doubtless there were others that escaped observation. On 30 August the coastal vessel Kopara sighted a mine 16 miles northeast from White Island, in the Bay of Plenty. She and the Port Tauranga, which came up about twenty minutes later, shot off all their rifle ammunition without success, but on her return passage from [Auckland](#) the Kopara, in company with the Margaret W, found the mine and sank it in a shooting match in which about one hundred rounds were fired. Two other mines sighted far out in the Bay of Plenty were sunk by rifle fire from ships.

After a week at [Auckland](#), the flotilla carried out searching sweeps from Cuvier Island northward to Needles Point, the northern tip of Great Barrier Island, until 16 September 1941, when that stretch of sea was declared free of mines. The Gale and Muritai were then sent to begin cross searches in the Cradock Channel, while the Matai went to Mercury Bay, where a drifting mine had been found by fishermen. She found that they had moored the mine about three miles off Castle Rock in a highly dangerous state, with its mooring spindle half withdrawn. The Matai towed the mine out and sank it some five miles east from Ohena light. During the check search in

the Cradock Channel three mines were swept and sunk by rifle fire, well clear of the line which the senior officer thought he had established previously. Because of his uncertainty about the direction in which the mines had been laid in the Moko Hinau sector, he could not guarantee that the area was clear. An intended check sweep north of the Moko Hinau-Marō Tiri line was cancelled because of the difficulty of getting accurate fixes in the prevailing poor visibility, and the flotilla returned to [Auckland](#) on 20 September.

Nevertheless, the approaches to the [Hauraki Gulf](#) had been rendered reasonably safe for shipping though navigation was restricted to definite swept channels. When operations ceased, the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla had swept 106 mines and 27 had been accounted for in other ways, making a total of 133 out of the 228 laid by the [Orion](#). Many others undoubtedly had sunk or broken away from their moorings and drifted unobserved far out into the open ocean. One was sunk by the Port Line motor-vessel Port Saint John on 16 February 1942 in a position well to the eastward of Great Barrier Island. Two days later another was sunk by the Port Tauranga about seven miles north from Bream Head. On 24 September 1941 the Naval Board sent a message to the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla congratulating it on a 'very creditable piece of minesweeping, often carried out under very adverse weather conditions. Special credit was due to Coastguard for her part in these operations.'

A few days later the flotilla went south, sweeping off East Cape and calling at [Napier](#) on passage to [Wellington](#). From 6 to 9 October the ships carried out a series of sweeps and patrols in the focal area about Farewell Spit, after which a fortnight was spent in intensive sweeping and gunnery exercises in Cook Strait, the port sweepers South Sea and Futurist being temporarily attached to the flotilla during that period. For the remainder of the year the flotilla and port sweepers were engaged in routine duties or refitting.

In January 1941 the Naval Board decided that an officer should be placed in charge of the disposal of all magnetic mines found otherwise than by routine sweeping. Volunteers were called for to form a magnetic mine disposal party at [Auckland](#). Lieutenant W. H. Minchall, RNZNVR, was appointed in charge and four ratings recommended by him were chosen to complete the party. ¹

A year later the scheme was expanded to include [Wellington](#) and [Lyttelton](#) and

to deal with all types of mines. Each party consisted of a mine disposal officer (MDO), three petty officers, four able seamen, and a diving unit. On the recommendation of [Dr E. Marsden](#), Director of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Messrs [R. D. Neale](#) ([Christchurch](#)), ² [N. A. MacKay](#) ([Wellington](#)), ³ and [C. Dawson](#) ([Auckland](#)) ⁴ were entered in the RNZNVR as mine disposal officers and the petty officers were drawn from the staff of the Scientific and Industrial Research Department. Since there were no experts on magnetic or acoustic mines

¹ Lieutenant-Commander Minchall was later appointed Staff Officer Torpedo and Mining (SOTM). Born Christchurch, 5 Jun 1909; electrical engineer; Superintendent, Armament Supply Depot, 1948.

² [R. D. Neale](#), BE, AMIEE, AMINZE; born NZ Feb 1906; lecturer, School of Engineering, Canterbury University College.

³ [N. A. MacKay](#), BE, AMIEE; born NZ 25 Dec 1916; electrical engineer, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

⁴ [C. Dawson](#), AMIEE, ANZ Soc CE; born NZ 22 Oct 1896; electrical engineer; senior lecturer, Auckland University College.

in New Zealand, the Auckland MDO, Lieutenant Dawson, was sent to [Australia](#) for an instructional course at the Royal Australian Navy Torpedo School.

No magnetic mines were ever found in New Zealand, but official anxiety was not unfounded because, in June 1941, the small German auxiliary vessel [Adjutant](#) had actually laid twenty magnetic ground mines from the raider [Komet](#) in the approaches to [Lyttelton](#) and [Wellington](#) harbours. This, however, did not become known till after the war when it was revealed by German records. Nevertheless, the mine disposal organisation was justified by its successful handling of a number of German mines of the contact type washed ashore on the coasts of New Zealand. Most of these had drifted across the [Tasman Sea](#) after breaking away from the minefields laid in Australian waters by a German raider. Two mines from the [Hauraki Gulf](#) field laid by the raider [Orion](#) in June 1940 were destroyed, one on the coast of Coromandel Peninsula on 30 January 1941 and the other south of Mangawai harbour, 50 miles

north from [Auckland](#), on 4 April 1942.

The first mine from the Australian coast was reported on 18 October 1942 by Mr [J. Dawson](#), master of the fishing vessel *Britannia*, in Pegasus harbour, Stewart Island. When Lieutenant Neale and a petty officer arrived from [Lyttelton](#), they found that 'these well-meaning but foolhardy fishermen' had secured a rope to the mine and dragged it up on the rocks where it was high and dry at low tide. It was a rusty German Y * type mine with all but one of its horns bent or broken off and the mooring wire missing. Before destroying the mine Neale blew a small hole in the shell with a charge of gelignite to see if there were any unusual internal fittings. The master of the *Britannia* was paid a reward of £5 for finding and reporting the mine.

In November 1942 Lieutenant Neale had to deal with a German mine found by Mr [A. Cropp](#) on the beach about three miles from Westport. After blowing a hole in the casing to examine the internal features and removing all seven horns, which were badly bent, he rolled the mine over until the inspection plate was revealed and the positions of the mooring spindle and the switch noted. The detonator and primer were then removed and, finally, the mechanism plate and the explosive charge.

The MDO's procedure was roundly condemned by the SOTM, who remarked that in not one instance had that officer complied with the Admiralty instructions or carried out the orders of his superior officer. The SOTM recommended that Lieutenant Neale be discharged from the service.

In a second report Neale described some interesting technical features of the mine which, he said, had never been active. The primer, in the 'safety for laying' position, and the state of other parts of the mechanism verified this conclusion. In a spirited defence of his actions, Neale pointed out that the SOTM himself had suggested that a hole could be cut in the shell of the mine. Before the horns were removed all the battery leads had been cut, an almost unnecessary precaution in view of the battering the horns had obviously received. Apart from this and other precautions taken, the harmless state of the mine was proved by the fact that it had survived the rolling and battering it had sustained on the beach and the explosion of gelignite on its casing. Neale wound up his defence by quoting a paragraph in the Admiralty instructions which emphasised that the MDO must be allowed some liberty to work according to the circumstances of a particular case and his own judgment.

The saving clause said 'it is not possible to lay down a definite sequence of operations required for rendering a mine safe....'

The means employed by another MDO, Lieutenant MacKay, to render safe a badly damaged mine washed ashore on a reef at Bell Block, [New Plymouth](#), on 26 November 1942 were also condemned by SOTM. In this case the lower horns, including the elbows, had been wrenched off by bumping on the reef, the mooring spindle broken off flush with the gland, and the mine partly flooded. A small hole was blown in the casing and the interior examined for booby traps, etc. The wires from the horns were cut, the primer charge taken out from under the mechanism plate, which was then removed intact, and the detonator destroyed. The mine was demolished by counter-mining.

MacKay, in reply, took his stand on the permissive clause in the Admiralty instructions and the fact that the former SOTM, Lieutenant-Commander Green, RN (who in August 1940 had dismantled the first mine from the [Hauraki Gulf](#) field), had stressed the application of scientific principles. MacKay said his every action had been carefully considered and that the whole operation had since been discussed with and approved by the scientific adviser to the Naval Board, Dr Marsden.

A mine found on the south side of the mouth of the Mokau River on 2 December 1942 by Mr [A. Povey](#) was dealt with by Lieutenant Savage, RN (ret'd), ¹ base torpedo officer at [Auckland](#), assisted by Petty Officers Boyd ² and Wallis. ³ Working in the breakers, the latter two held the mine steady while Savage spent half an hour extracting the detonator. With the help of members of the local

¹ Lieutenant E. Savage, RN; born England, 13 May 1893; served RN 1914–18 War; Base Torpedo Officer, 1942–45.

² Petty Officer J. S. Boyd, [RNZN](#); born [Wellington](#), 4 Dec 1905; entered [RNZN](#) Jun 1923; served [Leander](#) 1938–42; [Achilles](#) 1945.

³ Petty Officer A. Wallis, [RNZN](#); born [London](#), 11 May 1897; electrical engineer.

Home Guard, the mine was worked clear of the surf and, when the horns had been removed, it was rolled up the beach and dismantled. The shell was exhibited by the Mokau Patriotic Committee to raise funds and later set up in the township square as a memorial.

In the same month two more mines were found and dismantled on the west coast of the [North Island](#), one about three miles south from Albatross Point at the entrance to Kawhia harbour, and the other on the beach about 12 miles from [Ohakea](#) airfield. On 11 January 1943 the motor-vessel Port Tauranga sank a floating mine by rifle fire about 96 miles west from Cape Egmont.

The Deputy Chiefs of Staff Committee decided in January 1943, on the recommendation of SOTM, to reorganise the mine disposal system. Following a course of instruction at the naval mine depot, [Auckland](#), an army officer was to pass on his knowledge to army bomb disposal units so that they could, if necessary, deal with mines. The naval mine disposal organisation was disbanded and the appointments of Lieutenants Dawson, Neale, and MacKay terminated.

A mine found in [New Plymouth](#) harbour on 15 February 1943 was dealt with by an army bomb disposal group under the direction of SOTM. Another mine ashore on Muriwai Beach on 16 May 1943 was dismantled by a bomb disposal group under the supervision of Lieutenant Savage. Two other German mines were similarly disposed of in 1943, one on Ruapuke Beach in the Raglan area on the west coast and the other (doubtless from the [Hauraki Gulf](#) field) at Kennedy's Bay, Coromandel Peninsula.

During the next five years, five German mines that had drifted across from [Australia](#) were found in various places on the west coast of the [North Island](#) from as far north as [Hokianga](#) to a point near Raglan harbour. All were destroyed, as was one from the [Hauraki Gulf](#) field found at Marsden Point, Bream Bay. Besides these, seven British mines of the controlled type were found and demolished in the Bay of Islands from 1947 to the end of January 1951. These were some of those unaccounted for when the controlled minefields in that area were fired in April 1944.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 13 – THE LOSS OF HMS NEPTUNE

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The Loss of HMS Neptune

ON 15 January 1941 the Prime Minister was informed by the Admiralty through the High Commissioner in London that the steadily increasing requirements of naval ratings arising from the building of new ships, in addition to heavy unforeseen commitments all involving a severe strain on the resources of trained ratings, were causing some concern. The Admiralty 'would, therefore, be grateful if some further assistance, in addition to the considerable help which has been and is to be given by New Zealand could be undertaken.'

The manning of an additional cruiser of the *Leander* class was envisaged, but it was fully realised that the provision of the necessary personnel would require a strenuous and sustained effort over a considerable period and that it could not, therefore, be done in the near future. The Admiralty suggested, however, that by means of dilution of existing New Zealand units to an extent approximating that already found essential in the Royal Navy, expansion of the New Zealand Division might be attained by, say, the end of 1941 for the manning of a third cruiser. Such dilution would follow the procedure already in operation in the Royal Navy, in which a heavy dilution of skilled ratings by men less qualified was being applied in order to release a proportion of experienced men to man new ships.

The Prime Minister replied that, in order to meet the requirements of Admiralty for more trained ratings, a new naval training establishment was being started and would commission as HMS Tamaki on 20 January 1941. When in full operation Tamaki would turn out at least 100 seamen, 40 signalmen and telegraphists, 20 stokers, and 36 supply ratings, trained for 'hostilities only', three times a year, in addition to the numbers entered for continuous service. The 'hostilities only' ratings entered under this scheme would be lent for service in the Royal Navy. The entry of continuous service ratings would be maintained at the peacetime numbers, which aimed at providing 100 per cent New Zealand personnel for the ships at present manned.

The Admiralty expressed appreciation of the Government's action in starting the new training establishment and informed the Prime Minister that it proposed

gradually to form a New Zealand crew for an additional cruiser of the [Leander](#) class and that the selection of HMS Neptune had been approved. ¹ The Admiralty suggested that, as soon as requirements for this ship in any particular branch had been met, New Zealand-trained ratings becoming available should be used in the East or Near East.

The Neptune was expected to leave the [United Kingdom](#) for New Zealand in late May or early June 1941. The New Zealand Government was prepared to accept responsibility for her maintenance on the same basis as for the [Leander](#) and [Achilles](#) and the Admiralty was so informed. Already a considerable number of New Zealanders—approximately one-fifth of her complement of ratings—had been drafted to the Neptune.

But, owing to heavy losses of cruisers during the [Crete](#) campaign and the critical position in the [Mediterranean](#), the Neptune was not destined to see service on the New Zealand Station. She sailed from the [United Kingdom](#) about the end of May 1941 as one of a naval force escorting an important convoy for the [Middle East](#). At that time a number of German ships were cruising in the [Atlantic](#) acting as supply vessels for U-boats and armed merchant raiders. One of them, the *Gonzenheim*, was sighted on 4 June by HMS *Esperance Bay* ² which was not fast enough to catch her, but the German was located by an aircraft from the [Victorious](#). The battleship [Nelson](#) intercepted the *Gonzenheim* and ordered the Neptune to board her; but her crew took scuttling action before this could be done and the cruiser sank her in a position about 750 miles west from Cape Finisterre.

When the Neptune arrived in the [Mediterranean](#) in July she rejoined the Seventh Cruiser Squadron, in which she had served during the previous year, and, in company with the [Leander](#), HMAS *Hobart*, and other ships, took part in the transport of troops to [Cyprus](#) (Operation *guillotine*). ³ During the last week of October 1941 the Neptune took part in three bombardments of enemy positions in and about [Bardia](#), on the coast of [Libya](#). These were carried out as a preliminary to the offensive in the [Western Desert](#) by the British Eighth Army in November, in which the New Zealand Division played a notable part.

Submarines and aircraft based at [Malta](#) had been doing great work on the enemy's supply lines across the [Mediterranean](#). In the period from 1 May to 20

August one-third of the ships sailing from [Italy](#) to North Africa were sunk. On 21 October Force 'K', consisting

¹ See ante, pp. 105. HMS Neptune, 7175 tons displacement; speed 32 ½ knots; eight 6-inch, eight 4-inch, and anti-aircraft guns; eight 21-inch torpedo-tubes; completed February 1934.

² HMS Esperance Bay, armed merchant cruiser; 14,200 tons; eight 6-inch guns; speed 15 knots. Owned by Aberdeen and Commonwealth Line (Shaw Savill and Albion Co.).

³ See ante, p. 115.

of the cruisers Aurora and Penelope and the destroyers Lance and Lively, arrived at [Malta](#) from England. Working in co-operation with the submarines and aircraft, Force 'K' played havoc with the enemy's convoys and completely disorganised the traffic to [Tripoli](#). During October 1941 nearly 63 per cent of the shipping sailing from [Italy](#) to [Tripoli](#) was sunk in transit. In November 77 per cent was sunk or badly damaged and only 8400 tons reached its destination, the lowest monthly delivery during the war. The enemy retaliated with heavy air attacks on [Malta](#), which was 'really the linchpin of the campaign in the [Mediterranean](#).' ¹

In the early hours of 24 November two enemy convoys were reported to be making for [Benghazi](#) and a force of five cruisers, including the Neptune, and four destroyers sailed from [Alexandria](#) to try to intercept them. Admiral Cunningham took his three battleships and eight destroyers to sea from [Alexandria](#) in support of the cruisers. He suffered a severe blow next day when the battleship Barham was torpedoed and sunk with a loss of 862 lives.

The successes of Force 'K' had compelled the enemy to provide cruiser escorts and battleship support for his convoys. On 27 November the [Ajax](#) (flag of Rear-Admiral H. B. Rawlings) and Neptune, with the destroyers [Kimberley](#) and [Kingston](#), sailed from [Alexandria](#) to reinforce Force 'K' which, on 1 December, sank an ammunition ship, a tanker, and a destroyer. In the early hours of 13 December the destroyers Sikh, Maori, and Legion, with the [Netherlands](#) destroyer Isaac Sweers, on

passage from Gibraltar to [Malta](#), made a surprise attack on two Italian 6-inch-gun cruisers and a torpedoboat off [Cape Bon](#), all three being sunk. On the following night the *Galatea*, one of Rear-Admiral Vian's cruisers, was torpedoed and sunk by a U-boat near [Alexandria](#).

The operations of Force 'K' from [Malta](#) necessitated extreme measures to maintain the supply of fuel-oil in the island, and HMS *Breconshire*, a converted merchant ship which could carry 5000 tons of oil, was generally used for that purpose. On 15 December 1941 Rear-Admiral Vian's cruisers and destroyers sailed from [Alexandria](#) to escort the *Breconshire* to [Malta](#). The *Aurora*, *Penelope*, and six destroyers left [Malta](#) next evening and met Vian's force at daybreak on 17 December. When Italian heavy ships were reported at sea, the Commander-in-Chief ordered Vice-Admiral, [Malta](#), to sail every ship he had to join Rear-Admiral Vian, whose force was continually attacked during the day by enemy aircraft, luckily without damage. In the evening an Italian force which included two battleships was sighted to the westward. Vian ordered the *Breconshire* away at full speed to the southward and boldly closed in to attack. The Italian battleships fired a few salvos and then retired to the northward,

¹ [Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Cunningham, A Sailor's Odyssey](#) (Hutchinson), pp. 419– 21.

disappearing in the darkness. The *Breconshire* was escorted safely to [Malta](#) by Force 'K'.

While Rear-Admiral Vian was returning at high speed to [Alexandria](#), air reconnaissance from [Malta](#) on 18 December showed that the Italian battleship force had turned about and was cruising in an area about midway between [Malta](#) and [Benghazi](#). This made it evident that enemy convoys had also turned and were aiming to arrive at [Benghazi](#) and [Tripoli](#) during the night. After refuelling, the *Neptune*, *Aurora*, and *Penelope*,¹ with the destroyers [Kandahar](#), *Lance*, *Lively*, and [Havock](#), sailed from [Malta](#) at high speed that evening to try to intercept the convoy off [Tripoli](#). The force was under the command of Captain Rory O'Connor, of the *Neptune*.

The ships streamed their paravanes as they left harbour at 6.30 p.m. and less than an hour later had worked up to 30 knots. It was blowing hard from the west-south-west, with a heavy sea. At one o'clock in the morning speed was reduced to 28 knots and four minutes later to 24 knots. The force was about 20 miles from [Tripoli](#) and steaming in single line ahead on a course approximately south by west when, at 1.6 a.m., the Neptune, which was leading, appeared for an instant dark against a bright flash of flame. She had exploded a mine on one of her paravanes. The Aurora, which was next astern, instantly put her helm hard-a-starboard and then hard-a-port, but she, too, exploded a mine barely a minute later. The Neptune was going full speed astern when she hit another mine which wrecked her propellers and steering gear and brought her to a standstill. A minute or so later she exploded a third mine and took a heavy list to port. Force 'K' had run into a minefield which had been laid in deep water well off shore in April 1941 after a bombardment of [Tripoli](#) by Admiral Cunningham's battle-ships and cruisers.

A quarter of an hour before the Neptune hit the first mine, the Penelope had started her echo-sounding machine. No depth less than 120 fathoms (720 feet) was recorded between that time and 1.10 a.m. The sounding machine was tested subsequently and found to be working correctly.

At first, Captain A. D. Nicholl of the Penelope thought that the Neptune and Aurora had been torpedoed and he turned to starboard; but at 1.10 a.m. there was an explosion abreast his bridge and he realised that they had run into a minefield. No serious damage seemed to have been sustained by the Penelope and her engines and steering gear were in full working order. She turned to the northward to get clear of the minefield and took station astern of the Aurora, which was then steering north-by-east at 10 knots. The Aurora was badly damaged, [Tripoli](#) and its airfields were barely

¹ HMS [Ajax](#) was out of action with defects.

20 miles away, and it was imperative that the ship should get as far from the enemy coast before daybreak as her much-reduced speed would allow.

In the meantime the Neptune had signalled several times: 'Come alongside',

and then that she was badly damaged and had lost all steam and power. Captain W. G. Agnew, in command in the Aurora, signalled to the [Kandahar](#): 'One destroyer is to go alongside Neptune; the other three are to join me'; and, later, to the Penelope: 'I also am damaged and am returning to [Malta](#). Do what you can for Neptune, but keep clear of the minefield. Give me two destroyers.'

Already, on finding that the Penelope was not seriously damaged, Captain Nicholl had asked permission to return towards the Neptune. His signal crossed that from the Aurora asking him to do so. He decided not to approach closer than two and a half miles from the Neptune until the situation became clearer, but considered it a justifiable risk to send the destroyer Lively closer in. He signalled to her: 'Close Neptune and let me know what I can do. Go on. Good luck.'

When he received the signal from the Aurora, Commander W. G. A. Robson, DSO, DSC, of the [Kandahar](#), decided to take his own destroyer into the minefield, but at 2.18 a.m. the Neptune informed the Penelope: 'Have told [Kandahar](#) to lay off till I have drifted clear of the minefield. Am preparing to be taken in tow then.' Four minutes later the Penelope, who was preparing her towing gear, signalled the Lively: 'I will circle round here. I will come in if there is any chance of towing Neptune.' She also informed the [Kandahar](#): 'Have told Lively to close Neptune: I will close and take Neptune in tow when signalled.' The Lively's reply to the Penelope was: 'Neptune mined and cannot steam. Ordered to tow. Am going back to her now.'

At 3.9 a.m., when two hours had elapsed since the Neptune was first mined, Captain Nicholl considered he should accept the risk and signalled to the Neptune: 'Am ready to tow you. Shall I come now?', to which the Neptune replied: 'Close on my port side.' The Penelope was cautiously edging her way in when, at 3.18 a.m., there was an explosion in the [Kandahar](#) about two miles away. She had struck a mine which blew off her stern. The Penelope was turning when Captain O'Connor, in the Neptune, flashed the warning: 'Keep away', and the [Kandahar](#) made a similar signal to the Lively. The [Kandahar](#) reported: 'After engine-room bulkhead is holding and ship can be towed. But realise this is impossible', and the Penelope made answer: 'Regret I must keep clear.' From the Lively came the message: '[Kandahar](#) mined. She has ordered me out of the field.'

Nicholl still hoped that it might be possible to rescue the crews of the Neptune

and [Kandahar](#), but when, at about four o'clock, the Neptune hit a fourth mine, he decided that no further risks must be taken by the Penelope and Lively. Five minutes later the Neptune rolled over and sank. Nicholl faced a most difficult situation. It was against the custom of the sea to leave comrades in distress, but there was every chance that more ships and lives would be lost if he went back into the minefield. Sunrise was coming, too, and he was very near the enemy's coast.

From the [Kandahar](#) came the signal: 'Neptune has touched off another mine', to which Captain Nicholl replied: 'I clearly cannot help. God be with you.' Commander Robson viewed the coming dawn from the bridge of his crippled ship and made a last signal to the Penelope: 'Suggest you should go. Consider sending submarine to pick up survivors.' As the cruiser steamed away she signalled to the Lively: 'Course 10 degrees (north by east). Speed, 15 knots.'

But Lieutenant-Commander W. F. E. Hussey, DSC, of the Lively took it hard. 'Suggest I go for Neptune's survivors', he urged. When the Penelope replied: 'Regret not approved', he signalled: 'Suggest a submarine could be asked for', and Captain Nicholl answered: 'I am going to do that. I hate to leave them, but I am afraid we must.' As the two ships steamed at 25 knots for [Malta](#), Nicholl broke wireless silence to suggest that a flying boat or a submarine be sent to pick up survivors from the mined ships. ¹

The [Kandahar](#) drifted all day unmolested by the enemy. Signals from her were received at [Malta](#) and she was sighted by friendly aircraft. After dark the destroyer Jaguar, commanded by Lieutenant-Commander L. R. K. Tyrwhitt, sailed from [Malta](#) to find the [Kandahar](#) by midnight and with orders to be clear of the area by daylight. Though assisted by an aircraft fitted with radar, the Jaguar did not find the [Kandahar](#) until 4 a.m. on 20 December. The sea was still so rough that the Jaguar could not go alongside without risk of serious damage, so she lay off while the [Kandahar's](#) crew swam to her, after which the wreck was sunk. The Jaguar got safely back to [Malta](#), having saved eight officers and 166 ratings.

When the Neptune struck the fourth mine the order was given to abandon ship. A heavy sea was running and the men had to go overboard. The ship sank within a few minutes, and death came quickly to most of her company. Many perished while trying to swim to the crippled [Kandahar](#). According to the sole survivor of the

Neptune, Leading Seaman John Walton, an English rating, only sixteen men were left afloat on a raft when daylight came. They included Captain O'Connor and two other officers and one New Zealand rating, Able Seaman J. B. Quinn, of Kaiwarra, [Wellington](#), who died on 20 December. One after another the little party

¹ HMS Penelope: Report of Proceedings to Rear-Admiral, Seventh Cruiser Squadron.

succumbed to exhaustion and thirst. Captain O'Connor died on the fourth day. Finally, Walton was left all alone on the raft, from which he was rescued by an Italian destroyer on Christmas Eve. He was a prisoner of war in [Italy](#) until his release in 1943, and subsequently served as a petty officer in the minesweeper Rowena in the [Mediterranean](#).

More than 750 men—150 of them New Zealanders—died when HMS Neptune went down in the [Mediterranean](#) on that stormy morning. The names of two officers and 148 ratings furnished by far the longest list of casualties in the war record of the Royal New Zealand Navy, then but lately come of age. The Neptune was not a New Zealand ship as were her sisters, [Achilles](#) and [Leander](#), but her loss brought grief to many homes in every city and major town in the Dominion, as well as to country villages from [Auckland](#) to Southland. Seventeen South Africans and two Australians died with their comrades from Great Britain and New Zealand.

The Neptune was the thirteenth British cruiser and the [Kandahar](#) the fifty-ninth British destroyer lost during the first twenty-eight months of the war. Within a few hours of their being mined, the [Queen Elizabeth](#) and Valiant, the two remaining battleships in the [Mediterranean Fleet](#), were severely damaged in harbour at [Alexandria](#) by 'human torpedoes' and put out of action for long periods of time. These disastrous episodes followed closely after the crippling of the United States Pacific Fleet at [Pearl Harbour](#) and the sinking of the Prince of Wales and Repulse off [Malaya](#). It was a time of crisis in our fortunes.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 14 – ANTI-SUBMARINE POLICY

CHAPTER 14

Anti-Submarine Policy

FROM time to time during the pre-war years the Admiralty had issued memoranda regarding the provision of auxiliary minesweeping and anti-submarine vessels in the event of a war in [Europe](#) or with [Japan](#). In February 1939 it indicated that New Zealand should provide for twenty-four such vessels. The reply was made that shortly before the international crisis of September 1938 the New Zealand Naval Board had reviewed its mobilisation instructions and the policy relating to the provision of auxiliary minesweeping and anti-submarine vessels 'in the light of Dominion local defence requirements and the capacity of the shipping industry to meet demands made upon it in the event of an emergency'.

The Naval Board said that it was not in a position to meet the manpower requirements of a policy based on the Admiralty memoranda without drawing on active-service and trained reservist personnel 'who should be made available for more important service elsewhere'. New Zealand ports would be kept open by a flotilla of auxiliary vessels to be operated 'in accordance with the dictates of the general situation'. The number would, at first, be six, later increased to nine, armed with 4-inch guns and depth-charges. They would serve a dual purpose as minesweeping and anti-submarine vessels, but they would not be fitted with asdics, 'unless the circumstances call for such action at a later stage.' This policy would be applied 'whether or not a war eventuates in the [Far East](#)'.¹

The Naval Board's policy was dictated largely by the scarcity of suitable vessels due to the serious decline in coastal shipping. But, even so, for more than nine months after the outbreak of war this limited scheme fell far short of fulfilment. It is fair to add that the Naval Board was gravely handicapped by lack of staff, particularly by a total lack of officers with expert knowledge of minesweeping and anti-submarine warfare. Thus, in June 1940, when a German raider laid an extensive minefield in the approaches to [Hauraki Gulf](#), there were only four aged fishing trawlers in commission as minesweepers. A month earlier, on taking over the duties of Chief of Naval Staff, Commodore Parry had warned the Government of

¹ Naval Board memorandum to Admiralty, 20 February 1939.

this very danger and urged the provision of more minesweepers. Steps to that end were taken during the next few weeks.

In August 1940 Parry directed the Government's attention to the 'lamentable unpreparedness of New Zealand to meet attacks on shipping or minelaying by enemy submarines.' He pointed out that, though [Germany](#) and [Italy](#) had no [Pacific](#) possessions, there was little to prevent their using unfrequented anchorages as bases and the possibility of [Japan's](#) conniving at the use of her islands could not be overlooked. It was unlikely, though not impossible, that German or Italian submarines would appear in New Zealand waters. But if [Japan](#) entered the war, her submarines could operate here from their own bases in the mandated islands. Their probable plan would be to attack shipping in focal areas and lay mines off harbour entrances, but the possibility of attacks on shipping at undefended roadstead ports had also to be considered.

Shallow water would prevent submerged submarines entering [Auckland](#), [Wellington](#), and [Lyttelton](#) harbours, where the existing defences were probably sufficient to prevent their entering on the surface. The entrances to [Hauraki Gulf](#) confined shipping to three channels, each approximately ten miles wide. The depths were suitable for submarines to operate submerged and lay contact mines. Under present circumstances shipping was confined to one channel ¹ which, therefore, was not only extremely vulnerable but relatively congested. It was of the utmost importance that these approaches should be kept free from submarine activities since [Auckland](#) was a major port as well as the naval base.

The immediate approach to [Wellington](#) was not ideal for mining owing to bad weather and strong tides which were likely to break mines adrift from their moorings. The east and west approaches to Cook Strait, however, were important focal areas for coastal and overseas shipping. The approaches to [Lyttelton](#) were suitable for submerged submarines for a distance of 40 miles from Godley Head. The direct route from [Lyttelton](#) to Otago was all in mineable waters. The approaches to [Timaru](#) and [Oamaru](#) were too shallow for submerged submarines, but mines could be laid from the surface and there was nothing to prevent even a submarine shelling either of these ports, or Dunedin from the southward. Other 'outports' were similarly

liable to attack, those used by overseas shipping being probably the most tempting targets. Submarines could work submerged in Foveaux Strait, but the strong tidal stream would greatly reduce the efficiency of contact mines. North Cape and East Cape were also vital focal areas for shipping.

Apart from normal harbour defences such as guns and searchlights, fixed anti-submarine defences included indicator loops which

¹ Because of the minefields laid by the German raider [Orion](#) on 13 June 1940.

gave an indication that a vessel had passed over a predetermined line; harbour defence asdics which required skilled operation; controlled mines which were exploded by a shore operator as a submarine crossed the line; and anti-submarine booms. All these required large quantities of expensive material and, with the possible exception of the asdics, could be installed only from specially equipped vessels.

Mobile defence against submarines was provided by patrol vessels fitted with asdic and depth-charges, or with the latter only. Aircraft also had considerable anti-submarine value. The only effective means of locating a submerged submarine was the asdic, which gave a fairly accurate range and bearing and had a normal effective range of some 2500 yards.

But there were no asdic-fitted vessels in New Zealand, no asdic equipment, and no trained SD ratings. ¹ The only vessels fitted with depth-charges were the minesweeping trawlers which were too slow to be of any real value against submarines. The few available aircraft, which were not designed or trained for the work, could carry out anti-submarine patrols, but they were not sufficient to protect ships from attack by submerged submarines.

Three minesweeping or anti-submarine vessels were building in [Scotland](#), but their delivery was uncertain. Commodore Parry suggested that, if some of the local defence vessels building in [Australia](#) could be got, the demand for coastal vessels would be reduced. The building of trawlers in New Zealand was being considered,

but these would make indifferent anti-submarine vessels because of their slow speed and it would be a long time before they materialised. Inquiries were also being made into the possibilities of fast motor-boats which should be fitted with asdics. The hulls could be built in New Zealand and the engines imported.

The entry of [Japan](#) into the war would be followed sooner or later by the arrival of submarines in these waters. For this eventuality New Zealand was totally unprepared, except that certain aircraft could carry out anti-submarine patrols of the coast. It was essential that shipping should be given some measure of anti-submarine protection from the time of reaching the focal areas on the inward passage till it sailed laden for overseas. Parry recommended that, on the first indication of a submarine in New Zealand waters, all secondary ports should be closed to overseas ships and the sailings of coastal vessels suspended until their protection was arranged unless heavy losses of these ships could be accepted.

At the beginning of September 1940 Commodore Parry visited [Melbourne](#), where he discussed with the Australian Chief of the Naval Staff strategical dispositions and operations in the event of

¹ SD: Submarine Detector.

war with [Japan](#), as well as local defence and the protection of shipping. It was agreed that if a raider appeared again in the [Tasman Sea](#) the operations of Australian and New Zealand forces should be co-ordinated. Australian minesweeping and anti-submarine forces were being developed as quickly as possible, the intention being to work up to a total of 23 anti-submarine and 24 minesweeping vessels for local defence, as well as a fast minesweeping flotilla of light ships and an anti-submarine striking force of three vessels. This was being done by building and requisitioning ships. [Australia](#) had decided that it was no good building trawlers. Such vessels were taken up and used because they made passable minesweeping and anti-submarine vessels in the absence of anything better.

Commodore Parry considered that New Zealand was liable to the same scale of attack on shipping as [Australia](#). He therefore recommended that the anti-submarine forces of the Dominion should comprise fast motor anti-submarine boats as a striking

force working from defended ports, six at [Auckland](#) and six in the Cook Strait area; and six local defence vessels for local convoy and patrol duties, three at [Auckland](#) and three in the Cook Strait area. All the existing and projected minesweepers should be fitted with asdics to enable them to work as anti-submarine vessels if necessary and when not minesweeping.

The local defence vessels being built in [Australia](#) ¹ were well suited to New Zealand requirements. If orders were placed now, none would be ready until the end of 1941 at the earliest. It was therefore proposed that the Admiralty be asked to take over the three vessels under construction in the [United Kingdom](#) for New Zealand and in return release as soon as possible three of the local defence vessels building in [Australia](#) for the Royal Navy. ² Three others should be ordered in [Australia](#) for early delivery.

The disadvantages of fast motor-boats were that as asdic-fitted anti-submarine craft they could work in the open sea only in fair weather, they had limited endurance at high speed and poor habitability and could not cover the whole coast. It was roughly estimated that two units of six boats each, with the necessary bases, would involve a capital expenditure of more than £1,000,000 apart from the costs of maintenance. The hulls could be built in New Zealand but the engines, armament, and other equipment would have to be obtained abroad, possibly from the [United States](#).

¹ Local defence vessels; 840 tons displacement; twin-screw, oil-burning; speed about 16 knots; one 4-inch gun and one 12-pounder; 25 depth-charges; complement, 4 officers and 58 ratings; cost, approximately £250,000 each.

² When this suggestion was made to the Admiralty in November 1940, the High Commissioner was informed that the Australian-built vessels were needed urgently for service in the [Middle East](#) and could not be spared for New Zealand. The matter would be reconsidered if, in April 1941, the situation became acute.

The training of SD ratings and anti-submarine courses for officers could be undertaken in [Australia](#). If an anti-submarine attack teacher were obtained from

England, it would be possible to train officers in New Zealand. A staff officer at Navy Office, [Wellington](#), would be in general charge of anti-submarine matters, the Admiralty to be asked to have an RNZNVR officer now in England trained for that purpose. In the meantime, the Australian Naval Board had agreed that Commander H. M. Newcomb, RN, Officer-in-Charge of the Anti-Submarine School at [Sydney](#), should come to New Zealand to give advice on anti-submarine policy.

Approval in principle to these proposals was given on 16 October 1940 by War Cabinet, which also authorised the procurement of twelve asdic sets, at a cost of approximately £18,000, to be fitted in the auxiliary anti-submarine vessels.

The Admiralty selected Lieutenant-Commander J. A. Smyth, RNZNVR, ¹ to undergo a long anti-submarine specialist course in HMS Nimrod. He qualified in February 1941, arrived in New Zealand in May 1941, and assumed duty as Staff Officer (Anti-Submarine).

The proposals were referred to the Admiralty, which replied on 1 December 1940 that the best means of defence in New Zealand waters against submarine attack were considered to be (a) convoy escort by ships of the corvette or trawler type and adequate air reconnaissance, and (b) local defence vessels of the trawler type to patrol the approaches to the four main ports. Experience in Home waters suggested six for [Auckland](#), five each for [Wellington](#) and [Lyttelton](#), and three for Dunedin. It would be most economical if both the escorts and the local defence vessels were dual purpose A/S M/S ships. It was not thought that a striking force of fast anti-submarine motor-boats would be of value. It seemed very unlikely that Japanese submarines would carry mines as far as New Zealand, where the principal mining danger appeared to be an occasional surface raider. The Admiralty agreed that, in view of the anticipated scale of attack and the navigational difficulties, elaborate and costly fixed anti-submarine defences for New Zealand ports were unnecessary.

In a later message the Admiralty said that if it was desired to proceed with motor-boats for anti-submarine work it was thought the Fairmile type was the most suitable. Supplies of engines, which were manufactured in the [United States](#), and of equipment could not, however, be made before the second half of 1941.

A more urgent note was struck in March 1941 when the Prime Minister informed the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs that

¹ Commander J. A. Smyth, VRD, RNZNVR; born NZ 13 Mar 1908; sales manager; joined RNVR (NZ) as Ordinary Seaman, Oct 1928; Lieutenant, May 1932; commanded HM Minesweeper Chestnut, 1940–41.

the Government, 'after conferring with the Chief of Naval Staff, are much concerned as to the ability of New Zealand to meet the submarine menace which has come closer to New Zealand in consequence of the changed situation with regard to [Japan](#).' New Zealand would shortly have in commission twelve minesweeping vessels which were to be fitted with asdics, but this number was still seven short of that recommended by the Admiralty. The High Commissioner was renewing the request that the Admiralty should take the three small vessels (Moa, Kiwi, and Tui) building at Leith for New Zealand in exchange for three of the local defence vessels building in [Australia](#) for the Royal Navy. If the Admiralty agreed to this, the [New Zealand Government](#) still felt that something more should be done to bring the total number of A/S M/S vessels up to nineteen, if not by the release of a further three or four Australian-built vessels, then by the Admiralty sending anti-submarine vessels to the New Zealand Station.

Four weeks later the High Commissioner informed the Prime Minister that the Admiralty needed a flotilla of fast minesweepers in [Malaya](#) and, as the Australian-built ships were better suited for that purpose, it preferred that New Zealand should have the three vessels building at Leith. A number of Admiralty-designed trawlers somewhat similar to them were being built and as soon as four could be spared they would be made available to New Zealand, say about October 1941. ¹ This offer was accepted by the Government on 5 July 1941.

Taking account of the report of Commander Newcomb on his expert study of the anti-submarine needs of the four main ports, Commodore Parry, on 27 March 1941, recommended for the underwater defences of [Auckland](#) an indicator loop system ² to cover the area through which shipping passed on entering and leaving [Auckland](#) and a minefield to obstruct the remaining approach. The initial cost of the [Auckland](#) proposals was estimated at £160,000 and annual recurring costs at £10,000. No loop

system or mining was recommended for [Wellington](#) or [Lyttelton](#).

The minesweepers, all to be fitted with asdics, would normally be disposed as follows: Five vessels as a mobile M/S A/S flotilla ([25 Minesweeping Flotilla](#)); three others at [Auckland](#), two at [Wellington](#), and two at [Lyttelton](#). In addition, striking forces of anti-submarine motor-boats were recommended, six at [Auckland](#), four at [Wellington](#), and two at [Lyttelton](#). The Australian Naval Board

¹ These were the Scottish Isles class trawlers Inchkeith, Killegray, Sanda, and Scarba. They arrived at [Auckland](#) in August–September 1942.

² The indicator loop consists of a length of cable laid on the seabed, its ends being connected on shore to an instrument designed to record a minute current. A submarine, like all steel vessels, has magnetic properties and when crossing the loop sets up a current which is detected by the shore recorder. This is known as 'obtaining a signature'.

had undertaken to provide for the initial training of all officers and ratings at the Anti-Submarine School, [Sydney](#), where a number had already qualified.

These proposals were approved by War Cabinet on 4 April 1941. On the same day Commodore Parry had addressed yet another comprehensive paper to the Minister of Defence in which he dealt with the general principles of submarine detection and destruction and summarised his anti-submarine proposals. Immediate steps were taken at this eleventh hour to implement this policy; but it was apparent that months must elapse before it could be brought into operation.

Nine months earlier the Australian naval authorities had informed the New Zealand Naval Board that a factory with a capacity of 1000 mines a year on one shift had begun production. An order for 300 mines could be accepted but delivery would be dependent upon their own and Admiralty requirements. HMAS Bungaree, ¹ the only minelayer [Australia](#) possessed, could probably be spared to lay the mines, but it was unlikely she could make more than one trip to New Zealand.

On 7 April 1941 the New Zealand Naval Board made a signal to the [Australian Commonwealth Naval Board](#) requesting the manufacture of 300 mines. A reply was

received on 28 June that the order could 'probably be met any time after 1 January 1942.' In the course of correspondence about the delivery of the mines, the establishment of a depot and the use of the minelayer, the Naval Board said it was not intended to lay the mines 'until after the outbreak of a Far Eastern War.'²

When the plans and estimates for the construction of a mine depot at Kauri Point on the north shore of [Auckland](#) harbour were produced by the Public Works Department in October 1941, they exceeded the estimate of cost already approved by more than £7000, mainly because it had been found necessary to carve 26 chains of roadway along the steep hillsides to give access to the depot. The additional expenditure was approved in War Cabinet on 21 November 1941 – less than three weeks before [Pearl Harbour](#). In the meantime, Lieutenant Haynes, OBE, RN (retd), Armament Supply Officer at Kauri Point, had been appointed Inspector of Naval Ordnance and Officer-in-Charge of the embryonic mine depot.³

On 27 November 1941 the Prime Minister informed the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs that the Government could not discharge its defence responsibilities to [Fiji](#) unless the Viti was placed

¹ HMAS Bungaree, a converted merchant cargo vessel of 3043 tons gross register, built at Dundee in 1937 for the Adelaide Steamship Company Limited.

² Naval Secretary's memorandum of 7 July 1941 to Navy Department, [Melbourne](#).

³ Lieutenant H. A. Haynes, OBE, RN (retd); born England, Mar 1883; Commissioned Gunner, HMS Diomedé 1925–27; retired Nov 1927 as Lieutenant.

under the control of the Naval Board for uninterrupted employment in Fijian waters. On the day after [Pearl Harbour](#), the Governor of [Fiji](#) reported that the Viti was being sent to New Zealand for an overhaul and the fitting of anti-submarine equipment. She had been formally offered to the Admiralty, which requested the Naval Board to assume operational control of the vessel. She arrived at [Auckland](#) on

19 December 1941 and went on to [Lyttelton](#) for her refit. At that critical time it was necessary that another vessel should be stationed in Fijian waters, and accordingly HMNZS Gale was hastily got ready and sailed for [Suva](#), where she arrived on Christmas Day.

It had been decided, in the event of war with [Japan](#), that trans- [Tasman](#) shipping was to be sailed in convoy. However, owing to more urgent demands on the all-too-few cruisers available for escort duties, this arrangement was short-lived and only two such convoys appear to have been sailed. Anti-submarine escort for them in New Zealand waters was provided by the anti-submarine minesweepers Rata and Muritai.

They sailed from [Wellington](#) on 6 January 1942 to meet the first convoy of eight ships which had left [Sydney](#) on the 3rd escorted by HMAS [Adelaide](#).¹ The Muritai was delayed on passage to assist the [Lyttelton](#) floating crane Rapaki which was in difficulties in heavy weather off Stephens Island,² but she and the Rata took station on the convoy to the westward of Farewell Spit, [Wellington](#) being reached on 10 January.

Two days later the Rata and Muritai sailed with a convoy of four ships bound to [Sydney](#). A strong north-west gale was blowing in Cook Strait, and by the time the convoy was off Stephens Island the Rata was two miles and the Muritai six miles astern. They were then ordered by HMAS [Adelaide](#) to return to [Wellington](#). On 15 January the Rata and Muritai gave anti-submarine escort to the [United States](#) transport Republic, 17,886 tons, from [Wellington](#) to a position nine miles south-east from Cape Palliser.

Both ships went to [Suva](#) later in the month and the Gale returned to New Zealand for a refit and the installation of asdic. HMNZS Moa arrived at [Suva](#) from the [United Kingdom](#) on 4 February 1942 and took the place of the Rata, which returned to [Wellington](#). The Matai, followed by the danlayers Kaiwaka and Coastguard, joined company with the Moa and Muritai at [Suva](#) during March.

The Moa was the first of the new A/S M/S vessels built in [Scotland](#) for the Royal New Zealand Navy. She was launched at

¹ Six ships in this convoy were on passage to the Panama Canal, one to [Wellington](#), and one to [Auckland](#).

² The *Rapaki*, which had been requisitioned on behalf of the British Ministry of War Transport, was on her way to [Suez](#) via [Australia](#). She put back to [Wellington](#) and thence to [Lyttelton](#), but later was used to handle heavy lifts in American transports at [Wellington](#). At the beginning of 1943 she was sent to [Noumea](#) for a similar purpose and returned to New Zealand in November 1945.

Leith on 15 April 1941 by Lady Fergusson, wife of a former Governor-General of New Zealand, General Sir Charles Fergusson, who was present at the ceremony. The *Kiwi* was launched on 7 July 1941 by Lady Galway, wife of the late Governor-General Viscount Galway, and the *Tui* on 26 August 1941 by the Countess Jellicoe, widow of Admiral of the Fleet Earl Jellicoe, also a former Governor-General of New Zealand. ¹

The *Moa* was commissioned on 12 August 1941 by Lieutenant-Commander Connolly, DSC, RNZNVR, ² and sailed from Greenock on 1 November as an additional escort for a North [Atlantic](#) convoy. She arrived at [Suva](#) on 4 February 1942 and remained there on patrol duty until 6 April, when she sailed for [Auckland](#), arriving there four days later. The *Kiwi* was commissioned on 20 October 1941 by Lieutenant-Commander Bridson, DSO, DSC, RNZNVR. ³ She left Greenock on New Year's Day in company with a convoy for St. Johns, [Newfoundland](#), and arrived at [Auckland](#) on 21 May 1942.

The four vessels provided by the Admiralty, as promised in April 1941, were the *Inchkeith*, *Killegray*, *Sanda*, and *Scarba* – anti-submarine and minesweeping trawlers of the numerous Scottish Isles class. ⁴ War Cabinet approval of their purchase at an estimated price of £65,000 sterling for each ship was given on 27 January 1942. They were commissioned in October-November 1941. Lieutenant-Commander Dunnet, RNR, ⁵ was appointed in command of the *Inchkeith*, Lieutenant Bell, RNZNVR, ⁶ to the *Killegray*, Lieutenant-Commander Phipps, DSC, RNZNVR, ⁷ to the *Scarba*, and Lieutenant-Commander Mackie, RNR, ⁸ to the *Sanda*. The *Tui* was commissioned at Leith on 26 November 1941 by
Lieutenant-Com-

¹ Kiwi, Moa, Tui, corvette type, 600 tons displacement; one 4-inch gun; five light anti-aircraft guns; depth-charges; triple-expansion engines; oil-fired boilers; speed 13 knots.

² Commander P. G. Connolly, DSC, VRD, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Dunedin, 14 Nov 1899; engineer; commanding officer HMS Deodar (Channel convoys) 1940–41; HMNZS Moa 1941–43; MP for Dunedin Central.

³ Commander Gordon Bridson, DSO, DSC, VRD, RNZNVR, US Navy Cross; born [Auckland](#), 2 Dec 1909; merchant; commanded HMS Walnut (Channel convoys) 1940–41; HMNZS Kiwi 1941–44; NOC Dunedin, 1944; NOC Lyttelton, 1944–46.

⁴ Scottish Isles class; 140 built during the war; 560 tons; coal-burning boilers; triple-expansion engines; speed 10 knots; armament one 12-pounder gun and five light AA guns; depth-charges.

⁵ Lieutenant-Commander H. A. Dunnet, VRD, RNR; born NZ 8 Jan 1907; master mariner; commanded HMNZS Inchkeith 1941–43; Sanda 1944; Kiwi 1945–46.

⁶ Lieutenant-Commander A. A. Bell, VRD, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), Apr 1907; builder; commanded HMNZS Killegray 1941–43; Kiwi 1944; LST 3019 (East Indies) 1944–45.

⁷ Captain P. Phipps, DSC and bar, VRD, [RNZN](#), m.i.d., US Navy Cross; born Milton, 7 Jun 1909; bank clerk; RNZNVR 1928–46; commanded HMS Bay (Channel convoys) 1940–41; HMNZS Scarba 1941–42; Moa 1943; Matai and Arabis (SO 25 M/S Flotilla) 1944–45; transferred [RNZN](#) Feb 1946; CO HMNZS Philomel, 1946; executive officer HMNZS Bellona, 1948; CO HMNZS Tamaki, 1949–50; naval assistant, Second Nava Member, 1950–53; Captain, 30 Jun 1952.

⁸ Lieutenant-Commander N. L. Mackie, RNR; born [Scotland](#), Jul 1901; master mariner and farmer; commanded HMNZS Rata 1941; Sanda 1941–44.

mander

Hilliard, DSC, RNZNVR. ¹ The subordinate officers and the ratings in these ships, as in the Kiwi and Moa, were largely New Zealanders.

All five ships sailed from Greenock on 15 March 1942 as escorts for an [Atlantic](#) convoy (ONS 76) and after calling at St. Johns, [Newfoundland](#), arrived at Bermuda on 8 April. During a stay of twelve days repairs were made to the Inchkeith and Killegray, which had been damaged in collisions. The flotilla spent four days at [Kingston, Jamaica](#), and a week in the Panama Canal Zone and arrived at San Pedro, [California](#), on 26 May 1942. With the addition of two American patrol vessels, the New Zealand flotilla formed an anti-submarine escort for a convoy of ten [US Navy](#) tankers from San Pedro to [Pearl Harbour](#), where they arrived on 22 June.

With the exception of the Killegray, which was detained for major repairs to her boiler, the flotilla sailed on 6 July for Palmyra Island, whence it escorted the [United States](#) transport Majaba to [Fanning Island](#) and [Suva](#). On passage from [Suva](#) the Sanda and Scarba ran short of coal about 300 miles from New Zealand and were taken in tow by the Tui and Inchkeith, the flotilla arriving at [Auckland](#) on 4 August. As very little coal was available at [Pearl Harbour](#), the Killegray left that port for [Suva](#) on 29 August in tow of the Dutch motor-vessel Japara and finally arrived at [Auckland](#) on 16 September.

Drawings and specifications of the Fairmile anti-submarine motorboat ² developed by the Fairmile Marine Company were received from England in April 1941. After discussions between the Ship-building and Repairs Committee and [Auckland](#) boat-building firms, it was agreed that these craft could be built in New Zealand, the engines and other equipment and prefabricated parts being ordered from England. On 17 December 1941 War Cabinet approved the recommendation of the Supply Council that twelve Fairmile motorboats should be built, and the orders were distributed among four [Auckland](#) firms. The estimated cost of each vessel was £35,000, making a total of £420,000 for the twelve.

Because of delays in the delivery of prefabricated components, the first of which arrived at [Auckland](#) in February 1942, the difficulty in getting supplies of first-class kauri timber, which was used for the frames and deck planking, and a serious

shortage of skilled labour, it was not possible to achieve maximum production until July 1942, when a 54-hour week was instituted. The first Fairmile,

¹ Captain J. G. Hilliard, DSC, VRD, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 15 Jan 1908; company director; CO HMS Blackthorn (Channel convoys) 1940–41; Tui 1941–44; executive officer Philomel, 1944–45; CO Auckland Division RNZNVR, 1946; Captain, 31 Dec 1951.

² Fairmile motor-boat; length, 112 ft; breadth, 17 ft 10 in; mean draught, 4 ft 10 in; 80 tons; two Hall-Scott 12-cylinder petrol engines, each of 630 horse-power; speed, 18 ½ knots.

ML 403, was launched on 29 September 1942 and commissioned on 21 October. Thereafter the completed boats were delivered at short intervals until the last of them, ML 411, was commissioned on 20 December 1943. But by that time it was fairly evident that these expensive craft were not needed in the anti-submarine organisation in New Zealand waters. They were formed into the 80th and 81st Motor Launch Flotillas and early in 1944 went to the Solomon Islands, where they did good service under the operational control of

comsopac

(Commander South Pacific).

When Japan entered the war in December 1941 there were no fixed underwater defences against submarines in any New Zealand harbour. At the beginning of 1941 War Cabinet had approved the construction of an anti-boat boom across the channel into [Auckland](#) harbour at an estimated cost of £30,000. The possibility of providing steel-wire nets as a counter to enemy small craft was examined, but it was thought that it would be difficult to obtain the wire to make the nets. Because of the danger of attack by midget submarines such as the Japanese had employed at [Pearl Harbour](#), it was decided that the hardwood piles in the boom should be spaced not more than five feet apart. The estimated additional cost of £15,000 was approved in War Cabinet on 30 December 1941.

Meanwhile arrangements were being made to lay the anti-submarine indicator loops authorised in April 1941 across the [Hauraki Gulf](#) channels. The small steamer

Kaitoa ¹ was selected for the purpose, but later was found to be unsuitable for conversion. The Australian naval authorities then agreed to make their cable-laying vessel Mernoo ² available and it was decided to charter her. The Mernoo arrived at [Auckland](#) on 27 February 1942, completed the laying of the indicator loops on 29 March, and sailed two days later on her return to [Melbourne](#).

At the end of December 1941 the Naval Board had considered plans for an anti-boat boom of piles and an anti-torpedo net across the outer harbour at [Wellington](#) at an estimated cost of £285,000. The time required to carry out the work was stated to be two years. The Board was disturbed by the estimate of cost and the difficulty of getting supplies of steel wire for the net and, on 19 January 1942, it informed the Minister of Defence that it was intended to construct only the eastern section of the piled boom. War Cabinet approved the proposed expenditure on this project on 19 March 1942.

A month earlier the Commander-in-Chief United States Navy had intimated to the Australian and New Zealand Naval Boards through

¹ Kaitoa, twin-screw steamer; 309 tons gross register; built [Glasgow](#), 1909, for the Anchor Shipping and Foundry Co. Ltd., of Nelson.

² Mernoo, cargo steamer; 2417 tons gross register; built Newcastle-on-Tyne, 1926, for the Melbourne Steam Ship Co. Ltd., of [Melbourne](#).

comanzac

¹ that 'serious consideration must be given at once' to the preparation of [Suva](#) and [Auckland](#) as fleet operating bases. This caused a proliferation of plans, which included anti-submarine and other fixed defences for both ports.

The New Zealand Naval Board's proposals for [Auckland](#) included an anti-torpedo net boom complete with gate and gate vessel to close the gap of 700 yards in the anti-boat piled obstruction then under construction, as well as additional indicator loops in the outer channels. Other underwater defences would be the independent and controlled minefields already planned as part of the anti-invasion measures.

The United States Navy Department agreed to supply an anti-torpedo net boom with gate and gate vessel to cover the full width of the approach channel to the inner harbour. It asked that the scheme for a fleet anchorage inside a line from Tiri Tiri to [Rangitoto](#) be completed to the extent necessary to give underwater protection to ships so anchored, and that the proposed mine defences at the Bay of Islands and Great Barrier Island be installed to enable those anchorages to be used. The United States Navy Department also indicated that it was proposed to use the [Wellington](#) area for the training of an amphibious division of Marines. Underwater defences would be needed in [Wellington](#) harbour and Queen Charlotte Sound for the protection of an estimated maximum of twelve transports and twenty other large vessels.

At the direction of the Chief of Naval Staff a comprehensive scheme for strengthening the naval defences of [Wellington](#) was prepared. This comprised anti-submarine fixed defences in the main channel, an extension of the anti-boat piled boom to cover the western side of the outer harbour, a net boom with gate and gate vessel, anti-torpedo nets to protect the floating dock and Aotea Quay, anti-torpedo baffles to guard the other wharves, as well as the shore stations for the officers and men to operate the defences. The erection of a radar station at the harbour entrance was also recommended. This scheme, estimated to cost £652,500 in capital charges and £11,050 a year for wages, was approved in War Cabinet on 25 April 1942.

The underwater and other defences to cover the proposed fleet anchorage in Queen Charlotte Sound were agreed upon with the [United States](#) naval authorities after a brisk exchange of lengthy signals with Washington. As well as the necessary shore stations, the defences included anti-submarine fixed defences in the main entrance to the sound and in Tory Channel, boom defences and controlled minefields in the former and an observation minefield in Tory Channel. The estimated cost of the whole scheme was £405,100,

¹ comanzac: United States Commander of Anzac Area and Forces.

for which approval in principle was given by War Cabinet on 4 June 1942. To provide the data necessary for the proper siting of the various underwater defences, the information on the Admiralty charts was checked and supplemented by an

extensive survey of Queen Charlotte Sound and Tory Channel by Lieutenant-Commander Lowry, RN, ¹ in the launch Elaine.

Much of the material and equipment for the net booms at [Auckland](#) and [Wellington](#) was supplied by the United States Navy Department on a lease-lend basis. The preparation and installation of the booms were carried out under the superintendence of Commander H. M. Montague, OBE, RN, Staff Officer (Boom Defence).

For various reasons, including the shortage of manpower and material, there were delays in the construction of the boom depots at [Auckland](#) and [Wellington](#). Thus, when an American naval party under Lieutenant-Commander J. A. Rylander, USNR, started on 20 July 1942 to rig the anti-torpedo boom at [Auckland](#), Commander Montague was moved to protest that 'while it is gratifying that the actual work should have been started, the feeble share borne hitherto by the R.N.Z. Naval Service is deplorable ... I would urge that all possible steps be taken to hasten the construction of the boom depots and the provision of boats, vessels and men so that we can take a worthy share in furnishing our own defence instead of sitting back and letting the Americans labour alone and unaided.'²

The Auckland net boom and anti-torpedo baffles were completed about the end of September 1942. No other vessel being available, the [United States](#) net tender [Ebony](#), ³ which had laid the nets, was used as the gate opening vessel until she was called away early in January 1943 for duty at [Noumea](#). In the meantime the aged steamer [Claymore](#) was being repaired and fitted out as a gate vessel at a cost of more than £10,000. It was decided that the gate would have to remain open until she was ready, a tug or launch being used to close it in an emergency. The Napier dredge [Whakarire](#) was hired in April 1943 and also fitted out as a gate vessel. It was not until October 1943 that the [Claymore](#) and [Whakarire](#) were commissioned and commenced duty at the main gate of the boom.

The anti-boat piled obstruction across the outer harbour at [Wellington](#) took nine months to complete. The anti-torpedo net to protect the floating dock and Aotea Quay (which was the principal berth used by American transports and supply ships) was laid in

¹ Commander C. C. Lowry, RN, m.i.d.; entered RN, 1926; joined survey service, 1934; commanded HMNZS Lachlan 1952–54.

² Minute of Staff Officer (Boom Defence) to Naval Board, 23 July 1942. Actually, the estimates for the [Auckland](#) boom depot were not submitted to the Government till 19 July. They were approved in War Cabinet three days later and those for the [Wellington](#) depot in August.

³ Ebony, boom defence net tender; 700 tons displacement; diesel-electric propulsion; speed 14 knots; one 3-inch AA gun.

January 1943. In the same month a start was made with the heavy indicator net boom across the main channel and it was completed some months later. Here again the difficulty was to find suitable craft to act as gate vessels.

With the approval of War Cabinet, the lighters Matata and Matuku for [Wellington](#) and Ruru and Titi for Queen Charlotte Sound were requisitioned from the Gisborne Lightering and Stevedoring Company after a cursory inspection. They were towed to [Wellington](#), where, four months later, a survey revealed that they were 'full of decay' and had other serious defects, making them quite unfit for service as gate vessels. It was ultimately decided to return them to their owners. ¹ The minesweeping trawler Futurist was converted into a gate vessel but it was October 1943 before she was commissioned for that service.

The auxiliary scow Vesper ² was chartered from her [Auckland](#) owners to lay the cables for the additional anti-submarine fixed defences at [Auckland](#) and those at [Wellington](#) and Queen Charlotte Sound. In addition to the indicator loops, two harbour defence asdics were laid at [Wellington](#) and four at [Auckland](#). The American loop equipment installed at [Wellington](#) was replaced subsequently by instruments of Admiralty pattern. Owing to delay in completing the control and power rooms, the [Wellington](#) station did not go into full operation until the end of April 1943. The [Auckland](#) stations at Takapuna and [Motutapu](#) were commissioned in November 1943.

Sixteen harbour defence motor-launches purchased in the [United States](#) were commissioned between March 1943 and March 1944 and operated as the 124th and 125th Motor Launch Flotillas, based on [Auckland](#) and [Wellington](#) respectively. They

were equipped with depth-charges and maintained anti-submarine patrols inside the indicator loops. Though they were not tested by enemy action at any time, the anti-submarine fixed defences at [Wellington](#) and [Auckland](#) attained a high degree of efficiency.

¹ When the Matuku and Ruru were being towed to [Gisborne](#) in August 1943 they broke adrift from the tug and the former drifted ashore and became a total loss. The Ruru was picked up and towed first to [Napier](#) and thence to [Gisborne](#), where the owners refused to accept delivery. The Titi broke adrift from her moorings in [Wellington](#) harbour in September 1943 and went aground at Kaiwarra. She was refloated but, being water-logged, could not be slipped for repairs and was beached in Evans Bay. The owners claimed £9723 but, after lengthy negotiations with the Treasury, agreed to accept £8250 for the four lighters. This was approved in War Cabinet on 24 December 1943. The Auditor-General in his annual report drew attention to the 'very unsatisfactory nature of this transaction' and said the matter should have been referred to a magistrate for settlement. In a report to the Minister of Finance, Treasury said that Navy Office appeared to have been negligent in not ascertaining the true condition of the lighters before they were requisitioned and dilatory in their subsequent decisions and actions. Navy Office held that responsibility for requisitioning the vessels after a survey at [Gisborne](#) had revealed their poor condition rested with the [Marine Department](#). The Matata was sold in November 1944 for £250.

² Vesper, wooden auxiliary-screw scow; 47 tons register; built [Auckland](#), 1902; owned by Parry Bros., [Auckland](#).

Work on the underwater defences in Queen Charlotte Sound had barely started in the latter part of 1942 when ComSOPAC indicated that, because of the changed situation in the [Pacific](#), it was unlikely that the sound would be used as a fleet anchorage. Accordingly, with the approval of War Cabinet, the scheme was drastically modified. Work on the boom defence project was stopped and the proposed minefields were cancelled. The indicator loops of the anti-submarine fixed defences were laid in the main entrance to the sound and the control station built, but the instruments were not installed. These and other works had been completed when, in November 1943, with the concurrence of ComSOPAC, it was decided not to proceed any further with the Queen Charlotte Sound defences on which about

£96,000 had been spent. The question of charging the cost of the works, less any residual value, to the [United States](#) authorities on a reverse lease-lend or cash basis was left to the Treasury.

The underwater defences planned for [Lyttelton](#) were an anti-torpedo net boom to protect the inner harbour, a controlled minefield in the main entrance, and a series of indicator loops and harbour defence asdics to cover the seaward approaches to the port. In June 1942 these proposals were submitted to ComSOPAC, who referred them to Washington. The United States Navy Department, however, was reluctant to provide the considerable quantity of loop material needed. The anti-submarine fixed defences, as well as the controlled minefield, were cancelled but, following the approval of War Cabinet in January 1943, the anti-torpedo boom was rigged to cover the entrance to the inner harbour. This was worked from shore stations and came into operation on 28 May 1943. In less than six months, however, it ceased working and the boom remained open till July 1944, when it was dismantled.

The first officers and ratings for anti-submarine duties, twelve in all, were trained in HMAS Rushcutter at [Sydney](#). Subsequently, instruction was started at an improvised school at [Auckland](#), but no material was then available for demonstration. In September 1942 an anti-submarine training establishment, known as the Naval Electrical School to disguise its activities, was opened on the foreshore at [Petone](#), Lieutenant Berry, RNZNVR, being appointed as Officer-in-Charge.¹ This was the principal anti-submarine school and provided continuous training for about ten officers and forty ratings. The school had an attack teacher, asdic sets for demonstration purposes, procedure teachers, a cinema, loop instruction and echo-sounding equipment. A small training establishment with attack teacher and working-up organisation was maintained at [Auckland](#).

¹ Lieutenant-Commander R. V. Berry, VRD, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), Dec 1914; joined RNZNVR Nov 1933; analytical chemist.

Most of the [RNZN](#) watchkeeping officers and some hundreds of ratings passed through the anti-submarine school at [Petone](#). A high degree of efficiency was maintained by the anti-submarine vessels of the Royal New Zealand Navy, most of

which operated under the orders of ComSOPAC in the South Pacific, where they achieved the destruction of one Japanese submarine and took part in the sinking of another.

Authority for the formation of a [Naval Auxiliary Patrol Service](#) was given by War Cabinet on 6 December 1941. The objects of the service were to assist in the protection of harbours against enemy attack, particularly by small craft, the spotting of mines dropped by parachutes, and the saving of life. The NAPS was constituted under the Naval Defence Emergency Regulations 1941 and was deemed a part of the Royal New Zealand Navy. Enlistment was open to men over the age of 16 years, but it was expressly provided that such enlistment did not absolve any person from liability for service with any of His Majesty's armed forces or from any liability to which he might be subject under the National Service Emergency Regulations 1940.

The motor-boats employed in the service were the property of the owner-members of the NAPS. Owner-masters were entered as chief petty officers and deputy skippers as petty officers. They and their crews were given a modified naval uniform. Service was honorary, but if called up for fulltime service members were to receive pay and allowances. Fuel and other stores were provided by the naval authorities for use on duty.

The [Naval Auxiliary Patrol Service](#), which was, in effect, a naval Home Guard organisation, operated under the orders of the naval officers in charge of the four main districts. The duty boats patrolled their respective harbours from sunset to sunrise daily, those at moorings being held in readiness for instant service in the event of an emergency. Instruction was given in signalling, chart work, coastal navigation, etc. Members of the NAPS showed keen interest and carried out their duties efficiently. The strength of the NAPS varied from time to time, due to men being called up for active service. Total entries were approximately 570, made up as follows: [Auckland](#) 180, [Whangarei](#) 84, [Wellington](#) 140, [Lyttelton](#) 68, and [Dunedin](#) 98. The service was disbanded early in 1944.

It was fortunate for the Allies' war effort in general and that in the [Pacific](#) in particular, that Japanese doctrine regarding the employment of submarines differed fundamentally from that of the Germans. From the outbreak of war in 1939 the German naval effort, expressed more and more in submarines, was directed against

British and Allied merchant shipping and sea communications with dire effect. In the first six months of 1942 the sinkings averaged three a day and totalled 546 vessels of 2,964,000 tons. But the Japanese submarines' share in that grim harvest was only seven ships of 31,456 tons.

At the time of [Pearl Harbour](#) the Japanese Navy possessed 60 fully operational submarines, 46 of which were of the I class and 14 of the Ro class. The former ranged from about 1500 tons to 2600 tons displacement and had a speed of from 18 to nearly 24 knots. They had a cruising range at economical speed of up to 16,000 miles. The I class submarines had from six to eight 21-inch torpedo-tubes, carried up to twenty-two torpedoes, and mounted one or two 5.5-inch or 4.7-inch guns and several light anti-aircraft guns. Many of them had a built-in hangar housing a small seaplane for reconnaissance purposes. At least five were fitted to carry a midget submarine, which was secured on deck by chocks and steel bands and four lugs with quick-release bolts. The Ro type of submarine ranged from 600 to 1000 tons, with a speed of from 16 to 19 knots, and had from four to six 21-inch torpedo tubes.

The submarines were employed primarily in fleet operations. Thus, ten to twelve I class boats, designated the Advance Expeditionary Force, took part in the attack on [Pearl Harbour](#). Three proceeded ahead of the main task force on scouting and reconnaissance duties. Five of the others carried midget submarines which were to enter [Pearl Harbour](#) after the air attack. None of the midgets survived; one of the I class boats was sunk and another damaged. Submarines scouted for the Japanese forces engaged in the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway. They also took an active part in the naval operations in the Solomon Islands, where they sank or damaged a number of American aircraft-carriers and other warships. In addition to fleet operations, Japanese submarines were constantly employed on long-distance reconnaissance missions which took them as far afield as the west coast of the [United States](#), the [Indian Ocean](#) and, on two known occasions, to the shores of New Zealand.

The months following [Pearl Harbour](#) afforded a remarkable contrast between Japanese and German submarine methods. When the [United States](#) was forced into war, an entirely new sphere of operations became wide open to German U-boats in the Western [Atlantic](#) which previously had been barred to them for political reasons. They left the convoy routes and concentrated against the unescorted and unarmed

merchant shipping in American coastal waters, where they found a rich choice of easy targets and sinkings rose alarmingly. During May 1942, 95 per cent of all U-boat sinkings of ships were in American waters. During the critical months that followed Japanese submarines made not the slightest effort to check the rapidly increasing flow of shipping as the Americans built up their island bases and lines of communication across the [Pacific](#) and made ready to strike back at the enemy from New Zealand and [Australia](#). The refrigerated cargo ships with their precious freights of vital foodstuffs from New Zealand, as well as many from [Australia](#), had already suffered severe losses from German U-boats in the [Atlantic](#), but they sailed unscathed across the [Pacific](#) to [Panama](#).

At that time New Zealand's anti-submarine defences were in an embryonic stage and the grim happenings on the [Atlantic](#) coast showed that the Americans were also ill-prepared. An all-out Japanese submarine onslaught against merchant shipping in the [Pacific](#), co-ordinated with that of the German U-boats in the [Atlantic](#), could have achieved disastrous results. Fortunately, the Japanese made no such effort and by the end of 1942, as the Allied offensive operations in the South Pacific gathered way, they were compelled to use submarines more and more to transport men and supplies in areas in which it was becoming too risky to move surface ships.

Meanwhile, American submarines were ranging far and wide in the [Pacific](#), attacking Japanese convoys and sinking ships wherever they could be found. From December 1941 to August 1945 they accounted for 1113 enemy ships totalling 4,780,000 tons, ¹ approximately 64 per cent of all Japanese shipping tonnage sunk in the [Pacific](#), and more than 80 per cent of the total merchant ship tonnage registered in [Japan](#) in 1940–41. They also sank 201 Japanese naval vessels, including 23 Japanese submarines. The achievements of [United States](#) submarines afford some measure of [Japan](#)'s failure in the strategic use of her submarines. ²

The first venture of a Japanese submarine into New Zealand waters appears to have been made in March 1942; but possibly one or more may have done so even earlier. Almost the only firm evidence of the presence of enemy submarines off the coast of New Zealand comes from a Japanese document, captured in 1944, which records the reconnaissance cruises made by aircraft-carrying submarines between 30 November 1941 and 11 November 1942. This document revealed that during that

period ten I class submarines of the Sixth Fleet made lengthy cruises extending to the west coast of the [United States](#) and Zanzibar, on the east coast of [Africa](#), as well as to the South Pacific.

¹ Japanese Navy and Merchant Shipping Losses during World War II; compiled by the Joint US Army–Navy Assessment Committee, February 1947.

² Assuming that roughly one half the merchant ships lost in the [Indian Ocean](#) were sunk by Japanese submarines and half by German U-boats, and crediting the former with the sinkings in the [Pacific](#), the Naval Staff (Trade Division) of the Admiralty calculated that on this basis, from December 1941 to May 1945, Japanese submarines sank altogether about 145 merchant ships and German U-boats (in all areas) 1650 vessels. The effective scale of activity by Japanese submarines against merchant shipping was, therefore, only about one-twelfth that of the Germans and about one-eighth that of the Americans against Japanese shipping.



Cruises of Japanese submarines I-25 and I-21

Cruises of Japanese submarines I-25 and I-21

The submarine I-10 was in Fijian waters at least eight days before the attack on [Pearl Harbour](#). Her seaplane made a night reconnaissance over [Suva](#) harbour and its approaches on 30 November 1941. Both the [Achilles](#) and the [Leander](#) were in the [Fiji](#) area at that time. The former had escorted the [Wahine](#) carrying troops from [Auckland](#) to [Lautoka](#) and the [Leander](#) was 'trailing' the American liner [Mariposa](#) to

Auckland. Dawn patrols over **Suva** and **Lautoka** were carried out by **RNZAF** aircraft, but neither they nor the ships sighted anything suspicious.

It was in this area seven weeks later that the Royal New Zealand Navy had its first encounter with a Japanese submarine. In the afternoon of 16 January 1942, HMNZS Monowai had just cleared **Suva** harbour when, following two heavy explosions, a submarine was seen breaking surface about 7500 yards away. After a brief exchange of gunfire in which no hits were made by either side, the submarine broke off the action and crash-dived. ¹

Two New Zealand traders had escapes from Japanese submarines at the beginning of March 1942. The Union Company's **Narbada** was shelled by an I-boat about 100 miles north-west from **Fremantle** in the afternoon of 2 March. The steamer was hit by shell splinters, but when she opened fire the submarine ceased its attack and disappeared. Next day, about 150 miles further south, the New Zealand Shipping Company's **Tongariro**, on passage from **Wellington** to **Fremantle**, was chased by a submarine, which dived when the ship opened fire.

Early in 1942 the submarine I-25 made an extensive cruise which embraced eastern **Australia**, New Zealand, and **Fiji**. At that time I-25, commanded by Commander Masaru Obiga, was a unit of the 4th Division of the Sixth Fleet, based at **Truk** in the Caroline Islands. The submarine came southward through the Coral Sea and made a leisurely cruise down the Australian coast. At daybreak on 7 February 1942 the boat's seaplane made a flight over **Sydney** harbour. I-25 then proceeded slowly southward to **Bass Strait**, and nineteen days later its aircraft made a dawn reconnaissance flight over **Melbourne** and Port Phillip. The approaches to Hobart were reconnoitred next and the aircraft flew over that port in daylight on 1 March.

From Tasmania, I-25 crossed the **Tasman Sea** to New Zealand and entered Cook Strait, a pre-dawn flight over **Wellington** being made in the morning of 8 March. Neither the submarine nor its aircraft was reported locally. Doubtful D/F bearings ² of a Japanese unit were obtained at 11 p.m. on 9 March, which when plotted placed it some 400 miles west from North Cape. From Cook Strait I-25 carried on up the east coast of the **North Island** to the vicinity of **Auckland**, where the seaplane made a flight, again before dawn, over the **Hauraki Gulf** and the port.

There is no evidence that the aircraft was seen or heard, but submarine sightings were reported about that time from the Bay of Plenty. The master of the fishing boat Waimana said that at 9.30 p.m. on 13 March, about 15 miles to the westward of Cape Runaway, he sighted a strange craft which looked to be very low in the water. When she arrived at Mayor Island next morning, the Waimana was boarded by a man who was quite positive that he had seen a submarine off the island. He described it as being painted dark grey and carrying a large gun. A third report was made by a fisherman working out of [Tauranga](#) that at 6.15 a.m. on 13 March

¹ See p. 258.

² D/F: Radio direction-finding.

he sighted a vessel, the description of which tallied closely with the Mayor Island sighting. It was considered probable that these sightings were of HMS Viti which was crossing the Bay of Plenty at the time on passage from [Wellington](#) to [Auckland](#). When that ship arrived at [Auckland](#), however, she reported having picked up a distinct hydrophone effect at 9.30 p.m. on 13 March, the indication being lost astern fifteen minutes later. A fishing vessel was sighted about that time.

According to the Japanese record, the I-25 went north from the [Auckland](#) area to the Fiji Islands, where its aircraft made a reconnaissance flight over [Suva](#) at dawn on 19 March. On the same day the Kandavu coastwatching station reported that a seaplane was sighted off [Suva](#) harbour and an unidentified craft was seen to the eastward of Cape Washington. Later in the day it was reported that the aircraft was seen to come down close to the vessel. Special searches were made by [RNZAF](#) aircraft, and an anti-submarine vessel was ordered to carry out extensive coastal patrols. Next day the port war signal station at [Suva](#) reported the sighting of a strange craft believed to be a submarine. Aircraft and two anti-submarine vessels carried out extensive searches in the approaches to [Suva](#) harbour. One of the aircraft reported a log with an accumulation of seaweed and this was accepted as a possible explanation of the sighting. There can be little doubt, however, that it was I-25 and its aircraft that had been seen. The submarine returned from the [Fiji](#) area to its base

at Truk. At the beginning of August 1942 the I-25 was off the Pacific coast of the United States.

After the battle of the Coral Sea on 7 May 1942 there was a sudden burst of Japanese submarine activity in eastern Australian waters. Their first victims were an American steamer of 7200 tons sunk on 5 May and the Greek steamer Chloe, 4640 tons, sunk next day, both within a few miles of Noumea, possibly by one of the I-boats scouting for the Japanese forces engaged in the Coral Sea operations. On her arrival at Newcastle from Wellington the Russian steamer Wellen, 5135 tons, reported that on the night of 16 May she was shelled by a submarine about 80 miles north-east from Sydney, sustaining minor casualties and slight damage.

After making a dawn reconnaissance of Suva on 19 May, the submarine I-21 came south to New Zealand and sent her seaplane over Auckland and the Hauraki Gulf five days later. At that time the Achilles was escorting the Rangatira back from Suva, the Monowai was in harbour, and HMAS Adelaide was approaching the port with a convoy from Sydney. There were no reports of either I-21 or its aircraft being sighted, but on 26 May D/F bearings indicated a Japanese submarine in a position about 400 miles west from North Cape. This was probably I-21 on its way to the Australian coast, where its commanding officer, Commander Hiroshi Imada, became senior officer of the group of five submarines from which a raid on Sydney harbour was made a few days later.

During the night of 29–30 May the seaplane from I-21 reconnoitred Sydney harbour and reported the presence there of 'battleships and cruisers', ¹ and it was decided to attack them with midget submarines the following night. At 4.30 p.m. on 31 May three midgets were released from their parent submarines a few miles north of the entrance to the harbour. About four hours later a watchman sighted an object caught in the anti-submarine net boom inside the heads. It was identified as a small submarine and at 10.15 p.m. it blew itself up. The wreck was subsequently salvaged.

A second midget was sighted just before eleven o'clock by the USS Chicago which was lying off Farm Cove, and she and the Whyalla opened fire on it. The Chicago was about to slip from her buoy when, at 0.30 a.m., two torpedoes were fired at her. Both missed the cruiser, but one exploded under the Kuttambul, a former ferry steamer converted into a depot ship, killing twenty-one ratings and wounding

ten others. This midget was attacked and sunk by depth-charges on its way down harbour. The third midget which had got past the net boom ² was sunk by depth-charges in Taylor Bay some hours later and subsequently salvaged. ³ Markings on charts recovered from one of the midgets indicated that five I class submarines, numbers 21, 22, 24, 27, and 29, took part in the raid, the midgets being borne by I-22, I-24, and I-27 to the point of release.

Far away in the [Indian Ocean](#) on the night of 30 May, a Japanese midget submarine made a successful attack on British ships at Diego Suarez, Madagascar. ⁴ HMS [Ramillies](#) was damaged by a torpedo and the tanker British Loyalty, anchored nearby, was torpedoed and sunk. A few days later two Japanese were rounded up north of Diego Suarez and killed by a commando patrol. Papers found on them showed that they were the crew of a midget submarine whose parent ship was I-20.

Both this attack and that at [Sydney](#) showed that the Japanese could transport midget submarines very far afield and could well have carried out similar raids on New Zealand ports. At that time

¹ The naval ships in harbour at the time were the cruisers [Canberra](#), [Adelaide](#), and [Chicago](#); armed merchant cruisers Westralia and Kanimbla; US destroyer Perkins; US destroyer tender Dobbin; corvettes [Geelong](#), [Whyalla](#), and [Bombay](#); depot ship Kuttabul, and [Netherlands](#) submarine K-9.

² Only the centre part of this boom was complete. There were gaps of 320 yards at one end and 300 yards at the other end.

³ This midget was 80 ft 6 in in length and its breadth 6 ft. It carried two torpedoes with an explosive head of about 700 lb and had a cruising range of about 18 miles at 20 knots and 175 miles at 5 knots, the single large propeller being driven by an electric motor. The midget, which was fitted with self-demolition charges, had a crew of two men.

⁴ Diego Suarez had been occupied by a British force on 7 May 1942.

and for some months afterwards the only anti-submarine fixed defences installed were two indicator loops and a minefield across the outer channels in

[Hauraki Gulf](#) and the pile boom partly covering the entrance to [Auckland](#) harbour. Work on the underwater defences in [Wellington](#) harbour was about to be started.

A few days after the [Sydney](#) harbour raid, Japanese I-boats attacked merchant shipping off the Australian coast. ¹ On the night of 3 June 1942 the Broken Hill Proprietary's steamer Iron Chieftain, 4812 tons, was torpedoed and sunk 30 miles east from [Sydney](#). Less than an hour later and about 35 miles further to the north-east, a submarine fired four shells at the steamer Age. Next day the Iron Crown, 3353 tons, loaded with 5500 tons of iron ore, was sunk with heavy loss of life off Cape Howe, on the border of [New South Wales](#) and Victoria. An RAAF aircraft which saw the attack bombed the submarine and made two near misses. The steamer Barwon reported a near miss by a torpedo in the same locality, and the Echunga that she had been chased by a submarine about midway between [Sydney](#) and Jervis Bay.

An aircraft bombed and claimed to have sunk a submarine on the morning of 5 June about 110 miles south-east from [Sydney](#); and in the afternoon an aircraft narrowly missed another about 180 miles north-east from that port. ² In the early hours of 8 June a submarine fired several shells into a [Sydney](#) suburb and Newcastle was shelled an hour and a half later. Next day the Blue Funnel steamer Orestes, 7743 tons, reported being fired at by a submarine southeast of Jervis Bay. The attacks ended for the time being on 11 June when the Panamanian steamer Guatemala, 5967 tons, which had straggled from a convoy, was torpedoed and sunk about 120 miles south-east from [Sydney](#).

Though they might have made reconnoitring cruises other than those already mentioned, Japanese submarines made no attempt to molest shipping in New Zealand waters through which, in addition to the normal commercial traffic, there was from the middle of 1942 onwards a great flow of Allied transports and supply ships.

On 18 June 1942 the Rangatira, making a daylight passage from [Lyttelton](#) to [Wellington](#), reported passing in dense fog about 14 miles from Godley Head an object resembling a small submarine. In the afternoon a searching aircraft sighted a log about three miles south of the position given by the Rangatira.

Less than forty-eight hours later, HMNZS Futurist reported having sighted a

suspicious object resembling a submarine six miles south of Island Bay, [Wellington](#). An immediate search revealed

¹ The submarines were probably those that took part in the [Sydney](#) operation.

² Debris and oil were seen after both attacks. The first-mentioned submarine was probably damaged. Neither Japanese records nor Allied post-war assessments list any submarine as being sunk off the Australian coast at that time.

nothing further. Aircraft from [Nelson](#) carried out sweeps of Cook Strait which were continued for some days. Radar contacts reported by a shore station and an aircraft were investigated with negative result. When the signal from the *Futurist* was received, all [Wellington](#) coastal defence batteries were ordered to 'stand to', and after the arrival of the *Rangatira* from [Lyttelton](#) the port of [Wellington](#) was closed and navigation lights in the harbour extinguished. On 21 June anti-submarine escort was provided for incoming and departing overseas ships. Close anti-submarine patrols were maintained and the port was closed from dusk to dawn for several nights. Normal conditions were resumed on 27 June.

Japanese submarines were again active in Australian waters in July-August 1942. A Greek steamer and two American steamers totalling 15,300 tons were sunk off the [New South Wales](#) coast on 20 July. Two days later the Australian steamer *Allara*, 3379 tons, was torpedoed off Newcastle and towed into port with the loss of four killed and six wounded. The Dutch motor-vessel *Tjinegara*, 9227 tons, was sunk 90 miles from [Noumea](#) on 25 July. During the next few days three vessels reported being shelled by submarines, one as far away as the western end of the [Great Australian Bight](#). A small vessel of 300 tons was sunk south of [Port Moresby](#) on 6 August and another of 3300 tons was damaged by a torpedo in the same locality on 29 August.

By that time the Solomon Islands campaign was well under way and the submarines were concentrated in and about that area, where some were employed frequently to transport troops and supplies. In the five months to the end of January

1943, nine Japanese submarines were destroyed in the South Pacific, six of them in the [Solomons](#). One was I-1 which was wrecked on the northern end of [Guadalcanal](#) after a fierce action with HMNZ ships Kiwi and Moa on the night of 29–30 January 1943. ¹

After a lapse of nearly five months submarines returned to the [Tasman Sea](#) in January 1943. Again they neglected New Zealand waters in favour of the east coast of [Australia](#), off which they cruised continuously for the next six months though never more than a few at a time. Their first New Zealand victim was the Union Steam Ship Company's Kalingo, 2050 tons. She was on passage to [New Plymouth](#) when she was torpedoed and sunk on 17 January 1943 about 100 miles east from [Sydney](#). On the following day the American tanker Mobilube, 10,220 tons, was torpedoed 60 miles from [Sydney](#) and towed back to harbour badly damaged. An American steamer torpedoed 85 miles from Lord Howe Island on 22 January was towed into Newcastle eleven days later. Another liberty ship was sunk on 29 January while on passage from [Noumea](#)

¹ See pp. 307– 9.

to Newcastle. The Broken Hill Proprietary suffered its third loss on 8 February when its Iron Knight, 4800 tons, was torpedoed and sunk in convoy 140 miles south-west from [Sydney](#). Two days later an American liberty ship was sunk 150 miles east from [Sydney](#).

Though no confirmation from Japanese sources has been found, it is certain that a submarine was in New Zealand waters about the end of February 1943, cruising through Cook Strait and up the east coast of the [North Island](#). Shortly after midnight of 22–23 February an unidentified radar contact was made from Cape Taurakirae, south-west headland of Palliser Bay, bearing about south-east by south, distant 10 miles. Ten minutes later a fair D/F 'fix' of a submarine was obtained from four stations in the Cook Strait area. Four aircraft from [Nelson](#) carried out a parallel track search and one reported sighting a long streak of oil three miles south from Taurakirae.

In the afternoon a battery at the entrance to Pelorus Sound reported sighting a

'black speck' about 15 miles off to the northeast. The United States anti-submarine minesweeper Sheldrake was sent from [Wellington](#) to search the area. About four hours later Cape Campbell reported a radar contact in a position about 20 miles south from Cape Palliser. Subsequently the submarine was re-placed north of Cook Strait towards the [Wanganui](#) area, in which the coastal vessel Storm had reported seeing lights and a partly submerged object in the early hours of 18 February.

Cook Strait and its approaches were searched intensively for three days and anti-submarine escort was provided for a [United States](#) task force which arrived at [Wellington](#) from [Guadalcanal](#) on 25 February. By that time, however, the submarine had left Cook Strait and was well up the east coast of the [North Island](#). On the night of the 25th it was located by D/F 50 miles south-east from Mahia Peninsula. Aircraft carried out a search next morning and one reported a radar contact which was held for forty minutes off East Cape, but nothing was sighted. Air patrols from East Cape towards Great Barrier Island were carried out during the next two days. The submarine had left the coast and in the early hours of 1 March it was located by D/F about 300 miles north-north-east from North Cape.

Because of the suspected presence of a submarine in Pegasus Bay on 25 February, anti-submarine escort was provided for the interisland steamer. A searching aircraft saw nothing, but a whale was sighted from Godley Head at daybreak next morning.

During the next four months Japanese submarines sank thirteen merchant ships totalling 78,369 tons in the South Pacific, eight of them off the east coast of [Australia](#). One of the latter was the Union Steam Ship Company's motor vessel Limerick, 8724 tons, which was torpedoed in convoy off Sandy Cape, Queensland, on 25 April 1943, two lives being lost. Another was the Australian hospital ship Centaur, 3222 tons, sunk with heavy loss of life 50 miles from Moreton Bay on 14 May. Of the other five ships lost, three were American steamers sunk in the [Fiji](#) area, one near [Noumea](#), and one north-west of [Tongatabu](#). Among other vessels attacked up to the end of August 1943 were an Australian passenger ship and an American tank landing ship off the [New South Wales](#) coast; two tankers and two liberty ships in the [New Hebrides- Fiji](#) area were torpedoed but were able to make port.

There were a few unconfirmed indications of submarines in New Zealand waters

during the latter part of 1943. On 6 September HDML 1186 ¹ made an asdic contact while on patrol off Cape Brett and dropped depth-charges, but a search revealed no sign of any submarine. The United States submarine Raton reported on 11 October that two torpedoes had been fired at her in a position about 300 miles north-east from [Auckland](#).

In the evening of 3 November Cape Campbell reported a series of radar contacts and the sighting of a low-lying object bearing about south-east. The inter-island steamers were warned to keep five miles outside their normal tracks and to zigzag in the vicinity of Cape Campbell. About two hours after the third radar contact was reported the motor-launches 400, 402, and 405 were ordered out from [Wellington](#) harbour to make anti-submarine searches. Motor-launch 409 continued her routine patrol outside the heads and the minesweepers Awatere and Maimai left port shortly after midnight to maintain an anti-submarine patrol between Baring Head and Karori Rock. At 4.19 a.m. ML400 sighted an object about due east of Cape Campbell and she and ML405 dropped depth-charges. Nothing further was sighted and the launches then screened the steamer Maori on her passage across Cook Strait.

On 12 November 1943 the [United States](#) transport Cape St. Juan, 6710 tons, was torpedoed and sunk about 160 miles west-south-west from [Tongatabu](#). There was some loss of life, but 1180 survivors were rescued. An RNZAF aircraft flying to [Norfolk Island](#) on 27 November reported sighting a submarine periscope about 100 miles north from North Cape, and on the following day another aircraft reported a radar contact east of the [North Auckland](#) peninsula.

The presence of a submarine on the New Zealand coast was indicated by three incidents at the end of February 1944. First, the [United States](#) tug Bald Head, 1117 tons, on passage from [Auckland](#) to Balboa, reported that a torpedo had crossed her bow in the early hours of 26 February in a position 75 miles east from Mercury Bay.

¹ HDML: Harbour defence motor-launch.

Two days later when the [United States](#) tanker Coquille, 10,450 tons, was about 25 miles south-east from East Cape, naval ratings of her gun's crew reported sighting a periscope and the track of a torpedo. It appeared that a submarine was moving

down the coast of the [North Island](#), and a warning was issued to all shipping in New Zealand waters. Next, at about two o'clock in the morning of 1 March when the northbound inter-island steamer Rangatira was about 12 miles east from Kaikoura Peninsula, her gun's crew reported seeing the track of a torpedo pass close across her stern. What they saw might have been a porpoise crossing the ship's wake, but in view of the previous reports the warning could not be disregarded.

The inter-island passenger services were suspended for the time being and [Wellington](#) and all ports on the east coast of the [South Island](#) were closed to outward shipping while anti-submarine vessels and aircraft carried out searching patrols. In the afternoon of 1 March an aircraft reported sighting well off shore east of Kaikoura what resembled a submarine barely submerged. Stormy weather interrupted the search for two or three days, but on 8 March one of the anti-submarine trawlers made an asdic contact on a possible submarine about 11 miles south from Pencarrow Head. A pattern of depth-charges was dropped and an air search was also made. An hour or two earlier the Wakakura sighted what looked like a periscope 40 miles north-east from Lyttelton Heads and made a depth-charge attack.

For the remainder of the year 1944 Japanese submarine activity in the South Pacific was very slight. None was evident in New Zealand waters and but few submarines were reported off the east coast of [Australia](#). For the most part they appeared to be employed in evacuating key personnel from and carrying supplies to Japanese forces isolated in the Solomon Islands and [New Britain](#), on the northern coast of [New Guinea](#), and in island bases bypassed by the American forces in the Central Pacific. 'Japanese submarines are offering virtually no resistance to the vast tonnage of American shipping plying in the [Pacific](#),' said Mr Elmer Davis, United States Director of War Information, in August 1944. 'One of the war's greatest mysteries is the ineffectiveness of Japanese submarines.' Fifty-seven of them were sunk during 1944.

[Japan](#) began her war with sixty submarines and during the period of hostilities built 127 of the I and Ro classes, as well as numerous midgets; in addition, she took over eight German U-boats. The Allied assessments, which are confirmed by Japanese naval records, show that 130 of her submarines were sunk and four were scrapped, leaving fifty-three in being in August 1945, as well as the eight ex-German

U-boats.

The final venture of a submarine (possibly German) into the [Tasman Sea](#) appears to have been made about the end of 1944. On 24 December of that year the American steamer Robert J. Walker, 7180 tons, was torpedoed and sunk about 200 miles south-east of Jervis Bay, [New South Wales](#).

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 15 – ANTI-INVASION MINE DEFENCES

CHAPTER 15

Anti-Invasion Mine Defences

A START had barely been made with the anti-submarine fixed defences before they more or less merged into a far more extensive and expensive programme of anti-invasion measures. During the early part of 1941 growing uneasiness over [Japan's](#) aggressive intentions in the [Pacific](#) led the [New Zealand Government](#) to call in a military adviser to make an estimate of the country's requirements to meet a possible invasion. He was General Sir Guy Williams, KCB, CMG, DSO, who as a former area commander in England had considerable experience in devising anti-invasion plans. His appreciation, which was printed on 1 October 1941, dealt not only with the defences of New Zealand but also with those of [Fiji](#) and [Tonga](#) for which the [New Zealand Government](#) assumed responsibility in November.

On the naval side, he pointed out that fixed defences at defended ports consisted of minefields, indicator loops, and anti-torpedo motorboat booms. These were particularly needed at [Auckland](#) with its more numerous approaches and on account of its importance as a base, not only for the New Zealand Navy but also for ships of associated powers which might need its dockyard facilities. When the requirements of [Auckland](#) had been met, similar fixed defences should be provided as necessary for the defended ports of [Wellington](#), [Lyttelton](#), and Dunedin in that order of priority.

After that, consideration should be given to the laying of mines in harbours of first-class military importance as a measure of defence additional to shore batteries. Such minefields need not be laid until after the outbreak of war, but the necessary number of mines should be available in the country. These harbours were Bay of Islands, Whangaroa, Queen Charlotte Sound, Tory Channel, Pelorus Sound, and [Akaroa](#). When the minefields had been laid, these harbours, with the possible exception of Tory Channel, should be closed to shipping. Two other harbours of major military importance, namely Port Fitzroy (Great Barrier Island) and Port Underwood, might also be defensively mined.

At the behest of War Cabinet, the Chief of Naval Staff prepared a paper on the measures necessary to implement the Williams proposals. Broadly speaking, the

recommendations regarding minefields were concurred in, subject to certain technical and operational limitations in respect of each field. It was clear, however, that the military adviser's recommendations called for a comprehensive mining organisation.

The only facilities in New Zealand were those being prepared for independent mining at [Auckland](#). This scheme could be expanded, but it was designed for independent mines only. They had been decided upon because they were manufactured in [Australia](#) and were readily available, and because the minelayer *Bungaree* had been promised to lay the field when required.

But if General Williams' requirements were to be met, a controlled mining organisation would have to be set up. This involved the provision of suitable minelaying vessels, a mine depot, a controlled mine base to assemble the mines and their associated gear, advance bases for prepared material in the vicinity of the minefield, adequate mining material and properly trained personnel.

Apart from the depot at Kauri Point, it would be necessary to construct a controlled mine base in a central area and three advance bases at the Bay of Islands, [Wellington](#), and [Lyttelton](#). A plan was being worked out with the assistance of the Public Works Department, initial specifications had been prepared and sites inspected. A preliminary investigation had indicated that owing to technical limitations it would not be worth while to lay minefields in Tory Channel and Pelorus Sound, but all the other specified areas were suitable. Initial requirements, plus a small margin for maintenance, were 11 fields, 11 guard loops, 42 loops, 750 controlled mines, and 600 independent mines.

The estimated cost of the scheme for ships, buildings, and other material was as follows:

	£
Auckland , including two loop minelayers	244,000
Whangaparaoa and Great Barrier Island	64,250
Bay of Islands and Whangaroa	67,500
Lyttelton , Akaroa , and Dunedin	69,000
Wellington , Queen Charlotte Sound, and Port Underwood	110,000
Independent mining items, including coastal minelayer (£230,000)	410,000

—
£964,750

An allowance for replacement of mines and equipment brought the total in round figures to £1,000,000. In addition, the annual wages bill was estimated at £111,650.

Forwarding this paper to the Minister of Defence on 27 November 1941, the Naval Secretary said the programme was necessarily a long-range one. It would take about three years to complete, but if given first priority enough progress might be made to enable initial minelaying operations to be started within eighteen months. The minelaying vessels could be built in New Zealand with imported materials at the expense of the projected programme for building steel minesweepers, but this was not advisable.

The Naval Secretary went on to say that the Chief of Naval Staff was extremely doubtful whether these mining proposals were necessary. The decision must depend upon the importance attached by the Government to precautions against invasion. As had been pointed out in the Williams report, 'invasion will not be feasible until a series of major disasters to the cause of the British and Associated Powers has taken place.'

However, the Government had approved in principle certain other anti-invasion measures recommended by General Williams, including the mounting of guns in the approaches to harbours other than defended ports. Even if the necessary guns were made available they would not necessarily prevent the entrance of ships. A mining organisation as proposed would be a more effective deterrent, particularly as all the minefields would be covered by guns and so could not be swept.

Nevertheless, in the opinion of the Chief of Naval Staff (Commodore Parry) 'the maintenance of additional mobile forces (e.g., another cruiser, if the United Kingdom Government could make one available in the [Pacific](#)) would be a more effective contribution to the general naval situation than the provision of these static defences which probably will never be required.'

[Pearl Harbour](#) and the simultaneous invasion of [Malaya](#) decided the matter. The defensive mining proposals outlined by the Chief of Naval Staff were approved in

War Cabinet on 15 December 1941. Cabinet said the difficulties of obtaining supplies were well understood, but the Navy was asked to do everything possible to expedite delivery.

The continuous series of 'major disasters to the cause of the British and Associated Powers' during the next four months made it appear that the invasion envisaged by General Williams might, before long, be 'feasible'. The Japanese had exploited their command of the sea (and the air) in the Western Pacific by their masterly use of sea, air, and land forces in a succession of successful invasions. By the end of March 1942 it seemed likely that they would strike westward towards [India](#) and southward towards [Australia](#) and New Zealand.

As Commodore Parry pointed out in an appreciation of the situation at that time, the latter move would be to deny the Australian and New Zealand bases to the Allied cause. The power to build up the necessary forces both for present defence and for ultimate operations against [Japan](#) depended entirely upon keeping open the sea communications across the [Pacific](#). It was therefore of the utmost importance to hold the islands on the reinforcing route, particularly [New Caledonia](#) and [Fiji](#).

What Japan had won by her command of the sea must ultimately be wrested from her by the same means. The defence of New Zealand, [Fiji](#), and [New Caledonia](#) depended primarily and mainly upon sea power. If the Allied navies could defeat the Japanese at sea, the latter's invading forces could not survive for long. Even if they attained their objectives, they would be cut off. Unhappily, at that time we could not count on a naval victory. It was therefore essential that the defences of New Zealand, [Fiji](#), and [New Caledonia](#) must be made as strong as possible, not only to meet the Japanese threat but to provide adequately defended bases for the use of the United States Pacific Fleet.

But in the early months of the [Pacific](#) war the anti-invasion measures in New Zealand were little more than plans on paper. Had the Japanese then been able in the tide of their affairs to take it at the flood in the South Pacific, they would have found no adequate organised defences in being. At that time it seemed that nothing could stem the swift tide of their advance. But, before they could attempt an attack on even [Fiji](#) or [New Caledonia](#), let alone New Zealand, the Japanese had sustained their first check in the Coral Sea action. This was followed two months later by the

disastrous Battle of Midway. In these two actions, in which the issue was decided by naval aircraft alone, the long arm of sea power had decided the problem of the defence of the South Pacific. Nevertheless, the plans for the defence of New Zealand, with certain modifications, were pushed on to completion at great cost in men, money, and material.

On 21 December 1941 the New Zealand Naval Board informed the [Australian Commonwealth Naval Board](#) that it was intended to lay the [Auckland](#) minefield as soon as possible, and asked when HMAS Bungaree and the mines would be available. The Australian reply was delayed and, in the meantime, the New Zealand Naval Board put in an order for 600 mines in addition to the 300 already on order. By the time [Australia](#) was able to send them the Kauri Point depot 'would be ready to receive them.' Replying to both messages on 9 January 1942, the Australian Naval Board said unforeseen demands from the [Netherlands East Indies](#) had affected supplies, but the Bungaree was expected to sail for [Auckland](#) with a full load of mines on 9 March.

A hastening message from New Zealand on 21 January brought a reproachful reply from the Chief of the Naval Staff, [Australia](#), to the Chief of Naval Staff, New Zealand. 'I feel sure you will realise,' he said, 'that the limited production of mines in [Australia](#) makes a careful review of priority necessary. In view of our agreed policy concerning [New Caledonia](#), I suggest that the mining of [Noumea](#) is of the utmost importance.'

The Bungaree sailed from [Geelong](#) on 6 March 1942 with a full load of 422 mines and, due to some misunderstanding, headed for [Wellington](#) instead of [Auckland](#). In the morning of the 13th she was ordered to proceed direct to [Auckland](#) and she passed through Cook Strait a few hours later. She arrived at [Auckland](#) on 16 March and began Operation Ned next day.

A zigzag line of 200 mines, spaced at 35 to the mile, was first laid across the main channel between Tiri Tiri Matangi Island and Motuhurakai Island. This was supplemented two days later by a line of 200 mines between Tiri Tiri and The Noises rocks off Motuhurakai. Six mines were laid in the Rakino Channel, between the island of that name and Motutapu Island, and a line of sixteen mines was run across the channel on the north side of Rakino. Out of 422 mines laid there was only one

failure. The Bungaree left [Auckland](#) for [Sydney](#) on 20 March.

The controlled mining scheme presented much greater difficulties and was the subject of considerable discussion with the Admiralty, which provided most of the material and the minelaying vessels. On 13 January 1942 the High Commissioner for New Zealand informed Navy Office that the Admiralty had stated the need to convert a suitable vessel for laying and maintaining controlled minefields 'should they become necessary.' The drawings and specifications of a typical conversion were not 'forwarded herewith' as stated, and as late as April the Naval Board was complaining that they had not arrived. ¹

Replying to an Admiralty query about the possibility of training officers and ratings to man controlled mining stations, the Naval Board said the Government had authorised the immediate establishment of a controlled mining service. The instruction of personnel could be undertaken if a loop minelayer and an attack teacher could be supplied.

On 21 February the Admiralty reported that 100 observation mines complete with underwater fittings, control equipment for three observation stations, and 60,000 yards of armoured cable were about to be shipped from the [United Kingdom](#). No controlled minelayer could be sent but drawings for a typical conversion job had been forwarded through the High Commissioner. However, it was hoped

¹ The drawings and specifications were lost when the ship carrying the mail was sunk by enemy action.

that the base ship *Atreus* and the minelaying trawler *Alsey* which were going out to [Australia](#) would be able to assist in New Zealand later. ¹ Four control stations, two guard loops, and eight mine loops would be sent to New Zealand in time for the arrival of the two ships. More material would be sent at the rate of about one complete station a month, provided it was available and a layer could be converted in New Zealand. A week later the Admiralty said a shipment of 520 mines and sinkers was being arranged.

Revised estimates totalling £674,000 for the controlled mining scheme and 600

independent mines, and an annual wages bill of £90,900 for 45 officers and 250 ratings, were approved in War Cabinet on 6 March 1942. Two days later a site for the controlled mine base at [Auckland](#) was selected at Islington Bay, between [Rangitoto](#) and Motutapu Islands. Together with the Kauri Point mine depot, the base was given priority among the numerous defence construction commitments of the Public Works Department. But the Islington Bay base was not actually commissioned until 5 January 1943, by which time most of the controlled minefields had been laid. Work at Kauri Point was also very slow, but by July 1942 a large number of mines was stored there. The depot was barely completed at the end of February 1943.

The proposed advanced base at Opuia, in the Bay of Islands, was not built. That at [Wellington](#) was constructed at Mahanga Bay on the western shore of the outer harbour, there being insufficient space for it at [Shelly Bay](#). It was one of the costly 'white elephants' of the controlled mining scheme. The minefield it was planned to serve was laid in November 1942, a fortnight after the Naval Secretary had complained that the base had barely been started! In September 1943 it was put to use to relieve congestion in the transit store at [Auckland](#).

After several sites in [Lyttelton](#) harbour had been rejected, Tikao Bay in [Akaroa](#) harbour was selected for the advanced base for the [Lyttelton](#) area. The Naval Board then decided upon a fully equipped base similar to that at Islington Bay and, a month later, in accordance with a policy of wide dispersion of ammunition reserves, to build eleven magazines at Tikao Bay. The estimated cost of these proposals was £97,440, as against £25,000 for the original base scheme. Authority for the additional expenditure was given by War Cabinet at the end of June 1942. But, following a visit to Tikao Bay in September 1942, the Superintending Armament Supply Officer informed the Naval Secretary that the magazine site was too far by road or sea from [Lyttelton](#), the port to be served. Moreover,

¹ The *Atreus* was a converted merchant steamer of 6546 tons gross register, built in 1911 for the China Mutual Steam Navigation Co. (Alfred Holt & Co.) of Liverpool. The *Alsey* was a converted trawler of 416 tons, built in 1932.

the magazines as planned would be only 200 or 300 yards away from the mining

depot, with no natural feature to protect the one in the event of an explosion in the other. It was eventually decided to build the magazines at Cass Bay, about two and a half miles from [Lyttelton](#).

The Tikao Bay mining base was not completed till March 1943. It was then manned by an officer and fourteen ratings, all specialists on loan from the Royal Navy. Since a big reduction in the controlled mining organisation was made shortly afterwards, Tikao Bay proved to be a white elephant of even greater proportions than the Mahanga Bay depot at [Wellington](#).

On 10 March 1942 the Admiralty requested the Commander-in-Chief East Indies to sail the controlled mine base ship Manchester City ¹ and the minelayer Jay to New Zealand as soon as their work at Grand Port, [Mauritius](#), was completed. The Admiralty informed the New Zealand Naval Board that the ships were expected to arrive about the end of April with stores for two minefields. Material for eight more would be shipped shortly. In the meantime the Naval Board should do its utmost to convert a local vessel for minelaying because the Manchester City and Jay would not be able to stay long enough to complete the laying programmes. Suitable officers and ratings should be selected for instruction in controlled minelaying and maintenance on board those ships.

At the beginning of May 1942, however, the Admiralty signalled that owing to the changed situation in the [Indian Ocean](#) it would not be possible to spare the Manchester City and Jay, and the Australian Naval Board had been requested to sail the Atreus and Aalsey to New Zealand after controlled minefields at Hobart and [Sydney](#) had been laid. At that time the latter ships were working in the approaches to Moreton Bay and [Brisbane](#). The Australian authorities on 5 May decided to postpone the laying of fields at Hobart and [Sydney](#), and on learning this the Admiralty asked that the Atreus and Aalsey be sent to [Auckland](#) as soon as the Moreton Bay fields had been completed. They did not arrive until the end of August, by which time most of the material from England was in hand.

When the Admiralty urged the conversion of a merchant vessel for laying and maintaining controlled mines, the Naval Board was hard put to it to find a suitable ship. Its first choice was the Titoki, a twin-screw steamer of 625 tons gross register, owned by the Anchor Shipping and Foundry Company Limited of Nelson. But when

negotiations for requisitioning her were opened, the Shipping

Con-

¹ Manchester City, converted merchant steamer of 5600 tons gross register; built in 1925 for Manchester Liners, Ltd.

troller

objected on the ground that she was indispensable to the already depleted coastal coal trade.

After the ship had been successfully tested for stability, with the reluctant consent of War Cabinet, the Naval Secretary stressed the need of haste in converting the Titoki, which, he insisted, was the only vessel available that met all the exacting requirements. The Shipping Controller and the Mining Controller were equally insistent that the ship must be retained in the coal trade. In a letter to the Minister of Mines the latter recalled the difficulties created by the requisitioning of the Anchor Company's Rata and Puriri for use as minesweepers. Of 77,000-odd tons of coal shipped from the [West Coast](#) by the Anchor Company in 1941, about 30,000 tons had been carried by the Titoki. The Minister of Mines agreed that 'a strong protest must be made against this ship being taken from the coal trade.'

In face of this opposition, the Naval Board sought the assistance of Vice-Admiral R. L. Ghormley, USN, Commander of the [South Pacific Area](#). His request of 30 July 1942 to [Washington](#) for a suitable vessel brought an offer of the Pine Ridge, a steam collier of 720 tons. The Naval Board cabled assent, and on 30 September 1942 the New Zealand Naval Attaché in [Washington](#) reported that he was about to requisition the vessel on lease-lend terms. A month later, however, an officer of the British Ministry of War Transport in [Washington](#), who had had twenty years' experience in the New Zealand trade, declared after inspecting the Pine Ridge that she was quite unsuitable for conversion.

When the New Zealand Joint Staff Mission in [Washington](#) reported that further investigation was being made, the Naval Board urged speed because the Atreus and Aalsey, which had arrived in August, would have to be released as soon as their work

in New Zealand was completed. Thereafter, a vessel would be needed not only for maintenance of the mine loops, but also for the laying and maintenance of harbour defence asdics and indicator loops which could not be worked by the Vesper, a small wooden scow which had been commissioned for cable work on 18 July 1942.

Further efforts to get a suitable vessel from the [United States](#) for conversion into a loop minelayer or to replace the Titoki if she were taken were unavailing. In December 1942 the Naval Secretary informed the Minister of Defence that it was proposed to convert HMNZS Muritai. She was by no means ideal and the loss of an anti-submarine vessel must be regarded with some misgiving; but the need of a loop minelayer was 'extremely urgent'. This hardly tallied with the further statement that strengthening and conversion work on the Muritai would take about six months.

War Cabinet approval was given on 30 January 1943. A few days earlier the New Zealand Joint Staff Mission reported from [Washington](#) that the United States Navy Department had been induced to offer the Wanks, a steamer of 642 tons. The Naval Board received this offer with some coolness and turned it down on the ground that it was too late. But the decision to convert the Muritai was also too late. In June 1943 the overworked [Devonport](#) dockyard reported that nothing had been done to the vessel, which could be taken in hand only if urgent repairs to [United States](#) ships were refused. The Muritai, which had then been idle for months, was recommissioned as a port M/S A/S vessel on 23 August 1943.

In many parts of the country where naval installations and defences were established, areas of land and sea were prohibited to all and sundry, except, in certain cases, by special permit. For the most part it was merely a matter of gazetting a Notice to Mariners, but where the use of certain channels, harbours, etc., which it was proposed to mine, was virtually essential to the economic life of the community, as in the Marlborough Sounds, serious difficulties arose.

At a conference on 29 April 1942 to discuss the proposed restrictions in the Sounds, it was represented to the naval officers present that they would virtually close down the fishing industry and the Tory Channel whaling station. The movements of coastal shipping would also be disorganised. The declaration of prohibited areas in Pelorus Sound and Port Underwood would also isolate a number of farms. The recommendations of the Senior Naval Officer included drastic

restriction, in some cases total prohibition, of the movement of ships and small craft in the various areas. Farmers and their families in Port Underwood and Pelorus Sound to whom access by sea would be denied were to be evacuated. These proposals were approved by War Cabinet on 6 June 1942, with the proviso that a further report be made on the need for removing the farmers.

When the naval authorities reaffirmed the recommendation, War Cabinet ordered an examination of the possibility of providing road access to the farms. The Public Works Department reported on 22 August that the existing tracks to the four farms concerned in Pelorus Sound and six at Port Underwood could be reconditioned at a cost of £4100. The Naval Secretary forwarded this information to the Minister of Defence with a reminder that the Bungaree was to lay the independent minefields in those areas at the end of September. On 25 September 1942 he submitted a draft of The Shipping Safety (Marlborough Sounds) Order 1942.

This order was not promulgated, however, for on 3 October War Cabinet decided that no further action should be taken with reference to the anti-invasion mines in Port Underwood and Pelorus Sound or the provision of track access to farms in those areas. The Naval Board was directed to investigate the possibility of using the mines at Doubtless Bay, [North Auckland](#), and, in the event of that area being found unsuitable, to consider retaining the mines as a reserve. Restrictions on vessels in Queen Charlotte Sound and Tory Channel were later relaxed to allow fishing and whaling to be carried on.

The Naval Board informed the Minister of Defence on 10 October 1942 that the most effective scheme for Doubtless Bay would be a contact minefield completely cutting off access to the area. In that case the port of Mangonui would be closed to shipping, thus placing an additional burden on road transport. Alternatively, the entire coastline of the [North Auckland](#) peninsula could be declared dangerous because of mines, in which case trading vessels would be licensed to enter the area at various ports. Failing approval of such comprehensive restrictions, which would undoubtedly upset the fishing industry, a smaller area outside Doubtless Bay could be declared dangerous. War Cabinet decided that nothing should be done in the matter.

In the meantime the Bungaree had left [Geelong](#) with a load of 465 mines for

New Zealand. On 21 October 1942 she arrived at the Bay of Islands, where she joined the *Atreus* and *Alsey* laying controlled minefields. Next day the *Bungaree* laid 258 contact mines in two main lines and one short line across the main entrance. She returned to [Auckland](#) on 25 October and, after landing the remaining 207 mines for storage at Kauri Point, sailed for [Melbourne](#).

The controlled minelayer *Alsey* had arrived at [Auckland](#) from [Australia](#) on 25 August 1942 and the base ship *Atreus* (Captain J. D. Campbell, RN) six days later. By that time the Japanese were far too deeply involved in the Solomon Islands, where the long struggle on [Guadalcanal](#) had begun, to give any thought to New Zealand, where elaborate anti-invasion preparations were still going on.

During the next six months the *Atreus* and *Alsey* were to lay eight minefields from Whangaroa in the north to [Akaroa](#) in the south. They also trained as many New Zealand officers and ratings as possible so that the efficient operation and maintenance of the controlled minefields would be assured after their departure. Yet, even before the ships had left New Zealand, the first moves were being made in a reduction programme that was to lead to the closing down of the first minefields only eleven months after they had been laid.

The first controlled minefield was laid in Whangaparaoa Passage between the peninsula of that name and Tiri Tiri Matangi Island in [Hauraki Gulf](#). Much preparatory work had been done at [Auckland](#) by a party of three officers and twenty-five ratings of the Royal Navy who had arrived from England in July 1942. The operation began on 4 September and was completed in a fortnight, seven loops of sixteen mines and two guard loops being laid.

The Bay of Islands field was laid during October. It consisted of thirteen loops, each of sixteen mines, across the main channel between Moturoa and Moturua Islands, and three others in the lesser passages. Six guard loops were also put down. This was one of the largest controlled minefields laid by the Royal Navy up to that time.

An observation minefield at Whangaroa was next on the priority list, but as the shore control tower and power-house had hardly been started, the *Atreus* and *Alsey* went on to [Wellington](#). By this time it had been decided not to lay minefields in

Queen Charlotte Sound and Tory Channel, because ComSOPAC no longer intended to use the sound as a fleet anchorage. A field of eight loops of sixteen mines and two guard loops was laid in [Wellington](#) harbour between Gordon Point and the south end of Ward Island. This work was completed on 1 December 1942.

The ships then returned to Whangaroa where, though the control buildings were still uncompleted, an observation field of ten groups totalling thirty mines was laid across the narrow entrance of the harbour. After remedying defects in the Bay of Islands field, the *Atreus* and *Alsey* left [Auckland](#) for the [South Island](#) on 5 January 1943.

When they arrived at [Akaroa](#) it was found that little progress had been made with the shore buildings. Temporary huts were set up and the laying of a field of sixteen mine loops and two guard loops was completed by 15 January. A few days earlier, Captain Campbell of the *Atreus* was informed by the Naval Board that, because of the 'change in the strategical situation', the [Lyttelton](#) minefield was not to be laid.

The Great Barrier fields might well have been cancelled for the same reason, but in accordance with orders the ships called at [Wellington](#) to remedy defects in that field and then proceeded to the island. There again they found the shore buildings in an embryonic state, compelling the use of portable huts. Five mine loops and two guard loops were laid across the entrance to Port Abercrombie and an observation field of forty-three mines in Governor Pass, the narrow southern entrance to Port Fitzroy.

The *Atreus* and *Alsey* returned to [Auckland](#) on 18 February for overdue docking and repairs. After that they were detained in New Zealand waters for some weeks longer remedying defects in the minefields in Whangaparaoa Passage and at [Wellington](#), no New Zealand vessel having been converted for this purpose. The *Atreus* left [Wellington](#) for [Melbourne](#) on 4 April 1943 and the *Alsey* sailed five days later.

An offer by [Australia](#) on 12 December 1942 to make the *Bungaree* available for operations in New Zealand after March 1943 led to a survey of mining policy. The Staff Officer (Torpedo and Mining) contended that the changed strategical situation

in the Pacific had relegated Auckland to a rear base status and that anti-invasion minefields were a waste of money and material. He advised against reinforcement of the Auckland independent minefield, but in case the Naval Board decided to do so, he submitted alternative schemes. One was to reinforce the existing field with a similar field and the other to support it with an anti-submarine field, since submarine attack was about the only possibility to guard against. If it was decided not to use the 800 available mines in that way, they should be offered to the United States naval authorities.

The position was explained to ComSOPAC, who replied on 25 January 1943 that he did not need the mines and agreed that they should be used to reinforce local fields. The Bungaree was engaged in mining operations on the Great Barrier Reef at that time, but the Australian Naval Board agreed to send her to New Zealand about the end of June.

No sooner had this been settled than ComSOPAC asked for the Bungaree to reinforce the minefields at Noumea, New Caledonia, using the mines stored at Auckland. The New Zealand Naval Board thereupon cancelled its plan for reinforcing the minefields at Auckland and the Bay of Islands. The Bungaree arrived at Auckland from Sydney on 12 July 1943, loaded 446 mines, and sailed five days later for Noumea, escorted by HMNZS Tui. She returned to Auckland on 4 August for the remaining 349 mines, which were duly laid. This was a useful disposition of approximately 800 mines which, for no apparently good reason, the Naval Board had planned to sow in the Auckland area after a previous decision not to lay any more minefields.

A series of vigorous minutes by the Staff Officer (Torpedo and Mining) in January and February 1943 had expressed the uneasiness he felt over the 'extravagant and unnecessary use of valuable war material, manpower and labour' on the controlled mining programme. He was 'unable to understand why this colossal expenditure and organisation was ever implemented against the Naval Board's strong recommendation to the contrary...' The time had arrived when 'everything should be devoted to the offensive, not to static defence schemes.'

After a survey of commitments involving large quantities of material and equipment and 44 officers and 245 ratings to man the controlled mining stations, he

said that if the full programme was carried out all the equipment received so far would be exhausted. Orders for spares should be cancelled and the Whangaroa, Great Barrier, [Lyttelton](#), and Tikao Bay projects abandoned, thus effecting a saving of about £100,000. The mine depot at Kauri Point should become part of the Armament Depot, which badly needed space for stores and ammunition.

The principle, but not all the details, of SOTM's recommendations was accepted by the Naval Board which, on 25 February 1943, submitted a modified mining policy to the Minister of Defence. It had already instructed the High Commissioner in [London](#) to cancel orders in hand for controlled mining equipment. It proposed that no more minefields be laid and that the controlled fields at [Auckland](#) and [Wellington](#) be maintained by using spare material. The conversion of the *Muritai* should be gone on with to provide a vessel for this work. These recommendations were approved in War Cabinet on 19 March 1943, by which time the *Atreus* and *Alsey* had just completed laying the minefields.

The position was again surveyed in June 1943 by SOTM, who remarked that £1,500,000 had already been spent on 'this colossal static programme inaugurated by a Government with the jitters, contrary to naval advice.' After questioning the value of each controlled minefield in turn, he said it was clear that maintenance of all except those at [Auckland](#) and [Wellington](#) was a waste of manpower and money. Conversion of the *Muritai* would cost £30,000 and take at least ten months, by which time deterioration of the minefields would entail the lifting and refitting of every mine loop. He proposed that the existing stations be manned as long as they were operative, after which the mines should be lifted or fired. *Islington Bay* should be paid off as a controlled mining base and used for storage purposes.

But the Naval Board procrastinated by recommending to the Minister of Defence that the situation be further reviewed at the end of the year, when consideration should be given to requesting [Australia](#) to make a vessel available to recondition the minefields not later than June 1944. Alternatively, at that time, 'should the general situation warrant it,' the Government should consider accepting further deterioration in the efficiency of the minefields and rely solely on anti-submarine vessels and anti-submarine fixed defences for the safety of the ports. No ministerial decision appears to have been received by the Board.

A conference presided over by the Chief of Naval Staff and attended by the other naval members of the Board, naval officers-in-charge, and staff officers was held on 28 September 1943 to consider 'reductions in the scale of the naval defences of New Zealand proposed as a result of the improved strategic situation and the necessity for conserving manpower.'

In respect of the minefields, it was agreed that the independent minefields in [Hauraki Gulf](#) should remain at present, except those in the channels on either side of Rakino Island, which were to be swept. The controlled minefield in Whangaparaoa Passage was to be reduced to a care and maintenance basis and that at [Wellington](#) to remain fully manned, the position in respect of both to be reviewed early in 1944. The independent minefield at the Bay of Islands was to be swept and the controlled fields there and at Whangaroa, Great Barrier, and [Akaroa](#) to be fired. All stores were to be transferred to Islington Bay and Tikao Bay base was to be closed down and offered to the Army.

The few mines in the Rakino channels were swept during October 1943 but War Cabinet's approval in regard to the other fields was not given until the end of the year. In January 1944 it was decided to dispose of all the minefields except that at [Wellington](#). The [Akaroa](#) controlled field was fired in February and sweeping of the Bay of Islands independent field completed about the same time. Thereafter, firing and sweeping operations continued until July 1944, when they were completed by the destruction of the controlled field at [Wellington](#).

The prophecy of Commodore Parry as Chief of Naval Staff in November 1941 that static mine defences would probably never be required had been completely fulfilled. Doubtless at that time the Government had felt bound to act on the advice of their military adviser, General Williams, regarding the defence of New Zealand against a possible Japanese invasion, which to many appeared a near probability in the black months following [Pearl Harbour](#). But, though it could not be known at the time, Japanese sources have since revealed that no attack on New Zealand was ever planned.

In any case, the defensive mining of harbours was a long-term programme. It took months to bring the necessary equipment from overseas and the ships to install it did not arrive in New Zealand until August 1942. By that time there was a definite

improvement in the strategic situation in the Pacific. New Caledonia, Fiji, Samoa, and other island bases on the oceanic lines of communication were well garrisoned and reasonably secure. The decisive actions of the Coral Sea and Midway had been fought and won by the Americans, who were using New Zealand as a southern base for their powerful thrust into the Solomon Islands. But the immensely costly mining programme went ahead for months almost in its entirety, adding to the almost intolerable strain on the country's resources of manpower and material. While there were huge commitments in respect of the other two services, the Navy was also concerned to get an extensive programme of works completed in its main base at Devonport Dockyard and the subsidiary base at Wellington, as well as to institute its anti-submarine defences, including the building of anti-submarine trawlers and launches.

The moral of all this is that the sure defence of our island country depends first and foremost, like that of the British Empire as a whole, upon the security of our sea communications, and that implies adequate naval strength. It was Japan's command of the sea that gave her initial success in an incredibly short time. It was the immense build-up of American sea power that brought her to ultimate defeat. Another lesson to be learned by New Zealand is that a healthy and vigorous mercantile marine, especially in coastal shipping and fishing vessels, is essential to our security. For it is to the pool of merchant shipping that the Navy must look to furnish the numerous auxiliary vessels needed in time of war. The real British Navy is still all British shipping and all British seamen.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 16 – THE AGGRESSIONS OF JAPAN

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The Aggressions of Japan

IN 1853 an American squadron under Commodore Matthew Perry, USN, paid an unwelcome visit to [Tokyo](#) asking for trade facilities in [Japan](#). That historic occasion marked the beginning of the end for [Japan](#) of more than two centuries of complete seclusion from the rest of the world. [Japan](#) had closed her harbours to all foreign ships in 1638 and a strictly enforced edict forbade any ocean-going enterprise, the building of ships being limited to small coastal vessels. That law was revoked in 1853, and a treaty with the [United States](#) was soon followed by others with European nations; but forty years passed before Japanese merchant ships were seen outside Far Eastern waters.

The transition of [Japan](#) from feudalism to modern ways was swift beyond all precedent, and violent. The final overthrow of the Shogunate and the restoration to power of the Emperor in 1868 marked a point from which [Japan](#) began the organisation of her land and sea forces and a rapid development of her internal resources and overseas trade. [Japan](#), like Great Britain, is an island outpost of a great continent and, once she had accepted the Western model of nineteenth-century progress, it was inevitable that she would develop into a great sea power.

The Japanese developed their navy on the British model under the guidance of officers lent from the Royal Navy. Japanese officers were trained in England and returned to [Japan](#) in three small warships built in [Britain](#).¹ There was a wealth of good seamen among the virile people of [Japan](#).

Two wars consolidated [Japan](#)'s position as a modern naval and military power. In 1894–95 she soundly defeated [China](#), which then recognised the 'independence' of [Korea](#) and ceded to Japan Formosa and the Kwantung Peninsula in [Manchuria](#). [Russia](#), however, backed by [France](#) and [Germany](#), forced the retrocession of the latter territory to [China](#). Ten years later, [Japan](#) had her revenge in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5. [Russia](#) was defeated, not only at sea but on land by great armies transported to the mainland to win bloody battles in [Manchuria](#). [Russia](#) was compelled to surrender

¹ The great Admiral Togo, as a young man, spent two years (1872–73) in the training ship HMS Worcester and made a voyage to Melbourne and back as an ordinary seaman in a British sailing ship.

the lease of Kwantung Peninsula (including Port Arthur) and evacuate Manchuria, to cede the southern half of Saghalien, and to recognise Japan's 'sphere of influence' in Korea (whose Emperor in 1910 was forced to renounce all his rights of sovereignty to Japan). Though Britain was strictly neutral during the war, Japan's hand had been greatly strengthened by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance concluded in January 1902.

If the world had been surprised by Japan's quick defeat of China, it was with amazement that it saw the overthrow of Russia's naval and military might in the Far East. Though Japan's fleet, largely foreign-built, was small, it was well trained and superbly efficient. Her then inadequate merchant marine had to be supplemented by many chartered foreign supply ships. Seldom, if ever before, had more decisive results been achieved by sea forces so limited. With aggressive skill and determination, the Japanese exploited the 'flexibility, the celerity and the baffling nature of amphibious power', as they were to do on a vaster scale less than forty years later.

The war merely substituted Japan for Russia in southern Manchuria and the former was no more scrupulous in respecting China's rights than the latter had been. Almost immediately after the conclusion of peace, complaints began to be made that the Japanese authorities in Manchuria were discriminating against the nationals of other countries. Yet Japan, in her treaty with Britain, had declared that she was 'actuated solely by a desire to maintain in status quo and general peace the extreme East', to uphold 'the independence and territorial integrity of the Empire of China and the Empire of Korea', and 'to secure equal opportunities in those countries for the commerce and industries of all nations.' By her annexation of Korea in 1910, Japan moved her frontier to the south-eastern edge of Manchuria.

The decade following the war saw a great growth of Japan's naval and military power, as well as of her industries and overseas trade. Her naval dockyards were organised on modern lines and superbly equipped and by 1907 were building the

battleships and other warships which formerly had been beyond her resources. Many private shipyards were developed to build the liners and cargo vessels needed to cope with her ever-expanding trade. In 1904–5 [Japan](#), with a merchant fleet of some 600 ships of 672,000 tons, ranked in eleventh place among the shipowning countries of the world. Thirty-five years later, she had advanced to third place with 2340 ships of 5,630,000 tons.

When the First World War started in August 1914, [Japan](#) promptly seized the opportunity to further her ambitious aims in the [Pacific](#). Her assistance in terms of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty was not invoked by [Britain](#), but on 15 August [Japan](#) addressed an ultimatum to [Germany](#) demanding the unconditional surrender of the naval base of Tsingtau in the leased territory of Kiaochow on the Shantung Peninsula. Tsingtau was [Germany](#)'s most important overseas naval station and the base of her Pacific Squadron, but its reduction was too formidable a task for the limited British forces then available. [Japan](#) commenced hostilities on 23 August when a powerful expeditionary force—which included the old British battleship *Triumph*—moved to the investment of Tsingtau which fell on 7 November.

Meanwhile, Japanese squadrons actively co-operated with the British naval forces covering the trade routes and searching for the enemy's ships in the [Pacific](#). One Japanese cruiser, the *Ibuki*, formed part of the escort for the New Zealand and Australian expeditionary forces proceeding to Egypt.

In the first days of the war a special sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence had arranged, inter alia, that Australian forces should occupy [Rabaul](#) in the Bismarck Archipelago, north of [New Guinea](#), as a base of operations for the seizure of the cable and wireless stations on Nauru Island and Yap and Angaur in the Western Carolines. New Zealand was invited to take similar action against German Samoa, which was occupied on 30 August 1914. [Rabaul](#) was seized on 12 September and HMAS [Melbourne](#) had destroyed the wireless station on Nauru Island three days earlier.

No action had been taken in respect of Yap and Angaur when, on 14 October, the Australian authorities were informed by the Colonial Office that the Japanese had 'temporarily occupied' Yap but were 'ready to hand it over to an Australian force.' Because of its strategic importance, it was 'desirable to relieve the Japanese

as quickly as possible of the task of holding the island.' This suggestion was strongly supported by the Australian Naval Board, which submitted to the Minister of Defence proposals for the effective occupation and administration of the German islands which were of 'great strategic importance' and 'closely affect the whole question of the naval defence of [Australia](#) in the future.'

That was a compelling reason for prompt action, but five weeks elapsed before the Admiralty was informed that an expedition was about to leave [Rabaul](#) to occupy [Saipan](#) in the Marianas, Yap, Angaur, and Ponape in the Carolines, Jaluit in the Marshalls, and Nauru Island. But on 24 November the Colonial Office informed the Australian Government that it was 'desirable for the present' that the expedition should not proceed to any islands north of the Equator. When Australia asked for further information, the reply was made that as the Pellew, Marianas, Caroline, and Marshall Islands were occupied by the Japanese, who were at [Britain's](#) request policing the north [Pacific](#), it was considered 'most convenient for strategic reasons, to allow them to remain in occupation for the present, leaving the whole question of future to be settled at the end of the war.'¹

In February 1917 the Australian Prime Minister, replying to the British Government, said his Government had no objection to a pledge being given to [Japan](#) that the islands north of the Equator would be hers after the war. On the day it referred the matter to [Australia](#), the British Government had informed the [Japanese Government](#) that it would support [Japan's](#) claim to the islands north of the Equator on the understanding that she would treat in the same spirit [Britain's](#) claims to the German islands south of the Equator. In return for this promise, [Japan](#) agreed to send destroyers to the [Mediterranean](#) to assist in convoy operations.

During the war relations between [Britain](#) and [Japan](#) were marked by mutual distrust. Ill-feeling against [Britain](#) frequently found vehement expression in the Japanese press, notably when the war in [Europe](#) was going badly for [Britain](#) and her Allies. Military aid for [Britain](#) was never forthcoming, and even when naval assistance was given a price was always exacted.

[Japan](#) also seized the opportunity in January 1915 to present her notorious Twenty-one Demands on [China](#) which included far-reaching political, economic, and territorial concessions. These caused great indignation in [China](#) and called forth

severe criticism in [Britain](#) and the [United States](#). [Japan](#) was constrained to make some modifications in her demands, but she had the upper hand and knew it and [China](#) had to submit.

At the Imperial Conferences in 1917 and 1918 and the Peace Conference in 1919, New Zealand and [Australia](#) made it clear that they would not tolerate the [Pacific](#) islands being returned to [Germany](#). With considerable misgiving they yielded to the British pledges already made to [Japan](#) regarding the islands north of the Equator, and only when a special type of mandate – C class – was devised to meet the special situation in the [Pacific](#), under which the trustee power was not obliged to keep the door open to foreign commerce and foreign immigration, did they agree to accept anything short of full possession of the islands and territories south of the Equator.

At the end of 1918 the German Fleet had ceased to exist and [Japan](#) had become the third great naval power. A year earlier the

¹ When the proposal to hand Yap over to [Australia](#) became known in [Japan](#), there were hostile demonstrations in [Tokyo](#) and great pressure was brought to bear on the [Japanese Government](#), which withdrew its offer. Possibly, it had not intended to hand over the eastern groups of islands. The original offer mentioned only Yap.— Official History of [Australia](#) in the War of 1914–18, Vol. IX, p. 136.

Imperial Diet had formally approved the so-called 'eight-eight policy' in capital ships – the building of eight battleships and eight battle-cruisers, each of 43,000 tons and armed with 16-inch guns, none of which at any time would be more than eight years old. It was the most ambitious programme of naval expansion yet undertaken in time of peace by any nation except [Germany](#). Its cost was one-third of [Japan](#)'s total revenue. Its completion would place [Japan](#) almost on a parity with the [United States](#) and relegate [Britain](#) to third place. The United States was then building sixteen capital ships. [Britain](#) was planning to build only four.

This grim prospect of a great naval armament 'race' was dispelled by the Washington Conference of 1921–22, at which it was agreed that the [United States](#) should retain eighteen existing capital ships of 500,000 tons, [Britain](#) twenty-two of

580,000 tons, [Japan](#) ten of 301,000 tons, [France](#) ten of 221,000 tons, and [Italy](#) ten of 183,000 tons. In addition, the [United States](#) was to complete two ships already launched and then scrap two others; and when two ships to be built by [Britain](#) were ready, four old ships were to be scrapped. Apart from these exceptions the Powers agreed that all their other capital ships built or building should be disposed of. (In the case of [Japan](#), four, and of the [United States](#), two, partly built ships were converted into aircraft-carriers.) They further agreed to abandon their respective capital-ship building programmes and not to construct any new capital ships except as replacements when existing vessels reached an age limit of twenty years. No capital ship was to exceed 35,000 tons standard displacement or carry guns larger than 16-inch. Cruisers were to be limited to 10,000 tons and 8-inch guns. Less than twenty years later [Japan](#) was secretly building three battleships of 73,000 tons displacement, armed with 18-inch guns, one of which was later converted into an aircraft-carrier.

The Washington Treaty put a limit to the total tonnage of aircraft-carriers for each power and no ship of this class was to exceed 27,000 tons. The London Naval Treaty of 1930 provided that no capital ships were to be laid down before 1936 and fixed the ratio of total tonnage of cruisers, destroyers, and submarines for [Britain](#), the [United States](#), and [Japan](#) at approximately 5:5:3.

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of twenty years' standing was ended by the Washington Conference. The United States delegation was determined that the treaty should not be renewed, taking the view that as the menace of [Russia](#) and [Germany](#) no longer existed, the Alliance could only be directed against [America](#). The British Ambassador to [Washington](#) had several times warned his government that renewal of the Alliance would antagonise the [United States](#). When the matter was debated at the Imperial Conference of 1921, the British Prime Minister, Mr Lloyd George, held that 'friendly co-operation with [America](#) is for us a cardinal principle'; to renew the Alliance in face of [America's](#) opposition would then be to destroy the whole basis of British foreign policy. This view was supported by [Canada](#) and South Africa who sternly opposed a renewal of the Alliance. [Australia](#) and New Zealand, on the other hand, argued strongly in favour of its continuance.

The Four Power Pact, signed by Great Britain, the [United States](#), [Japan](#), and [France](#), took the place of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The Pact, which was Article

XIX of the Treaty for Limitation of Naval Armament, provided that the status quo with regard to fortifications and naval bases should be maintained in specified Pacific islands and territories.

This was a good bargain for Japan who, in addition to the great naval bases in her home islands, already possessed a chain of secondary bases in the Kurile, Bonin, Ryukyu and Loochoo islands, Formosa, and the Pescadores. On the other hand, while the Hawaiian Islands were not affected by the Pact, the United States could not strengthen or develop Guam in the Marianas, the Philippines, or Pago Pago in Samoa. Britain fared little better. Hong Kong, the oilfields of Sarawak, the whole of North Borneo, and island groups in the Pacific were all in the status quo area. Since Hong Kong, the only British naval base of any size in the Pacific, could not dock large capital ships, it meant that, until Singapore had been developed, Britain had no adequate naval base nearer than Malta in the Mediterranean. Japan was thus secured against new British and American naval base development nearer to her shores than Singapore or Hawaii.

The Nine Power Treaty with China, signed at Washington, was an agreement to provide the fullest opportunity to China to develop an effective and stable government, to promote 'equal opportunity for the commerce and industry of all nations throughout China', and to refrain from seeking 'special rights or privileges which would abridge the rights of subjects of friendly nations and from countenancing action inimical to the security of such States.' Japan returned the Shantung Peninsula to China and Britain withdrew from Wei-hai-wei. But Japan's ambitions were in no way abated and she bided her time.

In September 1931, on a pretext of quelling local disorders, Japanese forces seized Mukden and the zone of the Manchurian railway. Four months later Japanese troops landed north of the international concession at Shanghai; the Chinese resisted with spirit but were driven inland. At about the same time the Japanese, who had occupied the whole of southern Manchuria, created the puppet state of Manchukuo. A year later the province of Jehol was annexed to it and Japanese troops had reached the Great Wall of China.

These moves were well timed. The world was in the depths of the Great Depression. The British and American Governments were pacifist and gravely

preoccupied with internal problems – the former also with embarrassments in Europe. China appealed to the League of Nations, which called upon Japan to remove her troops from Manchuria and appointed a commission under Lord Lytton to conduct an inquiry on the spot. Angered by Japan's actions, the United States informed her that she would not recognise any agreement impairing her treaty rights or infringing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China. Britain preferred not to take any action likely to antagonise Japan.

Lord Lytton's report, holding that the state of Manchukuo was the artificial creation of the Japanese General Staff, proposed the declaration of an autonomous Manchuria which would remain part of China under the aegis of the League. In February 1933 the League declared that the State of Manchukuo could not be recognised. A month later Japan withdrew from membership of the League. At the end of January Hitler had taken office as Chancellor of Germany.

These pregnant events were overshadowed in New Zealand and Australia by pressing internal economic and political problems, both countries being still in the throes of the depression. No protest came from either government at the time. Soon after it assumed office in 1935 the New Zealand Labour Government under Mr Savage made it known that its foreign policy was based on the Covenant of the League of Nations and this was reaffirmed at the Imperial Conference of 1937. The proposal of the Prime Minister of Australia at that conference of a regional pact for the Pacific came to nothing when Japan resumed her undeclared war in China, which soon extended far and wide.

Not only in the Far East but in Europe, the moral authority of the League of Nations was shown to be devoid of any physical support at a time when its activity and strength were most needed. Germany and Japan had both withdrawn from the League, and in November 1936 the latter joined the Axis Anti-Comintern Pact. In December 1934 Japan had announced her intention to withdraw from the Washington Naval Treaty, as a year later she did from the London Naval Treaty. Germany was helped on her rapid way to rearmament by the Anglo-German naval agreement which, though it provided that the German Navy should not exceed one-third of the British, in effect allowed her a programme of new construction at maximum activity for at least ten years. All these happenings, and many others,

gave sombre emphasis to the warning of the Committee of Imperial Defence at the Imperial Conference of 1937 of the grave risks to the Empire of being involved in war simultaneously in [Europe](#) and the far East.

In September 1937 [China](#) had again appealed to the League of Nations, the Far Eastern Advisory Committee of which passed a resolution solemnly condemning the Japanese bombing of open towns and later recommended a conference of members of the League which were parties to the Nine Power Treaty of 1922. [Japan](#) flatly refused to take part in the conference, which was held in [Brussels](#), holding that the conflict lay outside the scope of the Treaty, that it had been caused by [China](#), and that the League by assuring [China](#) of moral support had impugned the honour of [Japan](#). Since neither [Britain](#) nor the [United States](#) was willing to take positive action in the form of economic sanctions against [Japan](#), the conference achieved nothing. New Zealand had previously assured the British Government that she would support sanctions,¹ but [Australia](#) and South Africa were opposed to them and [Canada](#) was non-committal. In 1938 and again in January 1939, [China](#) made futile appeals to the League of Nations.

In November 1937 [Italy](#) joined the already firmly established Anti-Comintern Pact and in the following year, while [Britain](#) and [France](#) were preoccupied with the [Czechoslovakia](#) crisis and [Munich](#), [Japan](#) extended her war in [China](#). [Canton](#) and [Hankow](#) were captured in October 1938 and the Chinese Government of [Chiang Kai-shek](#) had retired to [Chungking](#). A few months later [Japan](#) seized the strategically placed island of [Hainan](#) and the [Spratly Islands](#) in the South China Sea.

Seriously perturbed by the swift march of events in [Europe](#) and the growing aggression of [Japan](#) in the [Far East](#), the New Zealand Prime Minister proposed to [Britain](#) and [Australia](#) a conference to discuss the 'strategic situation in the Western Pacific in its widest aspect and embracing all those political, economic and geographical considerations which would arise in a simultaneous war in [Europe](#).' The conference opened at [Wellington](#) in April 1939. The United Kingdom delegation stressed the intention to defend [Singapore](#) 'as one of the two keystones on which the survival of the British Empire depended' and to send a British fleet to the [Far East](#) immediately on the entry of [Japan](#) into the war.

Though considered highly improbable, it was conceivable that the Japanese

might embark upon a large-scale operation against

Aust-

¹ Many resolutions in favour of a boycott of Japanese goods were passed by trade unions and other organisations in New Zealand. In 1937 waterside workers several times refused to load scrap metal into Japanese ships, and on 8 October of that year a Government embargo was imposed on the export of all scrap metal.

ralia

or New Zealand. To meet the danger of raids the conference recommended a number of air observation posts in the chain of islands between [Tonga](#) and [New Guinea](#). [Fiji](#) was the most important of these for the defence of New Zealand and [Australia](#), and recommendations were made as to the strength of forces to be stationed in the islands. It was also suggested that the [New Zealand Government](#) should consider the manning and maintenance of a third cruiser and the stiffening of New Zealand merchant ships to take gun mountings. The Air Force should increase its output of trained pilots and the Army be built up to greater strength. Questions of supply were also discussed. Following the conference, Mr Savage lost no time in broadcasting an appeal for men for the regular forces and the Territorial army, and much military equipment was ordered.

From the summer of 1938, while [Britain](#) pursued her policy of appeasement in [Europe](#) where she 'sustained a defeat without a war,' she was compelled to let matters take their course in the [Far East](#). On the other hand, [United States](#) policy towards [Japan](#) stiffened, and in July 1939 it was decided to end the American-Japanese commercial treaty of 1911. In August 1939 the British Government contemplated denouncing the Anglo-Japanese commercial treaty, and the [New Zealand Government](#) intimated that it was prepared to end its trade agreement with [Japan](#) provided the other Dominions acted similarly. The British Government, however, decided to defer 'consideration of the matter.' After the outbreak of war in [Europe](#), [Britain](#) did everything possible to avoid antagonising [Japan](#), especially in regard to contraband control and her right of search at sea.

The fall of [Holland](#) and [France](#) in May-June 1940 brought inevitable

repercussions in [Japan](#), where the extremists expanded their ideas from a liquidation of the 'China Incident' to the setting up of a 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' by moving south and seizing French Indo- [China](#) and the coveted [Netherlands East Indies](#). The moderate cabinet of Admiral Yonai resigned and was replaced by that of Prince Konoye, with General Tojo as Minister of War and the pro-German Matsuoka as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

For Britain, faced with the possibility of a German invasion, the prospect was bleak indeed. Without the assistance of the French Navy she had not sufficient forces to deal with the German and Italian naval forces in European waters and withstand the Japanese fleet in the [Far East](#). This meant, in effect, that the basis of Imperial defence in the [Pacific](#) was shattered and nothing lay between [Japan](#) and New Zealand and [Australia](#) save [Singapore](#), which could be of little value if there was no powerful naval force to keep the seas in the [Far East](#).

In June 1940 [Japan](#) demanded that Marshal Petain stop the movement of war material to [China](#) by way of Indo- [China](#), and that [Britain](#) close the [Burma Road](#) and the [Hong Kong](#) frontier to supplies to [Chiang Kai-shek](#) and withdraw her garrison from [Shanghai](#). At the end of August, Petain consented to a Japanese military occupation and the construction of airfields in northern Indo- [China](#).

At first the British Government decided not to accede to the Japanese demand regarding the [Burma Road](#) and there was a hostile outburst in [Japan](#). It was then arranged to suspend traffic along the road for three months on the understanding that [Japan](#) would move toward a just and equitable settlement with [China](#). [Japan](#), however, did nothing to fulfil her part of the bargain and in September 1940 entered into a treaty with [Germany](#) and [Italy](#), who recognised the 'leadership of [Japan](#) in the establishment of a New Order in Greater East Asia.' Each would assist the others if attacked by the [United States](#).

While the Australian Government was for temporising in negotiations with [Japan](#) concerning the reopening of the [Burma Road](#), the [New Zealand Government](#) was averse to making further concessions, holding that the Chinese should be encouraged to continue their struggle which was a 'major safeguard to the remaining British interests in the [Far East](#) and in the South seas.' The United States when consulted expressed the hope that the road would not remain closed. It was

reopened in October 1940.

With this stiffening of British policy came evidence of a similar trend in that of the United States Government, on whose initiative private staff talks took place at [Washington](#) in January–March 1941 between representatives of the [United States](#), [Britain](#), [Australia](#), New Zealand, and the Netherlands Government to discuss the forces available for common action in the [Pacific](#) and to collate plans for prompt action if the need arose. No clear-cut discussions were reached at this conference, nor at those held at [Singapore](#) in February and April.

Plans for economic sanctions against [Japan](#) now began to take shape. The British Government proposed that throughout the Empire the export to [Japan](#) of all essential goods and raw materials should be brought under licence. The New Zealand Government agreed to adopt this policy. Already the [United States](#) had imposed drastic restrictions on the export to [Japan](#) of various minerals and chemicals, aircraft and their components, aviation fuel and lubricants, and scrap metal; and the embargoes were widened at the end of the year.

In February 1941, while arid discussions were proceeding between the British and Japanese Foreign Ministers, the Japanese Vice-Consul in New Zealand, Mr Nakafuji, called on the Prime Minister to discuss Japanese foreign policy, which he said was based upon a desire for peace, particularly with the British countries in the South Pacific. In his reply Mr Fraser did not mince words. New Zealand, he said, was 'most anxious that no trouble should come in the [Pacific](#)' and that her people entertained none but the most friendly feelings towards [Japan](#). If, however, war did come, New Zealand would play her part to the best of her ability along with the other members of the British Commonwealth.

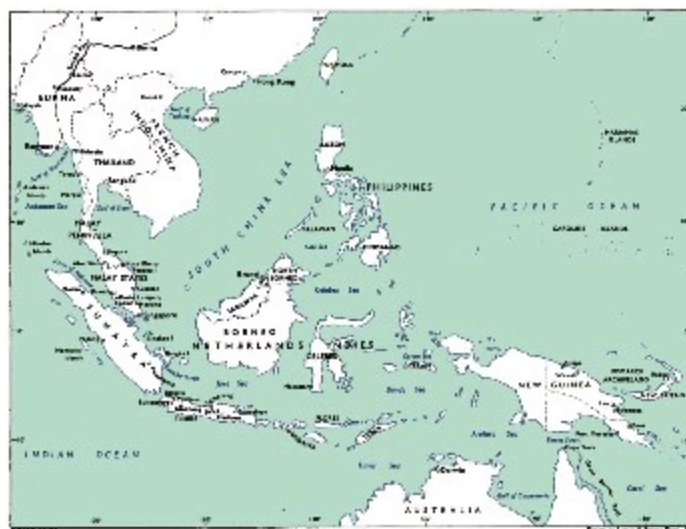
Meanwhile, [Japan](#) stepped up her warlike preparations. In April she concluded a non-aggression pact with [Russia](#) (which two months later was invaded by [Germany](#)). On 25 July the Japanese Foreign Minister announced that Vichy had agreed to admit [Japan](#) to a 'joint protectorate' in French Indo- [China](#) – in other words, [Japan](#) was free to complete her military occupation of that country, which she did forthwith.

On the following day the British and United States Governments issued orders 'freezing' all Japanese assets in their respective countries. The Netherlands

Government acted similarly in respect to the East Indies. At the same time the British Government gave notice of the termination of the Anglo-Japanese commercial treaty, and on 27 July the acting Prime Minister announced that New Zealand would end her trade agreement with [Japan](#).

Thus Japan was deprived at a stroke of vital oil supplies and other essential war supplies. She had long been building up great stocks of oil and now was forced to trench upon that reserve, which amounted to about eighteen months' supply. The choice before [Japan](#)'s military rulers was either to get an agreement (on their terms) with [Britain](#) and the [United States](#) or go to war. For the latter event they were already well ahead with their plans.

It is important to remember that the Japanese Cabinet, which was not responsible to Parliament, was completely dominated by the military in the persons of the War and Navy Ministers, who were invariably high-ranking officers on the active list. If a Prime Minister could not get a general or admiral to hold office he could not form or maintain a Cabinet, and no officer would serve as Army or Navy Minister whose policy was not approved of by his particular service. The Emperor was regarded as the supreme head and embodiment of the State and all actions were taken in his name. The Imperial Headquarters, created only in time of war, had been formed in November 1937. Its nucleus was the two general staffs and it was headed by the Chiefs of Staff of the Army and Navy.



SOUTH-EAST ASIA AND EAST INDIES ARCHIPELAGO

For the next four months the efforts of the governments of the [United States](#) and the British Commonwealth to secure a settlement in the [Far East](#) were concentrated in the discussions at [Washington](#) between the representatives of [America](#) and the Japanese Ambassador, Admiral Nomura. In Japan the extremists gained control in October 1941 when Prince Konoye resigned and General Tojo became Prime Minister, still retaining his office as Minister of War and taking that of Home Affairs as well.

At the beginning of November the Japanese chiefs of staff concluded a 'central agreement' between the Navy and the Army which aimed at the 'reduction of the primary foundations of American, British and Dutch power in Eastern Asia' by the occupation of the whole of the 'southern areas', including [Hong Kong](#), [Malaya](#), [Burma](#), the [Philippines](#), the Dutch East Indies, and the Bismarcks. Detailed plans for the various phases of this vast objective, as well as for the attack on [Pearl Harbour](#), had already been completed.

In the meantime, in the unduly optimistic hope that their presence would have a deterrent effect, it was decided to send the Prince of Wales and Repulse and the aircraft-carrier Indomitable out to the [Far East](#) as the forerunners of a [British Eastern Fleet](#). The Indomitable was temporarily disabled by an accident, but the other two ships arrived at [Singapore](#) less than a week before the Japanese struck.

On 5 November, the day on which Mr Saburo Kurusu left [Japan](#) for [Washington](#) to assist Admiral Nomura, the latter received a 'top-secret' telegram from [Tokyo](#) (which was decoded by the Americans) informing him that it was 'absolutely necessary' to reach an agreement by 25 November. ¹ After five days of fruitless discussions, Nomura on 20 November handed the United States Secretary of State a note that was virtually an ultimatum and completely unacceptable. On 26 November the Japanese envoys were given a lengthy memorandum proposing, inter alia, (1) a non-aggression pact between [Japan](#), [Britain](#), the [United States](#), the Netherlands Government, [China](#), [Russia](#), and [Thailand](#); (2) the evacuation by [Japan](#) of [China](#) and Indo- [China](#); (3) mutual recognition of extra-territorial rights in [China](#); (4) Japanese recognition of the Chungking Government; (5) the reciprocal unfreezing of assets and a new trade agreement between the [United States](#) and [Japan](#). On 6 December President Roosevelt sent a personal message to the Emperor of [Japan](#) in a last

attempt to avert the imminent clash. But General Tojo's secret decision to make war on the [United States](#), the British Commonwealth, and the Dutch East

¹ The date was later advanced to 29 November. The Japanese force which was to attack [Pearl Harbour](#) sailed from [Japan](#) on 26 November and the expeditionary forces for the invasion of [Malaya](#) and [Siam \(Thailand\)](#) were on their way southward.

Indies had been ratified on 1 December by a Cabinet council in the presence of the Emperor.

At 7.50 a.m. on 7 December the aircraft from Admiral Nagumo's carrier force began the treacherous attack on [Pearl Harbour](#) that, in barely two hours, crippled the United States Pacific Fleet for six months. ¹ In Washington, less than an hour after the attack had begun, the Japanese envoys presented to the Secretary of State, Mr Cordell Hull, a reply to his proposals. When he had finished reading it Mr Hull said he had 'never seen a document that was more crowded with infamous falsehoods and distortions.' A few hours later the Emperor's reply to Mr Roosevelt was handed to the American Ambassador in [Tokyo](#). 'Establishment of peace in the [Pacific](#),' it said, 'has been the cherished desire of His Majesty, for the realisation of which he has hitherto made his government continue its earnest endeavours.'

Simultaneously with the attack on [Pearl Harbour](#) the Japanese struck hard in the [Far East](#). In the early hours of 8 December ² they landed at Kota Bharu in [Malaya](#) and at Singora in [Siam \(Thailand\)](#), and air attacks were made on [Hong Kong](#) and [Manila](#). Two days later the Prince of Wales and Repulse were sunk by air attack during a sortie from [Singapore](#) that, when it started in the evening of the 8th, was already too late to counter the enemy landings.

The Japanese now held undisputed command of the sea in the Western Pacific, and the strategic balance in the world war was for the time being fundamentally changed. During the next four or five months the Japanese war machine operated with hideous efficiency against the utterly inadequate sea, air, and land forces of the Allies, who had to bear a heavy load of defeat in the South-West Pacific.

During December the main efforts of the Japanese were directed against [Malaya](#)

and the [Philippines](#),³ while minor forces occupied [Pacific](#) islands. [Guam](#) was captured on 12 December, [Tarawa](#) and Makin in the Gilberts on the 18th, and Wake Island on the 24th. [Hong Kong](#) surrendered on Christmas Day. By the end of the month all the outlying islands north of the Equator and west of the 180th meridian were in Japanese hands.

¹ On 25 July 1894 a Japanese cruiser squadron made a surprise attack on a Chinese naval force and, a few hours later, sank the British steamer [Kowshing](#) which was carrying Chinese troops. The Japanese formally declared war on [China](#) seven days later. Again, on 8 February 1904, a midnight surprise attack by Japanese torpedo-boats on the Russian fleet anchored outside Port Arthur preceded a formal declaration of war.

² Hawaiian time is 10 ½ hours behind and Malayan time 7 ½ hours ahead of Greenwich mean time – a total difference of 18 hours. Thus, 7.50 a.m., 7 December, at [Pearl Harbour](#) was 1.50 a.m., 8 December, at Kota Bharu. The Japanese landing at the latter place, 12.25 a.m., 8 December, therefore, actually started 1 hour 25 minutes before the attack on [Pearl Harbour](#).

³ The Philippines were soon isolated from Allied assistance and, though the defence of the Bataan Peninsula continued till 9 April and the island fortress of Corregidor in Manila Bay held out till 6 May, their conquest was only a matter of time.

Toward the end of December it was decided to set up a unified command of all American, British, Dutch, and Australian sea, air, and land forces in the South-West Pacific. General Wavell was appointed supreme commander of this ABDA area and opened his headquarters at [Bandoeng](#) in [Java](#) on 10 January 1942, the day on which the Japanese began the invasion of the [Netherlands East Indies](#). With inadequate forces and no strategic reserve at his disposal, Wavell could do little to stay the enemy advance.

[Borneo](#) and other Dutch islands were captured in quick succession. Lae and Salamaua in [New Guinea](#) and [Rabaul](#) and [Kavieng](#) in the Bismarcks were occupied, Darwin and [Port Moresby](#) were attacked from the air, and [Burma](#) was invaded from

Siam. **Singapore** surrendered on 15 February, the day on which **Palembang**, the great oil centre in **Sumatra**, was captured. A week later the ABDA Command was ended and General Wavell returned to the defence of **India**. On 27 February the disastrous naval action in the **Java** Sea sealed the fate of **Java**. An Allied squadron of five cruisers and ten destroyers under the command of Rear-Admiral Doorman, RNN,¹ was practically annihilated by powerful Japanese forces, four American destroyers alone escaping. **Java** capitulated on 9 March. The occupation of the **Andaman Islands** in March extended Japanese control to the eastern part of the Bay of Bengal.

Meanwhile, the **British Eastern Fleet** had assembled at Colombo. It consisted of five old battleships, one old and two modern aircraft-carriers, two 8-inch cruisers,² five light cruisers, and sixteen destroyers. They were all that could be spared for the **Indian Ocean**. The main part of this fleet was fuelling in the Maldivé Islands when a powerful Japanese force of five carriers, four battleships, three cruisers, and nine destroyers made a raid in the Bay of Bengal. Colombo and Trincomalee were heavily bombed, the cruisers **Cornwall** and Dorsetshire, the **Hermes** and a destroyer, and more than 112,000 tons of shipping were sunk.

The conquest of **Burma** was complete by the end of April when **Lashio**, terminus of the road to **China**, was captured. By 10 May the British troops had evacuated **Burma** and the fall of Corregidor had put an end to organised resistance in the **Philippines**.

Thus, with almost incredible swiftness the Japanese had gained the whole of the 'Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere' (with the sole exception of **Port Moresby**) and were in control of a vast area and rich resources in the western **Pacific** within a radius of 3000 miles from **Tokyo**. In less than six months they had come

¹ Dutch: light cruisers De Ruyter and **Java** and two destroyers; British: HMS **Exeter**, **HMAS Perth**, and three destroyers; **United States**: 8-inch cruiser **Houston** and five destroyers.

² Battleships: **Warspite**, **Resolution**, **Revenge**, **Ramillies**, and **Royal Sovereign**; aircraft-carriers: **Indomitable**, **Formidable**, **Hermes**; 8-inch cruisers: **Cornwall**, **Dorsetshire**.

within easy striking distance of [Australia](#) and New Zealand. All this had been achieved with a loss of five destroyers, eight submarines, ten small patrol craft, sixty-seven merchant ships (many more than this had been captured by the Japanese) and a few aircraft. Never before in the history of warfare was so much gained in exchange for so little.

During this period of triumph the Japanese exploited to the utmost their command of the sea gained by the crippling of the American Pacific Fleet and the non-existence of a powerful, balanced British naval force in eastern waters. A notable feature of their operations was the recognition of the interdependence of the sea, air, and land forces expressed in a masterly co-ordination of the functions of all three. This, and their demonstration of the mobility, range, and striking power of aircraft-carrier forces, set the pattern for the war in the vast expanses of the [Pacific](#). Fundamentally, the Japanese successes derived from their able exercise of sea power. Once the immeasurably greater maritime resources of the [United States](#) and [Britain](#) were marshalled, the doom of the Japanese Empire was certain.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 17 – PERIL IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

CHAPTER 17

Peril in the South Pacific

IN the early hours of 8 December 1941 the New Zealand Naval Board received an urgent signal from Commodore Parry, who was attending a conference at [Singapore](#), stating that the situation was critical and war with [Japan](#) was thought to be imminent. The Commander-in-Chief, therefore, was hastening the concentration of the Eastern Fleet, which at the moment consisted only of the Prince of Wales, Repulse, and six destroyers. Commodore Parry strongly recommended that HMNZS [Achilles](#) should be sent as soon as possible to join the Eastern Fleet which was 'desperately short' of cruisers. None was available from Home Waters and the Commander-in-Chief was trying to collect cruisers from those in the eastern theatre – namely, two from the East Indies, two from the Royal Netherlands Navy, one from [Australia](#), and one from New Zealand – for operations with his battleships and as a striking force in conjunction with air reconnaissance along the Malay Barrier.

Parry's request was approved at once by War Cabinet and he was so informed by a signal sent during the forenoon. Two hours earlier the [Achilles](#), which was escorting the Wahine carrying troops to [Fiji](#), had been ordered to proceed to [Suva](#) 'with all despatch', thence to [Port Moresby](#) 'with despatch', and on to [Singapore](#) 'with all convenient despatch.'¹

The [Achilles](#) arrived at [Suva](#) at 5.15 p.m. that day and, after refuelling, sailed less than four hours later for [Port Moresby](#). In the meantime, Navy Office had been informed that the ship was 5 officers and 82 ratings short of her complement. They had been given advance leave in anticipation of her docking at [Auckland](#) for a refit in January, when the remainder of the ship's company was to have gone on leave. Arrangements were made for twelve officers and 'key' ratings to be flown to [Singapore](#), the remainder to be sent on by steamer.²

But tragic events in Malayan waters had moved too fast. Even before the [Achilles](#) had reached [Suva](#), the Japanese had struck and on 10 December the Prince of Wales and Repulse were sunk.

¹ 'With all despatch', ship to steam at nine-tenths of her full power;

'with despatch', at three-fifths of full power; 'with all convenient despatch' at two-fifths of full power.

² These arrangements were cancelled later and all officers and ratings rejoined the [Achilles](#) at [Auckland](#).

Two days later the following signal from the Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet ¹ was received by the New Zealand Naval Board: 'In view of the changed circumstances, will you please cancel detachment of [Achilles](#) and give her any orders you please'. This decision doubtless was influenced by Commodore Parry's signal from [Batavia](#) on 11 December to the Commander-in-Chief China, asking whether the [Achilles](#) would be needed before the Eastern Fleet was reformed and whether her absence from the south-west [Pacific](#) was justified 'in view of increased scale of attacks on sea communications.'

The [Achilles](#) arrived at [Port Moresby](#) in the evening of 11 December, having made the passage of 1970 miles from [Suva](#) at an average speed of 27.78 knots. She was refuelling when she received a signal from [Wellington](#) cancelling her previous orders and instructing her to return to [Auckland](#) at 20 knots. She sailed at eight o'clock next morning and arrived at [Auckland](#) at midday on 16 December.

In the meantime, the Australian Naval Board had requested that the [Achilles](#) be ordered to [Brisbane](#) with all despatch to join HMAS [Canberra](#), flagship of Rear-Admiral J. G. Crace, and that consideration be given to the active co-operation of the [Leander](#) with the Australian Squadron. The [Achilles](#) left [Auckland](#) at midnight of the 16th to assist in covering an important [United States](#) convoy in the [New Caledonia-Brisbane](#) area.

This convoy of seven merchant ships escorted by the [United States](#) cruiser [Pensacola](#) ² had sailed from [Honolulu](#) on 29 November for [Manila](#), Philippine Islands. The ships were carrying 2600 troops of the United States Army Air Corps, including forty-eight pilots, and 2000 other troops comprising two field artillery regiments, as well as ninety aircraft, guns, and supplies. On 12 December the Australian and New Zealand naval authorities were informed that the convoy, which called at [Suva](#) next day for fuel and water, had been ordered to [Brisbane](#). The commanding officer of the

troops had received instructions that, if it were not possible for the troops to be sent to the Philippine Islands, they and their equipment were to be used in 'aiding the Allies of the U.S.A.'

At that time the major operations of the Japanese were directed against the Malay Peninsula and the [Philippines](#). Apart from the occupation of the [Gilbert Islands](#) and the bombing of Nauru and Ocean Islands, there was as yet no sign of any enemy movements in the South Pacific area, though several were imminent. Nevertheless,

¹ As soon as the news of the loss of Admiral Phillips was received by the Admiralty, Vice-Admiral Layton was ordered to re-hoist his flag as Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet.

² Pensacola, 9100 tons displacement; ten 8-inch, eight 5-inch guns, numerous anti-aircraft guns; four aircraft; speed 32 knots.

there was concern in [Australia](#) regarding the safety of [New Caledonia](#).

This was indicated in signals made by the Flag Officer Commanding Australian Squadron dealing with the despatch of Australian troops to [Noumea](#). ¹ In a signal to the Free French destroyer Le Triomphant which was to escort the troopship Ormiston ² from [Sydney](#) to [Noumea](#), he mentioned that a D/F bearing indicated that an enemy transport was on the line [Truk](#) – Solomon Islands during the evening of 13 December. Appreciating the 'possibility of enemy attempt to land in [New Caledonia](#) or vicinity, probably 18 December,' he said, 'my only object is to defeat any attempt by enemy to consolidate himself in [New Caledonia](#) area.' His dispositions would provide cover for the movements of the Ormiston, the American convoy, and the Wahine, escorted by the [Leander](#), carrying troops from [Auckland](#) to [Fiji](#).

The [Achilles](#) met the Pensacola and her convoy at midday on 19 December about midway between [Noumea](#) and [Brisbane](#), and the [Canberra](#) and [Perth](#) joined the escort about seven hours later. After dark on 21 December the [Canberra](#) and [Achilles](#) left the convoy and went ahead to Moreton Bay, where they refuelled. The [Achilles](#) left on the 22nd for [Auckland](#) but was recalled next day to rejoin the [Canberra](#) and [Perth](#), with whom she arrived at [Sydney](#) on 24 December.

The rapid adverse developments in the situation produced several complications at this time. During November arrangements had been made that the [Aquitania](#) should arrive at [Wellington](#) from [Sydney](#) on 19 December to embark the 8th Reinforcements, 2 NZEF. She was to sail four days later for [Sydney](#) to join the [Queen Elizabeth](#) as Convoy US 14 for [Suez](#). On 10 December, however, the New Zealand Naval Board was informed by [Australia](#) that the 'present intention is not to run U.S. 14', and on 14 December the Admiralty requested that 'pending further decisions on future U.S. convoys', the [Queen Elizabeth](#) and [Aquitania](#) be retained in [Australia](#). New Zealand Army Headquarters accordingly cancelled the embarkation orders for the troops.³ The transport [Empress of Canada](#), carrying Australian and New Zealand air trainees to [Canada](#), was to have gone from [Wellington](#) to Vancouver to be docked and refitted, but as no cruiser was available to escort her on that route, she was diverted and sailed on 28 December for [Halifax](#) via the Panama Canal.

¹ The signals were also addressed to the Australian and New Zealand naval authorities and to other ships concerned.

² Ormiston, steamship, 5832 tons gross register; owned by Australasian United Steam Navigation Company Ltd.

³ The 8th Reinforcements did not leave New Zealand until twelve months later. They sailed from [Wellington](#) in the [Aquitania](#) on 12 December 1942.

The [Achilles](#) had been recalled to take part in an operation involving the transport of 4250 Australian troops and some 10,000 tons of supplies to [Port Moresby](#) in anticipation of a southward movement by the Japanese. The troops were embarked in the [Aquitania](#) and the Blue Funnel liner [Sarpedon](#), 11,320 tons, the supplies being loaded in the latter vessel and the Norwegian motor-ship, [Herstein](#), 5100 tons. Escorted by the [Australia](#) (flagship), [Canberra](#), [Perth](#), and [Achilles](#), the convoy sailed from [Sydney](#) on 28 December and arrived at [Port Moresby](#) on 3 January 1942. In addition to daily patrols ahead of the convoy by aircraft of the [Royal Australian Air Force](#), anti-submarine protection was given by HMA Ships [Warrego](#) and [Swan](#)¹ for the last twenty-four hours of the passage, which was uneventful. During the month of December the [Achilles](#) had spent twenty-seven days

at sea and steamed 10,608 miles. This had involved much high-speed steaming under trying conditions in tropical waters and the performance reflected credit on the ship's engine-room staff.

After assisting in landing the troops from the [Aquitania](#), the [Achilles](#) sailed from [Port Moresby](#) in company with the [Australia](#) and [Perth](#) for [Noumea](#), arriving there on 7 January. The [Canberra](#) escorted the [Aquitania](#) back to [Sydney](#) and thence to Ratai Bay in [Sumatra](#), where the latter landed some 3500 Australian troops.

[Port Moresby](#), [New Caledonia](#), and [Fiji](#) – especially [Fiji](#) – were the linch-pins of Allied strategy in the South Pacific. Since November 1940, when the first units of the New Zealand 8th Brigade Group landed in [Fiji](#), strong defences had been built up in the [Suva](#) peninsula and in the Namaka area at the western end of [Viti Levu](#) about [Lautoka](#), the [Nandi](#) airfield, and Navula Passage, the entrance to Nandi Waters. In November 1941, at the request of the United States Government, New Zealand had undertaken to construct three major airfields in the Namaka area to operate the largest aircraft in service, the first to be ready in the middle of January 1942 and the other two in April. All three were in operation before those dates. A flying-boat base was constructed at [Lauthala Bay](#) near [Suva](#) and the Nandi Waters area was developed as a fleet anchorage.

The Australian and New Zealand Naval Boards had agreed that in the event of war with [Japan](#) shipping crossing the [Tasman Sea](#) would be sailed in convoy. Accordingly, HMAS [Adelaide](#) left [Sydney](#) on 3 January for [Wellington](#) with a convoy of eight ships, six of which were bound for the Panama Canal. The cruiser returned to [Australia](#) with four other ships. But because of the many urgent demands upon the all-too-few cruisers, no other trans- [Tasman](#)

con-

¹ Warrego and Swan, sloops, 1060 tons displacement; two 4-inch and several light anti-aircraft guns; depth-charges; speed 16 ½ knots; both built at [Sydney](#).

voys

were sailed. Yet during the next four years an unprecedented flow of many

hundreds of ships passed safely across the [Tasman Sea](#). Apart from sporadic attacks by submarines in Australian coastal waters and about [New Caledonia](#) and [Fiji](#), the Japanese made no attempt to disrupt the all-important sea communications of the Allies in the South Pacific.

In the second half of December 1941 the [Leander](#) made two voyages from [Auckland](#) to [Suva](#) as escort for the [Wahine](#) carrying reinforcements for the 8th Brigade Group. Three battalions were speedily organised from the 8th Reinforcements whose departure for Egypt had been cancelled, and these were sent to [Fiji](#) in three convoys. To supplement the shipping tonnage available in New Zealand, the [Port Montreal](#) ¹ came from [Melbourne](#) to [Auckland](#) and loaded the major part of the supplies for the troops. The Australian naval authorities also arranged to send the passenger steamer [Anhui](#) ² from [Sydney](#) to [Auckland](#) to embark 700 troops, but trouble with her Chinese crew necessitated her being replaced by the [Taroona](#) ³ from [Melbourne](#).

The first convoy, ZS 5, consisting of the [Rangatira](#), [Wahine](#), and [Matua](#), escorted by the [Leander](#) and [Monowai](#) (which was also carrying troops) sailed from [Auckland](#) for [Fiji](#) on 2 January 1942. The convoy deviated 60 miles to westward of the direct course from Cape Brett to avoid any enemy submarine that might be patrolling the normal route. On the morning of 6 January the [Monowai](#) and [Wahine](#) parted company with the convoy and went into [Suva](#), followed by the [Leander](#) after she had seen the [Rangatira](#) and [Matua](#) safely through [Navula Passage](#) on their way to [Lautoka](#). On their return passage, the ships passed east of [Kandavu Island](#) and deviated 60 miles to eastward of the direct route to [Auckland](#).

Convoy ZS 6, consisting of the [Rangatira](#), [Wahine](#), and [Port Montreal](#) escorted by the [Leander](#), sailed from [Auckland](#) after dark on 10 January. In accordance with instructions from the Chief of Naval Staff, close anti-aircraft defence was provided in the transports by organising the machine guns of troop units. Aircraft of the [RNZAF](#) provided anti-submarine patrols ahead of the convoy to the limit of their range. The direct route to [Suva](#) was again avoided by a deviation of 60 miles to the eastward.

The [Australia](#), [Perth](#), and [Achilles](#) from [Noumea](#) joined the convoy in the afternoon of 11 January. Two days later when the [Leander](#) intercepted a radio signal believed to be of Japanese origin,

¹ Port Montreal, motor-vessel, 5882 tons; owners, Port Line Ltd.; torpedoed and sunk, Caribbean Sea, 10 June 1942.

² Anhui, steamship, 3494 tons; owners, China Navigation Co. Ltd; damaged by aircraft attack, [Manila](#) harbour, 10 December 1941.

³ Taroon, [Melbourne](#)-Launceston express steamer; 4286 tons; owners, Tasmanian Steamers Proprietary Ltd.

and transmitted from a position about 50 miles distant, the second degree of readiness was ordered in the cruisers and maintained during the night. In the evening of 13 January the [Achilles](#) and [Perth](#) went on ahead with the Rangatira to Navula Passage.

At daybreak on 15 January the [Australia](#), [Perth](#), [Leander](#), and [Achilles](#) put to sea to cover the approach of the Monowai and Taroon, both carrying troops, which had left [Auckland](#) at midnight on the 13th. The [Achilles](#) parted company with the squadron at noon on the 17th and proceeded to [Auckland](#), where she was docked for a brief refit. The other cruisers arrived at [Sydney](#) on 19 January.

The Monowai left the Taroon off Navula Passage at daybreak on the 16th and went on to [Suva](#). After landing her troops and taking in fuel and fresh water, the Monowai sailed in the afternoon for [Auckland](#). She was about eight miles south-south-west from the harbour entrance when two heavy and almost simultaneous explosions were heard and two columns of black smoke rose to a height of about 180 feet a ship's length away on her port side. Thinking that a high-level aircraft attack was being made from above the clouds, Captain G. R. Deverell ordered action stations, made an AAAA signal, ¹ and began a zigzag at full speed. A few minutes later, however, a sharp-eyed seaman stationed at one of the port 6-inch guns reported a submarine breaking surface just abaft the port beam at a distance of 7000 yards. At that time the Taroon, on her way from [Lautoka](#) to [Suva](#), was about three miles away on the starboard quarter of the Monowai. She, too, sighted the submarine, which opened fire.

The Monowai at once replied with broadsides from her four port 6-inch guns,

made an SSSS signal and then altered course away, as Captain Deverell said, 'in order to comb possible torpedo tracks.' The first rounds fell short, but before 'A' arcs² were closed by the turn away, the submarine had been straddled and two shots fell close to it. No torpedo tracks having been sighted, the Monowai reversed course to reopen 'A' arcs and resumed firing with all guns that would bear. The submarine then crash-dived and disappeared.

When the submarine dived the Monowai had to act quickly to avoid the risk of more torpedoes. She therefore made for the Mbengga Passage at full speed, closely followed by the Taroon which converged from the northward. Neither the Monowai nor any of her officers had ever been through the narrow passage and Captain Deverell praised his navigating officer, Lieutenant Edwards,³ for his part in piloting the big ship through this poorly charted

¹ AAAA signal indicates an aircraft attack; SSSS signal a submarine attack.

² 'A' arcs are the arcs on which all guns of the main armament will bear on the target, thus enabling them to fire simultaneously.

³ Commander G. H. Edwards, VRD, RNZNR; born [Shanghai](#), 15 Sep 1905; master mariner; assistant marine superintendent Union Steam Ship Co., 1953.

area against the glare of the westering sun at high speed, at a time when the numerous coral reefs were covered and dangerous rocks were invisible. After clearing the passage, the Monowai and Taroon shaped course for [Auckland](#).

Already the flow of troops and supplies from the [United States](#) to the South Pacific had begun. The [Achilles](#) left [Auckland](#) on 25 January and, two days later, met a convoy of three big transports from [San Francisco](#) escorted by USS Phoenix. The New Zealand cruiser took over the President Monroe, 10,500 tons, for [Suva](#), where they arrived next day. The Phoenix, with the Mariposa, 18,000 tons, and President Coolidge, 22,000 tons, carried on for [Melbourne](#) and was joined on 29 January by the Australian cruisers [Australia](#), [Perth](#), and [Adelaide](#) and HMNZS [Leander](#) for the

passage across the [Tasman Sea](#). Meanwhile, the [Achilles](#) from [Suva](#) had met the United States Navy auxiliary [Hammonds port](#), 8060 tons, which was carrying a cargo of crated aircraft. On 3 February she was handed over to the [Leander](#), which escorted her to [Brisbane](#) while the [Achilles](#) returned to [Auckland](#).

Less than three weeks after the setting up of the ABDA Command covering [Burma](#), [Malaya](#), the [Philippines](#), and the Dutch East Indies, the principle of unified command was extended to the South Pacific. On 25 January the Combined Chiefs of Staff at [Washington](#) directed the establishment of a contiguous Anzac Area. This included most of the islands and territories south of the Equator in the Australian and New Zealand stations. Its western boundary cut south from the Equator to include the British half of [New Guinea](#) whence, excluding Torres Strait, it extended to the coast of [Australia](#). The eastern boundary, which excluded the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, ran south-eastward from the Equator to include [Fiji](#) and [Tongatabu](#), and then due south, passing east of the [Chatham Islands](#).

The naval forces allocated to the Anzac Area were to be under the strategical direction of the Commander-in-Chief United States Fleet, exercised through one or more [United States](#) flag officers, assisted by one or more flag officers named by [Australia](#) or New Zealand. All practicable use was to be made of the naval supply, communication, and repair facilities in [Australia](#) and New Zealand. The initial assignment of ships to the [Anzac Force](#) was as follows:

Royal Navy – One aircraft-carrier (HMS [Hermes](#)). ¹

[United States](#) – One heavy cruiser ([Chicago](#)) and two destroyers ([Lamson](#) and [Perkins](#)). ²

¹ HMS [Hermes](#), 10,850 tons, 20 aircraft, six 5·5-inch and numerous small AA guns, did not join the [Anzac Force](#). She had proceeded from Simonstown to Trincomalee and was sunk on 9 April 1942 by Japanese aircraft off the coast of [Ceylon](#).

² [Chicago](#), 9300 tons, nine 8-inch guns, 32 ½ knots. [Perkins](#) and [Lamson](#), 1500 tons, five 5-inch guns, 36 ½ knots.

Australia – Two heavy cruisers (**Australia** and **Canberra**); one light cruiser (**Adelaide**); three auxiliary cruisers (**Westralia**, **Kanimbla**, and **Manoora**); two destroyers (**Stuart** and **Voyager**) and eight anti-submarine vessels. The remainder of the Australian seagoing forces, namely, two light cruisers (**Hobart** and **Perth**), two destroyers and three sloops, were to be assigned to the ABDA Area Command. ¹

New Zealand – Two light cruisers (**Achilles** and **Leander**) and one auxiliary cruiser (**Monowai**).

The tasks assigned to the **Anzac Force**, in co-operation with the available air forces in the area, were to:

- (1) Cover the eastern and north-eastern approaches to **Australia** and New Zealand.
- (2) Protect shipping, including coastwise ships.
- (3) Support the defence of islands in the Anzac Area, with emphasis on key points, and attack adjacent enemy island key points.
- (4) Co-relate operations with the naval force in the ABDA Area and with the United States Pacific Fleet, as well as with local defence forces of **Australia** and New Zealand.

Vice-Admiral H. F. Leary, USN, assumed command of the Anzac Area on 7 February, the day on which he arrived at **Wellington** by air from the **United States** by way of **Suva**. He left a few days later for **Melbourne**, where he established his headquarters. Rear-Admiral J. G. Crace had arrived at **Wellington** in his flagship, HMAS **Australia**, on 3 February and on the 7th he took command of the Anzac Squadron.

During his stay at **Wellington**, Vice-Admiral Leary discussed the general situation in the **Pacific** with Rear-Admiral Crace and Commodore Parry, Chief of Naval Staff. On 27 January the Australian Naval Board, in an appreciation of the position, had pointed out to the Commander-in-Chief United States Pacific Fleet that the Japanese occupation of **Rabaul** on 23 January had increased the threat to **Port Moresby** and **New Caledonia**. The capture of the former, which had a garrison of 5500, would close Torres Strait. The capture of **New Caledonia**, which was virtually undefended, would give the enemy a base from which he could cut the sea and air routes from **Australia** to the **United States**, besides giving him control of the chrome and nickel

resources of that island.

On 8 February the Commander-in-Chief United States Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations ([Admiral E. J. King](#)) informed Vice-

¹ [HMAS Perth](#) was sunk in the [Java Sea](#) on 1 March 1942.

Admiral

Leary that the situation in the northern Anzac Area called for prompt action to check the enemy's advance. It was thought that a Japanese garrison and a powerful shore-based air force would be established at [Rabaul](#) within a few days and that a task force of at least two aircraft-carriers, with cruisers and destroyers and possibly battleships and amphibious troops, would become available 'to strike at the [New Hebrides](#), [New Caledonia](#) or other positions on our communication lines'. The commander of the [Anzac Force](#) was to expedite the concentration of naval forces in the [Fiji– New Caledonia](#) area and also 'to press and arrange for the full co-operation of the Australian Air Force, including one group of United States Army pursuit aircraft recently allocated'. The Commander-in-Chief United States Pacific Fleet was to order Task Force 11 ¹ and 'all practicable army bombers and Navy patrol planes from [Hawaii](#)' to proceed at once to the Anzac Area and co-operate with the Commander, [Anzac Force](#). A week earlier two American task forces consisting of the aircraft-carriers [Enterprise](#) and [Yorktown](#), five cruisers and ten destroyers, which had covered the arrival of troops at [Samoa](#), carried out bombardment raids on Japanese bases in the Marshall Islands. American troops for [New Caledonia](#) were then on their way from [San Francisco](#).

The Anzac Squadron assembled at [Suva](#) on 12 February when the [Australia](#), [Achilles](#), [Monowai](#), and destroyer [Lamson](#) arrived from New Zealand, the [Leander](#) from [Brisbane](#), and the [Chicago](#) and destroyer [Perkins](#) from [Pearl Harbour](#), all within seven hours. ² The [Monowai](#) embarked twelve officers and seventy ratings of Admiral Leary's staff who had travelled in the [Chicago](#) and, after loading cipher and radio equipment and a quantity of destroyer ammunition, sailed next day for [Melbourne](#) and [Sydney](#). Three notable ships passing through the Anzac Area at that time were

HMS Warspite, on her way from Esquimault to join the Eastern Fleet, and the transports [Queen Elizabeth](#) and [Aquitania](#), bound from [Sydney](#) to Esquimault and [San Francisco](#) respectively for docking. ³

Meanwhile Task Force 11 was on its way to patrol an area 300 miles square midway between [Fiji](#) and the [New Hebrides](#). The Anzac Squadron sailed from [Suva](#) in the afternoon of 14 February to patrol a contiguous area between [Fiji](#) and [New Caledonia](#). Task Force 11 was met at noon on the 16th and Rear-

¹ Task Force 11, commanded by Vice-Admiral Wilson Brown, USN, consisted of the aircraft-carrier [Lexington](#), 33,000 tons, 80 aircraft, speed 33 knots; the 8-inch-gun cruisers [Indianapolis](#), [Minneapolis](#), [Pensacola](#), and [San Francisco](#), speed 32 ½ knots; and ten 5-inch-gun destroyers, speed 36 knots.

² [HMAS Canberra](#) was refitting at [Sydney](#) and [HMAS Adelaide](#) on escort duty to [Fremantle](#).

³ The [Queen Elizabeth](#) called in at the [Hauraki Gulf](#) for fuel on 8 February.

Admiral

Crace boarded the [Lexington](#) for a conference with Vice-Admiral Wilson Brown. The latter had worked out a plan for an attack on [Rabaul](#) and received authority from Admiral Leary to carry it out. Briefly, the plan provided for air and ship bombardment, in co-operation with United States Army heavy bombers of the Australian Command, at dawn on 21 February. Bombardment by a cruiser and two destroyers was to be carried out only if the air attack was a success. More than four days' steaming lay ahead of Task Force 11 when it headed away to the north-east to pass wide of the [Santa Cruz](#) and [Solomon Islands](#). The Anzac Squadron returned to [Suva](#) on the 17th and sailed next day escorting the fleet tanker [Platte](#) ¹ to a prearranged rendezvous with the task force.

During the forenoon of 20 February when Task Force 11 was about 350 miles

north-east from [Rabaul](#), Japanese patrol flying boats were sighted by aircraft from the Lexington. Two were shot down, but the approach of the American ships was doubtless reported by a third aircraft which reversed course and disappeared. It was intended that the Lexington should launch her aircraft 125 miles from [Rabaul](#) at four o'clock next morning, but during the afternoon she was attacked by Japanese twin-engined bombers. Sixteen out of eighteen were shot down and one damaged for a loss of two American fighters. The element of surprise had been lost and, as a result of their high-speed manoeuvrings during the attack, the ships no longer had sufficient fuel to carry out their mission. They withdrew to the south-east during the night.

In the meantime, the Japanese had struck a heavy blow on the Australian mainland. On 19 February four aircraft-carriers under Vice-Admiral Nagumo, supported by two battleships, three heavy cruisers, and numerous destroyers, launched two devastating air attacks on [Port Darwin](#). The first was made by 71 bombers and the second by 54 bombers, both with fighter escort. The American destroyer Peary and six merchant ships were sunk and two others badly damaged. Minor damage was done to HMAS Swan, three naval auxiliary vessels, and the hospital ship Manunda. Twenty aircraft were destroyed, the air station wrecked, and the wharves and township severely damaged. The wrecking of Darwin and the occupation of airfields on the island of Timor next day severed air communication between [Australia](#) and [Java](#). The ABDA Area command was dissolved on 25 February.

The Anzac Squadron with the oiler Platte met Task Force 11 north of the Santa Cruz Islands in the afternoon of 22 February

¹ The Platte, 16,300 tons deadweight capacity, speed 18 knots, arrived at [Suva](#) on 18 February from [Pearl Harbour](#) in company with the seaplane tender Curtis and the destroyer Worden.

and remained in company for twenty-four hours while the ships refuelled. The squadron returned to [Suva](#) on the 26th. During the month the [Leander](#) was at sea for twenty-four days and steamed 7546 miles and the [Achilles](#) steamed 6703 miles in twenty-one days. The weather was very hot and damp with frequent rainstorms, and

conditions were most trying at night when the ships were closed down. There were epidemics of influenza and diarrhoea in the [Achilles](#). The [Monowai](#) arrived at [Noumea](#) from [Sydney](#) on 1 March and, after landing naval ratings and stores, returned to [Auckland](#). She was at sea for twenty days and steamed 7588 miles during the month of February.

Task Force 11, reinforced by the aircraft-carrier [Yorktown](#), was about to make a second attempt on [Rabaul](#) when news was received that the Japanese had landed on 8 March in the Huon Gulf in [New Guinea](#) and captured Salamaua. Admiral Wilson Brown immediately decided to strike the enemy there. He headed into the Gulf of Papua while Rear-Admiral Crace, with the [Australia](#) and [Chicago](#) and two destroyers of the Anzac Squadron with an oiler, patrolled south of the Louisiade Archipelago.

In the forenoon of 10 March, 104 aircraft took off from the [Lexington](#) and [Yorktown](#) and flew over the 7500-foot passes of the Owen Stanley range to attack the unsuspecting Japanese on the far side. Three transports were sunk for the loss of one aircraft and its pilot. The task force then retired and, after refuelling, sailed for [Pearl Harbour](#), where it arrived on 26 March, having been at sea continuously for fifty-four days.

Three weeks later sixteen long-range bombers under Lieutenant-Colonel James Doolittle, flown from the carrier [Hornet](#) of Vice-Admiral W. F. Halsey's Task Force 16, in a position 670 miles from [Japan](#), made a bold and spectacular raid on [Tokyo](#) and other Japanese cities. No great damage was done but the attack was a token of things to come.

On 12 February the New Zealand Prime Minister received from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs a message stating that 'under present conditions and having regard to the wide dispersion of enemy-occupied territories and the length of his sea communications', it was considered that 'serious damage could be inflicted on Japanese interests by one or more fast vessels acting as commerce raiders and capable of undertaking minor landing operations against outlying bases.' Preliminary investigations had shown that the Union Steam Ship Company's turbo-electric vessel [Rangatira](#) was suitable for conversion for this duty, and it would be greatly appreciated if the [New Zealand Government](#) would requisition the ship and hand her over to the Ministry of War Transport.

On the same date Commodore Parry as Chief of Naval Staff received a personal message from the First Sea Lord to the same effect. He added that the Rangatira would be required to proceed to Vancouver for conversion as quickly as possible and that it was desirable that the ship's engine-room complement should agree to continue service in the ship when converted. The Naval Board was in favour of the proposal. It considered, and the Chief of the General Staff concurred, that the Wahine and Maori could cope with the [Wellington– Lyttelton](#) traffic and that the Wahine would meet the Army's requirements for transport of troops to and from [Fiji](#).

The Prime Minister, however, informed the Dominions Office that the Government were 'reluctantly forced to the conclusion that they cannot afford to release the Rangatira unless some substitute vessel is provided which is capable of carrying on the present inter-island activities and likely future demands which are made on this type of vessel.' The Rangatira and Wahine were the only two passenger ships in New Zealand waters capable of acting adequately as fast troop transports at short notice; and the services of both ships in recent months had been repeatedly requisitioned for purposes of the utmost importance to the defence of the Dominion. It was essential to have fast ships of their type available for carrying reinforcements to [Fiji](#), where New Zealand had large numbers of troops and civil construction men engaged on defence work.

It might from time to time also be necessary to carry troops to other island outposts within New Zealand's sphere of naval responsibility, or even from one coastal point to another, the message added. If the Rangatira were released, the grave dangers to which New Zealand's isolation exposed her would be greatly accentuated, and if one or both the remaining passenger 'ferry' vessels were lost by enemy action, it would not even be possible to maintain adequate coastal connection between the North and South Islands, quite apart from the fact that there would, in an emergency, be no adequate fast means of carrying men to and from [Fiji](#). Since the outbreak of war the Dominion had lost the services of all New Zealand registered passenger ships engaged in the trade to [Australia](#) and the Pacific Coast of [North America](#). It was with the greatest reluctance that the Government had agreed in 1941 to the handing over of the Awatea and Aorangi, on the understanding that the Mariposa and Monterey of the Matson Line would maintain a monthly service to [North America](#) to enable drafts of airmen to be sent overseas and keep a trade

connection. The American ships were now engaged on transport duty. Moreover, the New Zealand registered cargo vessels in the North American trade had also been requisitioned and, excepting cargo ships trading to [Australia](#), New Zealand had no vessels of its own engaged in overseas trade.

On 1 March the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs informed the Prime Minister that the force of the reasons for which the [New Zealand Government](#) felt unable to release the Rangatira was appreciated and 'in view of our inability to find a suitable replacement ship, we no longer wish to press the request.'

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 18 – THE MINESWEEPING FLOTILLAS

CHAPTER 18

The Minesweeping Flotillas

THE first New Zealand minesweeper to leave for service in the South Pacific islands was the *Gale*, which went to [Suva](#) in December 1941 to do duty there while the *Viti* was refitting at [Lyttelton](#). From that time onward till the middle of 1945, ships of the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla saw continuous service in tropical waters. The *Rata* (Senior Officer 25th M/S Flotilla) and *Muritai* arrived at [Suva](#) from [Auckland](#) on 24 January 1942, relieving the *Gale*, which returned to New Zealand for a refit and the installation of anti-submarine equipment. When HMNZS *Moa* arrived from the [United Kingdom](#) a few days later, she took the place of the *Rata*, which went back to [Wellington](#). There SO 25th M/S Flotilla took command of the *Matai*, which had just completed a long refit.

At the beginning of March 1942 the *Matai* sailed to [Suva](#), where she was joined by the danlayers *Kaiwaka* and *Coastguard*. At that time the United States Navy was preparing to establish a base and fleet anchorage in Nandi Waters at the western end of [Viti Levu](#). Lieutenant C. C. Lowry, RN, in charge of a [Royal Australian Navy](#) survey party, arrived at [Suva](#) on 12 March and surveyed the [Nandi](#) area, assisted by Lieutenant-Commander A. D. Holden, RNZNR, commanding officer of the *Matai*, and his ship's company. During the first week of April the *Matai*, *Kaiwaka*, and *Coastguard*, as danlayers, co-operated with the [United States](#) ships *Gamble*, *Ramsay*, and *Kingfisher* which laid protective minefields in Nandi Waters. In company with the *Muritai*, the *Kaiwaka* and *Coastguard* returned to [Auckland](#) on 25 April. HMFS *Viti* arrived back at [Suva](#) early in April, relieving the *Moa* which sailed for [Auckland](#). The *Gale* also returned to [Suva](#) on 25 May but a month later was ordered to [Noumea](#).

For the next five months the *Matai* and *Viti*, in co-operation with aircraft of the [RNZAF](#), maintained almost continuous anti-submarine patrols and provided close anti-submarine escort for the increasing number of troop transports and supply ships arriving at and sailing from [Suva](#). This monotonous round of duty was scarcely relieved by infrequent and unverified reports of submarines.

From the beginning of August 1942, the start of the Solomon Islands campaign,

the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla was assigned to anti-submarine duties at [Noumea](#), the forward base of ComSOPAC, whose headquarters was later established there. The [Moa](#) and [Kiwi](#) joined the [Gale](#) at [Noumea](#) in August-September and the [Matai](#) (SO 25th M/S Flotilla) arrived on 25 October after a short refit in New Zealand. She had been replaced at [Suva](#) by the [Tui](#). The [Moa](#) was detached to [Norfolk Island](#) at the beginning of October and was away for two months.

[Norfolk Island](#), which is almost equidistant from New Zealand, [Australia](#), and [New Caledonia](#), was being developed as a base for anti-submarine patrols and a staging depot for aircraft. A start had been made in September on the construction of an airfield and New Zealand was furnishing a battalion as a garrison for its defence. The troops were carried in the [Wahine](#) which, escorted by HMNZS [Monowai](#) and the [United States](#) destroyer [Clark](#), made two voyages from [Auckland](#) to [Norfolk Island](#) during October 1942. The equipment and supplies for the garrison went in the steamer [Waipori](#), 4282 tons, whose discharge was difficult and prolonged owing to the lack of shore facilities. While she was lying at anchor off the island, anti-submarine protection was given by the [Inchkeith](#) and [Sanda](#), which had come from [Auckland](#), and the [Moa](#) from [Noumea](#). During the next eight months the [Inchkeith](#), [Sanda](#), and [Scarba](#) were regularly employed on anti-submarine patrols while supply ships were discharging at [Norfolk Island](#). In October 1943 the [Scarba](#) gave protection to the [Cable Enterprise](#) ¹ while that ship was repairing the [Norfolk Island – Suva](#) submarine cable.

At the end of October 1942 the Naval Board, with the approval of the Government, offered the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla to ComSOPAC for service wherever it might be wanted in the [Pacific](#). The offer was accepted and on 12 December the [Matai](#), [Kiwi](#), [Moa](#), and [Tui](#) sailed from [Espiritu Santo](#), in the [New Hebrides](#), for the Solomon Islands, where the [Guadalcanal](#) campaign was then nearing its climax. They arrived in [Tulagi](#) harbour on the 15th and, four days later, began a tour of duty that kept the flotilla hard at work in and about the [Solomons](#) for two and a half years. ² The [Gale](#) joined the flotilla in February 1943.

When the [Moa](#) was sunk by an air attack at [Tulagi](#) in April 1943, she was replaced by the [Breeze](#), ³ which had been commissioned in October 1942 by Lieutenant-Commander [Horler](#), RNZNR, ⁴ her former merchant-service master. Each ship returned to New Zealand

¹ Cable Enterprise, 943 tons; cable steamer owned by Cable and Wireless Ltd., [London](#).

² The story of the performance of the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla in the Solomon Islands is told elsewhere in this volume. See

³ [Breeze](#), motor-vessel, 625 tons; built 1933 for Canterbury Steam Shipping Co., Ltd.; sister ship to [Gale](#). The [Breeze](#) was requisitioned to replace HMNZS [Puriri](#), sunk in May 1941.

⁴ Lieutenant-Commander A. O. Horler, RNZNR; master mariner; born [Lower Hutt](#) 13 Sep 1906.

from time to time for a refit, but the composition of the flotilla remained unchanged till October 1944 when the [Gale](#) and, a month later, the [Breeze](#) were withdrawn from service. Both ships were paid off and restored to their owners, the Canterbury Steam Shipping Company Ltd.

On 16 December 1944 Commander P. Phipps (formerly of the [Moa](#)), who had succeeded Commander Holden as Senior Officer 25th M/S Flotilla, assumed command of the new corvette [Arabis](#), which relieved the [Matai](#). The latter ship returned to New Zealand and was paid off at [Wellington](#) on 25 January 1945. The reduced flotilla remained under the operational control of comsopac for another seven months, mainly in the Solomon Islands. The [Kiwi](#) was detached for duty at [Suva](#) for a few weeks and the [Arabis](#) was stationed in the [Funafuti](#) (Ellice) Group from 6 April to 28 May 1945. The former vessel returned finally to New Zealand in May and the [Arabis](#) and [Tui](#) in July 1945.

HMFS [Viti](#), while under the operational control of the New Zealand Naval Board, did two years' service on anti-submarine patrols at [Suva](#), varied only by rare visits to [Samoa](#), the [New Hebrides](#), and [Guadalcanal](#) on escort duty and a three months' refit at [Lyttelton](#) in 1943. By the middle of 1944 the widely scattered islands under the jurisdiction of the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific had been freed from the enemy and there was urgent need of another supply vessel to assist the [Awahou](#),¹ which earlier had been made available by the [New Zealand Government](#). Approval to disarm the [Viti](#) and refit her for that purpose was given by comsopac and the Naval Board and the work was done at [Lyttelton](#).

On the morning of 19 December 1942 HMNZS [South Sea](#) was sunk in [Wellington](#)

harbour as the result of a collision with the inter-island steamer Wahine, which had left the wharf a few minutes before on passage to [Lyttelton](#). The South Sea, patrolling in company with the Rata, was steering south by west towards Point Halswell and the Wahine was steaming about east by north to pass well clear of the point. Thus their respective courses were almost at a right angle to each other. The South Sea was badly holed when the Wahine struck her on her starboard side and the man at the wheel was slightly injured. While the Rata took the damaged ship in tow, the tug Toia went alongside and tried without success to control the inrush of water by means of a powerful pump. The South Sea sank about a mile from Point Halswell after her crew had been taken off by the Rata.

The evidence given before a naval board of inquiry showed that

¹ Awahou, motor-vessel, 410 tons; owned by Richardson & Co. Ltd., [Napier](#).

the commanding officer of the South Sea did not attempt to give way to the Wahine as the Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea required him to do, because he did not foresee the possibility of a collision. ¹ Even when the danger became so imminent that Captain A. H. Howie, master of the Wahine (which was the 'stand-on' ship), ordered his engines 'full speed astern' and his helm 'hard-a-starboard', the South Sea not only took no avoiding action but increased speed in order to facilitate her turning at the end of her patrol line.

The board of inquiry found, inter alia, that from the time the South Sea sighted the Wahine there was a definite risk of collision according to Article 19 of the regulations for preventing collisions, that the commanding officer was in error in not taking any bearings of the Wahine, and that he should have acted in accordance with Articles 22 and 23 of the regulations. ² The board also expressed the view that (a) had the Wahine held her original course and reversed engines at the same time as she did in fact reverse them, a collision probably would not have occurred; (b) had she held both her course and speed there was a strong possibility that a collision would have occurred; and (c) that the Wahine was correct in assuming that a collision was practically unavoidable and that action should be taken in accordance with the note to Article 21 of the regulations, but that 'she was probably incorrect in

altering course to starboard'.³ Excepting (a), which was considered to be at odds with the evidence, and (c), the last clause of which was considered contentious, the Naval Board accepted these findings. A civil Court of Marine Inquiry opened on 24 February 1943, but did not proceed when it was ruled in accordance with the Shipping and Seamen Act 1908 that it had no jurisdiction where one of His Majesty's ships was concerned.

The three composite minesweepers built at [Auckland](#) were commissioned in 1942 – the Manuka on 30 March by Lieutenant Allan,⁴ the Rimu on 15 July by Lieutenant-Commander Gilfillan (Senior Officer LL Minesweepers),⁵ and the Hinau on 23 July by Lieutenant

¹ Article 19 of the regulations provides that 'when two steam vessels are crossing so as to involve risk of collision, the vessel which has the other on her own starboard side shall keep out of the way of the other'.

² Articles 22 and 23 provide that every vessel directed by the rules to keep out of the way of another shall, if the circumstances admit, avoid crossing ahead of the other, and that every steam vessel directed to keep out of the way of another shall, if necessary, slacken her speed or stop or reverse.

³ Article 21 directs that where one of two vessels is to keep out of the way, the other shall keep her course and speed; but a note to this article adds that where she finds herself so close that collision cannot be avoided by the action of the giving-way vessel alone she also shall take such action as will best aid to avert collision.

⁴ Commander J. D. Allan, VRD; born Dunedin, 26 Dec 1911; accountant; joined RNZNVR, Apr 1930; Sub-Lieutenant, Mar 1934; Commander, Jun 1953; served Royal Navy 1944–45; CO HMS Dunbar, 15th M/S Flotilla, [Normandy](#) landing, Jun 1944.

⁵ Commander A. B. Gilfillan, VRD, [RNZN](#); born [Auckland](#), 9 Jun 1906; clerk; joined RNZNVR May 1925; Sub-Lieutenant, 1928; Commander, Dec 1944; transferred to [RNZN](#) Feb 1946.

E.M.C. Stevens. These vessels, known as LL minesweepers, were fitted with electrical equipment to deal with magnetic mines. ¹ The small coastal traders Kapuni and [Hawera](#) ² had been requisitioned in 1941 for the same purpose and the former was commissioned by Lieutenant Cable, RNZNVR, ³ on 1 June 1942. The conversion of the [Hawera](#) was unduly prolonged and it was not until 5 April 1943 that she was commissioned by Lieutenant Griffith, RNZNVR. ⁴ These five ships formed what was known first as the LL Minesweeping Flotilla. That designation was changed in May 1945 to 194th Auxiliary Minesweeping Group.

The 'double L' sweepers spent many months of monotonous service on the New Zealand coast, lengthy spells of harbour duty being varied only by training cruises from port to port. The efficiency of their constant training was not put to a practical test for no magnetic mines were ever found or suspected in New Zealand waters. A fourth composite minesweeper, the Tawhai, built at [Auckland](#), was delivered on 24 April 1944 but was not commissioned for service.

With a view to converting them for use as magnetic minesweepers, the Naval Board in June 1942 had got Cabinet authority to purchase two wooden steamers, the Wairua for £25,000 and the [Ruawai](#) for £4000. ⁵ On the advice of the Captain Superintendent of the dockyard, however, it was decided not to buy the latter vessel. The Wairua arrived at [Lyttelton](#) at the end of August 1942 for conversion and there she remained for more than two and a half years.

In October 1942 orders were given to stop all work on the vessel. The Government had recently requisitioned six coastal vessels for comsopac for use as supply ships in the South Pacific islands and it was thought that the Wairua should be returned to trade. Three months later, however, War Cabinet decided against this and work on the vessel was resumed. Progress was intermittent and slow, and at the beginning of October 1943 work was again stopped, probably for the reason that an additional magnetic minesweeper was quite unnecessary.

¹ Two ships stationed abeam and each towing lengths of buoyant cable known as 'tails' comprise the LL sweep. When an electric current is passed through the cables, a magnetic field is produced between the tails that will detonate a magnetic mine within its area of influence. The ships themselves were protected by degaussing equipment.

² Kapuni, wooden motor-vessel, 190 tons; oil-engine; built [Auckland](#), 1909; owned by A. G. Frankham Ltd., [Auckland](#). [Hawera](#), wooden motor-vessel; 188 tons; oil-engine; built [Auckland](#), 1912; owned by South Taranaki Shipping Co. Ltd., Patea.

³ Commander F. S. Cable, OBE, VRD; born South Africa, 10 Mar 1906; insurance officer; joined [Malaya](#) RNVR, Sep 1936; CO HMS Gemas, 1939–42; transferred RNZNVR May 1942; CO Kapuni, Manuka (Senior Officer LL Sweepers), Maimai, and Tui, 1942–45; died 17 Dec 1955.

⁴ Lieutenant A. K. Griffith; born England, 6 Aug 1894; mariner and radio engineer; served RNVR 1915–19; entered RNZNVR Mar 1941; CO patrol launches, 1941–42; Kaiwaka 1942–43; [Hawera](#) 1943–45.

⁵ Wairua, wooden twin-screw steamer, 352 tons; built [Auckland](#), 1913. [Ruawai](#), wooden steamer, 291 tons; built [Auckland](#), 1915. Both ships owned by Kaipara Steam Ship Co. Ltd., of [Helensville](#).

The Naval Board then decided that the Wairua should be adapted to service the outlying islands in the [Auckland](#) area, but when a prospective purchaser inquired about her, the Board informed the Treasury that it had no objection to the sale. Tenders called for brought one offer of £2500 which was not accepted and the vessel was laid up. In March 1945 the Wairua was sold to the [Marine Department](#) for £1000 for use as a ferry steamer between Bluff and Stewart Island. The cost of the purchase and partial conversion of the little vessel was £32,887 17s. 4d., and this sum, less the £1000 paid by the [Marine Department](#), was written off as 'nugatory expenditure'.

The fishing trawlers Nora Niven and Phyllis ¹ were purchased in 1942 and fitted out at [Lyttelton](#) as danlayers, the intention being to employ them at [Auckland](#) in place of the Kaiwaka and Coastguard which were to be stationed at [Wellington](#). They were commissioned on 11 January 1943 but when they arrived at [Auckland](#) an inspection revealed numerous defects in both vessels, one of which was 36 years and the other 31 years old. The selection of these aged vessels was criticised by the Captain Superintendent of the dockyard, who remarked that '... if vessels are old

enough their condition will be poor and expenditure will have to be large to bring them up to something like service standard.' Repairs were not completed and little or no use was made of the Nora Niven and Phyllis, which were paid off in February 1944 and later sold.

When the first of the New Zealand-built steel minesweepers came into service in 1943, the owners of coastal vessels requisitioned in more difficult times began to press for the release of some of their ships. On 13 March 1943 the Anchor Shipping and Foundry Company, of [Nelson](#), asked for the return of the Rata, but the Prime Minister replied that she would have to be retained for some time to come. A few days later the Controller of Shipbuilding lent support to the Anchor Company by asking that the Rata be released as soon as the first steel minesweeper had been commissioned. The Naval Secretary informed him that it would not be possible to return the Rata until the last of the thirteen steel minesweepers had been completed.

Though the Naval Board was best qualified to estimate the risk of a Japanese naval threat to New Zealand, there seemed to be a feeling in shipping and trade circles that the Navy had more A/S M/S vessels than it really needed, for on 17 May 1943 the Minister of Marine put the shipowners' case in a memorandum to the Prime Minister. He referred particularly to the disorganisation in the coal

¹ Nora Niven, 160 tons; built [UK1907](#); owned by New Zealand Fisheries Ltd., [Wellington](#). Phyllis, 148 tons; built [USA1912](#); owned by Canterbury Steam Trawling Co. Ltd. [Christchurch](#).

and timber trade, but the Prime Minister rejected his appeal on the ground that the danger to shipping from Japanese submarines was still too great for naval defences to be reduced. ¹ In a survey of the anti-submarine and minesweeping forces in August 1943 the Naval Secretary indicated that it would not be possible to release any ships until the arrival of the new corvettes Arabis and Arbutus from the [United Kingdom](#). ²

This decision was reviewed at a conference on 28 September 1943 attended by the members of the Naval Board, the Naval Officers-in-Charge at the main ports, and

staff officers. In view of the improved strategic situation in the Pacific and the need to conserve manpower, it was agreed that the last four steel minesweepers on the building programme should be cancelled, that the Rata and possibly the Nora Niven and Phyllis be returned to trade, and that a start be made with the sweeping of the defensive minefields laid in 1942. These recommendations were approved by the War Cabinet next day.

The Rata was paid off at Port Chalmers on 11 October 1943 and the two trawlers at Auckland in February 1944. The Futurist was withdrawn from minesweeping duties and converted into a boom gate vessel at Wellington.

HMNZS Aroha, first of the new steel minesweepers, had been commissioned by Lieutenant Peter Petersen, RNZNVR,³ at Port Chalmers on 12 May 1943. Then followed the Awatere, commissioned at Wellington by Lieutenant E. M. C. Stevens on 26 June, the Hautapu by Lieutenant-Commander Ralph-Smith, RNZNVR,⁴ on 28 July, the Maimai by Lieutenant Watson, RNZNR,⁵ on 15 September, and the Waipu by Lieutenant Blair, RNZNVR,⁶ on 17 November. At the end of 1943 there were twenty-four anti-submarine and minesweeping vessels and two danlayers in service.

During October 1943 the short lines of mines in the minor channels on either side of Rakino Island in the Hauraki Gulf were swept by the Thomas Currell and Kaiwaka, the small motor-vessel

¹ At that time there was a renewal of Japanese submarine activity in the Tasman Sea. From 1 March to 31 May eight merchant ships were sunk and others damaged by torpedo attacks off the Australian coast and in the vicinity of Noumea. Four other ships were sunk in the Fiji area.

² Arabis and Arbutus, 925 tons displacement; oil-burning; quadruple expansion engines; speed 17 knots; one 4-inch gun; eight light anti-aircraft guns; depth-charges.

³ Lieutenant P. Petersen; born Auckland, 4 Dec 1912; clerk; joined RNZNVR 1932; Sub-Lieutenant, Dec 1938: CO Hawera 1942–43; served RN 1944–45 as CO minesweepers Golden Fleece and Friendship, East Indies Station.

⁴ Lieutenant-Commander A. D. H. Ralph-Smith, VRD; born [Auckland](#), 22 Nov 1910; insurance clerk; joined RNZNVR Oct 1928; Sub-Lieutenant, Jun 1931; Lieutenant, Sep 1934; CO Scarba 1943–44; served RN 1944 as CO HMS Amber in [Mediterranean](#).

⁵ Lieutenant J. L. Watson, VRD; born England, 25 Mar 1914; master mariner; Sub-Lieutenant RNZNR, 1937; Lieutenant, Jun 1939; CO HMNZS Muritai 1944–46.

⁶ Lieutenant-Commander N. D. Blair; born [Sydney](#), 24 Jan 1902; merchant; Sub-Lieutenant RNZNVR, 1940; served RN 1940–41; CO Scarba, Arabis, Matai, and Arbutus, 1944–45.

Ikatere acting as danlayer. All but one of the twenty-two mines laid in March 1942 were accounted for. The missing one was probably the failure reported during the laying of the [Hauraki Gulf](#) defensive minefields.

With the approval of the War Cabinet, the Naval Board on 31 December 1943 ordered the sweeping of the independent minefield in the Bay of Islands. This was done by the Inchkeith, Killegray, Sanda, and Scarba and the danlayers Coastguard and Kaiwaka, three motor-launches being employed to sink the mines. By the end of February 1944 all but nine of the 258 mines laid in October 1942 had been swept: the others probably had broken adrift and gone out to sea.

The new steel minesweeper Pahau was commissioned by Lieutenant Gray, RNZNVR, ¹ on 12 February 1944 and the Waima by Lieutenant Stevens, RNZNVR, ² on 28 March 1944. The A/S M/S forces were then organised as follows:

7th Trawler Group ([Auckland](#)): Inchkeith, Killegray, Sanda, and Scarba.

95th Auxiliary Minesweeper Group ([Wellington](#)): Awatere, Maimai, and Pahau.

96th Auxiliary Minesweeper Group ([Lyttelton](#)): Hautapu, Wakakura, and Waima.

97th Auxiliary Minesweeper Group ([Auckland](#)): Aroha, Muritai, Thomas Currell, Waipu. ³

194th Auxiliary Minesweeping Group: Hinau, Manuka, and Rimu.

The James Cosgrove had been paid off on 8 January 1944; the Humphrey, which was awaiting disposal, was paid off on 20 July and the Thomas Currell on 5 September.⁴ The veteran Wakakura was withdrawn from 96th Group in April and in July she went to [Auckland](#) to serve as a danlayer. During March and April the [United States](#) submarine S-38, which had come from [Noumea](#), spent three weeks exercising with the A/S M/S groups and [RNZAF](#) aircraft at [Wellington](#) and [Auckland](#) to the great benefit of both services. In May 1944 the [Hawera](#) and Kapuni were stripped of their LL minesweeping equipment and fitted out for service as supply

¹ Lieutenant-Commander G. D. Gray, VRD; born [Invercargill](#), 30 Jun 1910; insurance clerk; joined RNZNVR May 1928; Sub Lieutenant, Jul 1933; Lieutenant, May 1938; served RN as CO HMS Ayrshire 1944–45; CO HMNZS Tui 1945–46.

² Commander C. C. Stevens, VRD, [RNZN](#); born Kelso, Otago, 21 Jun 1912; joined RNZNVR Jul 1933; Sub-Lieutenant, Mar 1934; Lieutenant, Mar 1940; CO Scarba 1944–45; Arabis 1945–46; transferred to [RNZN](#), Jun 1946.

³ The Thomas Currell was paid off in September 1944 and the Muritai was replaced by the Waiho.

⁴ The James Cosgrove, Humphrey, and Thomas Currell were resold later to their former owners Sanford Ltd., [Auckland](#).

ships under the control of the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific. They left [Auckland](#) for [Suva](#) on 24 June.¹

On 16 May 1944 a start was made with the sweeping of the defensive minefield laid in March 1942 across the main channel in [Hauraki Gulf](#). This major task, known as Operation PM, was carried out by the 7th Trawler Group (Senior Officer, Lieutenant-Commander Mackie, RNR,² in Sanda) assisted by the Muritai from the 97th Group, the danlayers Kaiwaka and Coastguard, and three motor-launches as mine sinkers. As the mines were spaced 150 to 170 feet apart and there was only a

mile between the two lines, one of which was a zigzag, special precautions were taken to restrict the number of mines cut in one sweep and to increase the chance of a ship sweeping any mine that might be tripped out of the sweep of her next ahead.

The Kaiwaka and Coastguard, the former acting as a sweeper, worked alone for the first six days to make sufficient clearance for the other ships to manoeuvre. In that time the danlayers swept and destroyed 22 mines and, with the Muritai, another 22 during the next three days. The 7th Trawler Group then joined in and, despite delays caused by bad weather and unfavourable tides, a total of 394 mines had been disposed of by 25 June. A second sweep of the area accounted for one more mine, and two further check sweeps were made without result. Two mines were known to have broken adrift before the clearance began and underwater explosions in the course of sweeping probably accounted for the remainder of the 400 mines originally laid. In his report to the Naval Board, the Naval Officer-in-Charge Auckland said the clearance of the minefield in a little more than two months 'reflected great credit on Lieutenant-Commander Mackie and all who took part in the operation'.

HMNZS Waiho, eighth and last of the new steel minesweepers completed for service, was commissioned at [Port Chalmers](#) on 3 June 1944 by Lieutenant Monaghan, RNZNR.³ She joined the 97th Minesweeping Group at [Auckland](#), replacing the Muritai which became a tender to HMNZS Tamaki for the sea training of new entries.

In June 1943 the British War Cabinet had offered two corvettes then under construction as a gift to the Royal New Zealand Navy. This offer was gratefully accepted by the Prime Minister, who

¹ The Kapuni and [Hawera](#) were paid off in 1945 and resold to their former owners for £250 each.

² Lieutenant-Commander N. L. Mackie, VRD; born England, 24 Jul 1901; master mariner and farmer; served RNR 1918–19.

³ Lieutenant-Commander J. W. Monaghan; born Birkenhead, England, 1 Aug 1900; master mariner; master MV Kapuni; Lieutenant, RNZNR, Jan 1941; served RN 1944–45 as CO HMS Scaravay, 7th M/S Flotilla, East Indies

insisted, however, that New Zealand should bear the additional cost of altering and equipping the vessels for service in tropical waters. For technical reasons the Admiralty subsequently substituted two Flower class corvettes for the vessels first selected. The ships, then nearing completion, were the *Arabis* and *Arbutus*, both of which were already being equipped for tropical service.

Lieutenant-Commander Seelye, RNZNVR, ¹ was appointed in command of the *Arabis* and Lieutenant-Commander Rhind, RNZNVR, ² to the *Arbutus*. Five other New Zealand officers were selected for each ship, in which most of the ratings were also New Zealanders.

The *Arabis* was commissioned on 22 February 1944 and sailed with an [Atlantic](#) convoy as far as the Azores Islands. Thence she proceeded by way of Bermuda, the Panama Canal, San Diego, [Pearl Harbour](#), and [Suva](#), arriving at [Auckland](#) on 15 August. The *Arbutus*, which was commissioned on 16 June 1944, sailed from Greenock on 1 August in company with a convoy and followed the same route as the *Arabis*.

Unfortunately, the *Arbutus* was severely damaged when she grounded on a reef off Viwa Island, the westernmost of the Fiji Islands, on 7 October. A ship had to be sent to assist her to [Suva](#), whence she was towed by HMNZS *Aroha* to [Auckland](#), arriving there on 27 October. A survey showed that, in addition to the loss of the rudder blade, the bearing casting of the rudder stock had been fractured, the tail shaft bent, the propeller blades broken and bent, and the ship's bottom 'set up' for a length of about 25 feet. The *Arbutus* remained at [Auckland](#) for nearly three months awaiting the making of a new rudder and several castings and the arrival of a new propeller and tail shaft from England. She was then towed to [Lyttelton](#), where permanent repairs were completed by the end of April 1945. Lieutenant N. D. Blair was appointed to command her in February 1945. As her services were not needed by the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla, the *Arbutus* was lent to the [British Pacific Fleet](#). She was fitted out at [Sydney](#) as a radar servicing and repair ship and did duty in the Fleet Train until the end of September 1945. After her return to New Zealand she was employed for a brief period on a scientific expedition to the Three Kings Islands.

In March 1945 the minesweepers began 'Operation NA' – a final clearance of the German minefield laid in June 1940 in the approaches to [Hauraki Gulf](#). The total number of mines accounted

¹ Commander J. H. Seelye, VRD; born Dunedin, 12 Sep 1907; joined RNZNVR May 1928; Sub-Lieutenant, Mar 1930; Lieutenant, Oct 1933; Lieutenant-Commander, Oct 1941; served RN 1940–43; transferred to [RNZN](#), 1946; retired 1953.

² Lieutenant-Commander J. A. Rhind, VRD; born [Lyttelton](#), 11 Jun 1912; joined RNZNVR May 1930; Sub-Lieutenant, Aug 1932; Lieutenant, Aug 1935; Lieutenant-Commander, Aug 1943; served RN 1941–43, 1945–46; CO HMS *Westray* ([Mediterranean](#)) 1942–43.

for at the end of September 1941 was 133, and since then others had drifted ashore or been sunk by ships at sea. After nearly five years of buffeting and corrosion it was probable that the rest had either sunk or drifted far away in the [Pacific](#). Nevertheless, the area had to be thoroughly swept to make it 100 per cent safe for shipping.

The *Sanda*, *Scarba*, *Killegray*, and *Inchkeith* of the 7th Trawler Group, with the *Waipu*, *Wakakura*, *Kaiwaka*, and *Coastguard* as danlayers, spent eight days sweeping the Cradock Channel area off the north-west end of Great Barrier Island but no mines were found. Starting again on 8 April, the sweepers searched most of the area extending north and west of Moko Hinau to the swept channel between Maro Tiri and the mainland. No mines had been found when sweeping ceased temporarily on 21 May.

Two months later a signal was received from the British Naval Officer-in-Charge at [Wilhelmshaven](#) giving the number of mines (228) and the approximate positions in which they had been laid. This was supplemented by a copy of the track chart of the German raider [Orion](#). Working on this precise information, the sweepers carried out a further search of the northern area, but no mines had been found when operations ceased on 17 October 1945. The sweeping of the eastern approaches to [Hauraki Gulf](#) on either side of Cuvier Island was postponed for five months.

The cause of this long delay and of many of the interruptions since March 1945 was a shortage of coal, which immobilised the minesweepers. Since there was no prospect of an improvement in coal supplies and shipowners were pressing for the reopening of the Cuvier Island channels, the oil-burning corvettes Arabis and Arbutus were temporarily fitted out as minesweepers at a cost of about £1350, and the coal-burning ships of the 7th Trawler Group were ordered to be paid off into reserve.¹ The Waiho, Waima, and Waipu, allocated as danlayers, were coal-burners and the Ministry of Mines guaranteed a supply of 500 tons of coal a month to keep them at sea.

The final sweeping of the Cuvier Island area as far as the 100–fathoms line was the last task of the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla, which then consisted of the Arabis, Arbutus, and Kiwi and the three danlayers.² It started on 7 March 1946 and was completed on 4 June. In a message to the senior officer of the flotilla, the Naval Board commented that the clearance of the minefield had been a long and arduous task ably carried out. That no mines had been

¹ The Inchkeith, Killegray, and Sanda were paid off in February and the Scarba in April 1946

² The boilers of the oil-burning Tui were defective. She took no part in the operation and was paid off into reserve in June 1946, as were the Arabis, Kiwi, Waiho, Waima, and Waipu a month later.

found by the 1945–46 sweeps had increased the dullness of the operation but 'had not in any way detracted from the importance of ensuring the safety of our waters for peaceful shipping'.

By that time the minesweeping flotillas, built up at great cost during the six years of war, were being rapidly dispersed. Demobilisation was proceeding rapidly, and within a year after VJ Day most of the little ships had been paid off to 'await disposal'.

Beginning with four vessels in 1939, the minesweepers had attained their maximum strength four years later when there were twenty-six in commission, two

in reserve, and others nearing completion. Most of them were dual-purpose vessels equipped for anti-submarine duties as well as minesweeping. It was the fortune of war that only the Kiwi, Tui, and Moa as anti-submarine vessels ever got to close grips with the enemy. The work of the port minesweepers for the greater part was to maintain the swept channels in the approaches to the main harbours. This and anti-submarine patrols and escorts were their long, continuous tasks, and they were well done. The performance of the minesweepers in the Second World War is one of the proud traditions of the Royal New Zealand Navy.

HMNZS Hautapu was recommissioned in April 1946 to take part in the 'Canterbury Project', a scientific investigation of long-range radar observations undertaken by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research at the request of the British Government. Based at [Timaru](#), the Hautapu made several offshore cruises, but so much time was spent in harbour that her crew became unsettled. She was paid off at [Auckland](#) in April 1947 and transferred to the [Marine Department](#), which provided a crew for the few remaining months of her scientific service. The Hautapu was sold later for £17,500 to New Zealand Fisheries Ltd., of [Wellington](#), who had already purchased the [Waikato](#) (later renamed Tairaroa).

The Aroha, Waiho, and Waima were sold to Red Funnel Fisheries Ltd. of [Sydney](#) for a lump sum of £50,000, and the Awatere and Pahau to A. A. Murrell of [Sydney](#) for £30,500. The Maimai went to the Maimai Trawling Company Ltd. of [Wellington](#) for £15,000, and the Waipu was bought by Sanford Ltd. of [Auckland](#) for £16,500. The average cost of each of these vessels when built was £73,230.

The Wakakura, paid off in October 1945 after nearly twenty years' service in the New Zealand Naval Forces, was sold for £2000 in 1947 to the Tasman Steamship Company, which had been formed by returned servicemen. They later bought the Fijian vessel Viti. The Muritai was sold to the Devonport Steam Ferry Company Ltd. of [Auckland](#) for £8000. The danlayer Kaiwaka, which was found to be in bad condition, was partly repaired before being returned to the New Zealand Refrigerating Company Ltd., to whom £13,343 was paid in lieu of full restoration and £9000 for loss of value.

The composite-built sweepers Hinau and Rimu were retained in reserve and the Manuka was leased to the Chatham Fishing Company, a group of returned

servicemen. Special conditions of the charter were that she would be used only in New Zealand waters and released to the Navy if required in the event of an emergency. The corvettes Arabis and Arbutus were returned to the Royal Navy in 1948 when the six Loch class frigates Hawea, Kaniere, Pukaki, Rotoiti, Taupo, and Tutira were purchased for the Royal New Zealand Navy.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 19 – TURN OF THE TIDE IN THE PACIFIC

CHAPTER 19

Turn of the Tide in the Pacific

THE close of the first quarter of 1942 found the Allied cause beset by many perils and difficulties. In the [Middle East](#) the British Eighth Army was locked in an indeterminate struggle with Rommel's forces. [Russia](#) was under heavy pressure from the Germans on the Volga and in the Crimea and was calling insistently for relief by a 'second front'. The Japanese were pushing on through [Burma](#) toward the frontier of [India](#). In the first days of April a powerful force of aircraft-carriers and fast battleships swept across the northern [Indian Ocean](#) to the shores of [Ceylon](#), causing grievous losses of warships and merchant vessels. New Zealand and [Australia](#) were preoccupied with anti-invasion measures. Overshadowing all were the grave conditions arising from the U-boat war which was to cost the Allies six and a quarter million tons of shipping during 1942.

Having in March assumed responsibility for the [Pacific](#), the Americans lost no time in implementing measures for the safety of [Australia](#) and New Zealand and their lines of communication through the island bases of [New Caledonia](#), [Fiji](#), [Samoa](#), [Tongatabu](#), and Bora Bora. While the Japanese were completing their victorious campaign in the [Far East](#) and edging toward [New Guinea](#) and the Solomon Islands, American troops and aircraft and supplies were speeding without interference and in ever-increasing volume across the [Pacific](#). From the beginning of March onward the main duty of the New Zealand cruisers was to meet the convoys of transports in the eastern part of the Anzac Area and escort them safely to their destinations.

A Far Eastern War Council had been set up in [London](#) in January 1942 to 'secure full and continuous association' of the Australian, New Zealand, and Netherlands Governments in the conduct of the war against [Japan](#). Dismayed by the rapid deterioration in the Far Eastern situation, New Zealand and [Australia](#) argued strongly for a [Pacific War Council](#) in [Washington](#), from which the war could best be directed, and this was established under President Roosevelt. The Honourable Walter Nash went to the [United States](#) as New Zealand Minister to [Washington](#), where the Dominion was also represented by a service officer on the British Joint Staff Mission.

At the end of March 1942, by agreement between the Governments concerned,

a new division of Pacific Ocean commands was decided upon and the Anzac Area command ceased to exist on 22 April. A new South-West Pacific Area, extending from the coast of South-East Asia, included the Philippine Islands, the [Netherlands East Indies](#) (excluding [Sumatra](#)), [Australia](#), [New Guinea](#), the Bismarck Archipelago, and the Solomon Islands. General Douglas MacArthur was appointed Commander-in-Chief of all Allied forces in this area, with headquarters at [Melbourne](#). All His Majesty's Australian ships in the area, other than local-defence vessels, came under the operational orders of Vice-Admiral Leary, USN, who commanded all Allied naval forces in the area.

The vast Pacific Ocean area, of which Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN, was appointed Commander-in-Chief, was subdivided into the North, Central, and South Pacific Areas. The last-mentioned, extending southward from the Equator, was contiguous on its western boundary with the South-West Pacific Area. It included New Zealand and dependencies, [New Caledonia](#), [New Hebrides](#), [Fiji](#), [Tonga](#), [Samoa](#) and the Ellice, Phoenix, Tuamotu, Society, and Marquesas groups.¹ There was also a separate South-East Pacific Area command extending from the eastern boundary of the [Pacific Ocean Area](#) to the coasts of Central and South America.

On 8 May Admiral Nimitz, who was also Commander-in-Chief United States Pacific Fleet, assumed command of all sea, air, and land defences in the [Pacific Ocean Area](#), except those for the land defence of New Zealand. Vice-Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, USN, was appointed in command of the [South Pacific Area](#) and its forces.

At a rendezvous south of [Tonga](#) in the evening of 3 March the [Leander](#) and [Achilles](#) from [Suva](#) met the American heavy cruiser [Portland](#) and took over from her convoy PW 2034 comprising the transports [Monterey](#), 18,017 tons, [Matsonia](#), 17,226 tons, and [Mormacsea](#), 4955 tons, bound from [San Francisco](#) for [Brisbane](#). After refuelling at [Brisbane](#) the [Leander](#) and [Achilles](#) went to [Noumea](#), where they were joined on 16 March by other ships of the Anzac Squadron. A convoy of eight ships with 20,000 American troops had arrived from [Melbourne](#) four days earlier. During their stay at [Noumea](#), parties of [Royal Marines](#) from the New Zealand cruisers and United States Marines from the [Chicago](#) were exercised in landing operations.

¹ In the course of the negotiations, both New Zealand and [Australia](#) strongly opposed being placed in separate areas, holding that both countries and the islands of the so-called Anzac Area were 'one strategic whole'. The United States naval high command, on the other hand, held that [Australia](#) and New Zealand were distinct strategic entities and that the defence of the latter was primarily a naval task for which [New Caledonia](#), [Fiji](#), [Tongatabu](#), and [Samoa](#) were key points on her line of communications.

The Anzac Squadron sailed on 25 March to cover the arrival and disembarkation of some 500 troops of the American division from [Noumea](#) at Vila, in the [New Hebrides](#), where an advanced base was about to be established. The ships carrying them were met in the forenoon of 28 March. The New Zealand cruisers then left the squadron and went on to [Suva](#), whence the [Leander](#) sailed on 30 March to rendezvous with convoy BT 201 coming from the Panama Canal, and the [Achilles](#) two days later to meet convoy PW 2055 from [San Francisco](#). The [Monowai](#) sailed from [Napier](#) on 8 March in company with the [Rangatira](#), both carrying troops for [Fiji](#). They were back at [Auckland](#) a week later, and on 30 March the [Monowai](#) sailed to meet convoy BT 201.

This convoy had sailed from [New York](#) by way of the Panama Canal to Bora Bora, where the [United States](#) cruiser [New Orleans](#) and a destroyer took over escorting duty. It comprised the [Uruguay](#), 20,183 tons, and [Santa Paula](#), 9135 tons, for [Melbourne](#) and the [General J. Parker](#), 12,000 tons, [Santa Clara](#), 8100 tons, and [Santa Lucia](#), 9135 tons, for [Brisbane](#). They were carrying 13,220 troops, whose ultimate destination was [New Caledonia](#).

The [Leander](#) from [Suva](#) and the [Monowai](#) from [Auckland](#) met the convoy about 250 miles south of [Tongatabu](#) on 1 April. When the [Uruguay](#) reported that she had only sufficient water for four days' steaming at 15 knots, she and the [Santa Paula](#), escorted by the [Monowai](#), were diverted to [Auckland](#), where they arrived on 3 April. They sailed next day and arrived at [Melbourne](#) on the 10th. The [Leander](#) delivered her section of the convoy at [Brisbane](#) on 6 April and sailed four days later for [Noumea](#).

On 3 April the [Achilles](#) from [Suva](#) met the American heavy cruiser [Chester](#) in a position north-east of the Kermadec Islands and took over convoy PW 2055. It

consisted of the [Queen Elizabeth](#), 83,673 tons, and the American transports [Mariposa](#), 18,017 tons, and [President Coolidge](#), 21,936 tons, all carrying troops for [Australia](#). As the [Queen Elizabeth](#) was unable to enter [Sydney](#) harbour more than one hour after high water, she and the [Achilles](#) left the convoy at noon on 5 April and, steaming at 26 ½ knots to 'catch the tide', arrived at [Sydney](#) heads at noon next day.

The [Achilles](#) remained at [Sydney](#) for twelve days, during which time positions were prepared by the dockyard staff for mounting seven Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns. Captain Mansergh, DSC, RN, ¹ relieved Captain H. M. Barnes in command of the [Achilles](#) on 16 April. The cruiser sailed two days later and met the [Mariposa](#) which

¹ Vice-Admiral Sir C. A. L. Mansergh, KBE, CB, DSC, m.i.d., US Silver Star; born England, 7 Oct 1898; served World War I, 1914–18 (DSC); Captain HMNZS [Achilles](#), 1942–43; HMNZS [Leander](#), Feb–Oct 1943; promoted Rear-Admiral, 1948; Vice-Admiral, 1951; President, RN College, Greenwich, 1953–.

was returning from [Melbourne](#) to [San Francisco](#). Having escorted the transport to a position about 230 miles north-east of [Samoa](#), the [Achilles](#) arrived at Pago Pago on 25 April.

The [Monowai](#), with the [United States](#) destroyer J. D. Ford in company, sailed from [Melbourne](#) on 12 April escorting the steamers [City of Paris](#), 10,902 tons, and [City of London](#), 8956 tons, to [Fremantle](#), where they arrived a week later. The [Monowai](#) and the destroyer returned to [Melbourne](#) on 25 April and the former sailed two days later for [Auckland](#), arriving there on 2 May. During the month of April the [Monowai](#) had steamed 7831 miles.

HMS [Ascania](#), ¹ an armed merchant cruiser, arrived at [Auckland](#) on 4 April after a passage of three months from the [United Kingdom](#). She had been allocated for duty on the New Zealand Station, but four days before her arrival the Admiralty informed the Naval Board that the loss of bases in the [Far East](#) necessitated the provision of depot ships and repair ships for the maintenance of the increased forces which would operate in Eastern waters. As the serious shipping situation would not allow additional merchant tonnage to be taken over for that purpose, it had been decided

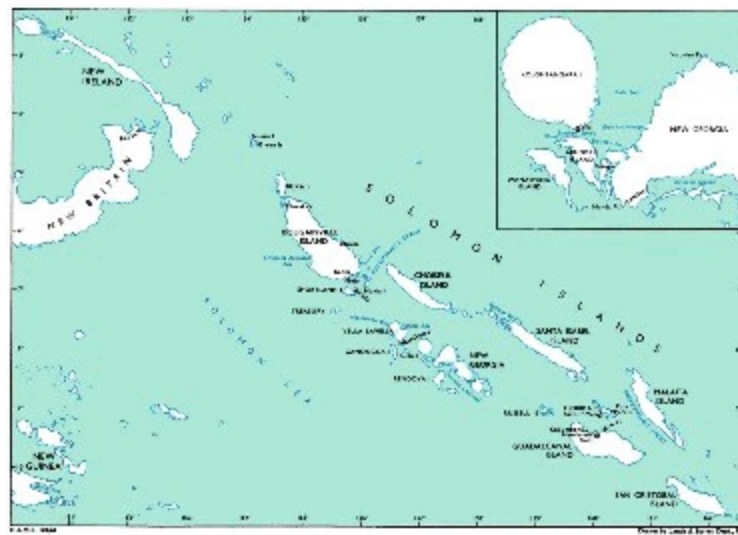
to convert a number of armed merchant cruisers, including the [Ascania](#). Admiral Leary, commanding the Anzac Area, indicated that he had 'no immediate use' for the [Ascania](#) which could be 'operated by the N.Z. Naval Board as required'. Accordingly, she was employed in transporting troops to [Fiji](#) and made four voyages between [Auckland](#) and [Suva](#). At the request of the Admiralty she was disarmed at the end of June and sailed from [Auckland](#) on 14 July on her return to the [United Kingdom](#).

Outside Pago Pago harbour on the morning of 28 April, the [Achilles](#) and her destroyers Helm and Henley were joined by the [Leander](#) and the destroyer Lamson which had come up from [Suva](#). The ships now operated under the direct orders of Admiral Nimitz as Task Group 12.2. They shaped course to the eastward and at noon met the [United States](#) cruiser [Honolulu](#) and three destroyers escorting convoy PW 2059 of eight ships from [San Francisco](#) and San Diego. The [Honolulu](#) and her destroyers then parted company with three of the transports for Pago Pago and Task Group 12.2 took over the remainder of the convoy.

The convoy arrived at Vila harbour, in the island of [Efate](#) in

¹ HMS [Ascania](#) sailed from the [United Kingdom](#) on 8 January 1942. She was detained at Port Elizabeth, South Africa, for urgent repairs and the stowage of 300 tons of rock ballast. After calling at [Mauritius](#) and [Fremantle](#) she spent twelve days at [Melbourne](#) repairing damage to her propelling machinery. The [Ascania](#), a twin-screw steamer of 14,000 tons, speed 15 knots, was built in 1925 for the Cunard Line. As an armed merchant cruiser, she mounted eight 6-inch and two 3-inch guns. She was to have been replaced on the New Zealand Station by HMS [Carthage](#), another armed merchant cruiser, but owing to raider and blockade-running activity in the [Atlantic](#) and Indian Oceans, this did not take place.

the [New Hebrides](#) group, in the forenoon of 4 May. While the troops were landing, one destroyer was on anti-submarine patrol off the harbour entrance. The remainder of the task group carried out a sweep to the north and west and entered harbour the following morning, when the [Achilles](#) went alongside the [Leander](#) to receive her Oerlikon gun equipment and stores.



SOLOMON ISLANDS
SOLOMON ISLANDS

Two United States minelayers had arrived shortly before the convoy and laid defensive minefields covering the approaches to Vila harbour and other possible landing beaches on [Efate](#). The [Achilles](#) and [Leander](#) refuelled from an American fleet tanker and during the night Task Force 12.2 carried out another sweep to the northward, returning to harbour next morning.

The orders of the Commander-in-Chief United States Pacific Fleet were that Task Force 12.2 was to cover the unloading of the convoy. The presence of a powerful Allied naval force in the Coral Sea at that time reduced largely the threat of sea attack. It was decided, therefore, that subject to any change in the situation, the [Achilles](#) and [Leander](#) should remain in harbour with steam at immediate readiness for sea, while one destroyer was on extended patrol and another at anchor in the entrance to Vila harbour.

On 4 May 1942, the day on which the [Achilles](#) and [Leander](#) arrived with their convoy, naval operations of vital importance to the security of New Zealand and [Australia](#) were taking place in the Coral Sea where the hitherto all-victorious Japanese were to experience their first check.

The unexpected ease and speed with which they had carried out the first part of their basic war plan and gained the 'Southern Areas' and their rich resources caused the Japanese to underestimate the actual and potential strength of the Allied powers and to undertake further expansion of their immense perimeter. Their operations continued to be offensive, but their strategy entered a defensive phase and was

directed towards securing their eastern flank against attack. Accordingly, plans were prepared for (a) the capture of [Port Moresby](#) in [New Guinea](#) and [Tulagi](#) in the Solomon Islands; (b) the capture of Midway Island, the western outlier of the Hawaiian Islands, and intended to force a decisive engagement with the [United States](#) fleet; (c) the occupation of the western [Aleutian Islands](#) in the North Pacific; and (d) the seizure of [New Caledonia](#), [Fiji](#), and [Samoa](#) in order to cut the lines of communication between [Australia](#) and New Zealand and the [United States](#).¹ The last project was contingent on the successful completion of the first two. The occupation of [Port Moresby](#) would deny the Allied

¹ By a coincidence, more than 6000 miles away in the [Indian Ocean](#), a British combined force was about to occupy Diego Suarez, in Madagascar, which in hostile hands would constitute a similar threat to communications to the Middle and [Far East](#).

air forces a base within range of [Rabaul](#) and establish the Japanese in a position dominating [New Guinea](#) and northern [Australia](#).

[United States](#) naval intelligence had given sufficient warning of the intended Japanese expedition to [Tulagi](#) and [Port Moresby](#) to enable the Americans to assemble a strong naval force in the Coral Sea. Task Force 17, commanded by Rear-Admiral F. J. Fletcher, USN, consisted of two aircraft-carriers, eight cruisers (including the [Australia](#), Hobart, and [Chicago](#) of Task Force 44 under Rear-Admiral Crace, RN), thirteen destroyers, and two oilers. The Allied air forces based in [Australia](#) were charged with 'air reconnaissance of the general area'. Eleven United States submarines based at [Brisbane](#) patrolled the northern approaches to the Coral Sea.

The Japanese forces consisted of a striking force, two aircraft-carriers, two heavy cruisers, six destroyers, and an oiler, commanded by Vice-Admiral Takeo Takagi; a group of eleven transports and six destroyers for the invasion of [Port Moresby](#); a smaller group for the occupation of [Tulagi](#) (to be followed by the seizure of Nauru and Ocean Islands); a support group with two cruisers and a seaplane carrier to establish a base on the Louisiades, and a covering group consisting of an aircraft-carrier, four heavy cruisers, and a destroyer, commanded by Rear-Admiral Goto. The overall command was exercised from [Rabaul](#) by Vice-Admiral Shigeyoshi

Inouye, commander of the Fourth Fleet, who also controlled seven submarines and a land-based air force.

The American ships had just completed refuelling from their oilers on 3 May when Rear-Admiral Fletcher received word that the Japanese had occupied [Tulagi](#). He steamed north during the night and at sunrise on 4 May, from a position about 100 miles southwest from [Guadalcanal](#), the Yorktown launched forty aircraft to the attack. This was followed by a second strike about four hours later and by yet another in the afternoon. The attacks were 'disappointing in terms of the ratio of ammunition expended to results achieved'.¹ One destroyer, three small craft, and four landing barges were sunk and a few aircraft destroyed for the loss of three [United States](#) aircraft. The damaged minelayer Okinoshima, flagship of Rear-Admiral Shima at the [Tulagi](#) landing, was sunk by an American submarine off [Rabaul](#) on 11 May.²

While the [Port Moresby](#) invasion group was steaming southward from [Rabaul](#), Admiral Takagi's striking force passed east and south of the Solomon Islands and entered the Coral Sea on the morning of 6 May. That afternoon his carriers were only 70 miles from those

¹ Comment by Commander-in-Chief US Pacific Fleet. The aircraft expended 22 torpedoes, seventy-six 1000-pound bombs, and nearly 83,000 rounds of machine-gun ammunition.

² Admiral Shima, who was on his way to Nauru Island at that time, was recalled to [Truk](#). Nauru and Ocean Islands were occupied by the Japanese on 25–26 August 1942.

of Admiral Fletcher steaming to the north-westward, but neither knew of the close proximity of the other. On the same day four long-range bombers from Queensland unsuccessfully attacked the aircraft-carrier of Goto's force heading southward 60 miles from [Bougainville](#) in the [Solomons](#). By midnight the Japanese transports were approaching Jomard Passage in the Louisiades.

At sunrise on 7 May Fletcher's task force turned north from a position about 100 miles south of the Louisiades. At the same time he ordered Admiral Crace's support

force to carry on to the northwest and attack the [Port Moresby](#) occupation group as it emerged from Jomard Passage. About an hour and a half later aircraft from the Yorktown and Lexington located and attacked Admiral Goto's force near Misima Island. The carrier Shoho was hit by seven torpedoes and thirteen bombs and sank in less than fifteen minutes.

Away to the south-east at about the same time, aircraft from the carriers Shokaku and Zuikaku attacked the oiler Neosho and destroyer Sims which had been reported as 'a carrier and a cruiser'. The Sims was sunk and the oiler disabled and badly damaged.¹ During the afternoon Crace's cruisers were attacked with torpedoes and bombs by Japanese shore-based aircraft, five of which were shot down. The ships carried on till midnight when, learning that the invasion force had turned back, they shaped course for [Sydney](#). In the evening twenty-seven aircraft from the Shokaku and Zuikaku were intercepted by fighters from the American carriers and ten shot down. Eleven others were lost while trying to land on their carriers in the darkness.

Next morning the two carrier forces located each other and simultaneously launched their aircraft to attack, the Japanese under cover of a weather 'front' while the Americans were in clear sunlight. None of the American torpedoes found its mark and the Shokaku was hit by only three bombs. But she was badly damaged and set on fire, 108 men being killed and many wounded. Less than three hours later she was on her way back to [Japan](#) for repairs.

On the other hand the Lexington was hit by two torpedoes and two bombs and several near misses ruptured her plates. The [York](#)-town avoided the Japanese torpedoes, but was hit by one bomb which killed or wounded sixty men and started fires that were soon brought under control. The Japanese lost 43 aircraft and the Americans 33 during this action, which ended shortly before noon. About an hour later, however, several internal explosions shook the Lexington, which was soon badly on fire. Further explosions finally forced the

¹ The destroyer Henley found the Neosho four days later and sank her after taking off 123 men, many of them wounded. A search for others who had left the oiler on rafts on 7 May was made by the destroyer Helm, which on 17 May found a raft and took off four men, the only survivors out of 68.

abandonment of the big carrier, which was sunk by torpedoes from a destroyer. Meanwhile, the [Port Moresby](#) invasion force was returning to its base to await another opportunity which never came.

The Battle of the Coral Sea was the first major engagement in naval history in which the issue was decided without the ships firing a shot at one another, it being fought out in a series of actions by aircraft operating as flying torpedo-boats and gunboats. It took place in an area barely 1700 miles from New Zealand. It was the first reverse suffered by the Japanese and had far-reaching consequences. It was the prelude to an even greater defeat in the Central Pacific a month later.

The New Zealand cruisers did not have the good fortune to take part in the Battle of the Coral Sea. The progress and outcome of the prolonged engagement, little more than a day's steaming from the [New Hebrides](#), became known to them at Vila from intercepted wireless signals. These indicated that enemy action against the [New Hebrides](#) was improbable in the immediate future. The situation was discussed with the General commanding the American forces at Vila, who agreed to the withdrawal of the [Achilles](#) and [Leander](#) should the Commander-in-Chief United States Pacific Fleet require their services for the continuance of offensive operations in the Coral Sea.

The [Leander's](#) aircraft was badly damaged on 17 May while being hoisted out for the routine dawn patrol. It was replaced by one from the armed merchant cruiser [Manoora](#) which, in company with [HMAS Mildura](#), arrived next day. The Australian ships took away the [Royal Australian Air Force](#) unit and the small detachment of Australian troops which had been garrisoning Vila until relieved by the Americans. A number of refugees from the [New Hebrides](#) and the Solomon Islands also left in the ships. The [Achilles](#) sailed from Vila on 20 May for [Suva](#) and Pago Pago.

While the [Leander](#) was at [Noumea](#) she was joined by the [United States](#) destroyers [Bulmer](#) and [Paul Jones](#) for duty with Task Group 12.2. It was arranged with the [United States](#) military authorities, in order to save time, that the cruiser should transport the advance body of troops for the occupation of the island of [Espiritu Santo](#) at the northern end of the [New Hebrides](#) group. ¹ Accordingly, the

[Leander](#) and the destroyers proceeded to Vila, where she embarked 500 troops and some 200 tons of stores and equipment. In company with the destroyer [Whipple](#), the [Leander](#) arrived on 28 May in the [Segond Channel](#) at the south-east end of [Espiritu Santo](#), where the

¹ [Espiritu Santo](#) was rapidly developed by the Americans into a great forward naval and air base, second only to that at [Noumea](#). The Segond Channel provided an extensive and secure fleet anchorage. Another great naval base, with facilities for large repairs to damaged ships, was established at Havannah harbour, north of Vila, in the island of [Efate](#).

destroyer [Alden](#) was waiting with lighters and towing craft to land the troops. The [Leander](#) returned to Vila next day and, her duty of covering the unloading of the supply ships completed, sailed on 1 June in company with the destroyers for [Suva](#).

The [Leander](#) and destroyer [Tucker](#) sailed from [Suva](#) on 4 June to meet convoy PW 2076 from [San Francisco](#) at a rendezvous about 500 miles east from [Samoa](#). They were joined in the morning of the 7th by the destroyers [Cummings](#) and [Farragut](#), and the convoy, escorted by the [United States](#) heavy cruiser [San Francisco](#), was sighted about three hours later. It was carrying the American 37th Division for [Fiji](#), where it was to relieve the New Zealanders.

In order to secure the early release of four transports, the [President Coolidge](#) and [Santa Lucia](#) were to go direct to [Fiji](#) and the other ships to [Auckland](#), whence the General Tasker H. Bliss was to proceed to [Australia](#). On completing her first disembarkation at [Suva](#) the [President Coolidge](#) was to maintain a shuttle service between that port and [Auckland](#) until all the 37th Division troops were landed in [Fiji](#).

¹ Accordingly, while the [San Francisco](#) and the destroyer [Farragut](#) carried on with the five transports for [Auckland](#), the [Leander](#) and the destroyers [Cummings](#) and [Tucker](#) as Task Group 12.2 escorted the other two to [Suva](#), where they arrived on 10 June. Subsequently the task group escorted the [President Coolidge](#) for three voyages from [Auckland](#) to [Fiji](#), the 'lift' of 37th Division being completed on 13 August.

During the last week of May and the first half of June the [Achilles](#) was engaged in covering the occupation by [United States](#) marines of Wallis Island, a French protectorate lying about 180 miles west from [Samoa](#). ² The [Achilles](#), in company with

the destroyer O'Brien, left Pago Pago on 25 May escorting the [United States](#) ships Sumner and Swan ³ which carried the first echelon of troops. Two days later the Free French vessel Chevreuil joined the convoy off Wallis Island and led the Sumner and Swan inside the reef. The

¹ The troops of the 37th Division landed at [Auckland](#) were accommodated in camps at Manurewa, [Papakura](#), Karaka, [Pukekohe](#), and Opaheke.

² At the beginning of May the political situation in [New Caledonia](#) was very disturbed. Rear-Admiral d'Argenlieu had been sent out by General de Gaulle, leader of the Free French movement, as High Commissioner for [French Oceania](#) and the popular Governor of [New Caledonia](#), M. Sautot, was under recall to [London](#). A committee of citizens had cabled to de Gaulle requesting him to recall d'Argenlieu instead of Sautot, and there were popular demonstrations in [Noumea](#) where a general strike was called. On the orders of d'Argenlieu, Marines entered Sautot's residence and escorted him on board the Chevreuil, together with four members of the citizens' committee who had been arrested. The latter were landed on Walpole Island, off the southern end of [New Caledonia](#), and Sautot was taken to [Auckland](#). In the meantime d'Argenlieu, his chief of staff, and four others had been taken into custody by the militia, but on the intervention of General Patch, United States Army commander, they were released, d'Argenlieu having agreed to the release of the four citizens, who were brought back from Walpole Island by the Chevreuil.

³ USS Sumner, surveying ship, 2900 tons; four 5-inch guns. USS Swan, seaplane tender, 840 tons; two 3-inch guns.

[Achilles](#) and O'Brien then returned to Pago Pago, whence they sailed on 29 May escorting the second echelon of [United States](#) marines in three transports. The [Achilles](#) remained at Wallis Island until 18 June, when she departed for Pago Pago and [Suva](#).

The Monowai, in company with HMS Ascania and the Wahine, sailed from [Auckland](#) on 13 May carrying 1000 New Zealand troops and a draft of naval ratings to [Suva](#). On her return to [Auckland](#) the Monowai spent five weeks refitting, two

additional Oerlikon guns and a radar set being installed. The *Ascania* and *Wahine* made a second voyage to [Suva](#) carrying 885 troops.

The turn of the tide of war in the [Pacific](#) came during the first week of June when the Battle of Midway was fought. Undeterred by the reverse of fortune in the Coral Sea, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Combined Fleet, went ahead with his grandiose plan to seize Midway Island ¹ and the western Aleutians and force a decisive fleet action on his own terms. By 27 May his various forces, comprising the major strength of the Japanese Navy, were all on their way. This great armada numbered 84 fighting ships, apart from 16 scouting submarines, 12 transports carrying a landing force of 5000 men, and 16 oilers and supply vessels.

Yamamoto flew his flag in the newly commissioned *Yamato*, a battleship of nearly 80,000 tons, mounting nine 18-inch guns. Vice-Admiral Nagumo was there with four of his big aircraft-carriers and their seasoned pilots. From December to April his carrier striking force had ranged victoriously across 120 degrees of longitude from [Pearl Harbour](#) to [Ceylon](#), seldom sighted and never attacked.

The odds against the Americans were heavy. They had only three aircraft-carriers against Nagumo's four. No battleships of sufficient speed to work with the fast carriers were available, whereas Yamamoto had eleven. The American carriers were supported by 13 cruisers and 25 destroyers. The *Yorktown*, which had returned from the Coral Sea to [Pearl Harbour](#) with damage estimated to take ninety days to make good, had been repaired in 48 hours. The defences of Midway had been greatly strengthened and more than 120 aircraft were stationed there. The American intelligence system had succeeded in penetrating the enemy's most closely guarded secrets well in advance of events and kept the naval command well informed, even as to the date when the expected blow was to fall.

The first report of the enemy's approach was made at nine o'clock on the morning of 3 June, when a flying boat on patrol 700 miles

¹ Midway Island, sentry outpost of the Hawaiian group, lying 1135 miles west-north-west from [Pearl Harbour](#), was an important air base and refuelling station for submarines. In 1942 it was the westernmost American

base in the Central Pacific and the nearest to [Japan](#).

to the westward of Midway sighted a group of eleven ships. Seven bombers made an unsuccessful attack in the afternoon, and shortly after midnight four flying boats attacked with torpedoes and damaged a tanker.

The Japanese carriers coming down from the north-west were 240 miles from Midway at 4.30 a.m. on the 4th when they launched an attack by 108 bombers, well supported by fighters. An hour later the carriers and the aircraft were sighted and reported by a flying boat and all aircraft took off from Midway. Admiral Fletcher's carriers Yorktown, Enterprise, and Hornet, then 200 miles north from Midway, intercepted the message and at once shaped course to the southwest in the direction of Nagumo's force.

The Japanese strike severely damaged the installations on Midway. Seventeen American fighters were shot down and others damaged. The enemy's losses of aircraft were heavy. The counter-attack from Midway did no damage to the Japanese carriers, but the American bombers, without fighter escort, suffered severe losses.

Their attack, however, appeared to cloud the judgment of Admiral Nagumo, whose airmen had told him by radio that a second strike at Midway was necessary. He had held some ninety torpedo-aircraft in readiness to deal with American carriers, but none had been sighted by his search patrols when he ordered the formations to be struck below and rearmed with bombs for a second attack on Midway. About twenty minutes later, when a patrol reported an enemy force, he changed his mind and ordered the torpedoes to be left on the aircraft not already dealt with. But his formations were already partly broken down and, in any case, he had to clear his flight decks to land the aircraft returning from the first strike on Midway.

At seven o'clock the Hornet and Enterprise began to launch a strike against Nagumo's force with all the aircraft they had except those needed for their own defence. Two hours later the Yorktown sent off all her torpedo-aircraft and half her dive-bombers with fighter escort. The Hornet's dive-bombers failed to find the Japanese carriers, which had made a drastic change of course. Her unescorted torpedo-bombers found and attacked the enemy, but all were shot down. Those from the Enterprise and Yorktown fared almost as badly. Of forty-one torpedo-

bombers from those ships, only six returned and no Japanese ship was hit. But their devotion brought its reward.

The violent manoeuvring imposed on the Japanese prevented their launching more aircraft, and while the enemy's fighters were low down chasing the torpedo-bombers, the dive-bombers went in almost unopposed against the carriers, whose flight-decks were crowded with aircraft refuelling and rearming. Their bombs crashed into the Kaga, Akagi, and Soryu,¹ whose decks quickly became a shambles littered with blazing and exploding aircraft. Great fires broke out below and it was soon clear that the ships were doomed. Admiral Nagumo was forced to shift his flag from the Akagi to the light cruiser Nagara. The Soryu was torpedoed and sunk during the afternoon by the American submarine Nautilus, the Kaga went down that evening, and the Akagi was sunk at sunrise next day by a torpedo from a Japanese destroyer.

Shortly after noon the Yorktown was attacked by dive-bombers from the Hiryu, the only remaining enemy carrier. Most of the aircraft were shot down, but six got through and scored three hits which severely damaged the Yorktown. She carried on at reduced speed, but two hours later the Hiryu struck again, this time with torpedo-bombers which made three disabling hits. The Yorktown was avenged by dive-bombers from the Enterprise. At five o'clock the Hiryu was badly damaged by four hits and she sank four hours later. The Yorktown, under tow, was sunk two days later by a Japanese submarine which also sank the destroyer Hammann.

Bereft of his four big carriers, Admiral Yamamoto ordered a general retirement of his forces.² But one more disaster was to befall him. The Mikuma and Mogami,³ two of four heavy cruisers previously sent to bombard Midway, collided while avoiding attack by an American submarine. On 6 June they were attacked by aircraft, the Mikuma being sunk. The Mogami was badly battered, but managed to make [Truk](#) for temporary repairs.

The Battle of Midway Island was one of the decisive battles of the Second World War. At one stroke the strategic situation in the [Pacific](#) had been reversed. Shorn of a major part of her hitherto predominant aircraft-carrier strength, [Japan](#) had lost the initiative. The balance of naval power in the [Pacific](#) was restored and thenceforth was to swing rapidly and heavily against [Japan](#). The threat to New Zealand and [Australia](#) was definitely removed, and in a few weeks the Allied forces passed to the

offensive in the South Pacific.

¹ Kaga and Akagi, 26,900 tons; speed 25 and 28 knots respectively; 60–70 aircraft; numerous AA guns. Soryu and Hiryu, 17,500 tons; 30 knots; 40–50 aircraft; many AA guns.

² Yamamoto's northern force seized the small islands of Attu and Kiska in the western Aleutians on 7 June.

³ Mikuma and Mogami, 13,000 tons; ten 8-inch, eight 5-inch, many light AA guns; twelve torpedo-tubes; four aircraft; speed 33 knots. The Mogami was sunk by aircraft in the Battle of the Philippine Sea on 25 October 1944.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 20 – THE STRUGGLE FOR GUADALCANAL

CHAPTER 20

The Struggle for Guadalcanal

AFTER their defeat at Midway the Japanese shelved their plans for the seizure of [New Caledonia](#), [Fiji](#), and [Samoa](#) ¹ and turned their attention once more to the capture of [Port Moresby](#) – this time by landing troops on the north-east coast of [New Guinea](#) and advancing over the Owen Stanley Mountains. This operation was to be staged from [Rabaul](#) where the existing airfields were being expanded. Others had been constructed at Gasmata, on the south coast of [New Britain](#), at Lae and Salamaua in [New Guinea](#), and in the northern [Solomons](#).

The Japanese had first moved into the Solomon Islands in March 1942 and established fighter strips on [Buka](#), the northernmost island, 170 miles from [Rabaul](#), at Buin and [Kahili](#) on the south end of [Bougainville](#), at Kieta on the east coast of that island, and later in the [Shortland Islands](#) near Buin. These were ultimately developed into major air bases. At [Tulagi](#) harbour in the southern [Solomons](#), which they seized at the beginning of May, the Japanese had established a seaplane base. ² During May and June coastwatchers and reconnaissance aircraft reported much activity at Lunga at the northern end of [Guadalcanal](#), opposite [Tulagi](#). By 4 July, when a small force of Japanese marines landed there, the construction of a large airfield was well advanced. Less than a fortnight later, Japanese troops were landing in strength at Buna and Gona in [New Guinea](#).

Supreme importance attached to the Solomon Islands, which extend in a south-easterly direction for some 600 miles from the Bismarcks towards the [New Hebrides](#). In Japanese hands they were a bastion of the [Pacific](#) defence perimeter and could provide a chain of sea and air bases ideally placed for striking at [New Caledonia](#) and the [New Hebrides](#), and at the sea communications between [Australia](#) and New Zealand and the [United States](#). Conversely, in Allied hands they would secure that line of communications and provide advanced bases for operations against the Bismarcks and beyond.

¹ On 11 July 1942 the Imperial General Headquarters finally cancelled the orders for the seizure of these islands.

² The little island of [Tulagi](#), administrative centre of the Solomon Islands Protectorate, lies 675 miles south-east from [Rabaul](#), 560 miles north-west from [Espiritu Santo](#) in the [New Hebrides](#), and about 800 miles north-north-west from [Noumea](#) in [New Caledonia](#).

After consultations with Admiral Nimitz at [Pearl Harbour](#) and a visit to [Noumea](#), Vice-Admiral Ghormley had arrived in New Zealand on 21 May and established his headquarters at [Auckland](#). On 19 June he formally assumed command of all sea, air, and land forces in the [South Pacific Area](#), with the exception of those assigned to the local defence of New Zealand. The naval command in [Fiji](#) was transferred from Commander T. S. Critchley, [RNZN](#), to Commander Holmes, USN, as Port Director, the former becoming New Zealand naval liaison officer, [Fiji](#).

On 2 July the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff issued their directive for offensive operations in the South Pacific in three stages as follows:

- (1) Operation WATCHTOWER to seize and occupy the Santa Cruz Islands, [Tulagi](#), and adjacent positions. The Commander-in-Chief United States Pacific Fleet was to be in charge and the date was fixed for 1 August.
- (2) The seizure and occupation of the remainder of the Solomon Islands, Lae, Salamaua, and the north-east coast of [New Guinea](#) under the overall command of General MacArthur.
- (3) The seizure and occupation of [Rabaul](#) and adjacent positions in [New Britain](#), [New Ireland](#), and [New Guinea](#), also under MacArthur's command.

The boundary between the South Pacific and South-West Pacific Areas was moved westward so that the south-eastern [Solomons](#), including [Guadalcanal](#) and [Tulagi](#), came within the former area. ¹

Operation WATCHTOWER, the first major Allied offensive in the [Pacific](#), was hastily planned in New Zealand under the direction of Vice-Admiral Ghormley who, after conferring with General Mac-Arthur, postponed it to 7 August. It involved landings on [Guadalcanal](#) and at [Tulagi](#), separated by 18 miles of sea – analogous to simultaneous landings on both sides of Cook Strait – for which air support and surface protection would be given from a common pool. The troops assigned to the landings were two regiments of the 1st Marine Division, a regiment of the 2nd Marine Division, and two battalions of Marines, totalling 19,105 officers and other

ranks and commanded by Major-General A. A. Vandegrift, USMC.

The Expeditionary Force, under the tactical command of Vice-Admiral Fletcher, was divided into an Air Support Force of three aircraft-carriers (Saratoga, Enterprise, and Wasp), one new battle-

¹ In the event, it was not necessary to occupy the Santa Cruz Islands (east of the [Solomons](#)) in force; the execution of the second stage was divided between the South Pacific and MacArthur's forces, and several islands in the [Solomons](#) were bypassed, as was [Rabaul](#) where large Japanese forces were neutralised.

ship

(North Carolina), ¹ five heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, sixteen destroyers, and five fleet oilers; and an Amphibious Force of six heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, fifteen destroyers, four fast transports (converted destroyers), and nineteen 'attack transports', commanded by Rear-Admiral R. K. Turner, USN. A third task force, commanded by Rear-Admiral J. S. McCain, USN, and consisting of aircraft based on [New Caledonia](#), [Fiji](#), and the [New Hebrides](#), was to co-operate with MacArthur's aircraft based on [Port Moresby](#) and Queensland. This force included a squadron of the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

The Amphibious Force assembled at [Wellington](#), where the United States Navy transports and supply ships arrived at intervals during May, June, and July and the waterfront became a scene of intense activity. The first echelon of Marines arrived on 14 June and was accommodated in specially constructed camps in and about [Wellington](#). ² A convoy of four supply ships arrived on 11 July. They had been escorted from the vicinity of Bora Bora by HMNZS [Achilles](#) and the [United States](#) destroyer [Walke](#). On the same day the second echelon of [US Marines](#) arrived from [San Francisco](#). Two of the ships in the convoy had gone into [Suva](#) and three others went on to [Australia](#), escorted by HMNZS [Monowai](#) and the destroyer [Tucker](#), which returned to [Auckland](#) on 17 July. The [Heywood](#), last of the attack transports in the convoy, arrived from [Noumea](#) on 16 July. ³

All the harbour facilities of [Wellington](#) were placed at the disposal of the Americans, who were given the full and active co-operation of the naval and military authorities and the Harbour Board. The capacity of the port was taxed to the utmost to handle the requirements of the Amphibious Force, as well as normal shipping traffic. All the transports were discharged and then 'combatloaded' – supplies and equipment that would be needed first in the landing areas being loaded last. Operations were centralised at Aotea Quay, which accommodated five or six ships at a time, and great dumps of ammunition, fuel, and other supplies were set up there. To speed up the work all the stevedoring was done by the Marines themselves working in continuous eight-hour shifts.

More than one hundred landing craft of various types were

¹ Saratoga, 33,000 tons; speed 33 knots; 90 aircraft; sixteen 5-inch and many AA guns. Enterprise, 19,800 tons; 34 knots, 80–85 aircraft; eight 5-inch and many AA guns. Wasp, 14,700 tons; 30 knots; 80 aircraft; similar armament. North Carolina, 41,000 tons; 27 knots; nine 16-inch, twenty 5-inch, and 70 AA guns.

² These camps were situated at Kaiwharawhara, [Porirua](#), Titahi Bay, McKay's Crossing, [Paekakariki](#), Paraparaumu, Pauatahanui, and Judgeford.

³ All the 'attack transports' were converted merchant ships ranging from 4000 tons to 10,000 tons, commissioned as units of the [US Navy](#). All were equipped for the rapid handling of troops and equipment by means of self-propelled landing craft. They were fitted with heavy-lift gear for handling tanks and amphibious tractors.

delivered at [Wellington](#), exclusive of those carried in the attack transports. The boat harbour at Oriental Bay was requisitioned for use as a depot for landing craft, barracks were built there to house their crews, and arrangements made with the Royal New Zealand Navy for repair and maintenance facilities, which during the next three years were extended to the hundreds of American ships of all types sailing in and out of [Wellington](#), [Auckland](#), and other ports of the Dominion.

During their stay at [Wellington](#) all the American ships, transports as well as

fighting ships, kept their many anti-aircraft guns manned for action at short notice. In co-operation with [RNZN](#) vessels, antisubmarine patrols were maintained by two destroyers in Cook Strait and landing craft carrying depth-charges patrolled inside the harbour.

The assembly of the Amphibious Force was completed on 18 July, when Task Group 62.2, commanded by Rear-Admiral V. A. C. Crutchley, VC, DSC, arrived from [Brisbane](#). This escort force consisted of the Australian cruisers [Australia](#) (flag), [Canberra](#), and Hobart, the [United States](#) 8-inch cruisers [Chicago](#) and Salt Lake City and seven destroyers.

The Amphibious Force went to sea in the morning of 22 July 1942 in twelve transports. Screened by the destroyers, they passed out of harbour in succession, watched by thousands who speculated about their destination. On the following day the escort was joined off East Cape by the destroyers Helm and Bagley from [Auckland](#). The force of twenty-six ships, the safeguard of considerable affairs, then shaped course for its [Pacific](#) rendezvous.

Meanwhile, the other forces were on their way south. The air-craft-carrier Wasp and her screening destroyers, which had come from the [Atlantic](#), sailed from San Diego, [California](#), on 1 July escorting five transports carrying the 2nd Marine Regiment. The Saratoga (flagship of Vice-Admiral Fletcher), Enterprise, and North Carolina with their cruisers and destroyers came down from [Pearl Harbour](#). Four destroyer-transports went on to [Noumea](#) and embarked part of the Marine Raider Battalion which had been training in [New Caledonia](#). The remainder of the raiders, numbering some two hundred, were lifted by HMNZS Monowai which, with the destroyer Tucker, arrived at [Noumea](#) on 25 July from [Auckland](#). The troops were transhipped to the Amphibious Force at Koro Island in the Fiji Group, and the Monowai, after refuelling at [Suva](#), returned to [Auckland](#).

In the afternoon of 26 July the forces joined company at the rendezvous on the 180th meridian at a point 400 miles south of Koro Island. The combined fleet, numbering eighty-seven ships, then steamed to Koro Island where two landing exercises were carried out. After refuelling, the fleet sailed in the afternoon of 31 July. Six thousand miles away the [British Eastern Fleet](#) under Admiral Sir James Somerville was carrying out a sweep in the Bay of Bengal planned to prevent the

transfer of Japanese air forces from the Malayan to the [South Pacific Area](#).¹ On 3 August the Amphibious Force was joined by two more transports with a battalion of Marines direct from [Pearl Harbour](#). The ships stood on to the westward till noon on the 5th and then headed due north on the 159th meridian for [Guadalcanal](#).

Preceded by heavy bombardments by ships and carrier aircraft, unopposed landings were made in the morning of 7 August on beaches at the northern end of [Tulagi](#) Island and eastward of Lunga Point on [Guadalcanal](#). As successive positions in the latter area were occupied without opposition, it was evident that the small Japanese force had been completely surprised and had gone inland without waiting to destroy their plants and great quantities of stores and material. The airfield was captured intact and only required rolling to make it usable.² Two attacks by Japanese bombers from [Rabaul](#) were driven off during the afternoon, sixteen being shot down at a cost of twelve American fighters. By nightfall about 11,000 Marines were ashore, but the unloading of the transports had to be suspended later because of congestion on the beach.

On the [Tulagi](#) side the attack on the southern end of that island³ had failed to dislodge the Japanese from caves and air-raid shelters blasted in the rock. The enemy also had most of Gavutu and Tanambogo. It was well on into the next day before these positions were cleared by the virtual extermination of their fanatical defenders. At midday on the 8th a strong force of torpedo-bombers attacked the transports. The *George F. Elliott* was set on fire by an aircraft which crashed on board and she became a total loss. The destroyer *Jarvis* was damaged by a torpedo and subsequently lost with all hands while on her way to [Noumea](#) for repairs. That night Admiral Fletcher's carriers, which had been cruising about 75 miles from [Guadalcanal](#), retired to the south-eastward. This left the Amphibious Force without air cover, and barely half the supplies and equipment had then been unloaded from the transports.

Meanwhile, Admiral Mikawa was on his way down from [Rabaul](#) with a force of five 8-inch cruisers, two light cruisers, and a des-

¹ Early in July Admiral King, Commander-in-Chief United States Navy,

had asked for a diversion by the Eastern Fleet to precede the operations in the [Solomons](#).

² The Japanese had built large camps, wharves, bridges, machine-shops, two radio stations, two electric-power plants, ice-making plants, and an elaborate air-compressor plant for torpedoes. The airfield had a 3600-ft runway, hangars, and blast pens. Anti-aircraft batteries and machine-gun emplacements had been installed.

³ [Tulagi](#) lies close to the promontory at Hallett on the south side of [Florida Island](#), 18 miles north from [Guadalcanal](#). Gavutu Island, joined by a causeway to Tanambogo Island, is about two miles east from [Tulagi](#).

troyer

. They were sighted by an Allied aircraft east of [Bougainville](#) and some 300 miles from [Guadalcanal](#) about midday on the 8th, but the course they were reported to be steering (to recover their own aircraft) seriously misled the Americans as to their intentions. ¹ Shortly before two o'clock in the morning of the 9th they steamed in round Savo Island, about eight miles off Cape Esperance, the northern extremity of [Guadalcanal](#).

Evading the American destroyers on radar patrol, they made a lightning attack on the two groups of patrolling 8-inch cruisers which were quickly disabled by gunfire and torpedoes. They then steamed away to the northward, not attempting to attack the transports anchored a few miles to the eastward. The Vincennes and Quincy sank about an hour after the attack and the Astoria and HMAS [Canberra](#), both badly battered and on fire, were sunk by torpedoes some hours later. The [Chicago](#) was badly damaged by a torpedo and a destroyer was disabled. Two Japanese cruisers sustained minor damage and another – the 8-inch Kako – was torpedoed and sunk by an American submarine near [Rabaul](#) next day.

Following this disastrous action, all the ships of the Amphibious Force were withdrawn in the evening of the 9th and shaped course for [Noumea](#). Vandegrift and his 17,000 Marines were left without air cover or near naval support. They were short of heavy equipment, and less than half their sixty days' supplies had been

landed from the transports. Fortunately, the Japanese had no troop reinforcements immediately available, but their ships – secure in their local command of the sea – bombarded the American positions day and night. The Americans, however, flew in aircraft from the [New Hebrides](#); within a fortnight they were operating dive-bombers with such effect as to restrict the enemy to night operations. This airfield ² thus assumed a crucial importance, and it was on its capture or immobilisation that Japanese effort was centred throughout the campaign. Few of the thousands of men who fought on [Guadalcanal](#) set foot further than ten miles from the spot on which they landed.

The Japanese had grossly underestimated the strength of the American force on [Guadalcanal](#), but they made elaborate plans for its destruction. During the night of 18 August destroyers landed two small reinforcement forces, the larger of which, numbering about one thousand, was wiped out by the Marines two days later. On 19 August four transports carrying 1500 troops and large supplies sailed from [Rabaul](#), escorted by a light cruiser, four destroyers, and a seaplane-carrier. They were supported by a force of three

¹ After recovering their aircraft, the Japanese headed in the direction of [Rabaul](#) until the Allied aircraft was out of sight.

² The airfield was named [Henderson Field](#) in commemoration of Major Lofton Henderson, who had led the [US Marines'](#) air attack at the Battle of Midway in June 1942.

aircraft-carriers and two battleships, with cruisers and destroyers, steaming 100 miles to the eastward. To meet this threat, a powerful American task force cruised to the eastward of [Guadalcanal](#).

In the afternoon of 24 August aircraft from the *Saratoga* found and attacked the small carrier *Ryujo*, ¹ which was set on fire and sank. A counter-attack from the *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* damaged the carrier *Enterprise*. The seaplane-carrier *Chitose* ² was hard hit by American dive-bombers and had to return to [Rabaul](#). During the action the Japanese lost ninety aircraft as against the American loss of twenty (eleven pilots). Their supporting force retired, leaving three destroyers to carry out a

midnight bombardment of [Henderson Field](#). The transport convoy was attacked next morning by dive-bombers from the airfield which sank a 9300-ton transport and a destroyer and badly damaged the light cruiser Jintsu. The attempt to land troops was cancelled and the enemy ships retired to the [Shortland Islands](#).

After this defeat the Japanese began to reinforce and supply their troops on [Guadalcanal](#) by what came to be known as the 'Tokyo Express'. Small groups of destroyers, sometimes supported by light cruisers, steamed at high speed down the 'Slot' – the deep-water passage between the two chains of islands – from the Shortland Islands anchorage, under cover of darkness, and made their landings at any convenient spot. They also dribbled in supplies by means of power-driven barges which travelled by night and remained hidden during daylight. Small-scale reinforcements and supplies for the [US Marines](#) were run by APDs – old destroyers modified as high-speed transports.

Vice-Admiral Fletcher's carrier forces covered the line of communications between [Espiritu Santo](#) and [Guadalcanal](#). The importance of this route was apparent to the Japanese, who by well-planned submarine operations inflicted serious damage on the carrier forces. On 31 August the Saratoga was torpedoed and so badly damaged that she was sent to [Pearl Harbour](#) for repairs. On 6 September the carrier Hornet³ and battleship North Carolina narrowly escaped three torpedoes. Nine days later the Wasp, North Carolina, and a destroyer were torpedoed in quick succession. The carrier took fire and sank, the destroyer was lost on its way to [Noumea](#), and the battleship had to go to [Pearl Harbour](#) for repairs. The Hornet was the only carrier remaining with the American task force.

During the eventful period from the end of July the New Zealand cruisers continued their monotonous but important duty of escorting

¹ Ryujo, 8500 tons; 25 knots; 30 aircraft; twelve 5-inch guns.

² Chitose, 9000 tons; 20 knots; 20 seaplanes; eight 5-inch guns.

³ Hornet, 20,000 tons; 32 1/2 knots; 94 aircraft; eight 5-inch and numerous light AA guns.

convoys of American transports. The [Achilles](#) arrived at Pago Pago from [Auckland](#) on 31 July and, three days later, went to meet the [United States](#) cruiser Helena which was escorting a convoy from [San Francisco](#). Four ships went into Pago Pago and the [Achilles](#) carried on with the others, two of which were for [Suva](#), one for [Noumea](#), and one for [Brisbane](#). She returned to [Noumea](#) on 22 August to await orders.

The [Leander](#) continued as escort to the President Coolidge carrying American troops from [Auckland](#) to [Fiji](#) until the middle of August. She then went to Pago Pago, whence she sailed to meet a convoy from [San Francisco](#) escorted by the [United States](#) cruiser Raleigh. The latter took one ship into Pago Pago and the [Leander](#), joined by the destroyer Cummings, went on with four others to [Noumea](#). The [Achilles](#) and two destroyers left that port on 2 September and escorted five American transports to Nukualofa ([Tonga](#)). A few days later near Niue Island, the [Achilles](#) took charge of a convoy of five transports carrying 5000 United States Marines and supplies for [Guadalcanal](#). The convoy went to Nukualofa, where the ships were re-stored, and the [Achilles](#) came to [Auckland](#) to undergo a refit.

After a spell of nearly six weeks at [Auckland](#), the Monowai embarked four officers and forty-five ratings, all wounded survivors from the [Canberra](#), sunk in the night action off Savo Island on 8 August. She called at [Wellington](#) on 11 September to embark twelve naval officers and 220 ratings from American ships sunk in that action. In company with the [United States](#) destroyer Benham, the Monowai took them to [Sydney](#). She returned to [Auckland](#) whence she and the Wahine made two voyages carrying New Zealand troops to garrison [Norfolk Island](#).

The [Leander](#) was the first New Zealand ship to take an active part in the [Guadalcanal](#) campaign. In company with USS McCawley (flagship of Rear-Admiral Turner) she arrived at [Espiritu Santo](#) on 10 September and, two days later, joined Task Force 64 ¹ commanded by Rear-Admiral C. H. Wright, USN. This force sailed on the 14th and next afternoon met the McCawley and five transports from Nukualofa.

The heavy losses suffered by Admiral Fletcher's carrier forces had put Admiral Turner in an awkward position. Japanese raids were taking place nightly on [Guadalcanal](#), the strength of enemy air attacks had increased, and there were strong

naval forces within less than one day's steaming to the northward. Because the 5000 troops in his transports were the only reinforcements available in

¹ Task Force 64 consisted of the 8-inch cruiser Minneapolis (flagship), 6-inch cruiser Boise, HMNZS [Leander](#), and a number of destroyers.

the South Pacific, he did not feel justified in risking an enemy attack during disembarkation and withdrew to the south-eastward to await a more favourable opportunity.

Meanwhile, the second Japanese attempt on [Guadalcanal](#) had failed. Their plan was to capture [Henderson Field](#), after which large reinforcements were to be landed to destroy the Americans. A powerfully escorted convoy of transports had put to sea, but when the attack on the airfield failed after heavy fighting on 13–14 September this force retired to the northward. The ' [Tokyo Express](#)' landed some troops during the night of the 15th–16th.

Turner's force arrived off [Guadalcanal](#) two days later. The Minneapolis, Boise, and [Leander](#) patrolled the anchorage area, with the destroyers as an anti-submarine screen to seaward. By seven o'clock most of the troops had landed and at the close of the day all their equipment and supplies for forty days had been unloaded. In addition, a large quantity of aviation fuel, oil, and stores had been landed from three other ships which arrived during the day. Shortly after dark the transports and their escorts sailed on their return to [Espiritu Santo](#). At midnight a force of Japanese cruisers and destroyers arrived off Kukum and, finding the anchorage empty, bombarded the Marines' shore positions.

By the end of September the nightly sorties of the ' [Tokyo Express](#)' destroyers had landed virtually an entire division of Japanese troops. In order to check this constant stream of reinforcements, a cruiser task force ¹ left [Espiritu Santo](#) on 7 October with orders to patrol the north-western approaches to [Guadalcanal](#) by night, keeping well to the southward by day.

Shortly before midnight of 11 October a transport and two destroyers were seen landing troops on one of the beaches, and a few minutes later the task force sighted

and engaged three Japanese 8-inch cruisers and two destroyers. A fierce action followed in which the cruiser Furutaka and a destroyer were sunk and the Aoba suffered severe damage and many casualties, including Rear-Admiral Goto, who was mortally wounded.² The cruiser Kinugasa was also damaged. On the other side the Salt Lake City, Boise, and a destroyer were damaged and the destroyer Duncan sunk. After daybreak aircraft from Guadalcanal sank two Japanese destroyers. Two days later the Marines were reinforced by some 3000 Army troops. The American strength was now nearly 28,000, of whom 23,000 were on Guadalcanal and the remainder at Tulagi.

¹ This force consisted of the 8-inch cruisers San Francisco and Salt Lake City, the 6-inch cruisers Boise and Helena, and five destroyers.

² Furutaka, Aoba, and Kinugasa, 7100 tons; 33 knots; six 8-inch and four 4.7-inch guns; eight 24-inch torpedo-tubes. Destroyers sunk: Fubuki, Murakamo, and Natsugumo, 1700 tons; 34 knots; six 5-inch guns; nine 21-inch torpedo-tubes.

But the Japanese still enjoyed local command of the sea by night. During the night of 13–14 October two battleships, a cruiser, and eight destroyers bombarded Henderson Field for more than an hour, destroying many aircraft. The bombardment was repeated with less effect by cruisers and destroyers on the two following nights. Before dawn on the 15th the Japanese landed about 10,000 troops and equipment from six transports, three of which were sunk by aircraft from Henderson Field soon after daybreak.

In the evening of 23 October, after a heavy artillery bombardment, the Japanese land forces which had been built up to some 29,000 attacked with tanks and massed infantry along the Matanikau River, their objective being Henderson Field. There was hard fighting throughout the 24th and 25th, but the Japanese failed to break through. At this juncture Vice-Admiral Nagumo, commanding the powerful naval forces¹ assigned to cover the passage of an occupation force from Buin, informed the Japanese Army commander that he would very soon have to retire owing to shortage of fuel. During the afternoon of the 25th American aircraft broke up many bomber attacks and sank the light cruiser Yura.² That night the Japanese

broke through the American lines but were driven back with heavy losses. The great attack had failed and the occupation force once again turned back.

A sequel to this defeat was a major engagement north of the Santa Cruz Islands next day between Nagumo's combined fleet and the American Task Force 61³ commanded by Rear-Admiral T. C. Kinkaid. This action was fought by the carrier-borne aircraft of both sides. The Japanese carriers Zuiho and Shokaku, the heavy cruiser Chikuma, and two destroyers were severely damaged. The American carrier Hornet was completely disabled by numerous hits and had to be sunk. The Enterprise, South Dakota, San Juan, and a destroyer were damaged and a destroyer was sunk by a Japanese submarine. The enemy lost 100 aircraft shot down and the Americans 74, most of them on board their carriers.

On 18 October Vice-Admiral Ghormley was succeeded by Vice-Admiral W. F. Halsey as Commander South Pacific Area and forces. At a conference of senior officers at [Noumea](#) two days later to discuss the critical situation, General Vandegrift informed Admiral Halsey that he could hold [Guadalcanal](#) if he were given stronger support. This the latter promised to do. On the 24th President Roosevelt, in a memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressed his desire

¹ These were divided into three groups, totalling 4 aircraft-carriers, 4 battleships, 10 cruisers, and 27 destroyers.

² Yura, 5170 tons; 33 knots; seven 5·5-inch, three 3-inch guns; eight 21-inch torpedo-tubes.

³ Task Force 61 consisted of two carriers, Enterprise and Hornet, the fast battleship South Dakota, heavy cruisers Northampton, Pensacola, and [Portland](#), light cruisers San Diego, San Juan, and Juneau, and 14 destroyers.

that all possible equipment and supplies be sent to [Guadalcanal](#) and North Africa. General Marshall said the situation in the South Pacific depended upon the outcome of the battle for [Guadalcanal](#) and that, in turn, depended upon the ability to reinforce and maintain the troops there. Admiral King replied that considerable naval and air reinforcements and additional transports would be sent to the South Pacific.

Before the Japanese could make good their recent losses, the United States Marines struck across the Matanikau River and by 3 November had advanced beyond [Point Cruz](#). During the night of 2 November the ' [Tokyo Express](#)' destroyers landed some 1500 troops east of Koli Point, and the American advance westward was halted to meet this new threat, which was liquidated by 11 November.

Meanwhile, the Americans had landed reinforcements at Lunga and another force well to the eastward at Aola Bay to construct an additional airfield. ¹ Arrangements were also made to bring 6000 additional troops in two convoys, one from New Zealand. The [Leander](#) had left [Espiritu Santo](#) on 10 October for a rendezvous east of [Fiji](#), to meet a convoy of six ships from the [United States](#) which she escorted to [Auckland](#). She afterwards took three of them to [Noumea](#), where they arrived on 6 November.

It was now apparent that yet another large-scale Japanese attack was imminent. On 10 November a coastwatcher reported some sixty ships in the Buin-Faisi anchorage in the [Shortland Islands](#) area. The Japanese had organised four naval task forces for the operation. Two bombardment forces were to neutralise [Henderson Field](#), a third was to land the 38th Division and its equipment, while a fourth force gave general support. Because of damage to their carriers and the heavy losses of aircraft and pilots in the Santa Cruz action in October, no fleet air support was available and the Japanese had to rely upon land-based aircraft.

On 11–12 November Japanese bombers attacked [Henderson Field](#) and American transports which were unloading 6000 troops and supplies at Lunga Point. ² Most of the aircraft were shot down but the cruiser [San Francisco](#), a destroyer, and three transports were damaged, one seriously. Early in the morning of the 12th, air reconnaissance reported Japanese forces approaching [Guadalcanal](#) from the north. One group included the battleships Hiyei and [Kirishima](#), ³ screened by a light cruiser and fifteen destroyers; a second

¹ This site proved unsuitable and the airfield was constructed at Koli Point.

² Four of the transports were carrying troops of the [Americal Division](#),

US Army, which had been garrisoning [New Caledonia](#). This division, now in process of transfer to [Guadalcanal](#), was being relieved in [New Caledonia](#) by the 3rd NZ Division. Most of the supplies in the ships had been loaded at [Wellington](#).

³ Hiyei and [Kirishima](#), 29,300 tons; 26 knots; eight 14-inch, fourteen 5.9-inch, and eight 5-inch guns.

more distant group consisted of transports escorted by cruisers and destroyers. That evening the American transports — several partly unloaded — left Lunga Roads for [Espiritu Santo](#), leaving Rear-Admirals D. J. Callaghan and N. Scott with only five cruisers ¹ and eight destroyers to deal with the approaching enemy.

Shortly after one o'clock in the morning of 13 November the two forces met near Savo Island in one of the fiercest naval actions of the war. Two Japanese destroyers were sunk and four damaged. The battleship Hiyei was hit about eighty-five times and withdrew with serious damage to her upperworks. Later in the day she was bombed and torpedoed by aircraft from [Henderson Field](#) and after dark was scuttled by her own crew. Admirals Callaghan and Scott and Captain C. Young, commanding officer of the [San Francisco](#), were among the many killed in action. The cruisers Atlanta and Juneau ² and four destroyers were sunk. The [San Francisco](#), [Portland](#), and Helena and three destroyers were more or less seriously damaged.

In the early hours of 14 November an enemy force of six cruisers and four destroyers bombarded [Henderson Field](#) for more than an hour and then withdrew. During the morning they were attacked near [New Georgia](#) by aircraft from the airfield and the carrier Enterprise. ³ The heavy cruiser Kinugasa was sunk and the Chokai, Maya, and Isuzu ⁴ and two destroyers badly damaged. Despite their heavy losses, the Japanese were determined to push through reinforcements. A convoy of eleven transports escorted by light cruisers and destroyers was sighted steaming south during the afternoon and attacked by aircraft. Seven transports totalling 50,560 tons were sunk. ⁵ Four others totalling some 27,000 tons beached themselves on [Guadalcanal](#) after dark. They were shelled and bombed and set on fire next morning. Of more than 12,000 troops in the transports, fewer than 4000 got ashore. Some thousands were drowned and the remainder rescued by Japanese ships. Very little of the thousands of tons of supplies and equipment was landed.

The final blow that completed the total defeat of the enemy's

¹ [San Francisco](#) (flag, Rear-Admiral Callaghan) and [Portland](#), 9900 tons; 32·7 knots; nine 8-inch, eight 5-inch guns. [Atlanta](#) (flag, Rear-Admiral Scott) and [Juneau](#), 6000 tons; 38 knots; sixteen 5-inch guns. [Helena](#), 9700 tons; 32·5 knots; fifteen 6-inch, eight 5-inch, and sixteen 1·1-inch AA guns.

² The badly damaged [Juneau](#) was torpedoed and sunk by a submarine while on passage to [Espiritu Santo](#), nearly all her crew being lost.

³ Task Force 16, consisting of the [Enterprise](#), battleships [Washington](#) and [South Dakota](#), two heavy cruisers, and eight destroyers, had arrived from [Noumea](#) in the morning of the 13th and was cruising south of [Guadalcanal](#).

⁴ [Kinugasa](#), 7100 tons; 33 knots; six 8-inch and four 4·7-inch guns; eight 24-inch torpedo-tubes. [Chokai](#) and [Maya](#), 9850 tons; 33 knots; ten 8-inch and four 4·7-inch guns; eight 24-inch torpedo-tubes. [Isuzu](#), 5170 tons; 33 knots; seven 5·5-inch and three 3-inch guns; eight 21-inch torpedo-tubes.

⁵ The sunken transports included the [Canberra Maru](#), 6477 tons, and [Brisbane Maru](#), 5425 tons, both of which traded regularly between [Japan](#) and [New Zealand](#) before the war.

supreme effort was struck about midnight on the 14th. A Japanese force consisting of the battleship [Kirishima](#), four cruisers, and nine destroyers, on its way to repeat the bombardment of [Henderson Field](#), was intercepted off [Savo Island](#) by an American squadron detached for that purpose from Task Force 16. It consisted of the battleships [Washington](#) (flagship of Rear-Admiral W. A. Lee) and the [South Dakota](#) and four destroyers. In a confused night action that lasted barely an hour, a Japanese destroyer and two American destroyers were sunk and the [Kirishima](#) so badly damaged that she was scuttled by order of her captain. The [South Dakota](#) and two American destroyers were damaged, one of the latter so severely that she had to be sunk by the other on passage to [Espiritu Santo](#).

Thus ended the decisive battle of the fiercely-fought [Guadalcanal](#) campaign. In the words of the Commander-in-Chief United States Pacific Fleet: 'In four days the fate of [Guadalcanal](#) and the fate of our campaign in the South Pacific for months to come were decided'. For a brief period the defeated and depleted Japanese naval forces abandoned their advanced base in the [Shortland Islands](#) area and withdrew to [Rabaul](#); but it was soon seen that the enemy was making every effort to strengthen his positions in the mid- [Solomons](#) where a new airfield was being constructed at [Munda, New Georgia](#), about 200 miles north-west from [Guadalcanal](#). ¹

In view of their losses of cruisers, it was decided that HMNZS [Leander](#) should postpone her refit and do duty with the Americans. Accordingly, she left [Noumea](#) on 16 November for [Espiritu Santo](#), where she joined Task Group 16.6 under Rear-Admiral Tisdale who was flying his flag in the heavy cruiser [Pensacola](#). But, as ill luck would have it, the [Leander](#) was to be out of service for some months. On 19 November a crack was found in the hull plating in one of the ship's fuel tanks. She was therefore withdrawn from the task group and, escorted by a destroyer, sailed for [Auckland](#), where she was docked for repairs and a refit which were not completed till the beginning of March 1943. Owing to ill-health which necessitated his return to England, Captain Bevan left the ship on 27 November and Commander Roskill, RN, ² assumed temporary command.

During the night of 30 November a ' [Tokyo Express](#)' of eight destroyers, commanded by Rear-Admiral Raizo Tanaka, attempted to run reinforcements and much-needed supplies to [Guadalcanal](#). They

¹ The construction of the [Munda](#) airfield was so cleverly concealed by the natural camouflage of coconut palms that its existence, though suspected, was not definitely verified till early December when it was nearly complete.

² Captain S. W. Roskill, DSC, RN (retd); born England, 1 Aug 1903; acting-Captain in command of [Leander](#), Nov 1943—Mar 1944; promoted Captain Jun 1944; retired 1949; [United Kingdom](#) naval historian.

were intercepted in the nick of time by Task Force 67, ¹ which had come up from

[Espiritu Santo](#) at 28 knots. The Japanese were taken by surprise, but their reaction was rapid and their well-trained destroyers fired salvos of torpedoes. The cruisers [Minneapolis](#), [New Orleans](#), [Pensacola](#), and [Northampton](#) were all hit in quick succession and seriously damaged, the last-mentioned sinking about three hours later. In accordance with orders, the Japanese destroyers withheld gunfire, except the [Takanami](#) which opened fire and paid the penalty of her disobedience by being promptly sunk. This was Admiral Tanaka's only loss, but he withdrew at high speed without having landed his troops and supplies. During the next few weeks Japanese destroyers running small reinforcements and supplies by night were constantly attacked. Eight were damaged by aircraft and two by collision; one was sunk by motor torpedo-boats based at [Tulagi](#) and the light cruiser [Tenryu](#)² was sunk by a submarine. Five Japanese submarines were also sunk.

Meanwhile the 1st Marine Division was being relieved by Army troops from [New Caledonia](#) and on 8 December Major-General Vandegrift turned over his command to Major-General A. M. Patch. By 7 January 1943 there were more than 50,000 American troops in the [Guadalcanal-Tulagi](#) area. The greatest concentration of naval strength yet available in the South Pacific was based at [Espiritu Santo](#) and [Noumea](#). The ships included seven battleships, two fleet aircraft-carriers, three auxiliary carriers, twelve cruisers, and numerous destroyers. The ultimate outcome of the [Guadalcanal](#) campaign was no longer in doubt and in January the Americans were able to carry the offensive into enemy waters.

It was at this stage that ships of the Royal New Zealand Navy were given a more active part — if still a minor one — in the Solomon Islands campaign. The [Achilles](#), which had recently completed a long refit at [Auckland](#), sailed from [Wellington](#) on 12 December escorting the [Aquitania](#), which was carrying the 8th Reinforcements 2 NZEF to the [Middle East](#). After rounding [Tasmania](#) the [Achilles](#) passed the big transport over to HMAS [Adelaide](#), refuelled at [Melbourne](#), and then went on to [Noumea](#), where she arrived on 21 December. The New Zealand cruiser joined Task Force 65, which included the auxiliary aircraft-carriers [Nassau](#) and [Altamaba](#),³ the cruiser [St. Louis](#), and four destroyers. This force arrived at [Espiritu Santo](#) on 30 December and the [Achilles](#) then transferred to Task

¹ Task Force 67: Cruisers [Minneapolis](#) (flag, Rear-Admiral [Wright](#)), [New](#)

Orleans, Pensacola, Northampton, and [Honolulu](#) (flag, Rear-Admiral Tisdale) and six destroyers.

² Tenryu: 3230 tons; 33 knots; four 5.5-inch and one 3-inch guns; six torpedo-tubes.

³ The Nassau and Altamaba were two of the first US escort carriers, of which a large number were evolved from merchant ships. On a displacement of about 10,000 tons, they were given a flight deck about 450 feet in length and carried about 30 aircraft.

Force 67, the other ships of which were the [United States](#) cruisers Nashville (flag, Rear-Admiral W. L. Ainsworth), St. Louis, [Honolulu](#) (flag, Rear-Admiral Tisdale), Helena, Columbia, and Louisville and five destroyers.

In the meantime, the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla had been assigned to anti-submarine and escort duties in the [Guadalcanal- Tulagi](#) area under the operational orders of the Commander South Pacific Area. The flotilla consisted of the Matai (Senior Officer), Kiwi (Lieutenant-Commander G. Bridson, DSC, RNZNVR), Moa, and Tui. They arrived off Lunga Point from [Espiritu Santo](#) on 15 December and, after refuelling and watering at [Tulagi](#), proceeded on anti-submarine patrol. Except when they went in turn to New Zealand to refit, the ships of the flotilla remained on active service in the Solomon Islands area for two and a half years.

The [Achilles](#) took part in the final stage of the relief of the 1st Marine Division on [Guadalcanal](#) at the beginning of January 1943. Six transports and a supply ship carrying part of the 25th Division, [US Army](#), recently arrived from the [United States](#), sailed from [Noumea](#) on New Year's Day. They were met on the 3rd by Task Force 67 and escorted till dark. The next day the task force proceeded round [Guadalcanal](#) to a position 25 miles south of the [Russell Islands](#). There it divided into two groups, one of which steamed at high speed to [New Georgia](#), where it carried out a heavy bombardment of the new airfield at [Munda](#).¹ The other group, including the [Achilles](#), patrolled to the south-eastward during the night to cover the transports which were to sail next day with the Marines for [Melbourne](#).

The two groups of Task Force 67 rejoined next morning about 12 miles off the

western end of [Guadalcanal](#) and headed east at 15 knots in fine, clear weather. The divisions were in line ahead formations, disposed abeam, Rear-Admiral Tisdale's group being to the northward in the order [Honolulu](#) (flag), [Achilles](#), [Columbia](#), [Louisville](#). At 9.25 a.m. when the ships were off Cape Hunter on the south coast of [Guadalcanal](#), a formation of four aircraft was sighted at about 12,000 feet above the [Achilles](#). They were positively and correctly identified as American Grumman fighters. Two minutes later another group of four aircraft was seen spiralling down through the high clouds at an angle of sight of about 40 degrees ahead of the ship and the aircraft alarm was sounded.

The aircraft followed one another in quick succession, the first three attacking the [Honolulu](#) and the fourth the [Achilles](#). The first bomb fell about 25 yards from the port side of the [Honolulu](#), the

¹ A total of 4150 rounds of 6-inch and 5-inch shell was fired. The damage caused, however, was so quickly made good that aircraft were operating from the airfield in less than eighteen hours.

second about 50 yards fine on her starboard bow, and the third about 25 yards off her starboard beam. One Japanese aircraft caught fire and dived into the sea, possibly shot down by the anti-aircraft fire of the [Honolulu](#).

The [Achilles](#) was swinging to starboard when a bomb hit the top of 'X' turret (manned by [Royal Marines](#)), piercing the roof and exploding on the right-hand gun. The gun-house was wrecked; eleven men were killed outright, two died of wounds, and eight others were more or less seriously wounded. The explosion blew the right side of the turret overboard and split the roof in two, throwing one half on to the quarter-deck together with the Oerlikon anti-aircraft gun mounted on the turret; the other half landed upside down on the turret. Fires were confined to the turret and quickly extinguished.

It transpired later that the enemy aircraft, which approached from the direction of [Guadalcanal](#) and originally numbered ten dive-bombers and fifteen fighters, had been engaged by fighters from [Henderson Field](#), all the bombers except the four which attacked the ships being shot down. At the time of the attack, the American

fighters were short of ammunition and engaged by enemy fighters. No enemy aircraft were detected by the ships' radar until the bombing started, possibly owing to the proximity of the high land of [Guadalcanal](#). After the attack, Task Force 67 retired at high speed to the south-eastward and covered the withdrawal of the transport convoy from [Guadalcanal](#), arriving at [Espiritu Santo](#) on 8 January.

Temporary repairs to the damaged turret of the [Achilles](#) were carried out by the American repair ship [Vestal](#).

During January the Americans extended and consolidated their positions on [Guadalcanal](#). [Henderson Field](#) was expanded into a first-class air base and [Tulagi](#) and Port Purvis were developed to provide facilities for fuelling and repairing ships. The Japanese troops were mostly in poor physical condition. If malaria decimated the American ranks, it caused havoc among the enemy. Of more than 21,500 Japanese casualties on [Guadalcanal](#), some 9000 died from disease. The increasing shortage of supplies had reduced rations to less than one-third of the regular allowance and the troops were often reduced to eating grass, roots, and jungle vegetation. The nocturnal ' [Tokyo Express](#)' achieved little to relieve the situation, and in eleven runs to [Guadalcanal](#) between mid-November 1942 and the end of January 1943, nine destroyers were sunk and nineteen damaged. The destroyers carried rice and other supplies packed in drums, roped fifty together. These were dumped overboard off shore to float in with the tide. Many were destroyed on the reefs and more by American motor torpedo-boats and aircraft. Of more than 20,000 drums carried to [Guadalcanal](#), the Japanese recovered less than 30 per cent. According to Japanese army officers, the troops not only did not receive the greater part of their heavy equipment but lost all but 10 per cent of their ammunition.

On 27 January 1943 a convoy of four transports loaded with supplies from [Wellington](#) and carrying troops left [Noumea](#) for [Guadalcanal](#). In the evening of the 29th the escort force was attacked by Japanese aircraft and the cruiser [Chicago](#) was hit and disabled by two torpedoes. She was taken in tow, but next day was again attacked from the air and sunk by four torpedoes. The convoy arrived safely at [Guadalcanal](#) and, after unloading, took on board the Second Marines and part of the Eighth Marines and sailed direct for [Wellington](#), where the troops went into camp.

The night of 29–30 January 1943 also proved eventful for two ships of the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla of the Royal New Zealand Navy. The [Kiwi](#) and [Moa](#) were

patrolling one mile apart off Kamimbo Bay at the north-west end of [Guadalcanal](#) when Able Seaman McVinnie, ¹ on asdic watch in the former ship, obtained a 'contact' at 3000 yards with a vessel immediately identified as a submarine. The Kiwi at once altered course toward the enemy and increased to full speed to attack with depth-charges. The Moa kept her course to act as 'asdic directing vessel'.

The phosphorescent outline of the submarine could be plainly seen when the Kiwi dropped a 'pattern' of six depth-charges, one of which fell in the wake of the periscope. The Kiwi carried on to open out the range and regain asdic contact, which normally is lost at close range or marred by depth-charge explosions. Contact was regained at 900 yards, but was lost during the run in for a second attack and no depth-charges were dropped. The range was then opened out to about 1300 yards and the Kiwi regained contact as she reversed course. This time she dropped six depth-charges. The submarine was forced to surface with its electric motors apparently disabled and, using its diesel engines, shaped course to escape in the darkness under the high land of [Guadalcanal](#).

The Kiwi and Moa turned toward the enemy at full speed, firing star shells and high explosive. The Moa scored a hit with her third round. The submarine opened fire with its 5-inch gun, two shells passing close over the Kiwi and three over the Moa. At 400 yards, the enemy being nearly beam-on, the Kiwi opened up with her 20-millimetre and machine guns and prepared to ram, the Moa assisting by firing star shells.

The submarine altered course slightly to starboard just before the Kiwi rammed it on the port side abaft the conning tower while

¹ Able Seaman E. McVinnie, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Opuia, Bay of Islands, 3 Oct 1919; refrigerating engineer.

firing every gun that could be brought to bear and scoring numerous hits. Landing barges were lashed on the submarine's deck close to the conning tower. Japanese soldiers with full pack equipment were seen to jump overboard. The Kiwi had to use full power astern to break clear of the submarine, which was definitely holed. Her fire silenced the enemy's gun and set fire to the landing barges, while

several rounds of 4-inch shell at a range of 50 yards were seen to explode about the conning tower. In a second attempt at ramming, the Kiwi struck the submarine a glancing blow well aft, which probably damaged the port hydroplane. An officer, probably the captain, was seen to be hit by machine-gun fire. ¹

During this stage of the action the Kiwi's searchlight and signalling lamp kept the submarine well illuminated and the star shell fired by the Moa lit up the whole area. The searchlight was controlled by Acting Leading Signalman Buchanan, ² who, though mortally wounded by machine-gun fire, remained quietly at his post during the action until he was relieved.

Keeping up a hot fire at close range, which was returned briefly by troops on the submarine's deck, the Kiwi steamed in to ram a third time. She struck the submarine on the starboard side abaft the conning tower, rode up on to its deck while fuel-oil spouted over her bows, and lay there listing heavily to port, still firing every gun that would bear. The shock of collision threw a number of Japanese into the sea. The Kiwi had to work her engines hard astern to break clear and, as she did so, oil was seen to be pouring from the submarine, which was well down by the stern. The action had now lasted for nearly an hour, the Kiwi's 4-inch gun was too hot to use and, as she had damaged herself in the ramming bouts and her asdic gear was out of action, she hauled off to give the Moa a clear target.

The submarine moved ahead at about 12 knots and succeeded in quelling the fire on its after deck. The action then developed into a stern chase, the submarine replying with a small gun to the fire of the Moa. The enemy altered course frequently and the Moa manoeuvred to prevent the submarine's gun being brought to bear. Star shells and searchlight were used to keep the submarine in view, and it appeared to be hit several times. At 11.20 p.m., more than two hours after the first depth-charge attack, the submarine struck hard on a submerged reef close inshore. The Moa remained on patrol in the vicinity until daybreak revealed the battered forepart of the submarine projecting about 40 to 50 feet out of the

¹ Japanese official records show that Lieutenant-Commander Eiichi Sakamoto, commanding officer of the submarine, was killed in action.

² Acting Leading Signalman C. H. Buchanan, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; US Navy Cross; born [Port Chalmers](#), 7 Apr 1920; factory employee; died of wounds, [Tulagi](#), 31 Jan 1943.

water at an angle of 45 degrees. One man was shot off the wreck by machine-gun fire and a wounded officer was picked up from the sea before the Moa was compelled to withdraw by artillery fire from the shore.

The ammunition expended by the Kiwi and Moa was 58 rounds of 4-inch (which included seventeen definite and several probable hits), 1250 rounds of 20-millimetre shell, and 3500 rounds of machine-gun and rifle fire. It was remarkable that in this bold and resolute action there was only one casualty in the New Zealand ships. As a result of ramming the submarine, the Kiwi's stem was stove-in and buckled from the first plate below the sheerstrake and as far back as the fifth frame. She also sustained minor damage by gunfire and was sent to [Auckland](#) for repairs.

Inspections of the wrecked submarine, which was identified as I-1 by HMNZS Matai and an American salvage vessel, revealed extensive damage. The wreck contained food and medical supplies, obviously intended to be landed at Kamimbo Bay. The American divers estimated that there were from forty to fifty bodies in various compartments. ¹ The submarine's torpedo-tubes, four forward and two aft, were loaded with 21-inch torpedoes.

The I-1 was a formidable opponent to be engaged by the Kiwi and Moa. The submarine measured 320 feet in length — more than twice that of the New Zealand ships — with a surface displacement of 1955 tons (2500 tons submerged) compared with their 600 tons, and a speed of about 18 knots as against their 12 ½ knots. The I-1 mounted a 5-inch gun (weight of shell, 82 lb) a six-pounder, and one or two machine guns. The armament of the Kiwi and Moa was one 4-inch gun (weight of shell, 31 lb), one Oerlikon 20-millimetre gun (two in Kiwi), two .303 machine guns, and forty depth-charges. The I-1 had seen war service in the [Aleutian Islands](#) area, the [Indian Ocean](#) and the South Pacific, and had completed several exceptionally long cruises.

On the night following that of the engagement with the I-1, the Moa was again

on patrol off Cape Esperance, this time in company with the Tui which had replaced the damaged Kiwi. Shortly before three o'clock on the morning of the 31st the ships sighted four Japanese landing craft lying stopped close inshore. When the Moa and Tui closed to investigate, the barges got under way and opened fire with machine guns and small arms. The Moa engaged at close range and received from the leading barge a hit that passed through the sight aperture of her 4-inch gun and ignited the cordite of a charge being loaded. The leading barge was silenced

¹ According to Japanese official records 66 men got ashore from I-1, but that number possibly included some of the troops. The crew complement of I-1 was 8 officers and 85 ratings.

by the Moa, which sank the last barge of the line by her 20-millimetre Oerlikon fire. She then broke off action to deal with the cordite fire and attend to casualties. The Tui engaged the barges with her 4-inch gun and sank one with a direct hit. The remaining two were presumed to have run inshore in the darkness.

All the members of the Moa's gun's crew suffered burns and several were wounded by splinters. During and after the action they were tended by Steward Barton, ¹ who, with complete disregard for his own severe wound, worked for one and a half hours until he collapsed. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, having already been mentioned in despatches for his good work during the action with the Japanese submarine.

At the end of December Imperial General Headquarters in [Tokyo](#) cancelled the [Guadalcanal](#) operation and on 4 January ordered Imamura and Vice-Admiral Kusaka, commanding the South-Eastern Fleet, to evacuate [Guadalcanal](#) and hold defensive positions in [New Georgia](#). The remnants of the Japanese 17th Army began their withdrawal toward Cape Esperance on the night of 22–23 January 1943, fighting a series of delaying actions as they went. Flotillas of destroyers steamed south under cover of darkness and evacuated some 13,000 sickly troops during the nights of 1–2, 4–5, and 7–8 February. When the Americans advancing along the north coast joined up at Cape Esperance on 9 February with a force that had landed on the south-west coast on the 1st, they found only a few stragglers and some abandoned landing craft and supplies.

The Guadalcanal campaign, waged for possession of an airfield on a savage island 3000 miles from [Japan](#), 6000 miles from the [United States](#), and 2000 miles from New Zealand, secured the Allied sea communications between [Australia](#), New Zealand, and [America](#). [Japan](#), with her limited shipbuilding potential, suffered losses in fighting ships and transports that she could ill afford and was unable to make good. There was a brief period during which the Allied naval losses caused some embarrassment, but these were quickly replaced by new and powerful ships of the immense building programme of the United States Navy, which less than a year later had attained an overwhelming strength in every category.

¹ Ernest Barton, DSM, m.i.d.; born Liverpool, 20 Dec 1918; steward in merchant service; joined RN May 1940; lent [RNZN](#) Sep 1941; reverted to RN Jun 1943.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 21 – BATTLES FOR THE SOLOMONS

CHAPTER 21

Battles for the Solomons

THE *Achilles* was in harbour at *Espiritu Santo* during the greater part of January 1943 while temporary repairs were being made to her damaged turret. It had been decided some months earlier that she and the *Leander* would go to England in turn at convenient times to undergo extensive refits and modernisation of their armament and other equipment. Accordingly, the *Achilles* sailed on 1 February for *Auckland*, where she arrived on the 3rd. Captain C. A. L. Mansergh, DSC, RN, who later assumed command of the *Leander*, was succeeded in command of the *Achilles* by acting Captain W. G. Davis, DSC, RN.

The *Achilles* sailed from *Auckland* on 19 February for England by way of Bora Bora and the Panama Canal. She called at Bermuda to refuel and arrived at Portsmouth on 22 March, having steamed more than 246,000 miles since the outbreak of war in September 1939. The Royal Navy officers and ratings were discharged and a large number of New Zealand ratings went to shore establishments for courses of instruction in gunnery, torpedo, communications, and radar. Nearly two years passed before the *Achilles* returned to New Zealand.

After a lengthy stay at *Auckland*, the *Monowai* spent two months carrying small drafts of Navy, Army, and Air Force details to *Suva*, Nukualofa (*Tonga*), *Norfolk Island*, *Noumea*, and *Espiritu Santo*. She then made two voyages, one from *Wellington* and one from *Lyttelton*, escorting the *Wahine* carrying troops to Nukualofa where New Zealanders had relieved the American garrison. The *Monowai* called at *Suva* and *Noumea* on her way back to *Auckland*, where she arrived on 16 March 1943. This completed her last mission in the South Pacific.

As an armed merchant cruiser the *Monowai* was of little value in the *Pacific*; in the *Atlantic*, where losses of large passenger liners had been heavy, there was an acute shortage of ships of her type suitable for use as fast transports. But in December 1942, when the British Ministry of War Transport first requested that the *Monowai* be released for that purpose, the New Zealand Naval Board represented that she was 'unsuitable for use in the *Atlantic*' and could 'best be used in the South Pacific where she is needed for comparatively short voyages'. Accordingly, the Prime

Minister replied that the continual and growing demands for transport between New Zealand and South Pacific bases 'seem to render it completely essential that the Monowai should be available for these purposes'.

In February 1943 further representations were made by the Ministry of War Transport, which said the Monowai would make an excellent troopship capable of carrying about 2000 men and offered to provide in exchange for her a slower ship of good capacity to meet New Zealand requirements. A complete change of view was now expressed by the Naval Board, which informed the Government that it had 'always been realised' that the Monowai was 'not a very satisfactory ship for New Zealand purposes' and that, as a result of detailed investigation, 'it now appears that she is almost useless' for the purpose of an armed naval transport. New Zealand requirements in the South Pacific could be met by the Wahine (whose fuel capacity had been increased) in conjunction with American vessels, and no ship would be needed to replace the Monowai.

After further discussion it was agreed to release the Monowai, which sailed from [Auckland](#) for the [United Kingdom](#) on 24 April 1943. Captain Morgan, ¹ of the Union Steam Ship Company's service, who was in command of the Awatea when she was sunk by German aircraft during the Allied landings in North Africa in November 1942 and who was to command the Monowai when she reverted to merchant ship status, took passage in the ship, which also carried a number of Navy, Army, and Air Force details and ten Tahitians who were to join the [Free French Forces](#). The Monowai made the passage by way of Bora Bora, the Panama Canal, and Bermuda. She arrived at Greenock on 2 June 1943 and at Liverpool next day, and paid off on 18 June. Since she was commissioned on 30 August 1940 as a unit of the Royal New Zealand Navy, a period of two years ten months, the Monowai had steamed a total of 149,629 miles.

Well before their decision to evacuate [Guadalcanal](#), the Japanese had decided on their next line for holding their defence perimeter through the Solomon Islands to [New Guinea](#). As early as 12 November 1942 an agreement was reached between the Navy and Army for the defence of [Rabaul](#). The Army accepted responsibility for [New Guinea](#), the Navy for [Rabaul](#) and the [Solomons](#) and for air operations against Allied shipping on the [New Guinea](#) coast. On 24 December 1942 Vice-Admiral Jinichi Kusaka, commanding

¹ Captain G. B. Morgan, DSO, DSC; born [Lyttelton](#), 3 Aug 1886; joined Union SS Co., 15 Jun 1909; served Royal Naval Reserve, World War I (DSC); first command USS Co., Dec 1920; retired 31 Oct 1950.

the Eleventh Air Fleet at [Rabaul](#), became Commander South-East Area Fleet with responsibility for all naval forces in the [Rabaul- Solomons- New Guinea](#) region. Kusaka set about strengthening the air base at [Rabaul](#), where the airfields were increased to four, and speeded up the construction of airfields at [Munda](#) in [New Georgia](#) and Vila on the south side of Kolombangara Island.

On 7 February 1943, still unaware that the Japanese were evacuating [Guadalcanal](#), Admiral Halsey ordered the occupation of the [Russell Islands](#), 30 miles north-west from Cape Esperance, as a staging base for the later capture of the [New Georgia](#) airfields. On the night of 12 February the Moa left Lunga with a party of three American intelligence officers and thirty Fijian and Malaitan armed scouts who were to reconnoitre the [Russell Islands](#) and select landing beaches and sites for airfields. They found that the Japanese had left the islands, which were occupied in force by the Americans on 21 February. Bases for motor torpedo-boats and landing craft were in operation a few days later.

By the middle of March nearly 16,000 troops and large quantities of equipment and stores had been landed on the islands. The first of two large airfields was in use by mid-April and a few weeks later both were supplementing the four airfields in [Guadalcanal](#). New Zealand-made radar sets manned by New Zealand officers and ratings were working with the coastal and anti-aircraft batteries. For their part, the Japanese continued to strengthen their bases in the northern and central [Solomons](#) and increased the tempo of their air attacks. The Americans replied in kind, and cruiser-destroyer task forces carried out several bombardments of the enemy's airfields at [Munda](#) and Vila, in the course of one of which two Japanese destroyers were sighted and sunk.

Meanwhile the campaign in [New Guinea](#) was going badly for the Japanese. In August 1942 they had landed a force at Milne Bay at the tail end of [New Guinea](#) to capture the airfield there and support their overland drive to [Port Moresby](#). After

suffering heavy losses at the hands of the Australians, the Japanese evacuated part of their force, the remainder of which was gradually destroyed by fighting and disease.

By a slow and painful advance through the jungle over the Owen Stanley Mountains, the enemy had reached Ioribaiwa, 32 miles from [Port Moresby](#), about 11 September 1942, but on the 26th the reinforced Australians began driving the Japanese back over the Kokoda Trail. The retreat became a rout and thousands of Japanese perished miserably from disease and starvation. By 9 December 1942 the Australians had captured Gona on the north coast; on 2 January 1943 American troops entered Buna; Sanananda, midway between those places, was taken by the Australians on the 18th.

Alarmed by the Allied threat to the whole of the Huon Gulf area, General Imamura and Admiral Kusaka laid careful plans to move 6900 troops from [Rabaul](#) to Lae in eight transports and eight destroyers. In the forenoon of 2 March Allied bombers attacked the convoy, sinking one transport and damaging two others. The slaughter went on all next day and was completed by motor torpedo-boats during the night. Of the convoy of sixteen ships only four destroyers escaped destruction and returned to [Rabaul](#). The Japanese destroyers and submarines rescued 2734 men, but more than 3000 were lost. A few hundred swam ashore, mostly to be hunted down by the natives or to die of starvation.

Shortly after midday on 7 April a task force commanded by Rear-Admiral Ainsworth was standing out of [Tulagi](#) harbour on its way to bombard [Munda](#) and Vila when warning was received from coast-watchers of an imminent air attack. Sixty-seven bombers covered by 110 Zero fighters were flying southward. The task force was ordered to retire eastward into Indispensable Strait and the Matai, Tui, and Gale of the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla, on anti-submarine escort duty off Cape Esperance, steamed at full speed towards [Tulagi](#).

The assault came about 3 p.m. when a large number of bombers attacked the ships in [Tulagi](#) harbour. The Moa was sunk alongside an oil hulk and an American destroyer and a tanker were also lost. Twelve Japanese bombers and nine fighters were shot down. The Moa was hit by a 500-pound bomb which drove through her commanding officer's cabin and exploded below, and she was also damaged by two

near misses. She fired a short burst from her after Oerlikon gun and anti-aircraft fire was maintained by the oil hulk. The Moa listed rapidly and sank bow first about four minutes after being hit. Her sea-boat had been lowered and it was assisted by landing craft in recovering survivors.

Five ratings – Leading Seaman J. C. O. Moffat, Able Seaman K. Bailey, Leading Stoker H. D. Crawford, Stoker E. J. Buckeridge, and Telegraphist C. Duncan – were killed. ¹ Seven ratings were seriously injured and Lieutenant-Commander P. Phipps, commanding officer of the Moa, and seven ratings were also injured. Lieutenant Belgrave ² dived for and rescued Assistant Steward Molloy, ³ who was unconscious. The coolness and courage of Leading Signaller Salter ⁴

¹ Leading Seaman J. C. O. Moffat; scholar; born [Tauranga](#), 19 Nov 1921. Able Seaman K. Bailey; clerk; born [Auckland](#), 3 Jun 1921. Leading Stoker H. D. Crawford; plasterer; born Darlington, England, 21 Apr 1916. Stoker E. J. Buckeridge; miner; born Waikino, 1 Jun 1916. Telegraphist C. Duncan, public servant (P & T Dept); born [Taihape](#), 19 Jan 1921.

² Lieutenant C. Belgrave, RNZNVR; born [Hamilton](#), 19 Nov 1916; school-teacher.

³ Steward W. J. Molloy, RNZN; born [Scotland](#), 24 Aug 1921; hairdresser.

⁴ Yeoman of Signals J. L. W. Salter, BEM, RNZNVR; born Dunedin, 5 Aug 1911; signaller, Bluff Harbour.

and Ordinary Telegraphist Bright ¹ saved the life of Signaller F. Thomas, who was severely wounded and unconscious on the bridge of the Moa. In the brief time before the ship sank, they fitted him with a life-jacket and, as the Moa went down, they floated off the bridge, both supporting their wounded comrade. Salter and Bright were awarded the British Empire Medal.

The highly efficient American intelligence service had learned that the Commander-in-Chief Combined Fleet was about to make a visit of inspection to the Japanese bases in the northern and central [Solomons](#). Based on precise information

as to the date and actual time of his arrival, plans to waylay him were made by Rear-Admiral Marc Mitscher, commander of the United States Air Forces in the [Solomons](#). Admiral Yamamoto, accompanied by his Chief of Staff, Vice-Admiral Ugichi, and other senior staff officers, left [Rabaul](#) in the forenoon of 18 April for [Kahili](#) airfield, near Buin at the south end of [Bougainville](#), in two bombers escorted by nine fighters. Thirty-five minutes later the bombers were about to land when they were intercepted and shot down by sixteen fighters from [Henderson Field](#). The Commander-in-Chief's bomber crashed in the jungle and the other in the sea. Yamamoto and five or six staff officers were killed and Ugichi was critically injured. The death of Yamamoto was a severe blow to Japanese morale. Not until 21 May was the news released in [Tokyo](#) that he had been killed in 'air combat'. His body was cremated and the ashes sent to [Tokyo](#), where they were given an impressive public funeral on 5 June. He was succeeded as Commander-in-Chief Combined Fleet by Admiral Mineichi Koga.

HMNZS [Leander](#), commanded by Captain Mansergh, formerly of the [Achilles](#), had returned to active service at the beginning of March 1943 after an extensive refit. She arrived at [Espiritu Santo](#) on 13 March and during the next six weeks went to sea on three occasions with American task forces. Then followed seven weeks of convoy escort duty which took her to [Pearl Harbour](#), Bora Bora, and [Noumea](#). On 17 June she returned to [Espiritu Santo](#) and reported for duty with Rear-Admiral Ainsworth's Task Force 18. He was soon to be glad of her services.

Combined operations by sea, air, and land forces to clear the Japanese from their strongholds in the central [Solomons](#) began during the last days of June 1943. Segi Point, at the south-east end of [New Georgia](#), was seized on the 20th and less than three weeks later fighters were flying from an airfield carved out of the jungle. The principal objective was [Munda](#) airfield, at the south-west end

¹ Telegraphist W. G. T. Bright, BEM, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 24 Mar 1923; shop assistant.

of [New Georgia](#), which, with that at Vila, less than 20 miles to the northward on [Kolombangara](#), was defended by some 15,000 troops.

The main landing was made on 30 June at the north end of [Rendova Island](#), five miles from [Munda](#) across Blanche Channel. Troops and supplies were ferried across the channel in landing vessels from [Rendova](#) harbour to beaches in Roviana Lagoon, six miles east from [Munda](#). The Americans were to face more than six weeks of fanatical Japanese resistance in the dense tropical jungle before they captured the airfield. Nearly 29,000 troops and 30,500 tons of supplies were landed at [Rendova](#) harbour. The New Georgia campaign was punctuated by several fierce naval actions in Kula Gulf.

In the early hours of 5 July some 2600 American troops were landed at Rice Anchorage on the Kula Gulf shore of [New Georgia](#). Their task was to advance southward to prevent enemy reinforcements reaching [Munda](#) from Vila. While the troops were going ashore, Ainsworth's escort force of three cruisers and nine destroyers bombarded Vila and Bairoko harbour. Two Japanese destroyers steaming out of the gulf fired torpedoes at long range, one of which sank the destroyer [Strong](#) with the loss of forty-eight men.

Ainsworth's task group ¹ was passing [Tulagi](#) that afternoon when he received orders to return to Kula Gulf to intercept a 'Tokyo Express' running troops down from Buin. This force, commanded by Rear-Admiral Teruo Akiyama, consisted of eleven destroyers in three groups, eight of them carrying troops. Shortly before two o'clock in the morning of 6 July the Americans made radar contact with the enemy off [Kolombangara](#). The first transport group had already been detached for Vila, but the second four stayed a while to fight. This high-speed action followed the familiar pattern. The rapid radar-controlled gunfire of the American ships quickly disabled the leading enemy destroyer [Niizuki](#), ² but not before the Japanese had launched more than twenty 24-inch torpedoes, three of which struck the [Helena](#) in quick succession. The whole forepart of the cruiser was blown away, her back was broken amidships, and she sank quickly. ³ Then the second transport group broke off action and steamed down to Vila at high speed. One destroyer ran aground there and was completely wrecked by American bombers later in the day. The Japanese had got their troops through and sunk a cruiser at a cost of two destroyers.

¹ The task group consisted of the cruisers [Honolulu](#) (flag), [Helena](#), and [St. Louis](#) and destroyers [O'Bannon](#), [Nicholas](#), [Jenkins](#), and [Radford](#).

² The Niizuki sank about three hours later. Rear-Admiral Akiyama and most of her crew were lost.

³ Some 700 survivors from the Helena were rescued by destroyers. More than 100 landed from boats on Vella Lavella Island and were picked up ten days later.

The [Leander](#), then lying at [Espiritu Santo](#), was now called upon to replace the Helena. She arrived at [Tulagi](#) next day and, in the forenoon of 11 July, joined Rear-Admiral Ainsworth's flag at a rendezvous off Savo Island. Replying to his signal of welcome, the [Leander](#) said: 'Hope to help you avenge the loss of Helena and [Strong](#)'. Ainsworth's force, which was on its way to Kula Gulf, patrolled the entrance to the gulf that night to cover the landing of supplies at Rice Anchorage. Nothing was seen of the enemy.

The ships returned to [Tulagi](#) next morning and, after refuelling, sailed at 5 p.m. for Kula Gulf in expectation of intercepting a '[Tokyo Express](#)'. Three hours after sailing they were joined by six more destroyers. These ships were from three separate destroyer squadrons, had not worked together with the cruisers, and had not operated at any time as a single tactical unit under the group commander. The higher command 'fully appreciated the situation but felt that the advantages to be gained justified the risks involved.'

The '[Tokyo Express](#)' had left [Rabaul](#) at 5.30 that morning with troops for Vila. It consisted of the light cruiser [Jintsu](#), flagship of Rear-Admiral Shunji Izaki, and five destroyers ¹ operating as a support group for the destroyers [Satsuki](#), [Minatsuki](#), [Yunagi](#), and [Matsukaze](#) which were carrying some 1200 troops.

After leaving [Tulagi](#), Ainsworth's task force stood over to [Santa Isabel Island](#) and steamed fast on a north-westerly course close along the coast to avoid being silhouetted against the bright moon, which was about three-quarters full and not due to set until 2.15 a.m. At midnight course was altered to about due west and the ships headed toward Visuvisu Point, the northernmost headland of [New Georgia](#). Half an hour later a patrolling 'Black Cat' (Catalina flying boat) reported six ships about 26 miles distant, steaming southeast at 30 knots.

The task force increased speed to 28 knots and took up a single-line-ahead formation. The five van destroyers were about three miles ahead and the rear destroyers about the same distance astern of the cruisers, but some of the latter were not properly in station when the action started. The cruisers were about 1000 yards apart, the [Honolulu](#) (flag) leading the [Leander](#) and St. Louis in that order. The sea was calm and the sky clear, except to the westward, where the moon was setting behind a bank of clouds.

According to the Japanese report on the action, their support group had taken 'alert cruising disposition' at dusk in the order Mikatsuki, Jintsu, Yukikaze, Hamakaze, Kiyonami, Yugure, proceeding at 22 knots and 'expecting at any moment to meet the

¹ Jintsu, 5195 tons; 33 knots; seven 5.5-inch, three 3-inch guns, and eight 21-inch torpedo-tubes. The destroyers of the support group mounted five to six 5-inch guns and six to eight 24-inch torpedo-tubes.

enemy.' At 9.16 p.m., south of Choiseul Island, the Jintsu launched her seaplane, but the result of its reconnaissance is not stated.

None of the Japanese ships engaged that night was equipped with radar, but some, at least, had been fitted with a radar detection device which was being used for the first time. This instrument picked up and plotted the electric impulses from the American ships' radar. Captain Yoshima Shimai of the Yukikaze reported: 'We positively determined the presence of the enemy two hours before we met him. Right up to our meeting with him we were aware of the changes in our relative positions and were able to verify the remarkable effectiveness of this instrument which gave us ample confidence in our ability to gain prior knowledge....'¹

It was a minute before one o'clock when the enemy ships appeared on the American radar screens. Three minutes later the destroyer Nicholas, leading the van, reported the enemy in sight at a distance of 16,500 yards. Steaming on reciprocal courses, the two forces were closing each other at the rate of a mile a minute. At 1.9 a.m. Ainsworth ordered his van destroyers to attack with torpedoes and the cruisers made two turns to port in succession to bring all their main guns to bear. During the

next ten minutes the leading destroyers discharged twenty-six torpedoes, and three in the rear, though badly bunched, got off twenty-five. The [Leander](#) fired four from her starboard tubes, but these probably passed south of the enemy.

But before the first American torpedoes had started to run the [Jintsu](#), second ship in the enemy line, exposed a searchlight on the leading American destroyers, opened fire, and discharged torpedoes. Almost instantly she became a target for the rapid gunfire of the [Honolulu](#), [Leander](#), and [St. Louis](#), the New Zealand cruiser opening at a range of 11,000 yards. The [Jintsu](#)'s searchlight was extinguished almost at once, and thereafter the cruisers used radar ranges and the indications of hits on the enemy's ships and his gun flashes as points of aim. By this time it was intensely dark, the moon being completely hidden behind a formation of dense rain clouds.

The Japanese account of the action says the [Jintsu](#) was 'exposed to a concentrated fire, so, together with the [Mikatsuki](#), she ducked into a squall and disappeared to the eastward.' The [Jintsu](#) took no further part in the action and sank soon afterwards. ² According to two survivors, who were picked up by an American destroyer

¹ Japanese Navy Torpedo School publication: Battle Lessons learned in the Greater East Asia War (Torpedoes), Vol. VI (translated by US Joint Intelligence Centre, Pacific Ocean Areas). The Japanese started late in their development of radar. The treatise, which discusses fully the advantages accruing to the Americans from radar, indicates that a few of their destroyers were equipped with it in July 1943.

² The [Jintsu](#) sustained 'more than ten' hits by gunfire in her boiler-rooms and broke in two after being hit in the engine-room by two torpedoes. Rear-Admiral Izaki, the captain, and 482 other officers and men perished.

three days later, there was a heavy explosion in the forepart of the cruiser which they thought was caused by a torpedo-hit. Another Japanese account of the action says the [Jintsu](#) 'achieved a heroic end, with the admiral, his staff, the commanding officer and all but a very few witnesses heroically killed.'

Immediately after the Jintsu opened fire the destroyers Yukikaze, Hamakaze, Kiyonami, and Yugure followed suit and, at a mean range of 6500 yards, discharged twenty-nine 24-inch torpedoes. ¹ These were well on their way when Admiral Ainsworth passed a signal to his ships by TBS radio ² to make a turn of 180 degrees to port together, but as a result of defects in the system the 'executive' order was not received in the [Leander](#) and was missed by all the rear destroyers except the Ralph Talbot. All the ships were firing hard and the situation was complicated by the dense smoke from the guns. It was seen through a gap in the smoke that the [Honolulu](#) had started to turn to port and drastic action had to be taken by the [Leander](#) to avoid collision, and she checked fire after getting off twenty-one broadsides. ³ The Ralph Talbot was 'forced to put her engines full astern, manoeuvre radically and use whistle signals to avoid the other four destroyers which were standing on at 30 knots'.

The cruisers were badly bunched at the turn and, almost as soon as the [Leander](#) had straightened up to follow the St. Louis on the new course, she was shaken severely by the violent explosion of a torpedo which hit her on the port side amidships. The engines were at once ordered to be stopped and the [Leander](#) was quickly left behind by the [Honolulu](#) and St. Louis, which resumed firing and continued the action to the north-eastward. The destroyers on the starboard quarter of the cruisers had 'manoeuvred violently' to avoid other enemy torpedoes as they crossed the American line.

At the time the task group was about to make its 180 degree turn, the patrolling Catalina reported that four enemy destroyers had also made a radical alteration of course to port and were retiring to the northward. The commander of the leading American destroyers was ordered to pursue them. As a matter of fact, the latter had been scattered during the turning manoeuvre and, 'acting more or less independently, they were unable to concentrate and coordinate their movements because of the darkness and the
con-

¹ The Japanese 24-inch torpedo carried a warhead of 1035 pounds of high explosive. It could travel nearly 11 miles at 49 knots, or nearly twice that distance at 36 knots. The standard American 21-inch torpedo with a

warhead of 789 pounds of high explosive could travel three miles at 45 knots, five miles at 33 ½ knots, and seven and a half miles at 26 ½ knots.

² Inter-ship voice radio communication.

³ The [Leander](#) fired 160 rounds of 6-inch shell. Between 1.12 a.m. and about 1.30 a.m. the [Honolulu](#) expended 1110 rounds of 6-inch and 123 rounds of 5-inch, and the St. Louis got off 1360 rounds of 6-inch and 230 of 5-inch.

fused

picture on the radar screen'. The Japanese account of the action says that their destroyers 'withdrew for a while' to the northwestward and, after reloading their torpedo-tubes in the remarkably short space of eighteen minutes, they 'reversed course and proceeded to the scene of the action'.

The [Honolulu](#) and St. Louis, after turning wide, steered northeast for a time and ceased firing about ten minutes after the [Leander](#) was hit. They then hauled round to a north-westerly course. At that time the van destroyers were some ten miles away to the westward finishing off the [Jintsu](#). At 1.55 a.m. the [Honolulu](#) made radar contact with a group of ships sharp on the port bow at a distance of about ten miles. They were the Japanese destroyers returning to attack, but in the American flagship there was grave uncertainty as to whether they were 'four of the enemy's vessels retiring or our own van destroyers in pursuit of the enemy after finishing off the cripples'. The position was confused further by a breakdown of the forward TBS radio in the [Honolulu](#). The after radar plot reported that the ships were Japanese, but 'in such a way that the various stations which received the report did not realise that Radar Aft was positive of their identity.... It was now apparent that whatever the mysterious ships were, they were closing rapidly toward our line'.

At 2.5 a.m. the [Honolulu](#) fired star shells and a minute later gave the order to commence firing. But before either cruiser could open fire, the tracks of torpedoes were seen approaching. Three torpedoes passed close ahead of the [Honolulu](#), one passed under her stem, and two cleared her astern by barely 100 yards. The St. Louis was hit on the port bow and forced to slow to eight knots. About two minutes

later the [Honolulu](#), which had made a sharp alteration of course, was struck by a torpedo on the starboard bow. The destroyer Gwin was also torpedoed and set on fire. Her rudder was jammed by the explosion and the [Honolulu](#) barely escaped a collision by making a drastic turn to starboard. Then the [Honolulu](#) was hit on the stern by yet another torpedo which, luckily, failed to explode. This successful attack was made by the Japanese destroyers Yukikaze, Hamakaze, Kiyonami, and Yugure, who discharged twenty-six torpedoes. They then withdrew to the north-westward and, 'not being able to locate the Jintsu, returned to base at the Short-land Islands'. While the action was being fought the four destroyers of the transport group had landed their troops and withdrawn from the gulf.

The [Honolulu](#) and St. Louis made a quick survey of their damage and reported that they could steam at 15 knots. The scattered destroyers were assembled to screen the cruisers. While preparations were being made to take the disabled Gwin in tow, the destroyer Buchanan collided with the Woodworth, damaging one of the latter's propellers and flooding three compartments aft. The Buchanan was severely shaken by the explosion of one of several depth-charges which were knocked overboard from the Woodworth. Between four and five hours later enemy aircraft made three attempts to attack the returning task group but were driven off by the ships' gunfire and by fighters from the [Russell Islands](#). At nine o'clock the Gwin began to settle and it was apparent that she could not be saved. Ten officers and forty-four ratings, who were all that survived of her ship's company, were taken off and she was sunk by torpedoes. She had lost two officers and fifty-nine men in action. The damaged cruisers and their screening destroyers arrived at [Tulagi](#) during the afternoon.

The torpedo that struck the [Leander](#) blew a huge, jagged hole in her port side amidships and exploded into No. 1 boiler-room, which was badly wrecked by the blast. All those on duty there were killed. The hole was about twenty feet in depth from the lower deck level and thirty feet in length, with distortion of armour and shell plating and frames extending more than fifty feet fore and aft. There were bad cracks in the ship's side and in the lower deck, which was lifted between three and four feet over the main damage area. The explosion threw up a great column of water, most of which fell on the after part of the ship and swept several men overboard. Blast from the explosion vented up a boiler-room fan casing and blew

seven members of a 4-inch gun's crew over the side. Unfortunately the [Leander](#), which was steaming at high speed when hit, had travelled a considerable distance before it was known that the men had gone. The port quadruple torpedo-tube mounting, situated about fifty feet abaft the seat of the explosion, was lifted bodily aft for several feet, leaving the torpedoes lolling over the ship's side.

The [Leander](#) took an immediate list of ten degrees to port. Main steam failed to the two after engines (inner shafts) and electric power was cut off everywhere forward of No. 3 boiler-room, plunging the ship into complete darkness and bringing all auxiliary machinery to a dead stop. Very soon, steam was lost on the port forward engine, due to the enforced evacuation of No. 2 boiler-room owing to the intense heat when the air supply fans were disabled by blast. The wrecking of the electrical installation caused a complete cut-out of all communications, except the very limited number of sound-powered telephones, and a total failure of all gunnery fire-control and radio equipment. The [Leander](#) was in no condition to renew the action had the enemy returned, and when daylight came there was every likelihood of air attacks.

Many of her ship's company were 'hostilities only' men, not long away from farm, factory, shop, or office in New Zealand: for not a few youngsters [Leander](#) was their first ship. 'The curtailment of [Leander's](#) part in the operations was a bitter disappointment to me and to everyone on board', said Captain Mansergh in his report of the action. 'There was but a fleeting opportunity for the ship to demonstrate her weapon efficiency, but the conduct and bearing of all hands during the action and the trying passage back to harbour were a source of extreme pride and gratification to me. All behaved like veterans. In particular, the work of the engine-room, damage control, and medical personnel call for very high commendation....'

It has been well said that 'however perfect the machines, war in the last analysis is fought by men whose nerves must remain steady to direct the machines, whose courage must remain high when they as well as their machines are in danger, whose discipline and training must be such that they work together'. Throughout that long day, officers and men of the [Leander](#) laboured resolutely and incessantly to save their sorely-stricken ship. How they succeeded has become one of the damage control classics of the Navy.

When some 600 square feet of her structure was blown open to the sea, five compartments were completely flooded – the forward boiler-room, main switchboard room, forward dynamo room, low-power room, and the transmitting station. Five fuel-oil tanks were wrecked and two others badly contaminated with sea water. There were big leaks through a damaged bulkhead into No. 2 boiler-room and the passage on the port side, as well as into the stokers' mess deck through the splits in the ship's side and the deck above. Major damage had been done to auxiliary machinery and steam, water, and fuel-oil pipe systems. It was found that the ship could steam at slow speed on the two outer engines, taking steam from No. 3 boiler-room. A south-easterly course was set to return to harbour and the [Leander](#) gradually worked up to 12 knots. Communication was established with the destroyers Radford and Jenkins, which had been detached by Rear-Admiral Ainsworth to stand by the [Leander](#) and which acted as anti-submarine and anti-aircraft screen during the passage to [Tulagi](#).

When No. 2 boiler-room had to be evacuated because of the stoppage of the air supply fans, it was not possible to close the stop valves of the main steam pipes owing to the intense heat. Acting Chief Engine-Room Artificer Morris Buckley ¹ went back a few minutes later and, at great risk in the darkness and escaping steam, succeeded in shutting down the valves. Led by Chief Shipwright

¹ Chief Engine-Room Artificer M. Buckley, RN, m.i.d.; born Northwich, England, 3 Dec 1914; fitter; joined RN 14 Jan 1936; took discharge 7 May 1948.

Stewart, ¹ a damage control party set about the establishment of a flooding boundary. Working in almost total darkness and up to their waists in oil and water, they shored up damaged bulkheads and hatches and plugged holes and cracks. The most immediate danger was the imminent flooding of No. 2 boiler-room. Stoker Petty Officer Fickling ² and Leading Stoker Haliday ³ volunteered to re-enter the compartment and shore up the damaged bulkhead. Measures were then taken to pump out the boiler-room by means of two portable electric pumps, with a capacity of sixty tons an hour, which kept the water level below the floor plates.

Commander S. W. Roskill had been injured in the leg and nearly swept

overboard by the explosion, but for some hours he directed the work of his damage control parties until incapacitated by his wound. 'The high standard of organisation and training shown by all hands was largely due to his initiative and leadership', said the captain's report. Regular drills, lectures, and demonstrations had made all officers and men 'damage control conscious' and it was for this reason that, in spite of severe casualties among the senior ratings of one party, correct action on their own initiative was taken by the survivors. The general reaction was: 'Well, it was just what we had been told it would be like.' A seaman boy, Mervyn Kelly,⁴ seventeen years of age, was employed as the commander's messenger. He, too, had been blown over and injured by the explosion, but he stuck gamely to his job, and during the period when all telephones were out of action he carried many important verbal messages speedily and accurately. He neither mentioned nor reported his injuries until long after daylight.

The port torpedo-tubes, which were about to be fired when the ship was hit, were dismounted by the explosion and most of their crew became casualties. A petty officer, Charles A. Patchett,⁵ though badly shaken, immediately organised the survivors and the crew of the starboard tubes into repair parties. They rapidly restored power to a number of important circuits, thus greatly assisting Chief Electrical Artificer Jones,⁶ who had taken charge of all electrical repair parties when he learned that the commissioned electrician and his staff had been killed in the main switchboard

¹ Chief Shipwright J. W. Stewart, DSM, RN; born Ardrossan, [Scotland](#), 21 Feb 1903; shipwright; joined NZ Division, Royal Navy, 21 Jun 1923; took discharge 4 Oct 1946.

² Stoker Petty Officer A. Fickling, DSM, [RNZN](#); born Tottenham, [London](#), 15 Apr 1909; joined NZ Division, Royal Navy, 15 Nov 1927; took discharge 23 Oct 1946.

³ Petty Officer Stoker Mechanician J. R. Haliday, [RNZN](#); born [Thames](#), 9 Aug 1921; joined [RNZN](#) Oct 1940; took discharge 1952.

⁴ Seaman Boy 1st Class M. A. Kelly; born Waimate, 4 Feb 1926; joined

RNZN 14 May 1942; took discharge 2 Apr 1947.

⁵ Petty Officer C. A. Patchett, RNZN, m.i.d.; born Blenheim, 4 Sep 1912; joined NZ Division, Royal Navy, 5 Feb 1928; Long Service and Good Conduct Medals.

⁶ Chief Electrical Artificer W. R. J. Jones, DSM, RN; born Pretoria, South Africa, 22 Dec 1905; joined Royal Navy 21 Mar 1927.

compartment. When he heard that there were badly injured men on the stokers' mess deck, Norman Craven,¹ the youngest member of the sick-berth staff, at once volunteered to go there and assist the first-aid parties. Under conditions requiring more than ordinary courage, he attended to wounded men, showing much initiative and a sound knowledge of his duties. Chief Petty Officer Telegraphist Rosbrook² showed great organising and technical ability in rapidly making good all breakdowns in the ship's wireless telegraphy system.

The first casualty arrived at the main dressing station six minutes after the explosion occurred, and almost all the fifteen cases were treated there within the next ten minutes. The seriously injured men suffered mainly from a combination of multiple fractures of leg and ankle bones and the effects of blast. All were standing up when they were injured, with the exception of a leading stoker who was seated at a desk. Two ratings standing one on either side of him were killed instantly. The behaviour and morale of the injured men was of a high order both during the action and afterwards, and they were unselfish in their insistence that we should treat 'the other fellow first', reported Surgeon Lieutenant-Commander McPhail.³ The sick-berth staff and auxiliary medical parties worked for eighteen hours without a break. The condition of the wounded on their discharge to hospital was evidence of their sound work.

For eighteen hours the engineers and stokers laboured in heat and semi-darkness to keep the ship afloat and steam her more than 200 miles back to harbour. Two-thirds of her boiler power was damaged and out of service. The only two available boilers, all the main and auxiliary machinery, and all the main and overflow feed water tanks were contaminated by salt water and fuel-oil. This caused

almost continuous 'priming'⁴ of both boilers. Both sets of evaporators were put on to make up feed water and the main feed tanks were allowed to overflow continuously. The boilers were blown down every ten minutes in order to reduce the density, which at one time was three degrees. Subsequent examination of the boilers showed that many of the tubes were so badly coated internally with oil residue that burning-out must have been imminent.

American fighter aircraft gave cover to the [Leander](#) from daylight on 13 July until her arrival in harbour. She was screened by the destroyers Radford and Jenkins, the latter being relieved by the

¹ Sick Berth Attendant [N. Craven](#), m.i.d.; born [Whangarei](#), 30 Mar 1921; joined [RNZN30](#) Jan 1942; took discharge 18 Apr 1946.

² Chief Petty Officer Telegraphist [C. J. Rosbrook](#), RN, m.i.d.; born [London](#), 18 May 1905; joined Royal Navy as boy, 17 Aug 1921.

³ Surgeon Captain [E. S. McPhail](#), VRD, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Invercargill](#), 25 Dec 1899; now Surgeon Captain, [RNZN](#), Director of Naval Medical Services.

⁴ The carrying over of water spray with the steam from the boilers to the engines, with consequent danger of damage.

Taylor at 8 a.m. Two other destroyers joined the escort during the afternoon and the [Leander](#) arrived in [Tulagi](#) harbour at seven o'clock, just after dark. There was a moving scene when the ship's company assembled on the forecastle in the brilliant light of a full tropical moon and the chaplain read prayers for the dead and of thanksgiving for the safety of the ship. The captain, standing by the capstan, read the names of the dead and missing.

The [Leander](#) spent a week in [Tulagi](#) harbour, where she was made sufficiently seaworthy to enable her to be steamed to [Auckland](#). Escorted by two [United States](#) destroyers, she left on 21 July for [Espiritu Santo](#), whence she sailed four days later in company with the destroyer Radford, arriving at [Auckland](#) on 29 July. It was agreed

with the Admiralty that temporary repairs to the hull and machinery should be carried out in Devonport Dockyard and that the [Leander](#) should then proceed to a [United States](#) port for a complete refit and modernisation of armament and other equipment. On 1 November 1943 a memorial tablet placed in the chapel of HMNZS [Philomel](#) to commemorate the thirty-three officers and ratings who had been killed in action or had died in HMNZS [Leander](#) since September 1939 was dedicated by the Rt Rev W. H. Baddeley, DSO, MC, Bishop of [Melanesia](#) and honorary chaplain, RNZNVR.

The [Leander](#) sailed from [Auckland](#) for the last time on 25 November 1943, passed through the Panama Canal on 14 December, and left Colon four days later in company with two American destroyer escorts for [Boston](#). The temperature was below zero when the [Leander](#) and her escorts, thickly coated with snow and ice, arrived at [Boston](#) on 23 December.

The ship was visited by representatives of the Anzac Club and Union Jack Club, who arranged for all officers and ratings to visit private homes over Christmas and on later occasions when leave was given. The hospitality shown by these clubs and hundreds of citizens was an outstanding feature of the time spent in [Boston](#).

During the next six weeks drafts of officers and ratings left the [Leander](#) to undergo courses of training in England. On 14 January 1944 a frigate built in [Boston](#) was commissioned as HMS Tyler and manned by ratings from the [Leander](#) for the passage to the [United Kingdom](#). Four officers and a number of selected ratings went to Norfolk, Virginia, to join a flotilla of six LCI (L).¹ Lieutenant-Commander Woodhouse, RN,² went as senior officer of

¹ LCI (L): Landing Craft, Infantry (Large), length 158 ft 6 in; breadth 23 ft 3 in; loaded displacement, 387 tons; capacity 205 troops, and 50 tons cargo; crew, 4 officers and 24 ratings; diesel engines and twin-screws; endurance 8000 miles at 12 knots.

² Lieutenant-Commander F. St. P. Woodhouse, RN; born England, 10 Nov 1912; Navigating Officer HMNZS [Leander](#), 1941–43; HMS Triumph 1945–48; Staff Officer (Operations), [RNZN](#), 1948–51.

the flotilla, and Lieutenants Hopkins,¹ Kirk,² and Hale, RNZNR,³ each

commanded one of the LCIs. The flotilla left Norfolk on 24 January 1944 and arrived at Falmouth on 19 February.

The [Leander](#) finally paid off on 8 May 1944, thus ending an eventful commission in the Royal New Zealand Navy of just over seven years. Her ship's company were dispersed far and wide on war service, proud in the knowledge that the [Leander](#) had upheld her noble motto and the traditions of the four ships of that name which had preceded her in the Royal Navy since 1780. ⁴

After the Battle of [Kolombangara](#) the attrition of Japanese naval forces in the [New Georgia](#) campaign continued unabated. The capture of [Munda](#) airfield on 5 August was a severe blow to the enemy. Nevertheless, he continued to reinforce his garrisons in the Vila area by landing troops and supplies by way of Vella Gulf (between [Vella Lavella](#) and [Kolombangara](#)) and Blakett Strait.

During the night of 6-7 August 1943, a task group of six American destroyers intercepted a 'Tokyo Express' of four destroyers carrying 950 troops and 55 tons of supplies to Vila. In a surprise attack three of the Japanese ships were sunk and the fourth was damaged by gunfire and forced to withdraw. More than 1500 seamen and soldiers perished; 300 survivors managed to reach [Vella Lavella](#). On the following night General Sasaki, the Japanese commander in the [New Georgia](#) area, moved his headquarters to Vila, but six weeks passed before the last Japanese pockets of resistance on [New Georgia](#), Baanga Island, and Arundel Island were liquidated.

About the middle of July the [South Pacific Command](#) had decided to bypass [Kolombangara](#), which was held by some 11,000 Japanese troops strongly entrenched about Vila, and occupy [Vella Lavella](#), lying to the north-west, athwart the enemy's supply route from [Rabaul](#) and [Bougainville](#). On 15 August American troops landed unopposed at [Barakoma](#) at the south-east end of [Vella Lavella](#). This marked the beginning of the bypassing strategy that was ultimately to isolate and neutralise [Rabaul](#), and made possible the giant strides of American task forces across the Central Pacific. Imperial Headquarters in [Tokyo](#) had already decided to cut its losses in the central [Solomons](#). When Admiral Kusaka and General Imamura at [Rabaul](#) learned of the American landing on Vella

¹ Lieutenant J. R. P. Hopkins, RNZNR; born [London](#), 27 Jun 1901;

Merchant Marine officer 1918–24; joined RNZNR Mar 1943; HMNZS [Leander](#) 1943–44; HMS Indomitable, [British Pacific Fleet](#), 1944–45; oil sales manager.

² Commander J. A. Kirk, RNZNR; born Lancashire, England, 29 Oct 1911; Merchant Marine officer; RNR Nov 1933; RNZNR May 1935; HMNZS [Leander](#) 1939–44; HMS Caistor Castle 1944–45.

³ Lieutenant-Commander R. T. Hale, [RNZN](#); born [Hamilton](#), 3 Dec 1921; Merchant Marine officer; HMS Ascania 1942; HMNZS [Leander](#) 1942–44; HMS Cowslip 1944–45; transferred [RNZN](#) Jun 1946.

⁴ See [Appendix II](#).

Lavella, they decided merely to establish a barge staging base at Horaniu, on the north-east corner of that island.

After the departure of the [Leander](#) in July, the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla were the only New Zealand naval vessels remaining in the Solomon Islands. While the [New Georgia](#) operations were in slow progress, these little vessels carried on their monotonous but essentially important duties in the [Guadalcanal- Tulagi- Russell Islands](#) area. Their continuous round of anti-submarine patrols and the escorting of supply ships was relieved from time to time as one or other came down to New Zealand for a refit. A more welcome break in the monotony fell to the lot of the Tui when she took part in the destruction of a Japanese submarine not long after her return from New Zealand.

The Tui sailed from [Noumea](#) at 6.30 a.m. on 19 August 1943 as anti-submarine escort to the [US Navy](#) supply ship [Taganak](#) and the liberty ship [Wiley Post](#), bound for [Espiritu Santo](#). Shortly after two o'clock in the afternoon when the convoy was about 55 miles south-south-east from the Amadee light outside [Noumea](#), the asdic operator in the Tui, Able Seaman John Gallon, RNVR, ¹ reported a 'contact' bearing east, at the long range of 3400 yards. The convoy was ordered to make an emergency turn to starboard and commenced zigzagging at full speed. The anti-submarine control officer did not confirm the contact as a submarine, but the asdic operator was insistent that it was a submarine.

The Tui then made a run over the position of the contact, during which no depth-charges were dropped. This was followed twelve minutes later by a second run, but only two depth-charges were dropped. Nine minutes later the Tui ran in a third time and discharged two depth-charges from the throwers. Contact was then lost.

At this stage American seaplanes arrived and assisted in the hunt. The Tui carried out an asdic sweep but did not regain contact, and at 3.55 p.m. she abandoned the search and left to rejoin the convoy which was then hull down on the horizon. Ten minutes later one of the seaplanes alighted close alongside the Tui. The pilot said he had seen what he took to be bubbles and suggested that the Tui should co-operate by making 'one more run'. The ship then steamed back and swept the area but made no asdic contact. At 4.25 p.m. she again shaped course to rejoin the convoy, which was out of sight.

Five minutes later what appeared to be smoke floats were seen on the horizon over Tui's port quarter. Soon afterwards a seaplane flew past the ship and the pilot made signs indicating that the Tui

¹ Able Seaman J. Gallon, RNVR, m.i.d.; born Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, 11 Jan 1921; glass-blower; reverted to RN, Feb 1945.

should steam in the direction of the smoke. She again turned back, and about a quarter of an hour later the smoke was seen to change to a brown colour, 'indicating the possibility of a submarine on the surface'.

At 5.15 p.m. what looked like the conning tower of a submarine was sighted. It was well out of range and making away at speed under much brown, oily smoke. The Tui opened fire with her 4-inch gun at an estimated range of 8000 yards, but the shot fell far short of the target. At 5.50 p.m. she scored a hit at 10,200 yards, and seven minutes later a second hit was observed. She ceased fire after twenty rounds, and three American aircraft then attacked with depth-charges. The submarine was seen to up-end and sink vertically, and three minutes later two heavy underwater explosions were heard in the asdic 'phones and felt throughout the ship. The Tui

picked up six Japanese ratings, the only survivors of the submarine's complement of more than ninety officers and ratings. She received orders to return to [Noumea](#), where she arrived next morning.

Interrogation of the prisoners disclosed that the submarine was the I-17,¹ commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Hakue Harada. The I-17 left [Truk](#) on 25 July to make an aircraft reconnaissance of [Espiritu Santo](#) and [Noumea](#) and raid shipping. According to the prisoners, I-17 was the submarine that shelled the oil tanks near Santa Barbara, [California](#), in February 1942. She was the seventeenth Japanese submarine destroyed in the South Pacific since January 1942.

Able Seaman Gallon was awarded a mention in despatches in recognition of his having by 'good operating, attention to duty and alertness, detected the presence of a Japanese submarine....' Replying later to the Prime Minister, who asked to be informed of the circumstances, the Naval Secretary said that 'due to doubt by the commanding officer and the anti-submarine control officer whether the contact obtained was a submarine, the depth-charge attacks made by HMNZS Tui were not properly carried out, since only two depth-charges were dropped in each attack. It appears also that had it not been for the insistence of Able Seaman Gallon, the asdic operator, that the contact was a submarine, no attack would have been made.' The Naval Board considered that 'had the proper procedure been followed and a full depth-charge pattern fired in the original attack, there is little doubt but that the submarine would have been destroyed then and there.'

By the beginning of September 6500 American troops had been landed on [Vella Lavella](#). They pushed up the east and west coasts

¹ I-17, 2200 tons displacement; speed 20 knots; one 6-inch, two 20-mm anti-aircraft guns; eight 21-inch torpedo-tubes (20 torpedoes); one aircraft; launched at Yokosuka, July 1939.

of the island and drove the Japanese out of Horaniu on the 14th. At this stage New Zealand troops were called upon to clear the enemy from the north-west corner of the island. The 3rd New Zealand Division, commanded by Major-General H. E. Barrow-clough, had moved from [New Caledonia](#) to [Guadalcanal](#) during August and

September, and on 18 September 35 and 37 Battalions of 14 Brigade landed on [Vella Lavella](#), followed a week later by 30 Battalion.

Barrowclough took over full command on the island on the 18th and a week later Brigadier L. Potter, commanding 14 Brigade, had established his troops in forward areas, 35 Battalion at Matu Soroto Bay on the north-west coast, and 37 Battalion at Paraso Bay on the north coast. The Japanese resisted stubbornly in the dense forest, and progress from bay to bay was arduous and slow. By the evening of 6 October the surviving Japanese had been herded by the converging New Zealanders on to the headland between Marquana Bay and Warambari Bay. ¹

The Japanese withdrawal from the central [Solomons](#) was now almost completed. Early in September 1943 they had abandoned their seaplane base at Rekata Bay on the north coast of Santa Isabel. After the loss of Horaniu on [Vella Lavella](#), they set up a barge staging base at Sumbi Point, on the south coast of [Choiseul](#), to handle the evacuation of [Kolombangara](#). Task groups of American destroyers failed to check the Japanese, though they sank a number of barges and the submarine I-20. The evacuation was completed on the night of 3-4 October, 5400 troops having been lifted by barges and some 4000 by destroyers in five days for the loss of twenty-nine barges, a submarine, and less than 1000 men. According to Japanese records, 12,435 troops from [Kolombangara](#) and [Choiseul](#) were landed at Buin, in [Bougainville](#).

There still remained the 589 Japanese rounded up by the New Zealanders on the north end of [Vella Lavella](#). Early in the morning of 6 October nine destroyers under Rear Admiral Ijuin left [Rabaul](#) to cover their rescue by twelve small craft from Buin. At 10.30 that night this powerful force was encountered by the American destroyers Selfridge, Chevalier, and O'Bannon and a high-speed action followed. One of fourteen American torpedoes wrecked the Yugumo, but not before one from that big destroyer blew the bows off the Chevalier, which was further damaged when the O'Bannon crashed into her engine-room. The Selfridge was racing after two Japanese destroyers when she was hit by a torpedo, which brought her to a standstill. Meanwhile three other American destroyers were steaming fast up the coast, and when they were reported by aircraft to Admiral Ijuin as cruisers he ordered his eight ships to

¹ For fuller account of this action see the official New Zealand war history, [The Pacific](#).

retire and headed back for [Rabaul](#). After her crew had been taken off, the *Chevalier* was sunk and the American ships withdrew to the southward. They failed to see the small craft which stole quietly into Marquana Bay and embarked the waiting Japanese in the darkness under the noses of the New Zealanders, who next day found only abandoned stores and some dead. After daybreak American torpedo-launches searching to seaward picked up seventy-eight survivors of the *Yugumo*. The New Zealanders rescued several American airmen from a raft which drifted inshore after their aircraft had been shot down.

While the operations in [New Georgia](#) were proceeding, Admiral Halsey's [South Pacific Command](#) was planning the seizure of a bridgehead on [Bougainville](#), northernmost but one and largest of the Solomon Islands, to provide an advanced air base for future operations against [Rabaul](#), the enemy's main stronghold in the South Pacific. It was decided to occupy the [Treasury Islands](#), 25 miles from the [Shortland Islands](#), as a preliminary to the seizure of a beachhead at Cape Torokina on the north side of [Empress Augusta Bay](#), about half-way up the west coast of [Bougainville](#), thus bypassing the enemy strongholds. The Americans were learning to appreciate the 'flexibility and baffling nature' of amphibious power. They were to exploit it to the full in the near future.

The Japanese forces on [Bougainville](#) and nearby islands totalled some 40,000 Army troops and 20,000 Navy personnel, of whom the majority were in the southern area. [Empress Augusta Bay](#) was defended by from 2000 to 3000 troops. Between the Americans' northernmost airfield at [Barakoma](#) on [Vella Lavella](#) and [Empress Augusta Bay](#), the enemy had well-developed airfields at [Kahili](#) and Kara and on Ballale Island, 13 miles south-east from [Kahili](#). There was a seaplane base and an uncompleted airfield at Kieta, on the east coast, 28 miles from [Kahili](#). At the north-west-end of [Bougainville](#) was Bonis airfield and across the narrow sea passage there was an airfield on Buka Island, both of them less than 200 miles from [Rabaul](#), the key point of the Japanese defence perimeter in the South Pacific.

These airfields were largely neutralised by constant heavy bombing by American

aircraft. At the same time long-range bombers of the South-West Pacific Command intensified their attacks on the airfields and shipping at [Rabaul](#) but with no commensurate result. Toward the end of October Admiral Koga, Commander-in-Chief of the [Combined Fleet](#), who was then at [Truk](#) flying his flag in the *Musashi*,¹ reinforced the Eleventh Air Fleet at [Rabaul](#) by sending down all the aircraft from the carriers of the Third Fleet.

¹ *Musashi*, battleship, 73,000 tons; nine 18-inch guns; sunk by aircraft, Philippine Islands, 24 October 1944.

The capture of the Treasury Group was entrusted to [8 Brigade](#) of the 3rd New Zealand Division, commanded by Brigadier R. A. Row, under whom also were American specialist units including a construction group. The assault force, totalling 3795 all ranks, embarked at [Guadalcanal](#) with 1785 tons of equipment and supplies in 31 landing craft and arrived off Blanche harbour in the early hours of 27 October 1943. Landings were made on Mono and Stirling Islands, and organised enemy resistance was quickly broken. Two radar stations set up on [Mono Island](#) were working by 31 October. An airfield with runways of 7000 feet was constructed on [Stirling Island](#) and in regular use by the end of December, as was a naval base for small craft in Blanche harbour between the two islands.

The landing of the 3rd United States Marine Division at [Empress Augusta Bay](#) on 1 November was preceded by cruiser and destroyer bombardments of the enemy airfields at both ends of [Bougainville](#), those at the northern end also being well bombed by aircraft from the carriers *Saratoga* and *Princeton*. The convoy of eight transports and four store ships, escorted by eleven destroyers, four minesweepers and two tugs, arrived off Cape Torokina at daybreak. By the afternoon more than 14,000 troops and 6200 tons of supplies had been landed at a cost of 70 killed and 124 wounded.

When the Japanese naval command at [Rabaul](#) learned of the landing, Rear-Admiral Sentaro Omori, commanding the Fifth Cruiser Division, was ordered to escort a counter-landing force of 1000 troops embarked in five destroyers and break up the American amphibious force. He sailed at 8.30 p.m. and an hour later was sighted by an aircraft which dropped a bomb close by one of his cruisers. [Omori](#) then decided he

could not make the landing that night, sent his troop-carriers back, and stood on at high speed to attack the American transports which he wrongly assumed were still at [Empress Augusta Bay](#). He did not know that Task Force 39, commanded by Rear-Admiral A. S. Merrill, ¹ who was accurately informed of his coming, was steaming north to intercept him. [Omori](#)'s force consisted of the heavy cruisers [Myoko](#) (flag) and [Haguro](#), the light cruiser [Agano](#) (flagship of Rear-Admiral [Ijuin](#)) and three destroyers, the light cruiser [Sendai](#) (flagship of Rear-Admiral [Osugi](#)) and three destroyers. ²

¹ Task Force 39: cruisers [Montpelier](#) (flag), [Cleveland](#), [Columbia](#), and [Denver](#), each of 12,000 tons, twelve 6-inch and twelve 5-inch guns, speed 33 knots; and eight destroyers each of 2100 tons, five 5-inch guns and ten torpedo-tubes, speed 35 knots.

² [Myoko](#) and [Haguro](#), 12,700 tons, ten 8-inch and six 4·7-inch guns; eight 24-inch torpedotubes; 33 knots. [Agano](#), 7000 tons; six 6-inch guns; eight 24-inch torpedo-tubes; 35 knots. [Sendai](#), 5900 tons; seven 5·5-inch guns; eight torpedo-tubes; 33 knots. The destroyers mounted six to eight 5-inch guns and eight 24-inch torpedo-tubes; speed 34 knots.

At 1.30 in the morning an American aircraft dropped a bomb on the [Haguro](#) which reduced her speed. In the ensuing action the [Sendai](#) was disabled by gunfire and sunk by torpedoes and two destroyers were forced to withdraw after a collision. The [Myoko](#) collided with the destroyer [Hatsukaze](#), which was sunk by gunfire soon afterwards. The [Haguro](#) was hit by six 6-inch shells. The American destroyer [Foote](#) had her stern blown off by a torpedo. The cruiser [Denver](#) was hit by three dud shells and the destroyer [Spence](#) slightly damaged. Admiral [Omori](#) broke off the action and retired at best speed to [Rabaul](#), where he was at once relieved of his command. At eight o'clock that morning the American ships, aided by sixteen aircraft which included four New Zealand fighters, fought off an attack by 100 Japanese carrier aircraft from [Rabaul](#), many of which were shot down.

Three days later nearly a hundred aircraft from the carriers [Saratoga](#) and [Princeton](#) struck at a group of heavy cruisers and other ships which had just arrived at [Rabaul](#) from [Truk](#). Four heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, and two destroyers were

damaged, some of the former so badly that they were sent back to [Japan](#) for repairs and were out of service for five months. In a second attack on 11 November the destroyer Suzunami ¹ was sunk and two cruisers and three destroyers more or less badly damaged. In the early hours of 25 November five American destroyers intercepted a like number of Japanese destroyers which had landed 950 troops at [Buka](#) and were evacuating 700 others to [Rabaul](#). In a high-speed action that ended 33 miles from Cape St. George, the Onami, Makinami, and Yugiri were sunk with heavy loss of life. ²

Though the Solomon Islands campaign was nearly ended, there was no relief for the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla in that area. Throughout the year the little ships were employed continuously on anti-submarine patrols and the escorting of American supply ships, mainly in the [Guadalcanal- Tulagi- Russell Islands](#) area. The monotony was relieved from time to time by a hunt for a suspected Japanese submarine. On the night of 10 October 1943, while patrolling off [Guadalcanal](#), the Tui was narrowly missed by a torpedo dropped by an enemy aircraft. During the last quarter of 1943 the Matai, Kiwi, and Tui gave anti-submarine escort to supply ships running to [New Georgia, Vella Lavella](#), and the [Treasury Islands](#). From January 1944 onward the flotilla saw similar service in the [Bougainville](#) area. On 12 February the Matai and Tui carried out a prolonged but unsuccessful hunt for a Japanese

¹ Suzunami, 2100 tons; 34 knots; six 5-inch guns and fifteen 24-inch torpedo-tubes.

² Onami and Makinami, sister ships to Suzunami. Yugiri, 1950 tons; 34 knots; six 5-inch guns; eight torpedo-tubes. The submarine I-177 from [Rabaul](#) rescued 278 survivors of the Yugiri.

submarine reported west of Buka Island. A fortnight later the Matai was in action west of Cape Moltke (north-west of [Empress Augusta Bay](#)), where she shelled Japanese posts about Kuraio Mission in support of American troops.

At the beginning of March 1944 the Americans were holding an area at [Empress Augusta Bay](#) extending about seven miles along the coast and five miles inland. The two airfields carved out of the jungle swamps about [Piva](#) were within range of

Japanese artillery fire, but the whole area was well served by a network of roads and defence in depth was carefully organised. During March some 15,000 Japanese troops made great efforts to take the perimeter, but five successive attacks were defeated with a loss of 5500 killed. HMNZS Matai took a small but effective part in the final operation when she bombarded Japanese positions near the mouth of the Reini River in [Empress Augusta Bay](#). A month later the Matai covered the landing of American tanks in the same area. At that time the ships of the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla were working on anti-submarine escort and patrol duties as far north as the [Green Islands](#), [Emirau Island](#), and the Admiralties.

The reputation of the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla stood high with the Americans, who admired the cheerful and efficient manner in which the New Zealanders carried out their unceasing round of duties. Expressing his 'sincere appreciation for the services you have rendered to our common cause', General O. W. Griswold, commanding the 14th Army Corps at [Torokina](#), said that the flotilla 'has at all times eagerly undertaken every mission assigned and has completed them all with signal success'.

On 14 January 1944 Admiral Halsey, Commander South Pacific Area, informed the New Zealand Naval Board that the 'current employment of Japanese submarines and estimates of their future employment indicate immunity from the submarine menace in New Zealand waters'. He proposed, therefore, that the New Zealand Fairmile motor-launches should be employed on anti-submarine patrols and other 'defence jobs' in the Solomon Islands, relieving American destroyers and patrol vessels for duty elsewhere. This was approved by War Cabinet on 25 January.

Accordingly, the twelve Fairmiles were refitted for service in tropical waters and organised as the 80th and 81st Motor Launch Flotillas under the command of Lieutenant-Commander Cave, RN (ret'd). ¹ The 80th Flotilla consisted of MLs 401 to 406, with Lieutenant Bull ² in ML403 as Senior Officer, and the 81st Flotilla of

¹ Commander H. E. Cave, RN (ret'd); born England, 11 Jun 1900; served Grand Fleet 1914–18; retired 1921; sheep farmer, [Gisborne](#).

² Lieutenant-Commander H. J. Bull, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 17

Aug 1913; served [Singapore](#) 1940–41 (DSC); company manager.

MLs 400 and 407 to 411, with Lieutenant Waylen ¹ in ML400 as Senior Officer. ² Both flotillas were escorted from [Auckland](#) by way of [Norfolk Island](#) to [Noumea](#) by the *Scarba*, the 80th arriving at [Guadalcanal](#) on 5 March 1944 and the 81st at the [Russell Islands](#) on 25 March.

A forward base known as HMNZS Cook II had been established in February 1943 at [Espiritu Santo](#) under Lieutenant-Commander (S) Twigg, RNZNVR, ³ to handle pay accounts, mails, etc., for the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla. The staff and equipment of the base were transferred to [Tulagi](#) in September 1943. When the motor-launch flotillas arrived, the base was shifted to Renard Sound in the [Russell Islands](#) and renamed Kahu. For accounting and administrative purposes ML400 was commissioned by Lieutenant-Commander Cave on 1 April 1944 as HMNZS Kahu.

During the first six months of their service in the [Solomons](#), each of the twelve Fairmiles averaged about 3000 miles a month on anti-submarine patrols and escort duties, and in less than eighteen months they logged a total of 380,000 miles. In August 1944 several of the launches went as far north as [Torokina](#) and the [Green Islands](#), and later ML402 was employed on escort duty to [Emirau Island](#).

The unlucky craft was ML400. On 27 April 1944 while escorting a supply ship from the [Russell Islands](#) to [New Georgia](#), she was disabled by an explosion and fire in her engine-room. She then drifted on to a reef and sustained severe damage to her hull and underwater fittings. She was back in service at the end of the year but soon in trouble again. On the night of 29 January 1945 she was lying at anchor in Lunga roads, [Guadalcanal](#), about 300 yards to seaward of the American ship *Serpens*, 3380 tons, which had arrived there from New Zealand on the 16th and was loading explosives. Shortly before midnight the *Serpens* was blown to pieces by a violent explosion. Chunks of steel weighing up to 40 pounds and other debris fell on the deck of ML400, causing considerable damage. She was able to proceed under her own power to the [Russell Islands](#) and the damage was made good in a fortnight.

¹ Lieutenant M. C. Waylen, DSC, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Jersey, [Channel Islands](#), 19 Dec 1913; mariner and meteorological officer; served RN 1940–

² The commanding officers of the Fairmiles were as follows: ML400, Lieutenant M. C. Waylen, DSC, RNZNVR; ML401, Lieutenant W. W. Black RNZNVR; ML402, Lieutenant B. W. Thorpe, RNZNVR; ML403, Lieutenant H. J. Bull, DSC, RNZNVR; ML404, Lieutenant R. L. R. Davidson, RNZNVR; ML405, Lieutenant R. E. Pugh-Williams, RNZNVR (Lieutenant F. G. Gresham, RNZNVR, from July 1944); ML406, Lieutenant J. W. Rainey, RNZNVR; ML407, Lieutenant J. C. Frankham, RNZNVR; ML408, Lieutenant R. P. W. Wills, RNZNVR; ML409, Lieutenant D. C. Algie, RNZNVR; ML410, Lieutenant P. C. Stannard, RNZNVR; ML411, Lieutenant W. H. Heath, RNZNVR.

³ Lieutenant-Commander (S) H. Twhigg, RNZNVR; born Dunedin, 17 Jun 1902; company director.

After refitting in New Zealand, the Matai and Tui returned to the Solomon Islands in October 1944, the former escorting the [United States](#) transport Alkaid which was carrying a draft of 700 officers and men of the Royal New Zealand Air Force to the [Green Islands](#) and [Emirau](#). By the end of the year the tide of war was flowing strongly against [Japan's](#) inner defences and the South Pacific had become a back area. In December 1944 the Matai was replaced by the Arabis which, with the Kiwi and Tui, now constituted the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla. The Kiwi was detached for two months for duty at [Suva](#) and in March 1945 she and the Tui went on escort duty to Hollandia, on the north coast of Dutch New Guinea. From 6 April to the beginning of June the Arabis was stationed in the Ellice Islands. The Kiwi returned to New Zealand in May 1945, and in July the Arabis and Tui escorted the Fairmiles in two sections back to [Auckland](#). ¹ The 25th Minesweeping Flotilla and the motor-launches had well earned Admiral Halsey's tribute that the 'alert and courageous actions of the crews of these gallant little ships merit the highest praise.'

¹ In January 1945 the two flotillas of Fairmiles were amalgamated as the 80th Motor Launch Flotilla under Lieutenant-Commander Bull as Senior Officer.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 22 – THE TIDE OF VICTORY

CHAPTER 22

The Tide of Victory

BARELY three weeks after the landing at [Empress Augusta Bay](#) in the northern [Solomons](#), [United States](#) forces carried out in the [Gilbert Islands](#) the first of the great amphibious operations that were to mark their victorious progress across the Central Pacific to the shores of [Japan](#).

The Gilbert Islands are a group of coral atolls spread for nearly 300 miles from north to south across the Equator between 170 degrees east longitude and the 180th meridian. Ocean Island, lying some 250 miles west of the group, and Nauru Island, about 170 miles farther west, are the principal sources of supply of phosphates for New Zealand and [Australia](#). The Gilberts derived considerable strategical importance from their position between Allied island bases in the South Pacific and those of [Japan](#) in the Marshalls and Carolines. Coastwatching stations controlled by the New Zealand Naval Board were maintained on most of the islands in the group. Makin and Abaiang were occupied by the Japanese in December 1941 and most of the other atolls in September 1942, when the coastwatchers on them were captured and executed. Nauru Island was occupied on 25 August 1942 and Ocean Island the following day.

During the next twelve months garrisons of special naval troops converted Butaritari (Makin atoll) and Betio ([Tarawa](#) atoll) into strong fortresses, and an airfield was constructed on the latter island. In the [Ellice Group](#), some 200 miles south-east of the Gilberts, [Funafuti](#) was occupied by the Americans in October 1942, Nanumea and Nukufetau in August 1943, and Baker Island, just above the Equator and east of the Gilberts, in September 1943. Airfields were constructed on all these islands.

The recapture of the [Gilbert Islands](#) was an essential preliminary to the great drive westward across the [Pacific](#) projected at the Quebec Conference in August 1943. Because of the great distances from bases and the size and complexity of the attacking forces, the operation posed difficult logistic problems. ¹

In October 1943 a Central Pacific Force was formed under the command of Vice-Admiral R. A. Spruance. It comprised, (a) a carrier

¹ [Tarawa](#) and Makin are approximately 2200 miles from [Pearl Harbour](#) and 1300 miles from [Efate](#) ([New Hebrides](#)), the two assembly bases of the expedition.

force (Task Force 50) totalling eleven aircraft-carriers, six battleships, three heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, and twenty-two destroyers; (b) an assault force (Task Force 54); (c) defence forces and shore-based aircraft (Task Force 57) operating from the [Ellice Group](#), Phoenix Island, and [Samoa](#). The assault force, also known as Fifth Amphibious Force, was divided into Task Force 52 (Northern Attack Force) for the capture of Makin, and Task Force 53 (Southern Attack Force) for the capture of [Tarawa](#) and Apamama. The Fifth Amphibious Force included eight escort aircraft-carriers, seven battleships, eight cruisers, about forty destroyers, two minesweepers, two groups of troop transports and supply ships, and thirty-eight landing craft. The Fifth Amphibious Corps, commanded by Major-General [Holland M. Smith](#), USMC, comprised all troops for operations in the Central Pacific. The 2nd Marine Division, commanded by Major-General Julian C. Smith, USMC, furnished the assault troops for the capture of [Tarawa](#) and Apamama, and the 27th Infantry Division, commanded by Major-General Ralph C. Smith, [US Army](#), was to take Makin.

The 2nd Marine Division, which had sustained heavy casualties in the [Guadalcanal](#) campaign, was recuperating and training in coastal camps near [Wellington](#). Many men were still suffering from malaria, and as late as 10 October the division had nearly 1400 ineffectives; but the arrival of reinforcements from [Pearl Harbour](#) brought it up to strength. Early in August 1943 Vice-Admiral Spruance arrived at [Wellington](#) to confer with Major-General Julian Smith, and two months later the latter flew with his staff to [Pearl Harbour](#) to discuss with the Fifth Amphibious Corps' commander the plans for the assault on [Tarawa](#).

In the meantime the 2nd Marine Division continued its intensive training in the coastal area about [Porirua](#) harbour. During September the troops embarked in transports at [Wellington](#) and carried out a series of realistic landing operations on the beaches north of the harbour. All available facilities were put at the disposal of the Marines, and the staffs of the Navy, Army, and Air Force and the Wellington Harbour Board were fully co-operative.

In the morning of 1 November 1943 the 2nd Marine Division sailed from [Wellington](#) for [Efate](#), in the [New Hebrides](#), the convoy of sixteen transports and supply ships being escorted by six destroyers. The utmost secrecy was observed regarding the destination of the ships, whose departure was 'ostensibly for the purpose of effecting practice landings in the vicinity of Hawkes Bay'. The convoy duly joined its covering force from [Pearl Harbour](#) at [Efate](#), where a further series of landing exercises was carried out. On 13 November the whole force, numbering fifty-five ships, sailed for [Tarawa](#) where the landing was to coincide with that on Makin by Task Force 52, which was on its way south from [Pearl Harbour](#).

The assault began in the early morning of 20 November and by the afternoon of the 22nd all resistance on Makin had ceased. Of the Japanese garrison of 800, a total of 696 were killed and 104 taken prisoners. The American losses were 56 killed and 131 wounded out of 6500 assault troops.

In the vanguard of the assault on [Tarawa](#) were three merchant service officers of the Royal New Zealand Naval Reserve who, because of their intimate knowledge of the [Gilbert Islands](#) and their navigational experience in those waters, had been assigned as pilots for the amphibious force. Lieutenant James Forbes ¹ was serving in the [United States](#) minesweeper Pursuit which, in company with the Requisite, swept the channel into [Tarawa](#) lagoon ahead of the destroyers Ringgold and Dashiell which gave gunfire support to the landing craft. Lieutenant Gordon Webster ² was serving as pilot in the Ringgold and Lieutenant Stanley Page ³ in the Dashiell. As they entered the lagoon all four ships came under heavy fire from the shore batteries, several of which were silenced by the destroyers. The Ringgold was hit twice by dud shells which caused minor damage. Throughout the period of the [Tarawa](#) operations the three New Zealand officers continued to pilot destroyers and other vessels to their assigned positions.

The Marines landed under heavy fire and in the face of fierce and fanatical opposition from the Japanese. Savage fighting lasted for seventy-six hours and it was not until the afternoon of 24 November that enemy resistance ended. At noon that day a carrier-based aircraft landed on the airfield, which had been repaired under fire. The capture of [Tarawa](#) cost the Marines 3301 casualties, of whom 990 were killed in action or died of wounds. The enemy killed totalled 4690, only 17

Japanese and 129 Korean labourers being taken as prisoners. Apamama, 76 miles south of [Tarawa](#), was captured on 21 November by a small force landed from the [United States](#) submarine Nautilus, the twenty-three Japanese found there being killed. No Japanese were found on Abaiang, Marakai, and Maiana.

The American operations in the [Gilbert Islands](#) were supported by approximately 900 aircraft flown from the carriers of Task Force 50. During the assault phase six Japanese submarines from

¹ Lieutenant J. Forbes, RNZNR, US Bronze Star; born [Scotland](#), 31 Jan 1903; master mariner; pilot, [Auckland](#); later manager, Devonport Steam Ferry Co. Ltd.

² Lieutenant G. J. Webster, RNZNR, US Bronze Star; born Edgbaston, [Birmingham](#), 16 Sep 1910; master mariner; subsequently commanded HMFS Viti.

³ Lieutenant S. S. Page, RNZNR, US Bronze Star; born Somerset, England, 17 Oct 1903; master mariner; chief officer, subsequently master, [London Missionary Society's](#) ship John Williams V.

[Truk](#) moved into the area. On 23 November the I-25 was sunk with depth-charges by the destroyers Frazier and Meade. On the following day the escort aircraft-carrier Liscome Bay ¹ was torpedoed by a submarine and sank with the loss of 54 officers, including Rear-Admiral Mullinix and Captain I. B. Wiltsie, and 648 ratings. The only damage from enemy air attack was a torpedo hit on the light aircraft-carrier Independence ² which necessitated her withdrawal for repairs.

By the end of December American aircraft were operating from four airfields in the Gilberts in conjunction with frequent carrier air strikes on Japanese bases in the Marshalls, Wake Island, and Nauru and Ocean Islands.

The recapture of the Gilberts prepared the way for breaching the enemy's defence perimeter in the Central Pacific by the seizure of selected atolls in the Marshall Islands, which had been held by the Japanese since 1914. Widely scattered over an ocean area of 400,000 square miles, the Marshalls comprise thirty-four atolls

in two roughly parallel chains about 130 miles apart, extending from north-west to south-east. [Kwajalein](#), the Americans' main objective, centrally situated in the western chain, is 75 miles in length and 30 miles across at its widest point, the 700 square miles enclosed by its reefs and eighty-odd islands providing safe anchorage for hundreds of ships. Its main defences were on [Kwajalein](#) Island, at the southern end, and Roi-Namur, 44 miles distant at the north-east corner of the atoll, the latter having the best airfield in the Marshalls. Their capture involved two separate but simultaneous landings, each by a division of troops. It was also planned to occupy Majuro, about 270 miles to the south-east, which commanded Wotje, Maloelap, Mille, and Jaluit and the sea route to [Kwajalein](#), and was a first-class anchorage with two islands on which airfields could be constructed.

The forces for the invasion of the Marshalls were the greatest ever provided for an amphibious operation in the [Pacific](#) up to that time. The various task forces included 20 aircraft-carriers, 15 battleships, 18 cruisers, and 84 destroyers, as well as minesweepers, transports, supply ships, landing ships, and auxiliary vessels, in all nearly 300 ships. The assault and occupation troops numbered nearly 85,000. After heavy bombardments by the supporting ships and aircraft, the troops made successful landings at small cost in casualties. The Japanese dead totalled 8000-odd as against 318 Americans, and 437 prisoners were taken.

The Japanese main fleet, whose heavy cruisers had been badly mauled at [Rabaul](#) at the beginning of November 1943, made no

¹ Liscome Bay, 9000 tons displacement; speed 18 knots; 30 aircraft.

² Independence, 13,000 tons; speed 33 knots; 45–50 aircraft.

attempt to intervene and withdrew from [Truk](#) to the Western Pacific after the capture of [Kwajalein](#) and Majuro. The American occupation had gone so rapidly that it was decided to proceed at once with the capture of [Eniwetok](#), three months in advance of the date originally planned. Aircraft-carrier strikes to neutralise [Truk](#) were carried out on 16–17 February 1944 and wrought havoc. Two cruisers, four destroyers, two anti-submarine vessels, and thirty merchant ships totalling 191,700

tons were sunk and others damaged,¹ more than 300 Japanese aircraft were destroyed, and great damage was done to the shore installations of the naval base.

Landings were made at [Eniwetok](#) on 18 February and the Japanese garrison was wiped out in five days, 3334 being killed and 60-odd taken as prisoners at a cost of 716 Americans killed and wounded. The airfields on the islands of [Eniwetok](#) were rapidly expanded and in the great lagoon, 21 miles long and 17 miles wide, anchor berths were laid out for 1500 ships. The Marshall Islands operations had eliminated [Truk](#) and the eastern Carolines as an effective part of the enemy's defence system.

On 4 September 1943, while severe fighting was in progress about Salamaua in [New Guinea](#), the Allied Seventh Amphibious Force of General MacArthur's South-West Pacific Command had landed the 9th Australian Division on the south shore of Huon Peninsula, east of Lae. The capture of Lae and Salamaua during September and of Finschafen on 22 October ended the first phase of the [New Guinea](#) campaign. Complete control of Vitiaz and Dampier Straits between the mainland of [New Guinea](#) and the western end of [New Britain](#) was secured when Allied troops, including the 1st US Marine Division of [Guadalcanal](#) fame, landed at Arawe and Cape Gloucester in December 1943. By the end of February 1944 the two forces had cleared the western end of [New Britain](#), more than 7000 Japanese being killed and a few prisoners taken. [Rabaul](#) was under daily air attack, and on 18 February it and [Kavieng](#) in [New Ireland](#) were bombarded, but the extensive underground stores, barracks, and workshops were impervious to bombing. Admiral Kusaka and General Imamura with their garrison of 100,000 men took no further part in the war. Marooned on a tropical island by the long arm of Allied sea power, they were completely shut off from the outside world until their surrender in September 1945.

A fortnight after the occupation of the [Green Islands](#) by the New Zealanders in mid-February 1944, amphibious forces of MacArthur's South-West Pacific Command seized the Admiralty

¹ Among the ships sunk was the [Hoki Maru](#), 7112 tons, formerly the Union Steam Ship Company's [Hauraki](#), which had been captured by Japanese raiders in the [Indian Ocean](#) in July 1942, while on passage from New Zealand to Colombo with a valuable cargo of war supplies.

Islands which lie athwart the northern approaches to the Bismarck Sea. The Americans rapidly extended their holding and on 15 March occupied Manus Island, where the Lorengau airfield was captured. Five days later a force from Admiral Halsey's [South Pacific Command](#) bypassed [Kavieng](#) and seized [Emirau Island](#), thus completing the ring round [Rabaul](#).

The occupation of the Admiralty Islands not only gave the Allied forces complete control of the Bismarck Sea and the approaches to [Rabaul](#) and [Kavieng](#), but it brought the Caroline Islands and western [New Guinea](#) within range of heavy bombers and reconnaissance aircraft. It also put the Allies in possession of a great fleet anchorage in Seeadler harbour at Manus Island, which was rapidly developed as a major naval base equipped with floating docks and repair and servicing facilities. By November 1944 the establishment on Manus Island totalled 48,000 officers and men.

[Rabaul](#), for long the main bastion of the enemy's defence perimeter in the South Pacific, had been reduced to impotence. For months on end it was pounded daily by Allied bombers, this being the main task of the Royal New Zealand Air Force based in the [Solomons](#). The township was largely destroyed and the enormous supply dumps, one of which was more than a mile square, were systematically reduced. On 28 February [Tokyo](#) Radio commented that the situation at [Rabaul](#) had 'reached a serious stage for which we cannot hold even the slightest optimism'.

The complete isolation of the Japanese forces in the northern [Solomons](#) was effected during February 1944 when the [Green Islands](#) were occupied by New Zealand troops. This group of atolls, lying about 25 miles north-west from [Buka](#) and barely 120 miles east from [Rabaul](#), had long been used by the Japanese as a staging base for barges carrying supplies to [Buka](#) and [Bougainville](#). Troops of 14 Brigade of the 3rd New Zealand Division landed unopposed on [Nissan Island](#) in the early morning of 15 February. By the end of March more than 17,000 troops and 43,000 tons of supplies had been landed and heavy bombers were operating from an airfield with two 6000-foot runways constructed by the Americans. During March and April the New Zealanders were relieved by [US Army](#) troops.

The Solomon Islands campaign, which had lasted eighteen months, cost the Imperial Japanese Navy the loss of nearly eighty ships, including two aircraft-

carriers, two battleships, seven cruisers, forty-three destroyers, and twenty-three submarines. Many others were damaged and out of service for months. Great numbers of transports and supply ships were sunk with the loss of thousands of troops and many thousands of tons of stores and equipment. More than 2900 aircraft had been destroyed with an almost equal loss of trained air crews. The latter loss was felt severely for, owing to shortages of fuel and training facilities, it was not possible to replace all these first-line airmen. Japanese naval air strength was reduced to a level from which it was never able to recover. The Japanese Army sustained heavy casualties in battle and sickness. The 17th Army, numbering about 40,000 under Lieutenant-General Hyakutake, and some 20,000 naval men under Vice-Admiral Sanajima, were shut up in [Bougainville](#) to suffer sickness and privation until their surrender on 8 September 1945.

The American occupation of [Kwajalein](#), [Majuro](#), and [Eniwetok](#) in the Marshall Islands and the carrier task force blow at [Truk](#) profoundly changed the strategic situation in the [Pacific](#). The seizure of the Marshall Islands atolls, the first major break in the Japanese defence perimeter, had established powerful Allied forces 2200 miles to the westward of [Pearl Harbour](#) in bases well placed for further advances. Both as a base for the [Japanese Fleet](#) and advanced supply, [Truk](#) was now useless. Thus [Rabaul](#) and Solomon Islands garrisons were cut off from outside support and supply. By the end of February 1944 the westward drive of the Allies across the Central Pacific had reached a stage at which it was necessary to clear [New Guinea](#) of the enemy in order to secure the flank of their advance to the Marianas and the [Philippines](#).

The nearest large concentration of Japanese forces west of the newly reoccupied Huon Peninsula was at Wewak, some hundreds of miles to the north-west. It was decided to make a giant stride to bypass and neutralise this stronghold by a landing 200 miles beyond Wewak, near Hollandia, on the coast of Dutch New Guinea. To prevent interference from Japanese bases in the western Carolines, a powerful task force which included eleven aircraft-carriers, under Admiral Spruance, Commander United States Fifth Fleet, carried out a great air strike on Palau Island on 30 March. Japanese shipping totalling 110,000 tons was sunk, 150 aircraft were destroyed, and the airfields badly damaged at small cost. The islands of Yap, Ulithi, and Woleai were attacked on the two following days. The attacks also resulted in

the death of Admiral Mineichi Koga, Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Combined Fleet. He had decided to transfer his headquarters from Palau to Davao in the [Philippines](#), and was killed with members of his staff when the flying boat in which they were travelling crashed in an attempted night landing near Cebu. Koga was succeeded by [Admiral Soyamu Toyoda](#), Commander of the Yokosuka naval base.

The assault on Hollandia was the greatest amphibious operation undertaken in the South-West Pacific up to that time, more than 200 ships, including Australian and Dutch, being employed. On 22 April 1944 troops landed virtually unopposed at Tanamerah Bay, 30 miles west of Hollandia, and at Humboldt Bay, immediately to the east, which trapped the Hollandia airfields, while a diversionary landing at Aitape, 90 miles farther east, secured yet another airfield. About 50,000 Japanese were cut off in this operation, many to die of sickness or starvation in the jungle, the survivors to give themselves up after the war. The New Guinea campaign was finished at the end of July 1944 by a series of amphibious operations along the north coast carried out by American and Australian forces.

The preparations for the conquest of the Marianas Islands indicated the colossal scale on which amphibious warfare was now being waged in the [Pacific](#). More than 600 ships, 2000 aircraft, and some 300,000 men were assembled at various bases under the overall command of Admiral Spruance. The main base in [Hawaii](#) was so far away from [Saipan](#) in the Marianas that the convoy of transports carrying most of the assault battalions had to sail from [Pearl Harbour](#) twenty-three days before the landing was to take place. Carrier task forces ranged far and wide on their preliminary air strikes on the Marianas and Marcus and Wake Islands, while long-range bombers from the vast semicircle of airfields on Green, [Emirau](#), and Manus Islands and at Hollandia neutralised the enemy's bases at [Truk](#), Palau, and Yap.

The Marianas form a section 450 miles in length of an almost continuous chain of islands extending some 1350 miles southward from [Japan](#). Their strategic importance is readily apparent. [Saipan](#), the initial objective, was the key to the Japanese defences. There, during twenty-five years of occupation, formidable fortifications had been added to the natural obstacles to assault. The American landing was made on 15 June 1944, but the stubborn and bitter defence of the Japanese garrison lasted for more than three weeks.

It was at this juncture that Admiral Spruance learned of the sortie of a powerful Japanese fleet which included nine aircraft-carriers, five battleships, eleven cruisers, numerous destroyers, and six oil-tankers. To meet the threat of this force, Spruance disposed his fast carriers and battleships to the westward of [Saipan](#).

The expected Japanese air attack on 19 June developed into the most powerful yet experienced by an American naval force. The enemy strikes, however, were poorly co-ordinated and the air fighting ended in a signal success for the Americans. More than 400 Japanese aircraft were destroyed in action and others were doubtless lost when the carriers Shokaku (veteran of the Coral Sea) and Taiho ¹ were torpedoed and sunk by two American submarines.

It was well on in the afternoon of 20 June when a strike of 216 aircraft from the American carriers found and attacked the

¹ Shokaku, 30,000 tons; Taiho, 31,000 tons; speed 30 knots. Each carried 80 aircraft and mounted sixteen 5-inch and many small anti-aircraft guns.

Japanese force about 260 miles west of [Saipan](#). The carrier Hiyo ¹ and two 10,000-ton tankers were sunk and damage was done to four other carriers, a battleship, a heavy cruiser, and a tanker. Many aircraft were lost with the ships and twenty-two enemy fighters were shot down in combat. Darkness and shortage of fuel caused the loss of many returning American aircraft, but most of their crews were rescued by the ships.

The recapture of [Guam](#), southernmost and largest island in the Marianas, which had been seized by the Japanese on 12 December 1941, was effected in three weeks of heavy fighting in which the enemy lost more than 17,000 killed. Tinian Island, close to [Saipan](#), was also occupied. [Guam](#) subsequently became the headquarters of Admiral Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief Pacific. Imperial Headquarters in [Tokyo](#) regarded the loss of the Marianas as a decisive victory for the Allies. On 18 July 1944 the Tojo cabinet, which had misguided the affairs of [Japan](#) since pre- [Pearl Harbour](#) days, was forced from office to give place to a government charged with giving 'fundamental reconsideration to the problem of continuing the war'.

To 'gain and maintain control of the eastern approaches to the [Philippines-Formosa- China](#) coast area', the Americans had decided to occupy the Palau Islands, Yap, and Ulithi, which form a link between the Marianas and the southern [Philippines](#). Admiral Halsey, then commanding the United States Third Fleet, was in charge of the operations with the designation of Commander, Western Pacific Task Forces. He had at his disposal nearly 800 ships, 1600 aircraft, and some 250,000 officers and men, of whom 202,000 were Navy, 28,400 US Marines, and 19,600 US Army. Prior to the landings, carrier-based air attacks were made over a vast area to eliminate Japanese air forces within striking distance of the amphibious operations.

The 1st Marine Division landed on Peleliu Island in the Palaus on 15 September 1944, and although the Japanese were not exterminated till November, American aircraft were using the captured airfield on 24 September and a completely new heavy-bomber runway was in operation by 16 October. Five days sufficed to secure Angaur Island, where a heavy-bomber field was ready soon afterwards. The extensive atoll of Ulithi, which was occupied without opposition, provided the United States Fleet with an advanced anchorage for subsequent operations. It was decided that the seizure of Yap was unnecessary. Simultaneously with the assault on Peleliu, General MacArthur's South-West Pacific Force occupied Morotai, northernmost island in the Moluccas, on the southern flank of the route from the Palaus to the [Philippines](#). This operation

¹ Hiyo, 28,000 tons; speed 28 knots; 60 aircraft; sixteen 5-inch guns.

completely isolated the Japanese base on the large island of Halmahera, just south of Morotai, and permitted the construction of air-fields and a motor torpedo-boat base to support the coming invasion of the [Philippines](#).

That campaign was heralded by carrier-based air strikes on the 100 Japanese airfields within flying range of Leyte Island, 1000 aircraft and forty ships being destroyed and many damaged. The American amphibious force sailed in 650 ships from Manus Island and [New Guinea](#) harbours during the nine days preceding the assault on Leyte, where the landings were made on 20 October against little resistance.

The Japanese Navy reacted promptly and vigorously and threw its full strength into the struggle to stay the Allied onslaught. It was a forlorn hope in a situation far removed from that of December 1941. The First Diversion Attack Force, commanded by Admiral Kurita, consisted of five battleships, ten heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and fifteen destroyers. The battleships included the giants Musashi and Yamato.¹ Force 'C', commanded by Vice-Admiral Nishimura, numbered two battleships, one heavy cruiser, and four destroyers. After fuelling at Brunei, North Borneo, both groups moved to the Sulu Sea, whither they were closely followed by the Second Diversion Attack Force of two heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, and seven destroyers, under Vice-Admiral Shima, which had come down from [Okinawa](#). Co-ordinated with these movements was the sortie southward from [Japan](#) of the so-called 'Main Body' – six carriers with a hundred-odd aircraft, two 'battleship-carriers' with no aircraft,² three light cruisers and ten destroyers, commanded by [Admiral Ozawa](#).

The essence of the Japanese 'Sho Plan' was that the two attack forces were to approach Leyte Gulf through Surigao Strait from the south and San Bernardino Strait from the north, with the object of destroying the allied landing force, while the 'Main Body' lured Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet away to the northward. All available submarines were ordered to patrol the eastern approaches to the [Philippines](#) and the Navy's Second Air Fleet (about 450 aircraft) moved from [Formosa](#) to the airfields in Luzon.

Admiral Nishimura's section of the southern force was attacked in the Sulu Sea on 24 October by carrier aircraft of the United States Third Fleet, but suffered little damage. Pressing on, the enemy entered Surigao Strait, between Leyte and Mindanao, where terrible punishment awaited them. Nishimura's ships were thrice attacked

¹ The Musashi and Yamato were by far the largest warships ever built. Length 863 feet; breadth 127 feet; displacement 72,810 tons; speed 27 knots; nine 18·1-inch guns (projectile 3000 lb); numerous anti-aircraft batteries included 6-inch guns in triple turrets; complement, 2400 officers and ratings.

² Ise and Hyuga, 30,000 tons; speed 22 knots; formerly twelve 14-inch guns, reduced to eight when the two after turrets were replaced by a flight

deck and a hangar for 20 aircraft.

in the darkness by motor torpedo-boats and destroyers which torpedoed the battleship Yamashiro and three destroyers; and finally they were blasted by the concentrated fire of the battleships and cruisers of the United States Seventh Fleet. The Yamashiro and Fuso ¹ and three destroyers were sunk. The cruiser Mogami ² and one destroyer retired damaged. The second group, that commanded by Admiral Shima, which followed in support, fared little better. The cruiser Abukuma ³ was torpedoed by a motor-boat, and when his flagship Nachi ⁴ collided with the Mogami, Shima retired to the westward. The Abukuma and Mogami were sunk next morning by carrier aircraft. No American ship was lost and a destroyer and two motor-boats were damaged in this fierce action.



Battle for Leyte Gulf, Philippine Islands, October 1944

Battle for Leyte Gulf, Philippine Islands, October 1944

Actually, Admiral Kurita's force was the first of the Japanese groups to be attacked. In the early hours of 23 October the United

¹ Yamashiro and Fuso, 33,000 tons; 22 knots; twelve 14-inch, sixteen 6-inch, eight 5-inch guns.

² Mogami, 13,000 tons; 33 knots; eight 8-inch, eight 5-inch guns; twelve torpedo-tubes.

³ Abukuma, light cruiser, 5700 tons; 33 knots; seven 5·5-inch, two 3-inch guns; eight torpedo-tubes.

⁴ Nachi, 12,700 tons; 33 knots; ten 8-inch, six 4·7-inch guns; eight torpedo-tubes.

States submarines Darter and Dace sank the cruisers Atago (flagship) and Maya and put four torpedoes into the Takao, ¹ causing her to withdraw under escort to Brunei Bay. Kurita shifted his flag to the Yamato and carried on into the Sibuyan Sea, where for eight hours next day his ships were attacked by swarms of American carrier-based aircraft. The battleship Musashi was hit by ten torpedoes and sixteen heavy bombs and capsized and sank with the loss of more than half of her crew. The Yamato and Nagato ² and several other ships were damaged by bombs and the cruiser Myoko ³ withdrew after being torpedoed. Kurita turned his force to the westward, but after dark he reversed his course and carried on for San Bernardino Strait, between the islands of Luzon and Samar. 'With confidence in heavenly guidance, the entire force will attack', he signalled to his ships.

During the day the northernmost of Halsey's three carrier forces had been attacked by Japanese naval aircraft, mostly shore-based, but some of them from [Admiral Ozawa](#)'s force then well to the north-east of Luzon. More than one hundred were shot down, but the carrier [Princeton](#) ⁴ was hit and set on fire and had to be sunk. Late in the afternoon Halsey's aircraft sighted Ozawa's ships steering southward. Having heard that Kurita had turned back, Halsey ordered the whole of his Third Fleet to steam northward and destroy the enemy next day. He did not know that Ozawa's carriers had barely thirty aircraft left and that the force had come down from [Japan](#) mainly as a decoy. The Japanese lure was working well.

Kurita's fleet cleared San Bernardino Strait soon after midnight of the 24th and headed southward for Leyte Gulf with intent to destroy the American invasion force. Instead of Halsey's Third Fleet, the Japanese encountered only six escort carriers screened by destroyers. They were one of three similar groups which, because of the near exhaustion of gun ammunition and torpedoes in the United States Seventh Fleet in the night action in Surigao Strait, were all that stood between the enemy

and the mass of shipping off the Leyte beaches. Pursued by four battleships, six cruisers, and eleven destroyers, the small, slow carriers and their escorts fought back with their aircraft, guns, and torpedoes as they retired under cover of smoke, supported only by aircraft from the other carrier groups to the southward.

In the course of this unequal action the Japanese heavy cruisers

¹ Atago, Maya, and Takao, 12,200 tons; 33 knots; ten 8-inch, four 4·7-inch guns; eight torpedo-tubes.

² Nagato, battleship, 35,000 tons; 25 knots; eight 16-inch, twenty 5-inch guns; three aircraft.

³ Myoko, 12,700 tons; 33 knots; ten 8-inch, six 4·7-inch guns; eight torpedo-tubes.

⁴ Princeton, light fleet aircraft-carrier; 13,000 tons; 33 knots; 45–50 aircraft.

Suzuya, Chokai, and Chikuma were sunk and the Kumano badly damaged by torpedoes. ¹ The escort carrier Gambier Bay ² and three American destroyers were sunk and others damaged by gunfire. At the height of the engagement, when the American force seemed doomed to complete destruction, the Japanese suddenly broke off the action and retired northward and through San Bernardino Strait. The light cruiser Noshiro ³ and two destroyers were sunk by carrier aircraft next day. Shortly before midday of the 25th Japanese suicide bombers sank the escort carrier St. Lo and damaged two others in the first organised Kamikaze attack. More than one hundred aircraft were lost by the escort carriers during the action with Kurita's force.

At daybreak that morning Halsey's Third Fleet found Ozawa's force in two groups well to the north-east of Luzon. From shortly after 8 a.m. till late in the afternoon the slaughter went on, cruisers and destroyers finishing off ships crippled by the air strikes. The carriers Zuikaku, Zuiho, Chitose, and Chiyoda, the light cruiser Tama, ⁴ and a destroyer were sunk and other ships more or less badly damaged at a

total cost of forty American aircraft shot down. Next day a small Japanese naval force which had landed some 2000 troops on the west side of Leyte Gulf was attacked by carrier aircraft. The cruiser Kinu, a destroyer, and two transports were sunk.

Thus ended the greatest naval battle of the Second World War. It was a disastrous and bitter defeat for the proud Imperial Japanese Navy with its traditions of the Yellow Sea and Tsushima. No longer could Japan's fleet count as an effective fighting force. Its surviving ships were fated to be destroyed in detail during the coming months. Suicide attacks by Kamikaze aircraft were now the last vain hope at sea of Japan's rapidly shrinking empire.

The next turn of the campaign in the Philippine Islands took the Japanese by surprise when landings in great force were made in Lingayen Gulf, on the west coast of Luzon, on 9 January 1945. More than 850 ships took part in the operation, the assault being made by 2500 landing craft and 900 amphibious tanks and the troops of two United States Army corps. While the troops rapidly advanced inland, the carrier task forces of Halsey's Third Fleet swept the South China Sea for ten days, their aircraft causing widespread destruction. Manila and its great harbour were captured

¹ Suzuya and Kumano, 13,000 tons; ten 8-inch, eight 5-inch guns; twelve 24-inch torpedo-tubes. Chokai, 12,000 tons; ten 8-inch, four 4·7-inch guns; eight 24-inch torpedo-tubes. Chikuma, 12,000 tons; eight 8-inch, eight 5-inch guns; twelve 24-inch torpedo-tubes. All, speed 33 knots. Kumano was sunk on 25 November 1944.

² Gambier Bay and St. Lo, escort carriers, 12,000 tons; 18 knots; 25 aircraft.

³ Noshiro, 7000 tons; 32 knots; six 6·1-inch guns; four 24-inch torpedo-tubes.

⁴ Zuikaku, 30,000 tons; 30 knots; 80 aircraft. Zuiho, 12,000 tons; 25 knots; 36 aircraft. Chitose and Chiyoda, 11,000 tons; 20 knots; 36 aircraft. Tama and Kinu, 5700 tons; 33 knots; seven 5·5-inch guns; eight 24-inch

torpedo-tubes.

on 24 February. The Japanese Army continued its bitter resistance in the [Philippines](#) for some weeks longer, but the severance of the enemy's sea communications with the oil and other resources of the 'South-East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere' was complete and final.

All was now ready for the Allied assault on the inner defences of [Japan](#). The Commander-in-Chief Pacific had been directed to seize one or more positions in the Nanpo Shoto (Volcano Islands) and the Nansei Shoto (Ryukyu Islands) to secure additional airfield sites 'in order to increase the weight of shore-based air attacks against [Japan](#), to complete the blockade and to facilitate preparations for the invasion of [Japan](#).' [Iwo Jima](#) was selected as the most suitable objective in the Nanpo Shoto.

This little island which had three airfields had been converted into a strong fortress with an intricate system of underground defences and artillery and machine guns sited to cover all possible landing places. The operations for the capture of [Iwo Jima](#) were under the command of Admiral Spruance, whose Fifth Fleet consisted of 17 carriers with 1170 aircraft embarked, 8 fast battleships, 16 cruisers, and 77 destroyers. The amphibious force numbered 495 ships, including 11 escort carriers with 352 aircraft, 7 battleships, 4 cruisers, and 15 destroyers. The assault troops, which included two [US Marines](#) divisions, numbered 75,000. The landing was made on 19 February 1945, but twenty-five days elapsed before the Japanese resistance ended with a loss of more than 21,000 killed and 212 prisoners. In the meantime, carrier aircraft of the Fifth Fleet had begun a series of devastating attacks on the mainland of [Japan](#).

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 23 – THE NEW ZEALAND CRUISERS

CHAPTER 23

The New Zealand Cruisers

WHEN the [Achilles](#) was taken in hand at Portsmouth in April 1943 for an extensive refit and rearming, it was estimated that she would be ready for sea by the middle of September 1943. But, because of serious damage caused by an explosion in the ship in June and other delays, the date of completion was put forward to May 1944.

The question of an early replacement for the [Achilles](#) was raised by the High Commissioner for New Zealand, the Rt. Hon. W. J. Jordan. In a telegram to the Prime Minister dated 30 June he said: '... I wonder whether under the circumstances, you would consider having another ship of the same type and so engage ship's company at earlier date, thus maintaining present high efficiency. It is hinted that HMS Gambia, ¹ comparatively new, is refitted and will probably be ready for commission about September....'

On the suggestion of the New Zealand Naval Board, the Prime Minister replied as follows:

Replacement of HMNZS [Achilles](#) by HMS Gambia would be accepted but we are not prepared to press for this as we have no information as to the urgency of providing cruisers for other theatres of war. It is possible that the manning situation in the [United Kingdom](#) makes the suggested exchange convenient to the Admiralty as it would provide earlier active employment for the New Zealand crew at present in [Achilles](#), which is desirable, and give more time for the assembly of a Royal Navy crew for [Achilles](#).

The matter became much more urgent when the [Leander](#) was torpedoed and badly damaged in action in the Solomon Islands in July 1943. Accordingly, on 7 August the Naval Board proposed to the Admiralty that the ship's company of the [Achilles](#) should recommission the Gambia, and that when the [Leander](#) arrived in the [United States](#) for repairs she should pay off and her crew go to

¹ Gambia, light cruiser of 'Fiji' class of eleven ships named after British colonies. Built at Wallsend-on-Tyne; laid down 24 Jul 1939; launched 30 Nov 1940; completed 21 Feb 1942; length 555 ft 6 in; breadth 62 ft;

standard displacement, 8000 tons; speed 32 knots; twelve 6-inch guns, eight 4-inch, and 22 light anti-aircraft guns; six 21-inch torpedo-tubes. When the *Gambia* during her first commission paid a visit to Bathurst, capital of the small West African colony, the Governor referred to her as 'our own ship'. The native people subscribed £800 to a welfare fund for the ship's company and presented her with a silk white ensign. As a unit of the Eastern Fleet, the *Gambia* took part in the operations against Madagascar, covering the landing of the troops who captured Diego Suarez in May 1942.

England to recommission the *Achilles*. It was requested that the *Gambia* be lent to the Royal New Zealand Navy and proceed to New Zealand, since both the other cruisers were out of action and it was considered most desirable that the New Zealand Navy should take an active part in the war in the Pacific.

The High Commissioner reported on 25 August the First Lord's assurance that the Admiralty would very much like to meet the request unreservedly, but that it was very difficult to meet cruiser requirements in the Atlantic and Mediterranean and for future operations in the Indian Ocean. Consequently, while the Admiralty was ready to agree that the *Gambia* be manned by the crew of the *Achilles* and lent to New Zealand, it could do so only on condition that she remained under the operational control of the Admiralty. It was the present intention that the *Gambia*, after commissioning and working up, should join the Eastern Fleet. The Admiralty had no objection to the crew of the *Leander* manning the *Achilles* and the latter ship returning to New Zealand when ready. These arrangements were agreed to by the Naval Board and the Admiralty was informed that they were acceptable to the Government.

In a personal letter to the High Commissioner, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr A. V. Alexander, said the New Zealand Government's concurrence in the proposals 'will be of the greatest assistance and we shall be proud indeed to have a ship manned by a New Zealand crew working with the Royal Navy. It is, of course, understood that the *Gambia* will commission as a ship of the Royal New Zealand Navy, but as she will be operating under Admiralty control, it would be reasonable for us to assume complete financial responsibility for her maintenance and material.'

This arrangement continued for twelve months. In a memorandum to the Minister of Defence dated 7 September 1944, the Naval Secretary pointed out that

the terms on which the [Achilles](#) and [Leander](#) were lent to New Zealand provided that the cost of maintenance and normal refits, and of any alterations necessary to keep them up to the standard of similar ships of the Royal Navy, were to be borne by New Zealand. Since the Royal New Zealand Navy could not provide sufficient ratings to man three cruisers, the [Leander](#) would not be recommissioned with a New Zealand crew. The Dominion would be responsible for at least a part of the cost of her large refit and also, of course, for the repair of her action damage. It was desirable, however, that the [Gambia](#) should be transferred to the Royal New Zealand Navy. The naval members of the Naval Board, therefore, recommended that the Government should take over full financial responsibility for the material and maintenance of the [Gambia](#) as from 8 May 1944, the date on which the [Leander](#) became a Royal Navy manned commitment, so that they would have continuous responsibility for two cruisers as hitherto, and that such responsibility be defined in the same way as for the [Achilles](#) and [Leander](#) and, before them, the [Dunedin](#) and [Diomedes](#). This proposal was approved by War Cabinet on 26 October 1944 and agreed to by the Admiralty.

HMNZS [Gambia](#) was commissioned at Liverpool on 22 September 1943 under the command of Captain William-Powlett, DSC, RN. ¹ A few of the officers and three-quarters of the ratings were New Zealanders. On 3 October the High Commissioner visited the [Gambia](#) and addressed the ship's company. He read the following message from the Prime Minister, the [Rt. Hon. P. Fraser](#):

On behalf of the [New Zealand Government](#) I wish to convey to Captain William-Powlett and the officers and men on the commissioning of the [Gambia](#) for service in the Royal New Zealand Navy best wishes for a successful commission. We know that you will add to the laurels already gained by the Royal New Zealand Navy, and that your ship will prove a source of pride to the Colony whose name it bears, and in which the people of [Gambia](#) have shown such great interest. The link which you form between the Dominion of New Zealand and the Colony of [Gambia](#) will, we trust, be a firm and lasting one. Kia ora.

At the time she was commissioned, the [Gambia](#) was completing an extensive refit which included the renewal of the fire-main system, additions to the anti-aircraft armament, and elaborate radar equipment. She was floated out of dock on 10

October 1943 and went to sea next morning for steaming and gunnery trials. After a week at anchor in the Clyde 'shaking down', the ship arrived at Scapa Flow on 20 October and was attached to the First Cruiser Squadron, Home Fleet. The next six weeks were spent in working-up exercises, all hands showing great keenness in learning to fight their ship.

The first task assigned to the Gambia was to take part in Operation STONEWALL, planned to intercept enemy blockade runners on passage to and from the Bay of Biscay. She arrived at Plymouth from Scapa Flow on 5 December 1943 to work with HM ships Glasgow and Enterprise ² under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief Plymouth.

Up to June 1941 when the Germans invaded Russia, a large volume of war materials had been carried from the Far East by the trans-Siberian railway, this traffic being one of the principal

¹ Captain N. J. W. William-Powlett, DSC, RN; born Devon, 1896; entered Royal Navy 1908; awarded DSC as Sub-Lieutenant of HMS Tipperary in Battle of Jutland, 31 May 1916; Captain, 31 Dec 1938; CO Anti-Submarine Experimental Establishment, 1940–42; CO HMNZS Gambia, Sep 1943–Apr 1945.

² HMS Glasgow, 9100 tons; 32 knots; twelve 6-inch, eight 4-inch guns; six 21-inch torpedo-tubes. HMS Enterprise, 7580 tons; 32 knots; seven 6-inch, five 4-inch guns; sixteen torpedo-tubes.

'leaks' in the British blockade of Germany. Thereafter, German and Italian ships which had been lying idle in Japanese and other Far East ports were employed as blockade runners to and from Europe. During the next twelve months at least twelve ships arrived at ports in the Bay of Biscay with cargoes of rubber, tin, and other commodities from the Far East. A shortage of cruisers at that time prevented organised measures being taken against the blockade runners but they did not go unmolested. Two outward-bound ships and three loaded vessels from the Far East were sunk during 1942, two of the latter in the Indian Ocean. During the first quarter of 1943 four homeward-bound blockade runners from the Far East were intercepted and sunk, making a total of seven lost since November 1942. Only one cargo of 5000

tons of rubber and 2000 tons of tin got through in that winter. Four outward-bound ships were also sunk and several others were damaged and cancelled their voyages.

The Gambia sailed from [Plymouth](#) on 12 December and arrived at Horta in the Azores three days later. During the next fortnight she and the Glasgow patrolled a line about 500 miles north-northwest of the islands, relieving each other at intervals to refuel at Horta. Nothing happened until the evening of 23 December, when an aircraft from the American escort carrier Card sighted a ship suspected as an inward-bound blockade runner, about 560 miles to the westward of Cape Ushant. About the same time other aircraft patrolling the southern part of the Bay of Biscay reported up to twelve ships — one a merchant ship and the others destroyers — steering a westerly course. They were reported next morning by several aircraft to be still heading to the westward in an area north-west of Cape Finisterre. The Gambia and Glasgow were ordered to take up a patrol line north of the Azores and the Enterprise left [Plymouth](#), steaming to the south-west at 25 knots.

At midday 24 December the shadowing aircraft reported that the enemy force had turned to an easterly course after meeting an inward-bound blockade runner whose description fitted the German motor-vessel Osorno, 6950 tons, known to be on passage from the [Far East](#). About three hours later the convoy was attacked by eight aircraft, one of which reported a direct hit and another a very near miss on a merchant ship. ¹

A widespread net was now cast across the approaches to the Bay of Biscay to intercept another blockade runner believed to be near. For this stage of Operation STONEWALL the Commander-in-Chief Plymouth had at his disposal four cruisers, a fast minelayer

¹ An aircraft reconnaissance on 28 December found the Osorno at Le Verdon, apparently aground and being unloaded into lighters.

(HMS Ariadne) ¹ and two Free French destroyers, with aircraft of Coastal Command of the Royal Air Force working in close cooperation.

In the forenoon of 27 December a Sunderland flying boat patrolling about 500

miles north-west of Cape Finisterre sighted a merchant ship steering to the south-eastward. The Enterprise to the eastward and the Glasgow, about 300 miles west from the vessel, were ordered to steam at best speed toward an intercepting position about 300 miles north-west of Cape Finisterre. About an hour later the Gambia, which had left Fayal shortly after midnight, and HMS Penelope,² then on her way from Gibraltar to the Azores, were also ordered to steer for that position. In the meantime the merchant ship was being shadowed by aircraft which made several unsuccessful bombing attacks.

Early in the afternoon the Commander-in-Chief Plymouth made a signal designating the Gambia, Glasgow, Enterprise, and Penelope as Force 3 under the command of Captain William-Powlett in HMNZS Gambia. The cruisers were informed that eleven or twelve German destroyers might have sailed from the French coast to meet the blockade runner, possibly before daybreak on the 28th.

But the fate of that vessel was already sealed. At 4.15 p.m. a heavy bomber of Coastal Command, manned by Czechs, arrived over the ship to take over shadowing, and at once attacked with bombs and rockets which scored direct hits. A heavy explosion followed, and when the striking force of Halifaxes arrived at six o'clock the ship was burning fiercely and sinking. Four lifeboats carrying seventyfour officers and men, including the master, were in the vicinity. They were picked up forty-eight hours later by four Canadian corvettes. They reported that three men had been killed in the ship, which was the Alsterufer laden with rubber, tin, and tungsten from [Bangkok](#) and [Singapore](#).³

There remained the possibility, if the enemy were not forewarned of the loss of their blockade runner, of bringing to action the escort force of destroyers which almost certainly would be on their way out to meet her. Accordingly, the Glasgow, which was not far away from the Alsterufer when she sank, was ordered to join the Enterprise and sweep to the eastward so as to reach a position about 150 miles north-west of Cape Finisterre by nine o'clock next morning. The Gambia was too far to the westward to be able to make that rendezvous, but was well placed to intercept any outward-bound blockade

¹ HMS Ariadne, minelayer, 2650 tons; speed 40 knots; six 4.7-inch

guns.

² HMS Penelope, light cruiser, 5270 tons; speed 32 knots; six 6-inch, eight 4-inch guns; six torpedo-tubes; sunk off [Naples](#), 18 February 1944.

³ Alsterufer, motor-vessel of 2729 tons gross register; speed 15 knots; built in 1939 as a fruit carrier. In 1941 she was employed as a supply ship for German raiders in the South [Atlantic](#) and the [Indian Ocean](#).

runner that might accompany the expected escort force and evade the Glasgow and Enterprise while they were dealing with the destroyers. At three o'clock in the morning she headed north-east at 27 knots.

The first definite news of the enemy was received at 9.28 a.m. on the 28th, when an aircraft reported four destroyers steaming west at 14 knots in a position about 250 miles north-west of Cape Finisterre, seemingly still unaware of the sinking of the Alsterufer. At eleven o'clock, however, another aircraft reported that the enemy had reversed course to the eastward, the number of destroyers being given as ten. The Glasgow and Enterprise, then about 45 miles to the south-eastward, headed north-north-east at high speed.

Action was joined at 1.46 p.m. when the Glasgow opened fire with eight destroyers in sight at a range of 18,500 yards; the Enterprise joined in four minutes later. The enemy ships made good use of smoke floats, retiring behind their screens as the cruisers' fire became effective. The destroyers kept together on a south-south-east course for about three-quarters of an hour, during which time the cruisers engaged one or another as the smoke allowed and probably damaged several of them. At two o'clock a Focke-Wulf aircraft appeared and released a glider bomb,¹ but effective fire from the Glasgow forced the enemy to turn away and the bomb fell astern of the ship and exploded harmlessly. The destroyers fired torpedoes with considerable accuracy but the cruisers successfully evaded their tracks. The enemy's gunfire was fairly accurate and both cruisers were straddled frequently, but the only direct hit was on the Glasgow and killed two men of the port pom-pom's crew, six others being slightly injured.

At 2.28 p.m. the enemy force divided, four ships turning away to the north-west and the others disappearing south behind smoke. The cruisers turned westward in pursuit of the four. Two minutes later another glider bomb exploded in the sea about 400 yards off the port quarter of the Enterprise. By 3.15 p.m. one destroyer had been brought to a standstill, another was damaged and retiring under cover of smoke, a third was being engaged by the Glasgow and the fourth by the Enterprise. These last two were sunk twenty-five minutes later and the Glasgow then sank the one which had been stopped. The destroyers sunk were two of the Elbing and one of the Narvik class. ² Sixty-two survivors were picked up by British minesweepers, 164 by a small Irish steamer which landed them at Cork, and four others by Spanish destroyers.

HMNZS Gambia, steaming at 27 knots against a head sea, was

¹ Glider bombs were fitted with wings and when released were directed toward their target by means of wireless control from the aircraft.

² Elbing class: 1100 tons; speed 33 knots; four 4·1-inch guns; six torpedo-tubes. Narvik class: 2400 tons; 36 knots; four 5·9-inch guns; eight torpedo-tubes.

more than 100 miles south-west from the scene of the action at the time the destroyers were sunk. 'Under the circumstances,' wrote Captain William-Powlett, 'Gambia, the senior of the four cruisers, was unable to take part in the successful and exciting operation carried out by Glasgow and Enterprise: she could merely play the part of an exasperated listener-in....' Those two cruisers and the Ariadne returned to [Plymouth](#) and the Penelope to Gibraltar.

As more blockade runners from the [Far East](#) were expected, the Gambia and her sister-ship [Mauritius](#) (from Gibraltar) maintained the outer cruiser patrol north of the Azores for the next three days. The Gambia returned to [Plymouth](#) on 1 January 1944. She had been at sea for 22 days and had steamed 8720 miles during the month of December. The last of the blockade runners were disposed of by United States Navy patrols in the South [Atlantic](#), three German ships being sunk between 3 and 5 January.

Having received orders to join the [British Eastern Fleet](#), the *Gambia* sailed from [Plymouth](#) in the forenoon of 30 January. She arrived at Gibraltar on 2 February and sailed the following morning for [Alexandria](#), where she made a stay of three days. The passage through the [Suez Canal](#) was made on 10 February. [Aden](#) was reached three days later, and on 19 February the *Gambia* arrived at Trincomalee where she joined the Fourth Cruiser Squadron, Eastern Fleet. The early months of 1944 saw a substantial strengthening of the Eastern Fleet. On 2 January the Admiralty issued a revised composition of the fleet in which 146 ships were listed for its reinforcement up to the end of April 1944.

During the last week of February 1944 a concentration of major Japanese ships at [Singapore](#) led to action being taken to increase the air protection of the Eastern Fleet bases in [Ceylon](#) and augment the air striking force in the Bay of Bengal. The United States aircraft-carrier *Saratoga* and three destroyers were sent from the [Pacific](#) to join the Eastern Fleet. The expected incursion of Japanese forces into the [Indian Ocean](#) did not eventuate. It is very doubtful whether the enemy had any such intention. The major breaches in his defence perimeter in the [Pacific](#) called for a drastic revision of Japanese basic strategy which gave no place to naval adventures in the [Indian Ocean](#).

The first seagoing duty assigned to the *Gambia* after joining the Eastern Fleet was concerned with enemy blockade-running. In consequence of information received from the Admiralty on 20 February, Operation SLEUTH was planned to intercept a possible German blockade runner on passage from the [Far East](#) to [Europe](#). HMS *Illustrious*, with the *Gambia* and destroyers *Rotherham* and *Tjerke Hiddes* (Dutch) in company, sailed from Trincomalee on 22 February and swept the area south-west of [Cocos Island](#). HMS *Sussex* joined the force on the 28th, relieving the *Gambia*, which went to [Fremantle](#) to fuel and await orders. Nothing was seen of any blockade runner.

Acting as ocean escort to a convoy of merchant ships, the *Gambia* left [Fremantle](#) on 7 March and arrived at Colombo ten days later. On 19 March Admiral Sir James Somerville, Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet, inspected the ship's company at divisions and welcomed the *Gambia* as a unit of his fleet. At that time, and later, a considerable number of RNZNVR officers and ratings were serving in other ships of

the Eastern Fleet.

During the last days of March 1944, the Gambia took part in Operation DIPLOMAT which was planned to meet a [United States](#) task group and carry out exercises preliminary to operations against the Japanese. The ships employed were the Renown (flag of Vice-Admiral second-in-command Eastern Fleet), [Queen Elizabeth](#) and Valiant, the fleet carrier Illustrious, cruisers [London](#), Cumberland, Gambia, and [Ceylon](#), and ten destroyers. They left Trincomalee and Colombo on 21 March and carried out a wide sweep to the southward.

The object of the cruise was to give the ships' companies practice in oiling at sea. On 24 March three British fleet tankers escorted by the Dutch cruiser Tromp ¹ were met at a mid-ocean rendezvous 850 miles south from [Ceylon](#). The ships of the force spent two days in refuelling from the tankers. They then steamed to the southward and on 27 March were joined by United States Task Group 58.5, which consisted of the carrier Saratoga and three destroyers. After carrying out exercises, the combined force returned to Trincomalee on 31 March.

A request was now made to the Admiralty by the United States Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral King, that the Eastern Fleet should carry out a diversionary attack about the middle of April with the object of holding Japanese air and surface forces in the [Singapore](#) area while the American seaborne assault on Hollandia and Aitape on the north coast of Dutch New Guinea was developing. It was decided that a seaborne air strike at the Japanese base at [Sabang](#), a small island off the north-west end of [Sumatra](#), was the most suitable form of attack.

For the purposes of what was designated Operation COCKPIT, two truly Allied forces were organised as follows:

Force 69: HM ships [Queen Elizabeth](#) (flagship of Admiral Somerville, Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet) and Valiant; French battleship Richelieu ²; HM cruisers Newcastle (flag-

¹ Tromp, 3350 tons; speed 33 knots; six 5·9-inch, sixteen light AA guns, six torpedo-tubes.

² Richelieu, 35,000 tons; speed 30 knots; eight 15-inch and nine 6-inch guns; twelve 3·9-inch and 106 light anti-aircraft guns.

ship

of Rear-Admiral A. D. Reid, commanding Fourth Cruiser Squadron), Nigeria, and [Ceylon](#); HMNZS Gambia; Dutch cruiser Tromp; HM destroyers Rotherham, Racehorse, Penn, Petard, and Quiberon; HM Australian destroyers [Napier](#), Nepal, and [Nizam](#); Dutch destroyer Van Galen.

Force 70: HMS Renown (flag of Vice-Admiral A. J. Power, second-in-command Eastern Fleet), HMS Illustrious (flag of Rear-Admiral Clement Moody, commanding aircraft-carriers), USS Saratoga; HMS [London](#); HM destroyers Quilliam, Queenborough, and Quadrant; US destroyers Dunlap, Cummings, and Fanning.

British submarines were stationed in the Strait of Malacca to co-operate with these forces. A number of New Zealand pilots of the Fleet Air Arm and six New Zealand radar ratings and a signalman were serving in HMS Illustrious.

The fleet sailed from Trincomalee on 16 April, and two days later the Gambia and [Ceylon](#) were detached from Force 69 to strengthen the anti-aircraft defence of the carrier force. At 5.30 a.m. on the 19th, 100 miles from [Sabang](#), 17 bombers and 13 fighters took off from the Illustrious and 29 bombers and 24 fighters from the Saratoga. Their attack was apparently a complete surprise to the enemy. As the Commander-in-Chief put it, the Japanese were 'caught with their kimonos up'. No fighter opposition was met and there was no anti-aircraft fire until after the first bombs were dropped. Twelve American aircraft were hit but all save one got safely back to the Saratoga. The twelfth came down about a mile from [Sabang](#), the pilot being rescued by the submarine Tactician under fire from shore batteries.

Thirty tons of bombs were dropped on [Sabang](#) and the Lho Nga airfield on the mainland. Two merchant ships were hit and two Japanese destroyers and an escort ship strafed and set on fire. Twenty-four aircraft were destroyed on the airfield and a direct hit by a 1000-pound bomb set a large oil tank on fire. The power-station,

barracks, and wireless station were badly damaged, and large fires in the dockyard were seen by the Tactician to be burning fiercely hours after the fleet had left on its return to Trincomalee.

On 6 May the Gambia sailed with the Allied fleet from Trincomalee on Operation TRANSOM, the main purpose of which was an attack by carrier-borne aircraft on the Japanese naval base at [Sourabaya](#) in [Java](#). The composition of the striking and covering forces was much the same as before. A convoy of six fleet tankers and a water-distilling ship, escorted by the cruisers [London](#) and [Suffolk](#), sailed in advance of the fleet to Exmouth Gulf on the north-west coast of [Australia](#), about 600 miles from [Java](#). After refuelling there on 15 May, the fleet put to sea before sunset and arrived in the flying-off position about 90 miles from the south-west coast of [Java](#) at daybreak on the 17th. The flying distance to [Sourabaya](#) was about 180 miles, one half of it over enemy-held territory. The striking force was made up of 30 bombers and 24 fighters from the [Saratoga](#) and 18 bombers and 16 fighters from the [Illustrious](#). One American bomber had to return owing to engine trouble and two from the [Illustrious](#) crashed after taking off, their crews being rescued.

The Japanese were again taken by surprise and considerable havoc was wrought. Ten ships in harbour were hit by bombs and one was seen to blow up. An oil refinery, a power-house, and an engineering works were demolished. The naval base and two floating docks were badly damaged and oil tanks and stores destroyed by fire. Nineteen aircraft were destroyed on the airfields, where hangars and other buildings were set on fire, and two aircraft were shot down by fighters. The only Allied loss due to enemy action was one American bomber, whose crew was last seen in a rubber dinghy outside the harbour. That night American bombers of the South-West Pacific Command flew 2500 miles to bomb [Sourabaya](#), causing further extensive damage.

Operation TRANSOM concluded what Admiral Somerville called 'a profitable and very happy association of Task Group 58.5 with the Eastern Fleet'. The [Saratoga](#) and her three destroyers parted company with the Eastern Fleet before sunset on 18 May. They called at [Fremantle](#) two days later to refuel and sailed thence to rejoin the United States Pacific Fleet. Somerville's ships refuelled from the tankers in Exmouth Gulf and arrived at Trincomalee on 27 May. On 9 June Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander South-East Asia, visited HMNZS Gambia

and addressed the ship's company. The New Zealand cruiser went to sea with the fleet on 10 June for a three-days' sweep across the Bay of Bengal, but nothing was seen of the enemy. She then went up from Trincomalee to Madras and embarked Fleet Air Arm personnel and stores for Colombo, where she arrived on 17 June for a stay of ten days. Liberal leave was granted to the ship's company and parties of 150 ratings from each watch were sent to the rest camp at Diyatalawa. All hands benefited from the change and rest.

The Gambia missed the air strike at Port Blair in the [Andaman Islands](#) on 21 June but took an active part in Operation CRIMSON, the bombardment of the Japanese naval base at [Sabang](#), five weeks later. This was a notable occasion, it being the first time since the Eastern Fleet turned to the offensive that the ship's guns were in action against Japanese shore defences. Admiral Somerville's Force 62 consisted of four capital ships, two aircraft-carriers, seven cruisers, and ten destroyers.

This time the role of the Fleet Air Arm was restricted to a surprise attack by fighter aircraft on enemy airfields before the bombardment started, and to maintaining patrols over the airfields and the ships until the operation ended. At daybreak on 25 July the fighter striking forces, which included a number of New Zealand pilots, were flown off the *Illustrious* and [Victorious](#) and strafed the airfields in face of considerable enemy fire. Two Japanese aircraft were destroyed at [Sabang](#) and one at each of the airfields at Lho Nga and Kota Raja. One of these was shot down by Sub-Lieutenant (A) Heffer, RNZNVR, ¹ of HMS *Illustrious*, whose 'considerable skill and fine judgment' on this, his first combat operation, earned him the award of the Distinguished Service Cross.

The battleships steamed in from the northward and opened fire at 6.55 a.m., the [Queen Elizabeth](#) leading the line. This was the first time she had engaged an enemy target with her 15-inch guns since she was in action off Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915 — twenty-nine years before. The battleships fired 292 rounds of 15-inch at a mean range of 18,000 yards, causing much destruction and starting numerous fires in and about the dockyard area.

The cruisers stood in much closer and effectively engaged coast-defence batteries and other targets at a mean range of 8500 yards. The *Cumberland's* 8-inch

fire demolished the radio station. The Gambia and Kenya quickly silenced the enemy batteries that were their particular targets. An ammunition dump was blown up and several fires started in and about the batteries. In all, the cruisers fired 1074 rounds. The Nigeria rescued the pilot of a fighter which crashed four miles off shore.

Immediately after the battleships ceased firing, the destroyers Quilliam, Quality, and Quickmatch and the Dutch cruiser Tromp steamed into the harbour, exchanging fire with shore batteries as they went. 'The entry of this group into Sabang harbour was most spectacular and inspiring,' wrote Admiral Somerville. 'The ships obviously were determined to take full advantage of the opportunity offered for close action.' The Tromp was hit four times by dud shells, but suffered no casualties. The Quilliam and Quality were slightly damaged by shellfire, two men being killed and twelve wounded. An enemy merchant ship was blown up and much damage about the waterfront was done by torpedoes and gunfire at pointblank range. The withdrawal was made under heavy fire from shore batteries, several of which were silenced.

The fleet had just reformed and shaped course to the westward when a Japanese aircraft was intercepted and shot down by fighters. Two hours later another was similarly destroyed after a long chase in the clouds. Shortly before sunset, when the carriers turned into

¹ Lieutenant (A) F. B. Heffer, DSC, RNZNVR; born Wellington, 10 Nov 1919; farmer.

the wind to land-on their fighter patrols in heavy rain squalls, a group of Japanese aircraft was detected by radar 50 miles away and approaching the fleet, then 180 miles from Sabang. Fighters were flown off and, after a difficult chase in the clouds, three of the enemy aircraft were shot down and two others badly damaged. The fighters landed on their carriers in darkness without mishap and the fleet returned to harbour without further incident.

At the end of August Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, GCB, KBE, late Commander-in-Chief Home Fleet, arrived at Trincomalee and relieved Admiral Sir James Somerville, who had been Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet since March 1942.

During August and September the Gambia was at sea for only seven days, mainly on exercises with the other ships of the Fourth Cruiser Squadron. A spell of six days at Madras was a welcome break in the ship's war routine. The Gambia arrived at Colombo on 10 September and spent the remainder of the month refitting in dry-dock, half of her ship's company at a time living in the Royal Navy rest camp at Diyatalawa. When she returned to Trincomalee on 6 October 1944, the Gambia found herself in company with HMNZS [Achilles](#), which had arrived from England on 13 September and joined the Eastern Fleet. The Gambia had received orders to proceed to New Zealand, and during the five days the two cruisers were together inter-ship drafting was carried out to relieve where possible ratings in the [Achilles](#) due for overseas service leave. On 15 October Rear-Admiral A. D. Read, CBE, who was soon to be relieved in command of the Fourth Cruiser Squadron, inspected the Gambia and in a brief farewell speech complimented the ship's company on her general efficiency and, in particular, on her good gunnery.

Having embarked seventy-eight service passengers for [Fremantle](#) and twenty torpedoes, the Gambia sailed from Trincomalee next day. On the 17th she met the [United States](#) transports General William Mitchell and General George M. Randall, ¹ the latter carrying New Zealand troops on furlough from the [Mediterranean](#). The cruiser parted company with the transports south-west of [Fremantle](#) on 24 October and, after refuelling at that port and at [Melbourne](#), arrived at [Wellington](#) on 24 November.

The Gambia was given a great welcome. She was inspected by the Governor-General, the Prime Minister and his Ministers, and members of the New Zealand Naval Board, and a temporary lifting of wartime security restrictions enabled more than 20,000 persons to visit the ship during the weekend. Similarly, at [Auckland](#), where she spent six weeks in refitting, and at Dunedin and [Lyttelton](#), which

¹ These ships belonged to a class of eleven fast troop transports built in [USA](#) in 1943–44. They had a loaded displacement of 19,650 tons and a speed of 21 knots.

were visited by the Gambia in January, the keenest public interest was shown in the ship.

The *Achilles* spent more than fourteen months in Portsmouth dockyard refitting and rearming. On 22 June 1943 a violent explosion occurred in one of her main fuel tanks, killing and injuring many dockyard hands and causing considerable structural damage to the ship. The tank had been emptied and cleaned in April and workmen were making moulds in the double-bottom fuel tank preparatory to erecting two bulkheads in the compartment.

Fourteen workmen were killed and many others injured by the explosion, twelve being sent to hospital. The fuel tank in which the explosion occurred and three other compartments were almost completely wrecked. A number of bulkheads were collapsed or badly distorted by the blast. The deck above was blown upwards six or seven feet, the platform deck was torn away from the ship's side, and the shell plating bulged outwards over an area of about thirty feet by ten feet. A number of watertight doors were blown through their frames. Besides those killed, a considerable number of workmen, injured or stunned, were trapped in the damaged compartments. They were rescued by members of the ship's company assisted by other workmen. Dense smoke at first prevented access to the seat of damage. Two ratings equipped with breathing apparatus tried to get through by way of the stokers' mess deck but were overpowered by smoke, and one had to be hauled out by means of a lifeline. The smoke was finally dispersed by water spray.

Some ten or twelve dockyard men owed their lives to the initiative and cold courage of three ratings who, regardless of their own safety, went below and worked to the limit of endurance. They were Stoker First Class William Dale, RNZNVR,¹ who was subsequently awarded the Albert Medal, and Engine-Room Artificer William Vaughan, RN,² and Stoker First Class Ernest Valentine, RNZNVR,³ who were mentioned in despatches.

Finding that all smoke apparatus was in use by others, Stoker Dale tied a handkerchief over his mouth and made a difficult descent through three decks into a smoke-filled space. The compartment was badly collapsed but in the darkness its condition was quite unknown to Dale. Without hesitation he got to work and passed up four injured men who were in various stages of collapse. They afterwards affirmed that they could not have got out without help. Having

¹ Stoker First Class W. D. Dale, AM, RNZNVR; born [Timaru](#), 30 Sep 1922; labourer; served [RNZN](#) 1942–46.

² Engine-Room Artificer W. Vaughan, RN, m.i.d.; born [Durham](#), England, 11 Feb 1909; served [RNZN](#) 1939–46.

³ Stoker First Class E. Valentine, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Ohakune](#), 21 Sep 1920; railway fireman; served [RNZN](#) 1942–45.

'surfaced for a short breather', Dale then went down into the fuel tank in which the explosion had taken place. He groped his way in the darkness through debris and thick smoke, and with great difficulty wriggled through the distorted manhole in the tank top. The twisted, vertical steel ladder was far short of the bottom of the tank but he trusted to luck and landed safely. With equal courage a dockyard worker named Rogers descended and assisted Dale in rescuing two injured men who were hauled up by ropes.

Wearing a smoke helmet, Vaughan went down into a compartment, the condition of which was unknown, in an endeavour to rescue men believed to have been working there. He could not find them in the pitch darkness and dense smoke, and, in an almost unconscious state, had to be assisted back. Recovering after a short spell, Vaughan went down to the switchboard room, from which he sent up several semi-conscious men before he was again almost overcome by fumes and assisted back to the upper deck. On both occasions Vaughan was saved by the energetic action of a sixteen-year-old lad named Baxter, who had been boiler-cleaning. Stoker Valentine worked his way through smoke and debris into a badly-wrecked compartment and extricated a number of dazed men. It was probably from this or an adjacent compartment that others were rescued later by Stokers Clarke ¹ and Stow ² and Leading Supply Assistant Brittain. ³

The rearming of the [Achilles](#) involved the removal of one of her after-turrets, thus reducing the number of her 6-inch guns from eight to six. Four additional 4-inch dual-purpose guns were mounted, increasing the number of these weapons to eight. The four two-pounder pom-pom guns were retained and the close-range antiaircraft

armament was increased by fitting eleven 20-millimetre Oerlikon guns. The fighting efficiency of the ship was increased by the installation of the latest types of radar and other equipment in which rapid developments had been made during the war. The appearance of the [Achilles](#) was altered by substituting tripod masts for those of the single-pole type.

The [Achilles](#) was commissioned on 23 May 1944 by Captain Butler, MBE, RN.⁴ His second-in-command was Commander Holmes, RN,⁵ a New Zealand officer who had served in HMS [Ajax](#)

¹ Stoker First Class A. W. Clarke, RNZNVR; born Shannon Vale, [Ireland](#), 27 Jan 1919; baker; served [RNZN](#) 1940–46.

² Stoker First Class H. E. Stow, RNZNVR; born [Huntly](#), 19 Dec 1922; grocer; served [RNZN](#) 1941–45.

³ Leading Supply Assistant J. O. Brittain; born Waipawa, 13 May 1918; farmer; served [RNZN](#) 1941–46.

⁴ Captain F. J. Butler, MBE, RN, m.i.d.; midshipman and sub-lieutenant, HMS [Lion](#), 1915–19; Commander, 31 Dec 1933; Captain, 31 Dec 1941; CO HMS [Danae](#) 1939–42; Gunnery School, [Devonport](#), 1942–44; HMNZS [Achilles](#) 1944–46; died 20 Jan 1953.

⁵ Commander H. B. C. Holmes, RN; born [Masterton](#), 18 Nov 1903; joined RN 1917; HMNZS [Diomedes](#) 1925–28, 1930–33; HMS [Ajax](#) 1939–40; retired 1946; farmer.

at the Battle of the [River Plate](#). Approximately 90 per cent of the ship's company were New Zealanders, 35 of whom had served in the [Achilles](#) in the [River Plate](#) action. The gunnery officer was Lieutenant-Commander Lewis King, DSC, RNZNVR,¹ who gained his decoration in HMS [Onslow](#) which was badly damaged while leading her destroyer flotilla in action defending a convoy to North Russia against attack by the German heavy cruiser [Admiral Hipper](#). Seventeen other New Zealand officers of the [Achilles](#) had seen active service in many parts of the world. The ship's company

included three native members of the [Fiji](#) naval defence force.

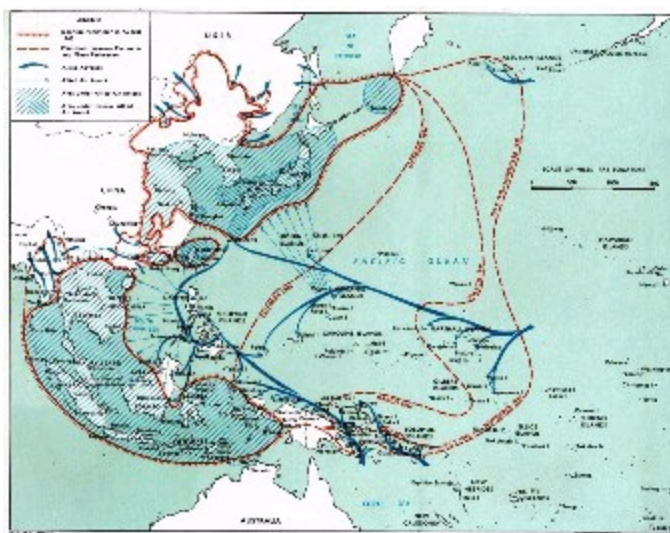
At the time the [Achilles](#) was commissioned, all the harbours along the south coast of England were alive with ships and landing craft getting ready for the great invasion of [Normandy](#). The pressure at Portsmouth was intense, and it was doubtless for that reason that the [Achilles](#) was ordered to sail as soon as possible for Scapa Flow to complete her refit. But, after leaving harbour on 3 June, the [Achilles](#) had a series of machinery failures and she anchored off Greenock, where she spent four weeks making good defects. Her 'working-up' exercises at Scapa Flow were cut short when she was selected as a reserve cruiser of the naval supporting forces for the landings on the south coast of [France](#) (Operation DRAGOON).

The [Achilles](#) sailed from the Clyde on 16 August. She arrived at Gibraltar on the 19th and left next day with 300 troops for [Algiers](#). As she was now not needed for Operation DRAGOON, the [Achilles](#) was ordered to join the Eastern Fleet and sailed from [Malta](#) on 26 August, calling at [Alexandria](#) and [Aden](#) on her way to [Bombay](#). Three days after leaving [Aden](#) an oil-fuel fire broke out in one of her boiler-rooms. It was extinguished in about twenty-five minutes after destroying some electric cables and other fittings and damaging brickwork in a boiler furnace. The [Achilles](#) arrived at [Bombay](#) on 8 September 1944 and five days later at Trincomalee, where repairs to the boiler-room were carried out. The cruiser joined the Fourth Cruiser Squadron, Eastern Fleet, in which HMNZS Gambia was then serving.

The ships of the [British Pacific Fleet](#), some of which, including the Fourth Cruiser Squadron, had been training with the Eastern Fleet, were moving to their station at the beginning of December 1944. The [Achilles](#), in company with the escort aircraft-carriers [Atheling](#) and [Battler](#) and destroyers [Wager](#) and [Whelp](#), sailed from Colombo on the 9th. Next day they joined HMS [Swiftsure](#) (flagship of Rear-Admiral E. J. P. Brind, CB, CBE, commanding Fourth Cruiser Squadron), with which were the escort carriers [Fencer](#) and [Striker](#) and destroyers [Kempenfelt](#) (Captain D, 4th Destroyer

¹ Lieutenant-Commander L. King, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Glasgow](#), 17 Oct 1914; HMS [Berkeley](#) 1940–41; HMS [Onslow](#) 1941–43; HMNZS [Achilles](#) 1943–45; company manager.

Flotilla), Wessex, and Wakeful. ¹ The destroyers left in the evening of the 11th to return to Trincomalee. Five days later the Swiftsure and *Achilles* parted company with the carriers and went on ahead to *Fremantle* and thence to Hobart, where they received a warm welcome.



THE WAR AGAINST JAPAN: ALLIED OPERATIONS IN THE PACIFIC

In company with the Australian-manned destroyers *Quiberon* and *Quickmatch*, ² the *Achilles* sailed from Hobart westbound on 9 January 1945, escorting the *Empress of Scotland* (formerly *Empress of Japan*, 26,032 tons) and two *United States* transports. The *Empress of Scotland*, which was carrying some 3700 troops of the 14th Reinforcements, *2 NZEF*, had sailed from *Wellington* on 6 January escorted by the *Quiberon* and *Quickmatch*. On the 14th the convoy was met off Cape Leeuwin by *HMS London*, ³ which took over the escort duties, the destroyers going to *Albany* and the *Achilles* to *Fremantle*.

During the afternoon of 17 January a fire broke out in the steamer *Panamanian*, 15,575 tons, which was loading wheat at *Fremantle*. The wooden piles of the wharf at which the ship was lying were soaked with fuel-oil and oil was floating on the water. Parties of ratings from the *Achilles* took a leading part in fighting and suppressing the fire, which badly damaged the *Panamanian*, endangered other ships in the harbour, and for a time threatened a major disaster.

The *Achilles* left *Fremantle* on 19 January and two days later, at a rendezvous off Cape Leeuwin, met HM ships *Suffolk*, *Unicorn*, and *Ulster*, ⁴ escorting the *New*

Zealand Shipping Company's steamer Rimutaka, 16,576 tons, in which the first royal Governor-General of [Australia](#), HRH the Duke of Gloucester, his wife and two children and staff, were travelling with some 200 other passengers from Liverpool to [Sydney](#). An hour later the Suffolk and her consorts parted company and the [Achilles](#), now joined by the Quiberon and Quickmatch from [Albany](#), took over the escorting of the Rimutaka. The convoy entered [Sydney](#) harbour in the evening of 27 January,

¹ HMS Swiftsure, light cruiser, 8000 tons; 31·5 knots; nine 6-inch, ten 4-inch, and numerous light anti-aircraft guns; six torpedo-tubes; completed June 1944. Atheling, Battler, Fencer, Striker, escort aircraft-carriers; 11,000 to 11,450 tons displacement; 16 knots; 15 to 20 aircraft; numerous anti-aircraft guns; built in [USA](#) 1942. Kempenfelt (leader), Wager, Wakeful, Wessex, Whelp, fleet destroyers; 1710 tons; 34 knots; 4·7-inch and numerous anti-aircraft guns; eight torpedo-tubes; completed 1943. In the [British Pacific Fleet](#) the escort aircraft-carriers provided transport for replacement aircraft for the fleet carriers and anti-submarine escort for Fleet Train convoys.

² Quiberon and Quickmatch (also Quality, Queenborough, and Quadrant), fleet destroyers; 1650 tons; 34 knots; four 4·7-inch and numerous light anti-aircraft guns; eight torpedo-tubes; completed 1942; transferred to [Royal Australian Navy](#) for manning, 1943.

³ HMS [London](#), cruiser; 10,000 tons standard displacement; 32·25 knots; eight 8-inch, eight 4-inch, and numerous small anti-aircraft guns; eight torpedo-tubes.

⁴ Suffolk, cruiser, 10,000 tons; 31·5 knots; eight 8-inch, eight 4-inch guns. Unicorn, aircraft-carrier, 15,000 tons; 35 aircraft; eight 4·5-inch and numerous light anti-aircraft guns; 22 knots; equipped as aircraft repair ship. Ulster, destroyer, 1710 tons; 34 knots; four 4·7-inch guns; eight torpedo-tubes.

and the [Achilles](#) and her destroyers received a signal from the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester thanking them for safe escort from Cape Leeuwin.

In company with HMS Howe and the destroyers Quadrant, Quality, and

Quickmatch, the [Achilles](#) arrived at [Auckland](#) from [Sydney](#) on 5 February 1945, having been absent from New Zealand a fortnight short of two years. After a refit which lasted for nearly ten weeks, the [Achilles](#) sailed on 26 April for [Sydney](#) and Jervis Bay, where she spent nine days working up. She left [Sydney](#) on 11 May for Manus Island to join Task Force 57 ([British Pacific Fleet](#)).

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 24 – WITH THE BRITISH PACIFIC FLEET

CHAPTER 24

With the British Pacific Fleet

AT the beginning of 1944 preparations were being made by the Admiralty to send a British fleet to the [Pacific](#) to take an active part in operations against the Japanese. The organisation and maintenance of such a fleet presented a major problem of logistics. Moreover, Admiral King, Commander-in-Chief United States Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, regarded the war in the [Pacific](#) as entirely an American affair and was known to have a rooted aversion to a British fleet operating with the Americans in the drive toward [Japan](#).¹ In January 1944 he represented that if the proposed British force for the [Pacific](#) was aggressively employed in the [Indian Ocean](#) against Japanese airfields, port installations, and the shipping and oil targets it could reach, it would tie down a large number of Japanese aircraft and contribute more to operations in the [Pacific](#) than if it were moved immediately into the latter ocean.

The Admiralty's view, from wide experience in the [Mediterranean](#), was that attacks on targets such as were suggested by Admiral King were unprofitable unless there was some definite objective to be achieved, and were a misuse of fleet carriers and naval aircraft. Nevertheless, while plans for a [British Pacific Fleet](#) went forward, the Eastern Fleet, as has been told, carried out several operations during 1944.

Preparations for a [British Pacific Fleet](#) with its main base at [Sydney](#) went forward during 1944. One factor which greatly influenced the preliminary planning was Admiral King's insistence that all British forces sent to the [Pacific](#) must be self-supporting, 'except that the United States Navy would share its excess facilities afloat and ashore in the forward areas, ... render emergency and temporary battle damage assistance to British ships on the same basis as to [United States](#) ships, and make available its airfields near the fleet anchorages for British carrier-based aircraft.'

Rear-Admiral C. S. Daniel, formerly Assistant Chief of Combined Operations, went to [Washington](#) in February 1944 with a mission for preliminary consultations, thence to the [Pacific](#) to study the logistics of American naval task forces, and in April to [Australia](#)

¹ [Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Cunningham, A Sailor's Odyssey](#) (Hutchinson), pp. 606, 611 et seq. [Chester Wilmot, The Struggle for Europe](#) (Collins), pp. 107–8, 120, 641–2

to arrange, in consultation with the Commonwealth Government, for the establishment of the fleet base at [Sydney](#).

This was an immense logistic undertaking involving the provision, among other things, of vast storage for supplies and equipment and accommodation for staffs numbering thousands. Much material and skilled labour as well as enormous quantities of naval stores had to be brought all the way from the [United Kingdom](#). But, despite shortages of manpower and the demands of their own fighting services, great and important contributions to meet the needs of the [British Pacific Fleet](#) were made by [Australia](#) and New Zealand. 'We were immensely assisted by having the resources of this area and the skill of the British people who live in it, at our back,' said the Chief of Staff of the Commander-in-Chief. 'In no other area in the East does the Empire possess comparable facilities with, in addition, ample food supplies to support a large force.'¹ During 1945–46 123 ships of the [British Pacific Fleet](#) were docked in [Australia](#) and 350 taken in hand for repairs. Numerous cruisers, destroyers, and lesser ships were also refitted in New Zealand. It is estimated that about 30,000 Australians were directly employed during the peak period on [British Pacific Fleet](#) projects.² During 1944 steps were also taken to organise a Fleet Train of supply and repair ships to give logistic support to the fleet when operating in the vastness of the [Pacific](#), thousands of miles from its base.

Preparations had so far advanced that, at the second Quebec Conference in September 1944, Mr Churchill was able to offer a 'powerful and well-balanced' British Fleet 'to take part in the major operations against [Japan](#) under United States Supreme Command.' A fleet train of adequate proportions would make the warships independent of shore-based resources for considerable periods. President Roosevelt 'intervened to say that the British Fleet was no sooner offered than accepted. In this, though the fact was not mentioned, he overruled Admiral King's opinion.'³

The British Pacific Fleet formally came into being on the morning of 22 November 1944, when Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser struck his flag at Trincomalee as

Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet and hoisted it in the gunboat Tarantula as Commander-in-Chief British Pacific Fleet. On 2 December he shifted his flag to HMS Howe,⁴ which

¹ Vice-Admiral E. M. Evans-Lombe, CB, *The Royal Navy in the Pacific*, Royal United Services Institution Journal, August 1947, pp. 333– 47.

² At the end of the war there were 142 ships in the *British Pacific Fleet* and 94 ships in the Fleet Train. There were some 500 first-line aircraft, 100 on ancillary services, and 1000 in reserve. The peak strength in personnel was about 125,000 officers and men. These figures were rapidly increasing, and by the end of 1945, had hostilities continued, there would have been 400 ships of all types, 900 first-line aircraft, and more than 200,000 officers and men.

³ Churchill, *The Second World War* (Cassell), Vol. VI, pp. 134– 5.

⁴ HMS Howe, battleship of King George V class; 35,000 tons standard displacement; speed 30 knots; ten 14-inch, sixteen 5.25-inch, and many light anti-aircraft guns.

sailed eight days later for *Australia* with an escort of four destroyers.

The British Pacific Fleet struck its first blows at the Japanese from the *Indian Ocean*. In January 1945 Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian's carrier force consisting of the *Indomitable*, *Indefatigable*, *Illustrious*, *Victorious*, the cruisers *Suffolk*, *Ceylon*, *Argonaut* and *Black Prince*, and eight destroyers, carried out three successful attacks on oil refineries in *Sumatra* which were supplying about three-quarters of the aircraft fuel used by the Japanese. The production of the three refineries was drastically reduced as a result of the damage done by these attacks. More than sixty New Zealand pilots of the Fleet Air Arm serving in the carriers took part in the operations.

The first strike (Operation LENTIL) was made at Pangkalan Brandan in eastern *Sumatra* on 4 January 1945. Sixteen fighters attacked the nearby airfields, and thirty-two Avengers and twelve rocket-firing Fireflies escorted by twelve fighters bombed the refinery. The fighters shot down two Japanese aircraft and destroyed

seven others on the ground. Much damage was done to the refinery, oil storage tanks and a small tanker were set on fire, and two locomotives were hit. Seven enemy aircraft were also shot down by the escorting fighters. The only losses were an Avenger which force-landed owing to engine failure and a Firefly which ran out of fuel and came down near the Indefatigable.

Two New Zealand pilots were mentioned in despatches for their part in this operation. Sub-Lieutenant (A) McLennan, ¹ of HMS Indomitable, was the leader of a flight which shot down three Japanese fighters and shared in the destruction of a fourth. McLennan himself shot down one and shared a second. Sub-Lieutenant (A) Rhodes, ² of 1834 Squadron, HMS [Victorious](#), shot down an enemy fighter and would almost certainly have accounted for another if he had not stuck to his job of giving top cover for the bombers.

The second attack (Operation MERIDIAN) took place on 24 January when 47 Avengers, 10 Fireflies, and 48 fighters attacked and badly damaged the Pladjoe refinery at [Palembang](#), the largest and most important in the [Far East](#), while twenty-four fighters made a sweep over the airfield. The striking force was intercepted some miles short of the refinery and met considerable fighter opposition and anti-aircraft fire. Fourteen Japanese aircraft were shot down and six probable kills were reported; 34 aircraft were destroyed

¹ Lieutenant (A) K. A. McLennan, RNZNVR, m.i.d. (2); born [Wellington](#), 28 Dec 1920; spray-painter.

² Lieutenant (A) H. A. Rhodes, DSC and bar, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Marton](#), 25 Sep 1922; veterinary surgeon.

and 25 damaged on the ground. Seven aircraft failed to return to their carriers.

Two of the airmen lost in this operation were New Zealanders – Sub-Lieutenant (A) Haberfield, ¹ of HMS Indomitable, and Sub-Lieutenant (A) Baxter, ² of HMS [Illustrious](#). They were shot down and taken prisoner by the Japanese, at whose hands they met a shocking end. They were taken to [Singapore](#) and kept there until July 1945, when they were executed together with seven other Fleet Air Arm

After refuelling at sea, the carrier force returned to the attack on 29 January, the target this time being the Soengai Gerong refinery on the opposite side of the river from Pladjoe. The strike included 48 Avengers, 12 Fireflies and 40 fighters, and 24 fighters again swept the airfields. Important sections of the refinery were wrecked by direct hits, and photographs taken during the strike showed a sea of flames in the cracking plant and power-house areas. Seven Japanese aircraft were shot down and three others probably destroyed. Nine British aircraft were lost but the crews of eight of these were rescued. Lieutenant (A) Webb, ⁴ of 1770 Squadron, HMS Indefatigable, lost his life in the ninth aircraft – a Firefly. A group of twelve Japanese bombers which attempted an attack on the carriers during landing-on operations was broken up by fighters, which shot down seven of the enemy.

For their part in the [Palembang](#) operations, five New Zealand airmen were mentioned in despatches. They were Lieutenant (A) Churchill ⁵ and Sub-Lieutenants (A) Mackie, DSC, ⁶ French, ⁷ Reynolds, ⁸ and K. A. McLennan – for whom it was his second 'mention' within the month. It was recorded of Mackie, of 1839 Squadron, HMS Indomitable, that after shooting down a Japanese fighter over Pladjoe, his own aircraft was hit by 'flak' which pierced one cylinder of his engine. The windscreen was coated with oil and the engine failed intermittently, but Mackie flew back 200 miles in formation and, with great skill, made an excellent landing on his carrier. In the strike on 29 January he helped to shoot down another enemy fighter. Churchill, of HMS Illustrious, showed great skill and

¹ Lieutenant (A) J. K. T. Haberfield, RNZNVR; born Greenhills, Southland, 25 Nov 1919; fireman, NZ Railways; executed by Japanese 31 Jul 1945.

² Lieutenant (A) E. J. Baxter, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 28 Sep 1921; clerk; executed by Japanese 31 Jul 1945.

³ See [Appendix V](#).

⁴ Lieutenant (A) J. F. Webb, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 4 Jul 1918;

clerk; killed on air operations 29 Jan 1945.

⁵ Lieutenant (A) A. H. Churchill, RNZNVR, m.i.d. (2); born [Wellington](#), 13 Aug 1921; killed on air operations 7 Apr 1945.

⁶ Lieutenant (A) R. F. Mackie, DSC, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Waipukurau](#), 23 Nov 1921; barrister.

⁷ Sub-Lieutenant (A) A. J. French, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Morrinsville](#), 18 May 1922.

⁸ Sub-Lieutenant (A) A. H. Reynolds, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Gisborne](#), 20 Jun 1921; clerk.

determination in warding off attacks on the Avenger bombers and shot down at least one Japanese aircraft. He 'displayed exemplary devotion to duty' in refusing to be drawn from his primary task of safely escorting the bombers. Reynolds, also of the *Illustrious*, took the lead during his squadron leader's temporary absence, and in both operations made his attacks at low altitudes in a very daring manner. In the strike on 24 January French, of 1836 Squadron, HMS *Victorious*, shot down two Japanese fighters and most probably destroyed a third while acting as top cover for the bombers. In the attack on the fleet on 29 January, McLennan, of 1844 Squadron, HMS *Indomitable*, 'again proved his metal' and with great gallantry and skill flew through the ships' gunfire to destroy one Japanese aircraft and probably shoot down another.

Admiral Vian's aircraft-carrier force, which now included HMS King George V, four cruisers, and nine destroyers, arrived at [Fremantle](#) on 4 February 1945 and proceeded thence to [Sydney](#) to join the other ships of the [British Pacific Fleet](#).

On his return to [Sydney](#) from a conference at [Pearl Harbour](#) with Admiral Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Ocean Area, Admiral Fraser on 15 January 1945 made the following signal to Admiral King at [Washington](#):

I hereby report for duty in accordance with the 'Octagon' decisions. ¹ The British

Fleet will look forward to fighting alongside the United States Navy in whatever area you may assign us.

Admiral King replied: 'Welcome to service in the [Pacific](#)', and stiffly stated that allocations to meet operational requirements would 'continue to be made by me in consonance with arrangements made at [Quebec](#) and in the same manner as is now done in my capacity as executive agent of the United States Chiefs of Staff with respect to the U.S. Navy'.

Admiral Fraser arrived at [Auckland](#) from [Sydney](#) on 5 February in HMS Howe, which was accompanied by HMNZS [Achilles](#) and the Australian fleet destroyers [Quality](#), [Quadrant](#), and [Queenborough](#). He visited [Wellington](#) to confer with the War Cabinet and the Naval Board and returned by air to [Sydney](#) three days later. In a farewell message to the Prime Minister, Admiral Fraser said:

I much appreciate all the kindness shown to me and I am very grateful for the opportunity of meeting you and your Government. The cooperation and help which New Zealand has always given to the Royal Navy has been fully demonstrated to me. All my best wishes to you.

In a message to the Naval Board, Admiral Fraser said that he had been impressed with the keenness and efficiency of the officers and men in the establishments he had visited.

¹ 'Octagon' was the code name of the Quebec Conference of September 1944.

During their stay at Auckland HMS Howe and her destroyers, with the [Gambia](#) in company, carried out gunnery and other exercises, graphic accounts and pictures of which were printed subsequently in the newspapers. The affection of New Zealanders for the Royal Navy was shown by the lavish hospitality accorded to the ships' companies. On their arrival at [Sydney](#) on 17 February, the [Gambia](#) took her place in the Fourth Cruiser Squadron. The British Pacific Fleet sailed from [Sydney](#) on 1 March and carried out exercises, including fuelling from tankers under way, on passage to [Seeadler](#) harbour, [Manus Island](#), where it arrived six days later.

The British Pacific Fleet was a truly Imperial naval force and included substantial components from the Dominions. New Zealand was represented by the cruisers Gambia and [Achilles](#) and the corvette Arbutus, [Australia](#) by a number of destroyers and sixteen minesweepers, ¹ and [Canada](#) by the cruiser Uganda. The command relationship with the United States Fleet is of historic interest as this was the first time a British fleet had ever operated under the command of a foreign flag officer. In order to facilitate joint operations Admiral Fraser decided to change over to the [US Navy](#) system of communications. To assist in this fundamental change and other highly specialised fields, more than 100 American officers and some 300 ratings served on liaison duties in the [British Pacific Fleet](#).

As at 8 March 1945, the [British Pacific Fleet](#) included nearly one hundred ships of all kinds. Of these, thirty were in Task Force 113 ² which was organised as follows:

First Battle Squadron: King George V (flagship of Vice-Admiral Rawlings), Howe.

First Aircraft-carrier Squadron: Indomitable (flagship of Rear-Admiral Vian), Victorious, Illustrious, Indefatigable.

Fourth Cruiser Squadron: Swiftsure (flagship of Rear-Admiral Brind), Argonaut, Black Prince, Euryalus, HMNZS Gambia.

Fourth Destroyer Flotilla: Quickmatch (Captain D.4), Quiberon, Queen-borough, Quality.

Twenty-fifth Destroyer Flotilla: Grenville (Captain D.25), Ulster, Undine, Urania, Undaunted, Ursa, Ulysses, Urchin.

Twenty-seventh Destroyer Flotilla: Kempenfelt (Captain D.27) Wager, Wakeful, Wessex, Whelp, Whirlwind.

Destroyer Depot Ship: Tyne.

HMS Formidable, HMNZS [Achilles](#), and HMCS Uganda and ten destroyers were refitting or off station at that time. They joined the fleet later and took part in the final operations against [Japan](#).

¹ The Australian cruisers [Australia](#), Shropshire, and Hobart and other ships were operating as an integral part of the US Seventh Fleet in General MacArthur's command.

² The American naval forces in the Central Pacific were known as the US Fifth Fleet when operating under the command of Admiral R. A. Spruance and as the US Third Fleet when commanded by Admiral Halsey. Accordingly, British Task Force 113 was designated Task Force 57 when it was working under Spruance and Task Force 37 when Halsey was in command at sea.

There were sixteen minesweepers and eight sloops and frigates in the British support forces in Task Force 112, which also included the Fleet Train. The latter consisted of destroyers as allocated, four combined operations vessels (landing ships), four replenishment aircraft-carriers (escort carriers), ¹ three repair ships, a netlaying vessel, a powerful tug and numerous oil tankers, water ships, and supply vessels.

It had been decided that the [British Pacific Fleet](#) would take part in the operations against [Okinawa](#) (Operation ICEBERG). On 16 March Admiral Rawlings reported his ships for duty to the United States Commander, [Pacific](#), adding that 'it is with a feeling of great pride and pleasure that the [British Pacific Fleet](#) joins the United States Naval forces under your command.' The following reply was received from Admiral Nimitz:

The United States Fleet welcomes the British Carrier Task Force and attached units which will add greatly to our power to strike the enemy and will also show our unity of purpose in the war against [Japan](#).

The fleet sailed from Manus Island on 18 March and arrived two days later at Ulithi, an atoll anchorage in the western Carolines. Replying to Admiral Rawlings, who had reported for duty with the United States Fifth Fleet, Admiral Spruance welcomed the British ships and wished them 'good hunting'. Task Force 57 sailed on the 23rd for a position about 400 miles east of the northern extremity of Luzon, in the Philippine Islands, where the Fleet Train was met two days later. Fuelling was carried out with some difficulty owing to a strong wind and heavy swell, and Task

Force 57 then proceeded at 231/2 knots to arrive in the operating area by dawn on 26 March.

After the capture of [Iwo Jima](#) in February—March 1945, intensification of the air attacks on the home islands of [Japan](#) called for a base nearer than any yet seized. The obvious choice was [Okinawa](#), in the Ryukyu Islands of the Nansei Shoto,² the last bastion of [Japan](#)'s inner line of defence. The Ryukyus form the two southernmost of the five main island groups of the Nansei Shoto which links [Japan](#) with [Formosa](#). They had numerous airfields within fighter and medium-bomber range of [Japan](#). They also possessed good harbours and anchorages, especially in the [Okinawa](#) area, and the Japanese had long used them as secondary naval bases. [Okinawa](#) is about 350 nautical miles from Kyushu and 865 miles from [Tokyo](#) and lies about 150 miles north-east of the Sakishima Gunto, which reaches to within 60 miles from the northern end of [Formosa](#). Allied possession of [Okinawa](#) would bypass [Formosa](#), give free access to

¹ One of these carriers provided aircraft for combat air patrol and anti-submarine patrol over the fleet while it was refuelling and re-storing.

² Shoto or Gunto – a chain or group of islands. Shima or Jima – an island.

the East China Sea, and threaten the communications between [Japan](#) and the mainland of [Asia](#).



Japan and Outlying Islands

Japan and Outlying Islands

The assault on and occupation of [Okinawa](#) was the greatest and most difficult combined operation of the [Pacific](#) war. The joint expeditionary force consisted of 1213 ships, 564 carrier-based aircraft, and 451,870 troops of three Marine and four Army divisions. In addition, this force was supported and covered throughout Operation ICEBERG by the task forces of the United States Fifth Fleet – the Fast Carrier Force commanded by Vice-Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, USN, and the British Task Force 57. The former numbered 86 ships, including 15 carriers with 919 aircraft, and the latter 29 ships, including 4 carriers with 244 aircraft. In these great forces the Royal New Zealand Navy was modestly but most efficiently represented by HMNZS Gambia, about one hundred Fleet Air Arm officers, and by other officers and ratings serving in the carriers and other Royal Navy ships.

The task assigned to the [British Pacific Fleet](#) was to neutralise the enemy airfields in the Sakishima Gunto as continuously and for as long as possible. At sunrise on 26 March strong fighter sweeps were flown off the carriers from a position about 100 miles due east of the islands to attack the airfields on Ishigaki and Miyako. One fighter came down 20 miles from Tarima Island; the pilot was rescued later in the day by a Walrus amphibian aircraft flown in for that purpose.

In the fighter sweep over Ishigaki airfield, Lieutenant (A) MacRae, RNZNVR, ¹ leader of 1839 Squadron from HMS Indomitable, was severely wounded in his right thigh by 'flak', but continued to press home his attack. Not until his squadron resumed its patrol did he announce that he was returning wounded to his ship.

Encouraged on the radio telephone by the flight direction officer, he flew alone more than 100 miles back to the Indomitable. When he arrived over the ship, MacRae found that he could not lower the undercarriage of his damaged fighter, but though his right leg was useless and he was weak from loss of blood, he made a perfect crash-landing. For his courage, devotion to duty and skill, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

The strikes on the island airfields were repeated next day when coastal shipping was also attacked. Shortly before noon the destroyer Undine, escorted by fighters, was sent in to rescue the crew of an Avenger bomber which had 'ditched' 56 miles from the carriers. She returned six hours later with the airmen and the pilot of an American fighter who was found after being adrift for forty-eight hours. The American submarine Kingfish was asked to keep a good lookout for 'ditched' airmen, but apparently she had not been fully briefed as she replied that she would 'have to ask her boss first'. The Kingfish later reported that she had picked up the pilot of an Avenger from HMS Illustrious.

During the two days the carrier aircraft flew 574 sorties and all

¹ Lieutenant (A) A. B. MacRae, DSO, RNZNVR; born Pahiatua, 30 Jul 1921; clerk.

the enemy airfields in the Sakishima Islands, as well as barracks, wireless and radar stations, were bombed and strafed. Several coastal ships were also attacked and one blew up. Twenty Japanese aircraft were destroyed on the ground and one in the air. Our own losses were seventeen aircraft, of which six were shot down by 'flak', five pilots and four others being killed or missing. A signal from Admiral Nimitz congratulated Task Force 57 on its 'illustrious' showing, to which reply was made that the enemy would be pursued 'indomitably, indefatigably and victoriously'.

The fleet withdrew to its fuelling area in the evening of 27 March to forestall a typhoon which was expected to arrive there a few days later. Three days were spent with the Fleet Train in the fuelling area east of Luzon, which covered a rectangular area of 5000 square miles. Replacement aircraft were supplied to the carriers, and Task Force 57 resumed its air strikes against the Sakishimas at daybreak on 31

March. Once again the submarine Kingfish rescued the crew of a 'ditched' Avenger.

The British Pacific Fleet was now to have its first experience of a Kamikaze attack by Japanese suicide aircraft. The enemy chose 1 April, the day on which the American forces made their landing on [Okinawa](#), to make their attack. Ten minutes after the carriers had flown off their first fighter strike, 'bogeys'¹ were detected by radar 75 miles to the eastward, closing the fleet at 210 knots at a height of 8000 feet. The fighter sweep was ordered to intercept the enemy and more fighters were flown off. Low cloud and consequent poor visibility gave an initial advantage to the Japanese, who split their formation when more than 40 miles from the fleet, but four were shot down by fighters before the attack began.

One single-engined aircraft machine-gunned HMS Indomitable, killing one rating and wounding two officers and four ratings. Still flying very low, it strafed HMS King George V but this time there were no casualties. All the ships were firing hard and had considerable difficulty in distinguishing the enemy from their own aircraft who were in close pursuit. A few minutes later a Kamikaze bomber dived on HMS Indefatigable and exploded at the base of her island superstructure. Four officers and ten ratings were killed and sixteen others wounded. The flight deck was put out of action temporarily, but 'within a remarkably short time and in a most creditable manner, aircraft were again being operated from this ship, although that day on a reduced scale.' HMS Ulster was badly damaged by a nearmiss bomb explosion, and when the Japanese attack had ended the Gambia was ordered to tow her to Leyte Gulf.

It was apparent that the Japanese strike was intended to cover

¹ Suspected enemy aircraft.

the staging of aircraft through the Sakishima Islands to attack the Americans at [Okinawa](#). Bombers and fighters flown off the carriers shortly after midday attacked the airfields on Ishigaki and Hirara, where fourteen enemy aircraft were destroyed and others damaged. In the late afternoon fighters were flown to intercept 'bogeys' approaching from the north-west, but the enemy evaded them in the clouds. Soon afterwards the ships sighted the raiders and opened fire. One aircraft dived on HMS

Victorious, which made a successful evasive swing under full helm. One wing of the aircraft struck the edge of the flight deck, which caused it to spin harmlessly into the sea, where its bomb exploded clear of the ship. The manuscript orders to the pilot were blown on board the **Victorious** and when translated were found to indicate priorities of targets for suicide bombers. Next day all the airfields in the Sakishimas were swept by fighters and the fleet then withdrew to the fuelling area.

The **Gambia**, with the **Ulster** in tow, left the fleet at midday on 1 April. Two days later the destroyer reported that she was short of drinking water and supplies were passed to her from the cruiser, sixteen casks being veered astern one at a time on the end of a light wire line. The Australian minesweepers **Ballarat** and **Lismore** met the **Gambia** on 4 April and gave anti-submarine escort for the rest of the passage. Two hours after the meeting, the tow-line carried away when two badly worn links in the **Ulster's** cable parted. It took the **Gambia** about five hours to recover her wire and pass a 61/2-inch wire hawser which was secured to the destroyer's two remaining shackles of cable. The ships arrived off the entrance to **Leyte Gulf** in the evening of the 5th and the tow was transferred to a naval tug. The **Gambia** had towed the **Ulster** 760 miles at an average speed of eight knots.

By this time there were forty-five cases of mumps isolated on board the **Gambia**. Thirty-seven ratings were sent to the hospital ship **Oxfordshire** and sixteen who had completed their period of isolation rejoined from that ship. A lieutenant (E) was borrowed from **HMS Unicorn**, two of the **Gambia's** engine-room officers being among the cases isolated on board. The **Gambia**, in company with the Canadian cruiser **Uganda** and the destroyers **Urchin** and **Ursa**, sailed from **San Pedro Bay** in the afternoon of 6 April and rejoined **Task Force 57** in the fuelling area at daybreak on the 8th.

After nine days of intensive bombardment by ships and aircraft, the amphibious assault on **Okinawa** had begun on 1 April. Landings in great force were made on the south-western beaches against unexpectedly light opposition. By midday two airfields had been captured, and within forty-eight hours the American troops had reached the east coast and isolated the southern end of the island. But nearly three months of bitter struggle on land, at sea, and in the air were to pass before **Okinawa** was finally cleared of Japanese, whose prodigal efforts to retain their stronghold were of no avail against the overwhelming sea power of the Allies. From 23 March

their fast carrier forces operated continuously for two and a half months in the [Okinawa](#) area, giving direct cover and support to the amphibious forces. This was the longest sustained operation by aircraft-carriers of the whole war.

The refuelling of Task Force 57 from 3 to 6 April was made difficult by bad weather and a heavy swell. During these periods of replenishment the Allied fleets and supply groups had to steer steady courses at slow speeds for hours on end. The fact that not one submarine or air attack was made on any ship by the Japanese during these periods of vulnerability was one of the remarkable features of the [Pacific](#) war. Vice-Admiral, [British Pacific Fleet](#), in his report on the ICEBERG operations, remarked that 'fuelling the fleet in this manner presents targets in which the German U-boats would have delighted'.

The Sakishima airfields were well bombed when Task Force 57 resumed strikes on 6 April. While returning from Miyako in the forenoon, fighters shot down a Japanese bomber after a chase of thirty miles. In the evening 'bogeys' detected by radar were intercepted, one being shot down by fighters. Another broke through the clouds and dived on HMS *Illustrious*, which took drastic avoiding action. The Kamikaze's wing-tip hit the carrier's island, causing the aircraft to spin into the sea, where its bomb exploded. The ship was slightly damaged, but there were no casualties. Three other suicide aircraft were shot down, one by destroyers and the others by fighters. Most unfortunately, a Seafire fighter was shot down by the gunfire of the fleet and the pilot was lost. Next day the carriers sent in three bomber strikes against the Sakishima airfields, all of which were well cratered. Two aircraft were shot down by flak and four were lost from other causes. Lieutenant (A) Churchill, RNZNVR, was one of the pilots killed that day. He was posthumously awarded a second mention in despatches.

During this third series of strikes, eight Japanese aircraft were destroyed and two junks sunk. Our own losses were fourteen aircraft, two in combat and twelve from other causes. These figures were very small in comparison with those of the heavy air fighting about [Okinawa](#). Vice-Admiral Rawlings remarked that 'the Nips do not seem to be trying very hard down our end'.

Starting on 6 April, the Japanese air forces struck against the Americans at [Okinawa](#) with unprecedented fury, the scale of their suicide attacks being the

outstanding and most spectacular feature of the [Okinawa](#) campaign. During the period from 6 April to 22 June, ten major Kamikaze attacks were made on American ships. The relatively short distance from Japanese air bases in Kyushu and [Formosa](#) enabled the enemy to use aircraft of all types, manned by pilots of every degree of proficiency. In all, there were 896 enemy air attacks, and approximately 4000 Japanese aircraft were destroyed, of which 1900 were Kamikaze aircraft. Twenty-six of the twenty-eight [United States](#) ships lost in air attacks were sunk by suicide aircraft, which also accounted for 164 of the 225 ships damaged. ¹

On its way to the fuelling area on 7 April, the [British Pacific Fleet](#) learned that Vice-Admiral Mitscher's Fast Carrier Force had virtually destroyed a powerful Japanese naval force, a report which, Admiral Rawlings commented, 'filled us with admiration and at the same time, it must be admitted, with envy'.

In accordance with the 'Ten' plan for the defence of the Nansei Shoto, naval forces were to take favourable opportunities to penetrate into [Okinawa](#) anchorages and carry out suicidal attacks on Allied ships. Orders for the 'Ten-Ichi' Operation were issued to Vice-Admiral Ito, Commander-in-Chief First Diversion Attack Force (Second Fleet), which consisted of the monster battleship Yamato (flagship), light cruiser Yahagi, ² and eight destroyers, and which sailed in the afternoon of 6 April. As the ships emerged from the Inland Sea through Bungo Strait they were sighted and reported by two [United States](#) submarines.

They were found next morning by aircraft from the Fast Carrier Force which was cruising east of [Okinawa](#). The destroyer Asashimo, ³ which had fallen astern owing to engine trouble, was sunk shortly after noon. Swarms of fighters, dive-bombers, and torpedo-carriers attacked the other ships through low clouds and rain squalls. For nearly two hours the Japanese ships manoeuvred drastically at maximum speed while the aircraft showered down their bombs and dropped shoals of torpedoes. The Yamato was hit by five bombs and ten torpedoes. She capsized and sank after a violent explosion with the loss of 2498 officers and men, including her commanding officer and Vice-Admiral Ito and his staff. The Yahagi and the destroyers Hamakaze, Isokaze and Kasumi ⁴ were also sunk with most of their ships' companies. The four surviving destroyers, one of which was badly damaged, returned to Sasebo during the night. A total of 386 American aircraft had achieved a great naval victory at a

cost of only ten of their number and the loss of sixteen airmen.

¹ United States Strategic Bombing Survey: Campaigns of the Pacific War, p. 325.

² Yahagi, cruiser, 7000 tons; speed 37 knots; six 6·1-inch, eight 4-inch, and nineteen small anti-aircraft guns; four 24-inch torpedo-tubes.

³ Asashimo, destroyer, 2100 tons; 37 knots; six 4·7-inch and ten anti-aircraft guns; fifteen 24-inch torpedo-tubes.

⁴ Hamakaze, Isokaze, and Kasumi, 1900 tons; 35 knots; six 5-inch guns; eight 24-inch torpedo-tubes.

Soon after leaving its fuelling area on 10 April, the [British Pacific Fleet](#) was instructed to attack airfields in northern [Formosa](#) while aircraft of General MacArthur's command struck at those in the southern part of the island and an American task group kept up the neutralisation of the Sakishima airfields. The fleet arrived in the flying-off position, 30 miles south-west of the Sakishimas, at daybreak on 11 April but bad weather caused a postponement of operations for twenty-four hours.

Early next morning the two main strikes, each of 24 bombers and 20 fighters, were flown off and proceeded round the north coast of [Formosa](#), heavy cloud preventing their flying over the mountains. One strike bombed the airfields at Shinchiku and the other, finding Matsuyama airfield shut in by low cloud, attacked Keelung harbour, doing damage to the docks, shipping, and a chemical plant. One flight bombed a railway station and a factory near Matsuyama, destroyed a grounded aircraft, and demolished a bridge. Two fighters shot down four out of five eastbound bombers and damaged the other. Four other enemy aircraft were shot down during the day. In the evening Japanese aircraft made a sortie from Ishigaki but were intercepted by fighters, eight being shot down and three damaged. A New Zealand pilot, Sub-Lieutenant (A) Daniel McAleese, ¹ of 849 Squadron, HMS *Indefatigable*, was lost when his Avenger crashed on Sharyo Island off Keelung

harbour. He was badly injured and died next day in a Japanese hospital at Keelung.

Shortly before dawn on 13 April, four Japanese aircraft made an unsuccessful attack on the fleet. HMS Indomitable was narrowly missed by a dud bomb. One enemy aircraft was destroyed by gunfire. Unfortunately, a Hellcat fighter which failed to get clear of the fleet during the heavy firing was shot down by the Gambia's port pom-pom in the dim light and the pilot killed. About an hour later, another enemy group was intercepted 25 miles from the fleet and two aircraft were shot down by Corsairs. Two bomber strikes made successful attacks on the [Formosa](#) airfields. During the two days' operations at least thirty-six Japanese aircraft were destroyed and others damaged.

When Task Force 57 arrived in the fuelling area on 14 April it was joined by HMS Formidable, which relieved HMS Illustrious. The latter carrier, which had been ordered home for an extensive refit, sailed for Leyte. On this occasion the Admiralty tanker Wave King established a record for the number of ships fuelled in one day and pumped 5050 tons of oil in nine hours. When news of the death of President Roosevelt was received, all ships flew colours at half-mast for the last hour before sunset on 14 April.

¹ Sub-Lieutenant (A) D. McAleese, RNZNVR: born County Antrim, [Ireland](#), 15 Oct 1919; public servant; killed on air operations 13 Apr 1945.

Vice-Admiral Rawlings had informed Admiral Spruance of his intention to prolong operations and advised him that Task Force 57 would be available to strike at the Sakishima airfields on 20 April. The Commander US Fifth Fleet replied: 'Affirmative. This is fine initiative and co-operation.' The Commander-in-Chief Pacific (Admiral Nimitz) noted the offer with gratification, adding: 'It is characteristic of your Force repeatedly to put forth extra effort whenever there is any chance to do added damage to the enemy. You have my appreciation of an offer so in keeping with the traditions of the British Navy.'

On 16 and 17 April the airfields on Ishigaki and Miyako were well bombed and left unserviceable. Four Japanese aircraft were shot down. During the afternoon of the 16th three separate 'bogeys' were reported. They were probably piloted 'flying-

bombs' launched too far away to reach the fleet before their fuel was exhausted. At that time the Japanese were using a rocket-propelled weapon which was launched from an aircraft and guided by a pilot in a suicide attack. Twelve such weapons were found by the Americans on [Okinawa](#).

Task Force 57 arrived in the fuelling area on the 18th and was joined by the Australian-manned destroyers [Napier](#), [Nepal](#), and [Norman](#). Though the fleet had received no replacement aircraft since 9 April, it was decided that an operation of one day was possible. Five strikes were flown off the carriers at daybreak on the 20th and dropped 75 tons of bombs on the airfields at Ishigaki and Miyako. Rocket-firing fighters set fire to a barracks, a radar station, and several small ships. A lengthy search failed to find the crew of an Avenger which 'ditched' 10 miles from Ishigaki, but they were rescued twenty-four hours later by a [United States](#) naval vessel. In the evening the fleet shaped course for Leyte Gulf. In a series of six air strikes in the Sakishima Gunto area, nineteen aircraft had been destroyed by enemy action, with a loss of sixteen pilots and thirteen members of the air crews. More than seventy Japanese aircraft had been destroyed and at least fifty-two damaged.

When the [British Pacific Fleet](#) arrived in San Pedro Bay in the afternoon of 23 April, it had completed thirty-one days at sea since sailing from Ulithi. During that period it had been refuelled and stored six times by the ships of the Fleet Train. This was the first occasion on which a modern British naval force of this size had been maintained at sea for so long a period. ¹

On board the [Gambia](#) the epidemic of mumps was still running

¹ In June 1945 Admiral Fraser reported that 'the [British Pacific Fleet](#) has been making British Naval history by operating off the enemy coast for periods of up to 30 days, but it is well to remember that similar American task groups are doing the same thing for twice as long'.

its course. When she arrived in San Pedro Bay there were twenty-three cases isolated on board, in addition to forty in the New Zealand hospital ship [Maunganui](#). By the end of the month a large number had returned to duty, but there were still eight cases on board and twenty-seven in the [Maunganui](#). The heat and lethargic effect of the tropical climate made conditions very trying for the many employed in

the cramped spaces below deck on maintenance, boiler-cleaning, and repairs. There was, in fact, little time for rest and relaxation for officers and ratings and many wished themselves back at sea again. Boats were very short while the fleet was in the crowded anchorage and insufficient for liberty men to be landed. Vice-Admiral Rawlings reported that 'since the liberty men could not get to the beer, I authorised the beer to be brought to them, the supplies available allowing one bottle per head per day. This innovation proved immensely popular ... and I have no doubt whatever that it was a great and well-deserved boon in a period of hard work in great heat'.

On 29 April HMNZS Gambia challenged the fleet to an 'allcomers' race in whalers, with crews of twenty-five using paddles instead of oars. Eighteen boats entered for the race in which the Gambia's crews, dressed as Maoris, finished first and third respectively, HMCS Uganda's crew being second.

Captain Edwards, CBE, RN, ¹ arrived on 27 April and assumed command of the Gambia next day, relieving Captain William-Powlett, DSC, RN, who had commissioned the ship as a unit of the Royal New Zealand Navy in September 1943.

While the [British Pacific Fleet](#) was at San Pedro Bay the possibility of its taking part in an operation against [Borneo](#) was under consideration, but the United States Commander-in-Chief, [Pacific](#), decided that air strikes against the Sakishima Gunto were to be continued. When Task Force 57 arrived in the flying-off area at daybreak on 4 May 1945, Japanese aircraft activity was detected by radar, the general trend of traffic being in the direction of [Okinawa](#). One small group approached the fleet and the combat air patrol shot down a Japanese fighter, the others escaping in the clouds. Bomber strikes from the four carriers left the airfields on Ishigaki and Miyako well cratered and unserviceable. One Avenger crashed into the sea when taking off, but the pilot was rescued unhurt by a destroyer.

During the forenoon the battleships and cruisers with six destroyers left the carriers and steamed in at 24 knots to bombard

¹ Rear-Admiral R. A. B. Edwards, CB, CBE; born 1901; entered RN 1914; midshipman HMS Tiger, 1917–19; Captain, 1939; Naval Staff, Admiralty, 1939–41; Eastern Fleet Headquarters, 1942–43; CO HMNZS Gambia 1945–46; Rear-Admiral, 1948; Assistant Chief of Naval Staff, Admiralty, 1948–50.

the airfields on Miyako Island. The four carriers, which were screened by eight destroyers, flew off an additional combat air patrol for the bombarding force, as well as aircraft for spotting its gunfire. The fleet opened fire at 12.5 p.m. While the *Euryalus* and *Black Prince* shelled the anti-aircraft batteries at Nobara airfield, the *King George V* and *Howe* bombarded Hirara airfield, 195 rounds from their 14-inch guns being fired at a mean range of 25,000 yards. The *Swiftsure* and *Gambia* concentrated on the Nobara airfield and the *Uganda* shelled the Sukuma airstrip at a mean range of 18,000 yards. HMNZS *Gambia* fired 230 rounds from her 6-inch guns. The bombardment lasted for three-quarters of an hour, and air photographs showed that it had been effective.

While the battleships and cruisers were away, the carriers were attacked by Kamikaze suicide bombers. There were probably from sixteen to twenty aircraft, some of which acted as decoys. While fighters engaged one group, others made for the ships. There were no 'bandits' on the radar screen when, at 11.30 a.m., an aircraft was seen diving from a great height on HMS *Formidable* and engaged by gunfire. The four carriers manoeuvred by successive emergency turns under full helm at high speed. Though reported hit by close-range fire from its target, the Kamikaze crashed on to the flight deck near the island superstructure of the *Formidable* and started a large fire in the aircraft park. One Corsair and ten Avengers were damaged beyond repair. A hole about two feet square was blown in the armoured flight deck, which was distorted to a depth of two feet at the centre of an area ten feet in width. A large splinter of steel was blown down through the hangar deck and the centre boiler-room, where a steam-pipe was ruptured, and came to rest in a fuel tank in the ship's double bottom. The barriers on the flight deck were damaged, one beyond repair, and much of the radar equipment was put out of action. Eight men were killed and 47 wounded.

Two minutes after the *Formidable* had been hit, two suicide aircraft were shot down in flames by the carriers' fighters, and a third which flew in close to HMS *Indomitable* disappeared in the clouds. It soon returned and dived steeply on that ship. The carriers were turning to starboard at the time and the *Indomitable* increased her helm to 'hard-over'. The aircraft was heavily engaged by the ship's close-range weapons and set on fire. It flattened out at the last moment, hit the

flight deck, and bounded over the side, its bomb exploding as it sank. Eight minutes later another aircraft dived on the Indomitable, whose guns and those of the destroyer Quality hit it hard. The aircraft burst into flames and crashed into the sea about ten yards off the starboard bow of the carrier. No casualties were sustained by the Indomitable in either of these attacks.

Half an hour later the carriers had to turn into the wind to land their fighters for refuelling, those of HMS Formidable being taken by the other carriers. Two Japanese suicide aircraft were shot down by fighters from the Indomitable and Indefatigable. In the meantime, the fires in the Formidable were got under control and the ship was able to steam at 24 knots. The hole in her flight deck was filled with steel plate and rapid-hardening cement, one aircraft barrier was made workable by hand tackle, and repairs to electrical, radar, and signalling equipment were well advanced. The bombardment force rejoined the carriers at 2.20 p.m. and the fleet withdrew to the southward. By five o'clock the Formidable was able to receive thirteen of her Corsairs.

During the afternoon Corsairs from HMS [Victorious](#) intercepted and shot down a Kamikaze aircraft. Later on an impending attack on the fleet was forestalled by fighters. One Japanese aircraft was shot down from 24,000 feet, and a few minutes later Seafires from the Indefatigable destroyed three out of four others. A Hellcat fighter, piloted by Sub-Lieutenant (A) A. R. Thompson, ¹ of 1839 Squadron, returning to make an emergency landing on the Indomitable, was fired on and hit by the Formidable. The aircraft crashed, but Thompson was rescued unhurt by the destroyer Undaunted. Less than an hour later, Corsairs from the [Victorious](#) found and shot down another Japanese aircraft, making a total of fourteen destroyed during the day. The carriers' losses totalled fifteen, including eleven destroyed on board the Formidable.

The airfields on Miyako and Ishigaki were again well bombed the following day. Three Japanese aircraft were destroyed on the ground and a petrol dump set on fire. As a result of the previous day's bombardment, no anti-aircraft fire was encountered over Miyako. About 7.30 a.m. four Corsairs belonging to the Formidable, but which had spent the night in the [Victorious](#), spotted a high-flying snooper and chased it for 300 miles. The aircraft was finally overhauled about 80 miles from the fleet and shot down from 30,000 feet by Sub-Lieutenant (A) Ian Stirling, ² of 1842 Squadron, a

remarkable feat that earned him the commendation of Admirals Rawlings and Vian and the subsequent award of the Distinguished Service Cross.

The next two days were spent with the Fleet Train, refuelling, replenishing aircraft, and making good damage to the Formidable. Thirty-six wounded from that carrier were taken by HMS Striker to Leyte, where they were transferred to the New Zealand hospital ship [Maunganui](#). Bad weather on 8 May caused a planned bombard-

¹ Lieutenant (A) A. R. Thompson, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 7 Jun 1921; clerk.

² Sub-Lieutenant (A) I. F. Stirling, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Whangarei](#), 1 Jul 1921; survey cadet, Lands and Survey Dept.

ment

of the Ishigaki airfields to be abandoned. The combat air patrols flown off at daybreak found it difficult to locate the Sakishima Islands in heavy rain squalls and low cloud and the bombing strikes were cancelled. It was with difficulty that the fighters were vectored back to the fleet. Flying almost at sea level and aided by the ships' searchlights, they managed to find their carriers and landed without mishap. The weather cleared next day and four bomber strikes were flown, 71 tons of bombs and 64 rocket projectiles being discharged on the Miyako and Ishigaki airfields. A direct hit was made on a Japanese aircraft at Miyako. Another aircraft hidden in a cave was destroyed by low-flying fighters.

During the afternoon another Kamikaze attack was made on the carriers. As the enemy aircraft approached, the fleet was manoeuvred radically by emergency turns at 22 knots. The ships had barely completed a turn of 60 degrees to starboard when a suicide bomber made a shallow dive on HMS [Victorious](#) from her starboard quarter. The aircraft was well hit by close-range weapons and crashed on the flight deck near the forward lift. The resulting fire was quickly got under control, but the bomb explosion blew a hole in the flight deck, put a 4.5-inch gun out of action, and damaged the motor of the lift. Another Kamikaze made a shallow power glide from

astern on the [Victorious](#). Hit hard by the guns, and burning fiercely, it struck the flight deck and went overboard. Minor damage was done to the ship, but four Corsairs were smashed beyond repair. Casualties from both attacks were three killed and fifteen injured, four of them seriously so.

Barely a minute later a third suicide bomber made a pass at the [Victorious](#) and then swept on HMS Howe, further ahead, in a long shallow dive. The aircraft was hit several times and was well ablaze when it crashed into the sea about 100 yards from the Howe after passing over her quarter-deck. Shortly afterwards the Gambia passed close by a body attached to a parachute which had come adrift from one of the Japanese aircraft.

Yet another suicide bomber was then sighted by the Gambia and engaged by several ships. It appeared to be diving straight for the New Zealand cruiser, which had opened fire from both 4-inch batteries, but turned sharply and dived on to the after-deck park of the Formidable. There was a great explosion and fire, which destroyed six fighters and a bomber. One man was killed and several injured. Speed was reduced to 15 knots to aid control of the fire, which was extinguished in about fifteen minutes. The explosion blew out a rivet in the flight deck; causing burning petrol to leak into the hangar which had to be sprayed with water. Eleven aircraft were damaged.

During the day the carriers had lost twelve aircraft and eight had been damaged beyond repair. The Formidable and [Victorious](#) could still operate, but the former had only four bombers and eleven fighters still serviceable and two pom-pom gun mountings were out of action. The fleet withdrew that night to the fuelling area, where temporary repairs to the two carriers were made and replacement aircraft flown on.

Attacks on the Miyako and Ishigaki airfields were repeated on 12–13 May, 128 tons of bombs being dropped and 66 rocket projectiles discharged. Five aircraft were lost, two being shot down. The crews of two ditched bombers were rescued by the [United States](#) submarine Bluefish. The tenth operation against the Sakishima Islands began on 16 May, when three bomber strikes were made on Miyako and two on Ishigaki. The airfields were again well cratered, seven grounded aircraft and numerous small craft being damaged and four truck-loads of Japanese troops

exterminated. A bomber and two fighters 'ditched' during the day, their crews being picked up by destroyers and the ubiquitous Bluefish. Very light winds handicapped the carriers on the 17th. In the morning a Corsair, making an emergency landing on the [Victorious](#), crashed through the barriers, burst into flames, and went overboard. On its way it damaged three aircraft in the deck park. One officer and a rating were mortally injured, two ratings seriously injured, and two others slightly hurt.

A few hours after the fleet arrived in the fuelling area on 18 May, a fire broke out in the Formidable when the guns of a Corsair in the hangar were accidentally fired into an Avenger bomber, which caught fire and exploded. The blaze was extinguished by drenching the hangar. Seven bombers and twenty-one fighters, destroyed or badly damaged, were replaced from HMS Chaser. The fleet ran into dense fog when it returned to the operating area on 20 May and HMS Quilliam badly damaged her bow in collision with the Indomitable. The Black Prince towed the destroyer stern first to Leyte Gulf for repairs.

Low cloud and heavy rain hampered operations that day and only one strike on Miyako was made. A fighter from the [Victorious](#) was shot down and one crashed when taking off from the Formidable, the pilot of the latter being rescued unhurt by a destroyer. Despite unfavourable weather next day, three successful strikes were flown against Miyako and two against Ishigaki. In the afternoon a Japanese aircraft was intercepted at 26,000 feet and shot down by four fighters from the Indomitable. As the fleet withdrew in the evening to meet the Fleet Train, Admiral Rawlings recalled that forty years before he had passed his sixteenth birthday in those waters. He was then a midshipman in HMS Goliath, which was on its way to reinforce the British China Fleet during the critical phase of the Russo-Japanese War, when the Russian Fleet was to be annihilated by Admiral Togo in the Battle of the Sea of [Japan](#) on 27 May 1905.

The [Achilles](#), which had come from Manus Island, joined Task Force 57 on 22 May and took her place in company with the Gambia in the Fourth Cruiser Squadron. Task Force 57 carried out its twelfth and final series of attacks on the Sakishima Gunto airfields on 24–25 May, five bomber strikes being made on Miyako and two on Ishigaki. The fleet withdrew after dark on the 25th, Vice-Admiral Rawlings in HMS King George V, with the destroyers Troubridge, Tenacious, and Termagant,¹ proceeding to [Guam](#), headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief Pacific. The

remainder of the fleet under Rear-Admiral Vian set course for Manus Island, where they arrived on 30 May.

During the whole period of the operations against the Sakishima Gunto, Task Force 57 was at sea for sixty-two days, broken by eight days spent in Leyte Gulf. In the absence of the British ships while refuelling, an American task group maintained the attacks on the airfields and, in the later stage, aircraft based on [Okinawa](#) also took part. In the course of its operations the task force flew 4852 aircraft sorties and discharged 875 tons of bombs and rocket projectiles. About one hundred Japanese aircraft were destroyed and more than seventy damaged. Vice-Admiral Rawlings reported that 'however thoroughly the airfields were neutralised by day, the enemy was determined and able to effect repairs by night.' During the second part of the operations, nine tankers supplied the fleet with 87,000 tons of fuel-oil and 756 tons of aviation spirit, so enabling it to remain at sea for a month between 700 and 900 miles from its base.

The *Gambia* was with Task Force 57 for the whole of the operations, except for the period of seven days when she was towing the damaged *Ulster* to Leyte and returning to the fleet. She accompanied part of the fleet to Manus Island and thence to [Sydney](#), where they arrived on 5 June 1945 to refit. The *Gambia* was at sea for the whole of May, during which she steamed 10,684 miles.

Many New Zealand officers of the Fleet Air Arm took part in the twelve operations against the Sakishima airfields and nine of them received awards for gallant service. In addition to Lieutenant (A) A. B. MacRae, DSO, and Sub-Lieutenant (A) Ian Stirling, DSC, already mentioned, Lieutenant (A) Parli ² and Sub-Lieutenants

¹ Troubridge, Tenacious, and Termagant, fleet destroyers; built 1942–43; 1710 tons; speed 34 knots; four 4·7-inch, eight AA guns; eight torpedo-tubes.

² Lieutenant (A) J. A. Parli, DSC, RNZNVR; born Taumarunui, 10 May 1919; NZ Railways employee.

(A) MacLeod, ¹ Rhodes, and Richards ² were awarded the Distinguished Service

Cross and Sub-Lieutenants (A) Glading,³ Stalker,⁴ and Holdaway⁵ were mentioned in despatches. Parli of 1833 Squadron, HMS *Illustrious*, was said to have shown 'outstanding leadership, determination and skill in pressing home strafing attacks on airfields in the Sakishima group in the face of anti-aircraft fire.' As a Seafire pilot of 887 Squadron, HMS *Indefatigable*, MacLeod led his division on combat air patrols. On one occasion they shot down three out of four Japanese suicide aircraft, of which MacLeod accounted for one. His leadership and flying were 'of a high standard and greatly inspired the pilots flying with him.' Rhodes, a fighter pilot of 1836 Squadron, HMS *Victorious*, took part in many strafing missions and shot down a Japanese fighter. He was a 'very reliable pilot' who several times had successfully led his division. Of Richards, 1836 Squadron HMS *Victorious*, it was recorded that 'his courage, keenness and all-round efficiency are of the highest order and he has always been an inspiration and example to his fellow-pilots.' During the Sakishima operations he completed 51 hours 55 minutes of combat flying. Glading, of 1841 Squadron HMS *Formidable*, showed great keenness and much initiative on operations. Holdaway, of 820 Squadron HMS *Indefatigable*, took part in many strikes and pressed his attacks with determination. Stalker, a bomber pilot of HMS *Victorious*, set himself a very high standard and in eighteen operations in which he took part the 'accuracy of his bombing would be hard to equal'. He had been twice 'shot up', once over *Palembang* in *Sumatra*, where his aircraft was hit forty times.

The *Achilles* spent nearly a fortnight at Manus Island, whence she sailed on 12 June, with Task Group 111.2, organised to carry out Operation INMATE — a bombardment of the Japanese base at *Truk*, which had been bypassed by the Americans in 1944. Rear-Admiral E. J. P. Brind, commanding Fourth Cruiser Squadron, hoisted his flag in the fleet carrier *Implacable* as commander of the task group, which included the escort carrier *Ruler* (to provide a spare deck for the *Implacable*'s aircraft), the cruisers *Swiftsure*, *Newfoundland*, *Uganda* and *Achilles*, and destroyers *Troubridge*, *Tenacious*, *Termagant*, *Terpsichore*, and *Teazer*. About twenty New

¹ Sub-Lieutenant (A) A. S. MacLeod, DSC, RNZNVR; born Manaia, 2 Sep 1920; advertising agent.

² Sub-Lieutenant (A) J. H. Richards, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Dannevirke](#), 1 Feb 1921; publisher.

³ Sub-Lieutenant (A) R. H. Glading, DSC, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Lower Hutt](#), 10 Mar 1921; golf professional.

⁴ Sub-Lieutenant (A) H. E. Stalker, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Masterton](#), 18 Sep 1922; architect.

⁵ Sub-Lieutenant (A) L. W. Holdaway, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Blenheim](#), 22 Aug 1921; watchmaker.

Zealand officers of the Fleet Air Arm were serving in the *Implacable* and *Ruler*. There were also New Zealand ratings in those ships and in some of the Royal Navy cruisers.

Aircraft from the *Implacable* made numerous strikes on docks, shipping, airfields, gun positions, and wireless stations in [Truk](#) atoll on 14–15 June. In the forenoon of the 15th the cruisers and destroyers bombarded the seaplane base on Dublon Island and other targets. The [Achilles](#) fired 180 rounds of 6-inch high-explosive shell at a mean range of 21,000 yards. During the action she flew battle flags, that on the foremast being the New Zealand ensign. One *Seafire* fighter was shot down by enemy anti-aircraft fire and four *Avengers* crashed when taking off from the *Implacable*. While the cruisers were withdrawing from the bombardment, the [Achilles](#) opened fire from her 4-inch batteries on two aircraft which came out of the clouds from the direction of [Truk](#). Six salvos were fired before the aircraft were identified as *Avengers*. The task group returned to Manus Island on 17 June.

The struggle for [Okinawa](#) lasted nearly twelve weeks and was one of the fiercest of the war. Continuous assistance to the [United States](#) troops was given by the supporting ships which on one day, 15 May, fired 420,000 rounds of 5-inch and larger shell against the Japanese positions. The stubborn resistance of the defenders of [Okinawa](#) was not finally overcome till 21 June. Approximately 131,300 Japanese were killed and 7400 prisoners were taken.

The Americans paid a high price in men and material for [Okinawa](#). Casualties to [US Army](#) troops were 7213 killed and missing and 31,080 wounded. In the naval forces 4907 were killed and missing and 4824 wounded. Thirty-six ships were sunk and 368 damaged, and 763 aircraft were lost. Nor was the damage suffered by the ships solely due to enemy attacks. On 5 June a typhoon struck the United States Fleet and damaged more than twenty ships, including three battleships, four aircraft-carriers, and the heavy cruiser [Pittsburg](#). That ship lost 104 feet of her bow but reached [Guam](#), 900 miles away, the forepart of the vessel being towed in by a tug some days later.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 25 – THE SURRENDER OF JAPAN

CHAPTER 25

The Surrender of Japan

THE overwhelming maritime power of the Allies was now free to concentrate on the Japanese homeland. Japan's sea power, which had gained her immense and easy conquests, was broken and she was a defeated nation. The remnant of her once powerful navy was impotent. Her mercantile marine was destroyed; more than 8,600,000 tons of shipping had been sunk, much of it by American submarines. In that story there was a moral for the British Commonwealth. Japan was completely cut off from oil and other overseas supplies, as Britain would have been had the U-boats succeeded. For many months Allied aircraft, from carriers and island bases, had been casting an ever-increasing weight of bombs upon Japan's principal cities.

On 1 July 1945 the fast carrier forces of the United States Third Fleet, commanded by Admiral Halsey, who had taken over from Admiral Spruance, sailed from Leyte Gulf for Japanese waters. Their task, in which they were to be aided by the British Pacific Fleet, was to 'complete the destruction of the Japanese Fleet, conduct a pre-invasion campaign of destruction against every industry and resource contributing to Japan's ability to wage war and maintain maximum pressure on the Japanese in order to lower their will to fight.' Halsey's Third Fleet, known as Task Force 38, consisted of 8 fast battleships, 16 large aircraft-carriers, 18 cruisers, and 62 destroyers. Arriving on 9 July 1945 in an area 170 miles south-east of Tokyo, Task Force 38 launched more than 1000 aircraft in an attack on industrial plants and airfields in the vicinity of the Japanese capital. Next day some 2000 aircraft struck in the greatest one-day attack of the Pacific war up to that time. Super-Fortresses from the Marianas and fighters and bombers from Iwo Jima and Okinawa joined with Halsey's thousand in spreading fire and destruction far and wide.

For 81 years no hostile warship had fired a gun at the shores of Japan, but that immunity was ended on 14 July 1945 when a force of three battleships and two heavy cruisers carried out the first of a series of bombardments. The target was a large steel works at Kamaishi, a port on the north-east of Honshu. The shelling started great fires and caused much destruction, one steel mill and other works being demolished. On the next day the ships bombarded the port of Muroran, in Hokkaido, where steel works and other industrial plants were destroyed. This attack

so far north beyond the range of shore-based aircraft came as a painful surprise to the Japanese. Not a shot was fired in return and no aircraft attempted to attack the ships off Kamaishi or Muroran.

The *Gambia* spent the greater part of June in refitting and storing at [Sydney](#). Rear-Admiral Brind, commanding Fourth Cruiser Squadron, hoisted his flag in her on the morning of 28 June, when she sailed with the [British Pacific Fleet](#) for Manus Island. Two days later the Admiral and his staff transferred at sea to HMS [Newfoundland](#). When the fleet arrived at Manus Island on 4 July, the *Achilles*, which had been refitting in one of the great floating docks there, rejoined the Fourth Cruiser Squadron.

The British Pacific Fleet, now designated Task Force 37, consisted of the following ships:

Battleship: King George V (flag of Vice-Admiral Rawlings).

Aircraft-carriers: Formidable (flag of Vice-Admiral Vian), Implacable, Indefatigable, Victorious.

Fourth Cruiser Squadron: [Newfoundland](#) (flag of Rear-Admiral Brind), *Gambia*, *Achilles*, *Uganda* ([Canada](#)), *Euryalus*, *Black Prince*.

Destroyers: *Barfleur*, *Grenville*, *Quality*, *Quadrant*, *Quiberon*, *Quickmatch*, *Teazer*, *Tenacious*, *Termagant*, *Terpsichore*, *Troubridge*, *Ulysses*, *Undaunted*, *Undine*, *Urania*, *Urchin*, *Wager*, *Wakeful*.

Task Force 37 sailed from Manus Island on 6 July, refuelled from the tankers of the Fleet Train on passage and, at daybreak on 16 July, joined Admiral Halsey's Task Force 38 in an area off the Japanese coast. Next morning, in low cloud and poor visibility, strong forces of aircraft flew off the Allied carriers and attacked airfields, railways, and other targets in the [Tokyo](#) area. One squadron of Corsairs from HMS Formidable, which included two or three New Zealanders, flew across [Honshu](#) and made a successful surprise attack on airfields at Niigata, on the north-west coast. The adverse weather conditions and a forecast of an approaching typhoon caused afternoon strikes to be cancelled. That night the King George V, Formidable, [Newfoundland](#), *Black Prince*, and five destroyers joined an American battleship force

in bombarding industrial plants along the coast north-east of [Tokyo](#). More than 1500 tons of shell were fired by the ships in less than one hour. Despite the weather, three strikes were flown from the British carriers on 18 July, thirteen aircraft being destroyed and twenty-five damaged on airfields near [Tokyo](#). In the two days five British aircraft were lost, but all the crews were saved. American aircraft attacked the naval base at Yokosuka, where the battleship Nagato ¹ was badly damaged by

¹ Nagato, 32,720 tons; 24 knots; eight 16-inch, twenty-five 5-inch guns; four torpedo-tubes.

heavy bombs. The old cruiser Kasuga, a veteran of the Russo-Japanese War, and several other ships were sunk. Twelve American aircraft were shot down, twenty-two airmen being killed.

All the New Zealand airmen in the British carriers took part on 24 July in the great strike on naval bases, shipping, and other targets in the Inland Sea. A major objective was the remnants of the [Japanese Fleet](#) lying in and about [Kure](#), virtually all the large ships being sunk or badly damaged. One New Zealander, Sub-Lieutenant (A) Graham, ¹ of 880 Squadron HMS Implacable, was killed that day. When his engine failed on the return journey, he baled out at 1000 feet, but his parachute failed to open. He was last seen floating, apparently unconscious, with his inflated dinghy nearby. Sub-Lieutenant (A) Banks, ² of HMS Indefatigable, was more fortunate. He was an observer in a Firefly fighter which had escorted a strike on an airfield on Shikoku and which, damaged and out of fuel, crashed about 40 miles from the fleet. The pilot, an Englishman, was lost, but Banks managed to get into the rubber dinghy, from which he was rescued by an American submarine three days later.

No desperate last-stand encounter in action at sea marked the end of the [Japanese Fleet](#). During the next few days carrier-based aircraft attacks on the surviving ships at [Kure](#) and other anchorages in the Inland Sea completed its destruction. Badly damaged by explosions and fires, all the major ships were sunk at their moorings and lay on the harbour bottom, either upright or capsized. The wrecked ships included the battleships Haruna, Hyuga, and Ise, the aircraft-carriers Amagi and Kaiyo, the heavy cruisers Aoba and Tone, and the light cruiser Oyoda. ³

The obsolete cruisers Iwate and Izumo,⁴ a destroyer, a submarine, and numerous small naval craft were also sunk. The aircraft-carrier Katsuragi⁵ was badly damaged but remained afloat.

Such was the grisly and unheroic end of the once proud fleet that had been the mainstay of [Japan's](#) imperialistic aggression and which, little more than three years before, had menaced the security of New Zealand and [Australia](#). Only one of her twelve battleships now remained afloat and it lay badly damaged in harbour.

Twenty-

¹ Sub-Lieutenant (A) D. N. Graham, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 6 Nov 1916; public servant; killed on air operations 24 Jul 1945.

² Sub-Lieutenant (A) D. W. Banks, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 1920; accountant.

³ Haruna, 31,000 tons; 25 knots; eight 14-inch, sixteen 6-inch guns; four torpedo-tubes. Hyuga and Ise, 34,500 tons; 23 knots; eight 14-inch, sixteen 5-inch guns; four torpedotubes; converted to carry aircraft. Amagi, 18,500 tons; 30 knots; about 50 aircraft. Kaiyo, 17,000 tons; 18 knots; about 40 aircraft. Aoba, 8800 tons; 33 knots; six 8-inch guns; twelve torpedo-tubes. Tone, 12,000 tons; 33 knots; eight 8-inch guns; twelve torpedotubes. Oyoda, 8000 tons; 33 knots; six 6 · 1-inch guns.

⁴ Iwate and Izumo, 9180 tons; 16 knots; four 8-inch, eight 6-inch guns; veterans of Russo-Japanese War; employed as training ships.

⁵ Katsuragi, 18,500 tons; 30 knots; about 50 aircraft.

three

out of twenty-seven aircraft-carriers had been sunk since May 1942, and three of the four survivors were unseaworthy. Of eighteen cruisers only two remained, lying heavily damaged at [Singapore](#). All but two of [Japan's](#) twenty-two light cruisers had been sunk and one of the survivors was partly destroyed. Approximately 130 destroyers, as well as 130 submarines, had been lost.

On 26 July there was issued from the Allied conference at [Potsdam](#), in the heart of defeated [Germany](#), an ultimatum calling on the Government of [Japan](#) to 'proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all the Japanese armed forces.' The proclamation said 'the prodigious sea, land and air forces of the [United States](#), the British Empire and [China](#), many times reinforced by their armies and air fleets from the west, are poised to strike the final blows upon [Japan](#).... The full application of our military power, backed by our resolve, will mean the inevitable and complete destruction of the Japanese armed forces and, just as inevitably, the utter devastation of the Japanese homeland....' The events of the next fortnight were to convince the [Japanese Government](#) and people that surrender was the only alternative to complete destruction.

Day after day thousands of aircraft from the Allied carriers and island bases bombed [Japan](#)'s airfields, harbours, railways, and industrial plants, causing immense havoc. The carrier strikes were interrupted only when the several task forces withdrew to refuel from their fleet trains. On 30 July three [United States](#) battleships and HMS King George V bombarded Hamamatsu, an important industrial city on the coast 120 miles south-west of [Tokyo](#). The bombardment lasted three hours, and at one point the ships were barely three-quarters of a mile from the shore.

When Task Force 37 arrived in the fuelling area on 31 July, the ships' companies of the [Gambia](#) and [Achilles](#) found HMNZS Arbutus with the Fleet Train and gave her a rousing welcome. The New Zealand Naval Board's offer of this little ship had been accepted by the Commander-in-Chief British Pacific Fleet in May, and she was sent to [Sydney](#) and fitted out for radio and radar repair and servicing duties. The Arbutus, which was commanded by Lieutenant Nigel Blair, RNZNVR, of [Wellington](#), left [Sydney](#) on 4 July and, after a call at Manus Island to embark a New Zealand radar officer and three radar mechanics, joined the Fleet Train in Japanese waters on 28 July. In one period of three days the Arbutus went alongside no fewer than forty ships to tranship stores and spare parts and service their radar equipment. On 8 August the Arbutus and two other small ships left the Fleet Train to escort three supply ships back to base at Manus Island. When she arrived there on the 17th, the Arbutus had completed a continuous period at sea of 33 days and steamed 7600 miles without a stop of her main engines. From Manus Island she escorted supply ships to [Hong](#)

[Kong](#), where she arrived in time for the Japanese surrender of that base on 16 September. When she finally returned to [Auckland](#) on 1 October, the *Arbutus* had steamed more than 20,000 miles in 77 days since leaving [Sydney](#). In a message to the New Zealand Naval Board, the Commander-in-Chief said he was 'most grateful for the contribution of HMNZS *Arbutus* to the effort of the [British Pacific Fleet](#).'

In the last three days of July radio transmissions and leaflets dropped by American aircraft warned the people of twenty-three Japanese cities of their imminent destruction by bombing. During the month Super-Fortress bombers of the United States Twentieth Air Force based in the Marianas Islands had dropped nearly 40,000 tons of heavy bombs on 39 industrial cities at a cost of 13 bombers. After refuelling, Task Forces 37 and 38 were ready on 2 August to resume their air strikes on targets in the Inland Sea area, but the passage of a severe typhoon caused a postponement of operations for a week. In the early hours of 2 August, Super-Fortresses loosed 6630 tons of bombs on four industrial cities in [Honshu](#) and the oil refineries at Kawasaki in the greatest strategic air operation yet carried out in the [Pacific](#). Three days later nearly 5000 tons of bombs were showered on four other 'nominated' cities.

These great air attacks were completely eclipsed by the dropping of the first atomic bomb on the city of [Hiroshima](#), an important military centre in [Honshu](#), a few miles north of [Kure](#). 'With this bomb,' said President Truman, 'we have now added a new and revolutionary increase in destruction to supplement the growing power of our armed forces.... We are now prepared to obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city. We shall destroy their docks, their factories and their communications. Let there be no mistake. We shall completely destroy [Japan's](#) power to make war.'

The atomic bomb was released over [Hiroshima](#) at 8.15 a.m. on 6 August 1945 from a B29 bomber piloted by Colonel Paul W. Tibbet, United States Army Air Force. Captain W. S. Parsons, USN, a naval ordnance expert, who had been associated for two years in the designing and testing of atomic bombs, was present as an observer. A built-up area of about four square miles was completely devastated in barely a second and great damage was done outside that area. Fires sprang up almost simultaneously over the wide flat area in the centre of the city and a great 'fire storm' developed with the inrush of air at from 30 to 40 miles an hour after the

explosion. Of an estimated population in [Hiroshima](#) of 225,000, more than 60,000 were killed outright or died soon afterwards and 69,000 were injured. More than 60,000 buildings of all kinds were destroyed or severely damaged. ¹

Less than forty-eight hours later another great shock befell the Japanese in the announcement that [Russia](#) had declared war. In the early hours of 9 August, troops of the Red Army crossed the frontier of Japanese-occupied [Manchuria](#) at several points. At eleven o'clock that morning the second atomic bomb was released over [Nagasaki](#), a great city and seaport on the west coast of Kyushu. A section of one and a half square miles of the city was completely devastated. Of a total population of about 200,000, more than 39,000 were killed and 25,000 injured.

About one hundred New Zealand pilots of the Fleet Air Arm serving in the carriers *Formidable*, *Victorious*, *Indefatigable*, and *Implacable* took an active part in the attacks – known as ‘Ramrods’ – on [Japan](#) in July and August. There were also many New Zealand radar ratings in the carriers and most of the other ships of the [British Pacific Fleet](#). Nine of the New Zealand pilots were included in the ‘honours and awards’ list, two of them for the second and one for the third time.

Sub-Lieutenant (A) H. A. Rhodes, a fighter pilot of 1836 Squadron HMS [Victorious](#), who fought in six ‘Ramrods’, was awarded a bar to his Distinguished Service Cross – he had earlier been mentioned in despatches. His alertness and quickness of eye and dash made him ‘outstanding in a good operational fighter squadron.’ He showed ‘coolness and superb airmanship’ in landing his badly shot-up Corsair, in which the flying controls were virtually entirely destroyed, safely on his carrier after returning with valuable photographs which he knew were needed to assess the damage done to a Japanese carrier.

Five officers – Lieutenant-Commander (A) Evans ² and Lieutenants (A) Curran, ³ R. H. Glading, McClisky, ⁴ and Woodroffe ⁵ – were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, and Lieutenants (A) Alexander ⁶ and Greenway ⁷ and Sub-Lieutenants (A) Morten ⁸ and

¹ United States Strategic Bombing Survey: Effects of Atomic Bombs.

² Lieutenant-Commander (A) D. K. Evans, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 16 Oct 1916; salesman.

³ Lieutenant (A) R. P. Curran, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Feilding](#), 30 Jan 1920; farmer.

⁴ Sub-Lieutenant (A) D. H. P. McClisky, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Wanganui](#), 3 Oct 1921; storeman; died Jul 1954.

⁵ Lieutenant (A) S. G. Woodroffe, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 26 Nov 1919; salesman.

⁶ Lieutenant (A) J. D. Alexander, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Christchurch](#), 21 May 1920; shipping clerk; killed on air operations 30 Jul 1945.

⁷ Lieutenant (A) R. H. Greenway, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Dunedin](#), 12 Feb 1918; clerk.

⁸ Sub-Lieutenant (A) D. Morten, DSC, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Sumner, Christchurch](#), 21 Dec 1921; clerk.

Middleton ¹ were mentioned in despatches. Evans had taken over command of 1836 Squadron in the [Victorious](#) at the beginning of July and successfully led eight 'Ramrods' over [Japan](#) 'with skill, courage, determination and good judgment.' Curran was the senior pilot of 849 (Bomber) Squadron in the [Victorious](#) and a 'gallant and capable officer who displayed good leadership, coolness and determination' in seven successful strikes. Glading, of 1841 Squadron, HMS Formidable, who had previously been mentioned in despatches, took part in eight 'Ramrods' in which he shot down a number of Japanese aircraft. He was known for his calmness in the stress of fighter operations. As an experienced fighter pilot of 1841 Squadron, HMS Formidable, McClisky was in five strikes over [Japan](#) and destroyed at least three enemy aircraft. Woodroffe, of 820 Squadron HMS Indefatigable, was noted for his determination and dash on operations.

The posthumous award of mention in despatches was made to Lieutenant (A) Alexander of 887 Squadron, HMS Indefatigable. While leading a Seafire fighter sweep in bad weather to strike at shipping in the Inland Sea on 30 July, he flew into intense anti-aircraft fire and was hit badly; but he was able to warn the other members of his squadron, who broke away and attacked successfully from a different direction without loss. Seven Seafires led by Lieutenant (A) A. S. MacLeod, DSC, made two searching runs without sighting Alexander's aircraft.

Lieutenant (A) Greenway of 1771 Squadron, HMS Implacable, was awarded a mention in despatches for his 'coolness and skill when navigating over long distances.' The good results achieved by every mission in which he took part were 'largely due to his efforts in bringing them to the right place at the right time.' A mention in despatches was awarded to Sub-Lieutenant (A) Derek Morten of 1841 Squadron, HMS Formidable, who had gained the DSC for his part in the air strikes on the German battleship Tirpitz in Norwegian waters in August 1944. He was a reliable flight leader who had taken part in many operations, including five 'Ramrods'. Sub-Lieutenant (A) Middleton of 1842 Squadron, HMS Formidable, who was also awarded a mention in despatches, was in eight 'Ramrods', after one of which he showed great skill and coolness in bringing back his badly damaged aircraft and landing safely on his carrier.

The American and British task forces resumed their attacks on [Honshu](#) in the morning of 9 August and for two days carrier aircraft operated in full strength. They ranged from Yokohama to the north-

¹ Sub-Lieutenant (A) J. A. Middleton, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Waimate, 27 Sep 1921; engineer.

east

end of the island, bombing airfields, shipping, railways, and industrial areas. More than 700 enemy aircraft were destroyed or damaged and numerous small naval and merchant vessels were sunk in harbour. A force of aircraft being assembled for suicide attacks on the American bomber bases in the Marianas was

wiped out. These attacks were to have taken the form of large-scale descents by suicide airborne troops.

For the first time since the combined fleets invaded Japanese home waters in July the enemy attempted a Kamikaze attack on 9 August. One aircraft crashed on board a [United States](#) destroyer, which was badly damaged. She was the only Allied warship damaged by enemy action during thirty-seven days of operations against [Japan](#) from 10 July to the end of hostilities. One Japanese suicide aircraft was shot down over one of the American task groups by two fighters from HMS Formidable. On 10 August Sub-Lieutenant (A) McBride,¹ of 1772 Squadron, HMS Indefatigable, was killed when returning from an attack on Koriyama airfield, 30 miles from the coast near [Sendai](#) in northern [Honshu](#).

On the morning of 9 August the [Gambia](#), [Newfoundland](#), and four destroyers, forming Task Unit 37.1.8 under the command of Rear-Admiral Brind, joined with an American task group in a bombardment of the steel works at Kamaishi, a seaport on the northeast coast of [Honshu](#). Aircraft from the [United States](#) battleship [Indiana](#) were employed for spotting and the bombardment lasted about two hours. During the retirement the ships were attacked by a Japanese aircraft, which was shot down by the [Gambia](#). This was probably the last enemy aircraft to be engaged by gunfire from a ship of the [British Pacific Fleet](#).

The fleets withdrew during the night of 10 August for fuel and provisions. On the following day the carriers [Formidable](#), [Victorious](#), and [Implacable](#), the cruisers [Achilles](#), [Euryalus](#), and [Argonaut](#), and eight destroyers were detached from Task Force 37 and sailed for Manus Island to await orders. The remaining ships – [King George V](#), [Indefatigable](#), [Newfoundland](#), [Gambia](#), and ten destroyers – now joined Task Group 38.5. On 13 August the [United States Third Fleet](#), with the British ships in company, attacked airfields and other targets in the vicinity of [Tokyo](#). Their combined aircraft flew more than 1150 offensive sorties and 400 combat air patrols during the day. They destroyed or damaged more than 400 enemy aircraft, as well as hangars and workshops on the airfields, railway locomotives, and industrial works. Seven American aircraft were lost.

¹ Sub-Lieutenant (A) T. C. G. McBride, RNZNVR; born [Petone](#), 2 Nov 1917;

public servant; killed on air operations 10 Aug 1945.

Hostilities against [Japan](#) ceased on 15 August 1945. The first wave of aircraft from the carriers, including one strike from HMS Indefatigable, attacked airfields and other targets near [Tokyo](#) before the cease fire order was received and a second flight was recalled. During the first strike some forty Japanese aircraft were engaged, of which about thirty were shot down. Combat air patrols shot down nine enemy bombers in the vicinity of the fleet. Six American aircraft were lost.

The Gambia recorded that the signal 'Cease hostilities against [Japan](#)' was made by the Commander Task Force at 11.23 a.m. While the signal was still flying there was a burst of cannon fire overhead from fighters engaging a Japanese bomber. This aircraft dropped a bomb which fell into the sea between the Gambia and the Indefatigable. The aircraft was shot down, part of it falling on the after superstructure of the Gambia. The ships then retired to the southward. At 10.10 am (GMT) 15 August, the Admiralty made the signal in plain language to all British ships: 'Splice the main brace.'

Early next morning HMS Duke of [York](#), flagship of the Commander-in-Chief British Pacific Fleet (Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser), escorted by two destroyers, joined Task Group 38.5. During the forenoon the American and British task groups steamed together in close formation to enable air photographs to be taken of the combined fleets, which were manoeuvred as one force by Admiral Halsey. This impressive demonstration of Allied sea power in Japanese waters was repeated on 17 August.

[Japan](#), which in 1941 was the third naval power of the world, had been defeated by the overwhelming maritime strength of the Allies. She was defeated without a single soldier having to be landed on her shores. She still had millions of troops under arms and thousands of combat aircraft. But, an island nation, she was without a navy. It is true that great and bitter land battles were fought for the possession of bases across the vast expanse of the [Pacific](#), but it was the sea power of the Allies and their command of the sea that enabled their armies to be transported great distances to storm ashore to capture those bases, while their fleets kept the seas for months at a time, supported by trains of supply ships. It was the bypassing strategy of Allied sea power that isolated and marooned Japanese armies in the [Pacific](#), some

of them for two years or more. Their numerous aircraft-carriers gave the Allied task forces a striking weapon of vastly increased flexibility, range, and power. The land-based aircraft operated from the captured bases as powerful adjuncts to the fleet. Even the atomic bomb, at its first use, functioned as a weapon of sea power.

Modern global war requires this co-ordinated use of all arms and weapons, backed by the full economic and industrial resources of the nation. [Japan](#), a country poor in basic resources and industrial potential, with a steel production little greater than that of [Belgium](#), had challenged two nations each of which possessed a navy greater than hers and which commanded immense industrial resources. In the circumstances of the first six months of the war [Japan](#) was able to make great conquests and rapidly expanded her area of command to embrace most of the Western Pacific as far as the Solomon Islands and the Aleutians. But by 1944–45 she had lost her navy and the greater part of her merchant marine, her communications with the 'Greater South-East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere' were severed, and she was overwhelmed by the combined American and British naval strength. The wartime-built ships of the United States Navy alone vastly exceeded in striking power the whole of [Japan's](#) 1941 fleet. In all this there is a profound lesson for the countries of the British Commonwealth. The Navy is 'still the first line the enemy must hurdle either in the air or on the sea in approaching our coasts across any ocean.' The Navy is still the first line of defence of our seaborne trade.

HMNZS [Gambia](#) was accorded the honour of representing the Royal New Zealand Navy in the naval occupation of defeated [Japan](#). Admiral Nimitz had accepted an offer by Admiral Fraser of a British force to take part in the operations, and HMS King George V (flagship of Vice-Admiral Rawlings), the [Indefatigable](#), the cruisers [Newfoundland](#) and [Gambia](#) and ten destroyers, two of which were Australian-manned, were detailed for this duty as Task Group 37. On the forenoon of 20 August the [Gambia](#) disembarked a detachment of her [Royal Marines](#) commanded by Captain G. M. Blake, RM, and two platoons of New Zealand seamen with a company headquarters commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Davis-Goff, [RNZN](#),¹ into two American destroyer-transports to prepare for the landing at the great naval base of Yokosuka at the entrance to [Tokyo Bay](#).

The entry of the great Allied armada into Sagami Wan² in brilliant sunshine on 27 August was a majestic and spectacular demonstration of the maritime power that

had brought [Japan](#) to utter defeat. The combined fleets numbered some 400 ships, including 14 battleships, 24 aircraft-carriers, 22 cruisers, 105 destroyers, 24 frigates, and about 200 vessels of the fleet trains – tankers, supply

¹ Captain G. R. Davis-Goff, DSC and bar, [RNZN](#), m.i.d.; born Renwicktown, [Marlborough](#), 24 Sep 1905; joined NZ Division, RN, as seaman boy, Aug 1921; warrant rank (Gunner) 1932; Lieutenant, May 1941; Commander, 1947; Captain, 30 Jun 1953.

² Sagami Wan is a wide bay from which the approach to [Tokyo](#) Bay lies through the narrow and strongly fortified Uraga Strait.

ships, minesweepers, tugs, and hospital ships. Overhead more than 1200 aircraft flown off the carriers covered the fleet, while bombers and fighters from [Okinawa](#) and [Iwo Jima](#) patrolled over the mainland of [Japan](#). The Gambia was the rear ship in the British Task Group 37. All the fighting ships were flying battle ensigns. The ships' crews were at general quarters in readiness for instant action in the event of any treacherous action. But Japan no longer possessed a fleet and all her combat aircraft had been grounded in conformity with the order of the Allied Supreme Commander. White flags were flying above the coast-defence batteries, from near which many Japanese gazed at the Allied ships. The days of [Pearl Harbour](#) and [Singapore](#) had passed into history.

When the fleets had moored, an advance force consisting of the [United States](#) cruiser San Diego, eight destroyers, and a transport crowded with [US Marines](#) steamed through Uraga Strait into [Tokyo](#) Bay, and anchored off Yokosuka near the badly damaged battleship Nagato and a number of sunken ships. Meanwhile, about 150 technicians of the United States Fifth Air Force from [Okinawa](#) had landed on Atsugi airfield, about 15 miles west of Yokohama, to set up communications and prepare for the arrival of airborne troops. Naval aircraft landed liaison officers and members of Admiral Halsey's staff for discussions with the Japanese command.

The Allied occupation forces began landing early on 30 August when a battalion of [US Marines](#) took over the heavy coast-defence guns covering the inner end of Uraga Strait. At the same time troops of the [United States](#) 11th Airborne Division

were arriving at Atsugi airfield at the rate of twenty transport aircraft an hour. They moved on Yokohama and took control of that city. The Allied Supreme Commander, General MacArthur, and his staff arrived in the afternoon and set up his headquarters in Yokohama. The naval landing took place at Yokosuka, where the city, the naval base, and the neighbouring forts were promptly occupied by a force of about 10,000 US Marines and naval ratings and the [Royal Marines](#) and seamen from the British ships. The battleship Nagato was taken possession of by an American naval party, an act which symbolised the unconditional and complete surrender of the Imperial Japanese Navy.

The Royal Marines, organised as a commando, landed on the east side of Yokosuka Bay, while C Company, which included two platoons of seamen from the [Newfoundland](#) and one from the Gambia, went ashore near the forts at Sura-Shima. The destroyer-transport carrying company headquarters (Lieutenant-Commander Davis-Goff and Lieutenant J. E. Washbourn, RN ¹) and D Company,

¹ Lieutenant-Commander J. E. Washbourn, [RNZN](#); born [Collingwood, Nelson](#), 26 Nov 1918; entered RN 1937; transferred to [RNZN](#), Nov 1947.

which included one platoon from the Gambia, moored in the harbour. Davis-Goff went ashore with the New Zealand platoon and organised a search of the dockyard, which had a neglected appearance and seemed to have been more or less deserted for weeks. In the administration offices were found Commander Yuzo Tanno, officer-in-charge of naval stores, ten junior officers, and forty guides and interpreters, wearing white armbands. All were extremely polite and anxious to help. Tanno handed over a large bunch of keys and the plans of the dockyard. During the afternoon the White Ensign and the New Zealand ensign were hoisted at company headquarters in the dockyard.

Late that night press correspondents returned from a visit to the Yokohama area with two prisoners of war released from a camp at [Ofuna](#), about eight miles from Yokosuka. They were Lieutenant (A) Donald Cameron, RNZNVR, ¹ of 1834 Squadron, HMS [Victorious](#), whose aircraft had been shot down over the Sakishima Gunto on 9 May 1945, and Chief Petty Officer Telegraphist H. E. G. Newman of HMS [Exeter](#), which was sunk in the Battle of the [Java](#) Sea on 1 March 1942. They were suffering

from the effects of ill-treatment and malnutrition, and from their statements it was apparent that [Ofuna](#), which was not registered as a prisoner-of-war camp, was a 'nasty little hell-hole'. There remained in the camp three other ratings from British ships sunk in the [Java](#) Sea and ninety-nine American airmen. The ratings were brought in next day, arrangements being made for a recovery team to look after the Americans. Incidentally, that was Lieutenant Cameron's second experience of a prisoner-of-war camp. As a Seafire pilot of 880 Squadron, HMS Stalker, he was flying over [Salerno, Italy](#), during the landing operations there in September 1943 when his engine failed and he made a forced landing on a beach. He was taken prisoner by the Germans, but escaped five days later when he was being transferred from one camp to another. After an arduous and perilous tramp of more than two weeks, including a crossing of the slopes of Mount Vesuvius, he remained in hiding with Italians for some time. He was found by a [Royal Marines](#) commando when [Naples](#) was captured. For his 'enterprise and devotion to duty' he was awarded a mention in despatches.

The combined fleets made their triumphal entry into [Tokyo](#) Bay on 29 August. The formal surrender of [Japan](#) to the Allies was made on board the USS Missouri there on the morning of Sunday, 2 September 1945. The United States flag flown by the Missouri that day carried thirty-one stars, as against the forty-eight of the present time; it was the flag flown by Commodore Perry, USN,

¹ Lieutenant (A) D. Cameron, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Christchurch](#), 23 Jul 1922; salesman.

when he entered Japanese waters ninety-two years before. Twelve signatures, requiring but a few minutes to subscribe to the instrument of surrender, marked a formal end to the [Pacific](#) war, which had entered its eighth year in [China](#) and for all the other Allies except [Russia](#) was nearing the end of its fourth year. Mr Mamoru Shigemitsu, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the new Japanese Cabinet, signed first on behalf of his Emperor and Government. He was followed by General Yoshijiro Uozu who signed for the Imperial General Staff. General MacArthur signed next as Allied Supreme Commander. Fleet Admiral Nimitz signed for the [United States](#), Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser for the [United Kingdom](#), and Air Vice-Marshal L. M. Isitt ¹ for New

Zealand. Thirty minutes after the signing of the surrender, a convoy of forty-two ships steamed into [Tokyo](#) Bay and began disembarking troops of the American occupation forces.

Lieutenant Allingham, RNZNVR,² of HMNZS [Gambia](#), was ADC to Air Vice-Marshal Isitt and accompanied him on board the [Missouri](#) for the surrender ceremony. That day the Royal Marine band of HMNZS [Gambia](#) was lent to HMS [Duke of York](#), flagship of Admiral Fraser, for the purposes of a musical 'sunset' ceremony, which was attended by Admiral Halsey and numerous officers of the American and British ships, among them Captain Ralph Edwards, RN, and five other officers from the [Gambia](#). The British ships' companies 'spliced the mainbrace' after the ceremony.³

During the next fortnight the commanders of more than three million troops of the Imperial Japanese Army on the mainland of [Asia](#) and isolated in the [Pacific](#) tasted the bitterness of defeat as they made their unconditional surrender to the Allies. A powerful force of the [British Pacific Fleet](#), commanded by Rear-Admiral Harcourt, entered [Hong Kong](#) on 30 August, and the formal surrender of that base took place on 16 September. The official surrender of all Japanese forces in South-East Asia was signed at [Singapore](#) on the 12th. In an Order of the Day read after the ceremony, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Com-

¹ AVM Sir Leonard Isitt, KBE, US Legion of Merit; born [Christchurch](#), 27 Jul 1891; served NZ Rifle Brigade 1915–16; RFC and [RAF](#) 1916–19; Chief of Air Staff (NZ) 1943–46; chairman, National Airways Corporation and Tasman Empire Airways.

² Lieutenant J. D. Allingham, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 1910; served RN 1940–41; HMNZS [Leander](#) 1943–44; HMNZS [Gambia](#) 1944–45.

³ That day the commander of the British Landing Force and two other officers visited the grave of Will Adams at the nearby village of Hammamate. Adams, who was born at Gillingham, near Chatham, in 1575, was the first Englishman to land in [Japan](#) and lived there from 1600 until his death in 1620. The grave and memorial were found to be in excellent order, the stone steps having been freshly swept and flowers placed on the

memorial by one Mazi Kobayashi, chief of the Neighbourhood Association. The keeper of the grave, Sintaro Furuoya, had been evicted in March 1945 by the Army authorities, who established a lookout post alongside the memorial. Furuoya, a spry little man of 70, arrived at BLF Headquarters next day and was presented to Vice-Admiral Rawlings, who expressed his appreciation of the care taken of the memorial.

mander

South-East Asia, said the Japanese surrender brought under the control of his command 500,000 Japanese troops and 1,500,000 square miles of territory with a population of 128,000,000. Many New Zealand officers and ratings serving in the East Indies were present at the surrender ceremony, after taking part in the occupation of [Malaya](#) and [Sumatra](#).

The formal surrender of the enemy forces, numbering 139,000, long cut off in the South Pacific, took place on 6 September on board HM aircraft-carrier *Glory*, anchored in St. George's Channel about 28 miles from [Rabaul](#). The instrument of surrender was signed by General Hitoshi Imamura and Vice-Admiral Jinichi Kusaka and by Lieutenant-General V. A. H. Sturdee, commanding the Australian 1st Army Corps.

A postscript to the story of the Solomon Islands campaign of 1942–44 was written at [Torokina](#), on [Empress Augusta Bay](#), [Bougainville](#), on 8 September, when Lieutenant-General J. S. Savige, commanding the Australian forces in that area, accepted the surrender of Lieutenant-General Kanda, commanding the Japanese Seventh Army, and of Vice-Admiral Noboru Sanajima. Lieutenant-General Adachi, commanding the Japanese Eighteenth Army in [New Guinea](#), surrendered at Wewak on 13 September.

The surrender of the Japanese forces on Nauru and Ocean Islands was the subject of some discussion between the Governments of the [United Kingdom](#), [Australia](#), and New Zealand and the United States Chiefs of Staff. As the islands were in the [United States](#) theatre of operations in the [Pacific](#), they were included in the 'other [Pacific Islands](#)' to be surrendered to the Commander-in-Chief United States Pacific Fleet as specified in the United States General Order. 'In the interests of expediting surrender and occupation, the U.S. Chiefs of Staff had no objection to the

use of Australian forces and shipping for the purpose, provided, however, that the commander of the Australian forces concerned reports to the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet, and accepts surrender of these two localities in his name.’¹

After it had been pointed out that Nauru and Ocean Islands were of urgent importance to [Australia](#) and New Zealand as sources of phosphates, and that production should be reopened at the earliest possible moment, it was finally agreed that in accepting the Japanese surrender of the islands the Australian commander ‘should sign, once as representative of the [United States](#) theatre commander and once as a representative of the [United Kingdom](#) or territorial authority.’

Escorted by HMAS *Diamantina*, the Australian force for the

¹ Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, telegram to Prime Minister, 31 August 1945.

occupation of Nauru Island sailed from [Torokina](#) on 9 September in two transports. Brigadier J. R. Stevenson was in command and was accompanied by Commander P. Phipps, DSC, RNZNVR, as representative of the [New Zealand Government](#), Sir Albert Ellis, New Zealand representative of the British Phosphate Commission, and Mr Bissett, New Zealand manager for the Commission. The force arrived at Nauru Island on 13 September, and the surrender of the 3200 Japanese and 550 Koreans was accepted that afternoon by Brigadier Stevenson on board the *Diamantina*. After landing the occupation troops and embarking the Japanese and Koreans, the ships returned to the Solomon Islands. A similar procedure was followed at Ocean Island, where Lieutenant-Commander Suzuki surrendered his force of 500 Japanese on 1 October 1945.

After the Japanese surrender, one of the most urgent tasks confronting the Allied forces was the recovery and repatriation of many thousands of prisoners of war and civilian internees. Under the compulsion of defeat the Japanese were co-operative, and the Allied organisation rapidly recovered all who had survived ill-treatment and malnutrition. They were transported in hospital ships, aircraft-carriers, and other readily available vessels. The *Gambia*, in company with the Australian-manned destroyer [Nizam](#), left [Tokyo](#) Bay on 12 September for Wakayama roadstead

in the eastern approach to the Inland Sea, where both ships worked with an American task group evacuating prisoners of war. About 2600 were embarked, Americans in a large landing ship for [Guam](#) and British and other nationals in two [United States](#) hospital ships for [Okinawa](#). To assist in the work the *Gambia* landed about one hundred officers and men, including the Royal Marine band which 'performed at the railway station nonstop, except for food, for over 24 hours.'

While lying in the roadstead the *Gambia* experienced the fury of a typhoon, a memorable experience for her ship's company. As the storm approached Wakayama in the evening of 17 September, special precautions were taken to secure the ship and a second anchor let go. By eleven o'clock the wind was at hurricane force with squalls of 100 miles an hour and very heavy rain. The *Gambia* rode well until midnight, when she was struck by an exceptionally heavy squall and started to drag almost beam on to wind and sea. Captain Edwards was compelled to steam at revolutions for 15 knots on the port engines until the ship was checked and came up into the wind. It was almost impossible to stand on deck, and one heavy sea half broke on board and injured an officer and two ratings. At 1 a.m. it was blowing harder than ever and the roar of wind and sea was terrific. The *Gambia* continued to steam up to her anchors at revolutions for eight to ten knots. The anchorage and its approaches were full of ships dragging or under way, many obviously in trouble. At 1.30 the barometer started to rise and it was 'estimated with some relief' that the storm centre was passing wide of the anchorage. The wind gradually decreased and, though a great sea was still running at eight o'clock, it fell away quickly. During the night three American landing craft drove ashore with the loss of four men, and a flying boat sank in the inner anchorage. The whole force of American heavy ships dragged seriously and one cruiser was less than half a mile from shallow water before she was checked by her engines. The *Gambia* and [Nizam](#) sustained minor damage.

Both ships returned on 20 September to [Tokyo](#) Bay, where the *Gambia* spent the next three weeks at anchor. On relief by the [Achilles](#), she sailed for New Zealand on 11 October and called at Manus Island for fuel and at [Sydney](#), where 34 officers and 80 ratings returning for demobilisation were embarked, and arrived at [Auckland](#) on the 30th. About that time, the [New Zealand Government](#) in agreement with the Admiralty had decided that, as soon as the manning situation made it possible, the

Gambia and [Achilles](#) would be replaced by two cruisers of the 'improved Dido' class as part of the post-war Royal New Zealand Navy. ¹

The Gambia ceased to be a unit of the [British Pacific Fleet](#) on 7 February 1946, when she paid off and re-commissioned with a steaming party of New Zealanders and Royal Navy ratings whose loan period had expired. After embarking a shipment of bullion, valued at £2,000,000, the Gambia sailed from [Auckland](#) for England on 12 February. Replying to a farewell message from the Naval Board, Captain Edwards expressed 'the pride which so many officers and men of the Royal Navy, including myself, feel in having served with the Royal New Zealand Navy on operations in the Second World War and the pleasure which they have experienced from their visits to the Dominion of New Zealand.'

The New Zealand steaming party left the Gambia at [Sydney](#), where large drafts of Royal Navy ratings joined, bringing the total of crew and passengers up to approximately 1000 officers and men. The cruiser called at [Melbourne](#) to embark a shipment of gold bullion valued at £3,000,000. She made the passage to England at 20 knots by way of [Fremantle](#), Trincomalee, [Aden](#), and the [Suez Canal](#), and arrived at Spithead on 27 March. After completing a long refit at [Devonport](#), the Gambia reverted to the Royal Navy on 1 July 1946.

¹ The cruisers allocated to the Royal New Zealand Navy were the [Bellona](#) and [Black Prince](#), 5770 tons displacement; speed 32 knots; eight 5.25-inch guns and numerous anti-aircraft guns; six torpedo-tubes; completed 1943. The [Black Prince](#), which was making a goodwill cruise of the Dominion, was taken over at [Auckland](#) in May 1946 and paid off to reserve. The [Bellona](#) was commissioned in the [United Kingdom](#) on 1 October 1946 and arrived at [Auckland](#) on 15 December 1946.

At the end of August 1945 the [Achilles](#) arrived at [Auckland](#) from Manus Island and was docked for repairs, after which she sailed for [Japan](#) to relieve the Gambia. She arrived in [Tokyo](#) Bay on 6 October and spent nearly four months in Japanese waters, during which time she made cruises to [Nagasaki](#), Sasebo, Kagoshima, and Nagoya. At that time facilities for recreation were very limited and shore leave was a somewhat difficult problem. The immediate postwar boredom was scarcely relieved by visits to [Kirishima](#), a centre of thermal activity, [Tokyo](#), and Nikko. At Nagasaki

most of the ship's company saw the devastation caused by the atomic bomb. A welcome break in the monotony came when the [Achilles](#) was relieved by HMS Argonaut and sailed for [Hong Kong](#), where she arrived on 26 January 1946. Three weeks were spent in harbour there and, as ample recreational grounds were available, the ship's company was able to enjoy most forms of sport.

The [Achilles](#) sailed from [Hong Kong](#) on 15 February and, after calling at Subic Bay in the Philippine Islands to supply stores to HMS Black Prince, left for Morotai. At that time the Indonesians in the north-east area of [Celebes](#) were in revolt against the returning Dutch authorities. On 19 February the [Achilles](#) intercepted a signal from the port director at Morotai to the [Australian Commonwealth Naval Board](#) stating that the situation at Menado, the main port in Northern Celebes, urgently needed the 'showing of the White Ensign.' As no Australian ship was available, he suggested that the [Achilles](#) be diverted to Menado. Pending the receipt of official approval, the [Achilles](#) steamed for three hours towards Menado but, no word having been received, she resumed her course for Morotai. After discussing the matter with the commander of the Australian military forces there, Captain Butler decided to proceed to Menado with a liaison party, the role of the [Achilles](#) being 'limited to showing the flag and acting as accommodation ship.' When the ship was about one hour's steaming from Menado, a signal that had been long delayed in transmission was received from HMS [Sussex](#) stating that the Commander Allied Forces, [Netherlands East Indies](#), had decreed that no British warship was to go to Menado. Soon afterwards, a signal was received from the Supreme Allied Commander South-East Asia stating definitely that the [Achilles](#) was not required and that the policy throughout his command was not to employ HM ships for such purposes. The [Achilles](#) returned to Morotai to refuel and the liaison mission took passage to Menado in a Dutch steamer.

After midday on 23 February the [Achilles](#) received a signal from the Australian Naval Board stating that a motor water-lighter was aground on a reef near Biak Island off the north-west coast of [New Guinea](#) and needed immediate assistance. The [Achilles](#) worked up to 27 ½ knots, but it was nearly dark when she arrived so she stood off for the night. At daybreak she sent in two pinnaces with salvage gear, but the lighter was unable to free itself. Later, an American naval tug arrived and the [Achilles](#) 'proceeded in execution of previous orders.' She called at Manus Island on

her way to [Sydney](#), where she arrived on 8 March 1946. Captain Banks, CBE, DSC, RN, ¹ assumed command of the [Achilles](#) next day, relieving Captain Butler, who returned to England.

When the ship arrived at [Auckland](#) on 17 March, the following signal from the Commander-in-Chief British Pacific Fleet was received by the New Zealand Naval Board:

On the occasion of the release of [Achilles](#) from my operational control, I should be grateful if you would convey to the [New Zealand Government](#) my appreciation of the fine service rendered by the New Zealand Squadron, both in the [British Pacific Fleet](#) and throughout the war. New Zealand ships have seen much hard fighting – none finer than [Achilles](#) at the Battle of the [River Plate](#).

After completing a refit, the [Achilles](#) left [Auckland](#) on 29 May 1946 on a farewell cruise round New Zealand, in the course of which she visited Dunedin, Bluff, Stewart Island, the [West Coast](#) sounds, Picton, [New Plymouth](#), [Nelson](#), [Lyttelton](#), [Timaru](#), [Wellington](#), and [Napier](#). That New Zealand was proud of the war record of the [Achilles](#) was shown by the thousands who visited her during her cruise. At Wellington, a detachment of [RNZN](#) ratings and [Royal Marines](#) marched through the city and the salute was taken by the Prime Minister. On 8 July the Governor-General and [Lady Freyberg](#) attended divine service on board the [Achilles](#). [Sir Bernard](#) made a farewell address to the ship's company, whom he inspected at divisions.

The [Achilles](#) sailed from [Auckland](#) for England on 17 July and arrived at Sheerness on 10 September 1946. She paid off a week later, having completed more than ten years' service in the Royal New Zealand Navy, in which she was first commissioned on 31 March 1936. After a complete refit the [Achilles](#) was renamed [Delhi](#) and commissioned for service in the [Royal Indian Navy](#), to which she was sold.

¹ Captain W. E. Banks, CBE, DSC, RN; entered RN 1918; 'submariner', 1922–40; Captain, Dec 1942; commanded Twelfth Submarine Flotilla, 1943–44; Captain, Landing Craft, [Mediterranean](#), 1945.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

PART II – ORGANISATION AND ADMINISTRATION

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THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 26 – RECRUITING AND TRAINING

CHAPTER 26

Recruiting and Training

FOR some months after the outbreak of hostilities no special recruiting effort was made by the Naval Board. Its peacetime policy had been to build up a corps of New Zealand long-service ratings sufficient to man the ships of the New Zealand Naval Forces,¹ recruiting being undertaken chiefly by Army Area offices throughout the Dominion. In practice, it was found that young New Zealanders did not take kindly to being bound to serve for so long a period as twelve years. In September 1939 New Zealand ratings made up rather more than one-half of the complements of the two cruisers and HMS Philomel, the base ship and training establishment. The rate of expansion had been limited by the shortage of accommodation in the Philomel and the small number of men re-engaging.²

At the outbreak of war it was decided that every effort should be made to replace as many as possible of the ratings on loan from the Royal Navy with New Zealanders by retaining time-expired men, calling up reservists, and entering artificer and artisan ratings for 'hostilities only'. No steps were taken to increase the normal inflow of long-service ratings or to explore ways and means to recruit and train the considerable number of yachtsmen and seaminded lads who were keen to see war service in the Navy, but who, if they were not sought after, would inevitably be taken by the Army or the Air Force. Some of them made their way to England and found naval service there.

A strong hint of things to come was conveyed on 9 September 1939 when the Government was informed that the Admiralty was prepared to accept for service in the Royal Navy, (a) trained naval reserves surplus to New Zealand requirements; (b) trained civil air pilots for service in the Fleet Air Arm; yachtsmen or ex-merchant marine officers suitable for RNVR commissions; and (c) telegraphists and signalmen, artificers, scientists (electrical and wireless telegraphy) and skilled electrical workmen. The Government was asked to furnish the appropriate numbers likely to be available in

¹ The Pacific Conference on defence in 1939 had recommended that New Zealand should undertake to maintain a third cruiser and two sloops.

² Steps were taken during 1939 to encourage men to re-engage.

those categories and to 'indicate the capacity for increasing the numbers of trained personnel who will become available as the war progresses.'¹

The Government replied that very few trained naval reserves and no trained civil air pilots were available for service in the Royal Navy, but it was thought that a substantial number of yachtsmen and ex-merchant marine officers could be found. It was not thought that many men in the third category surplus to requirements would be available, but the possibility of increasing the number of such trained men was being investigated.

That the Naval Board failed to anticipate the great demand for men that was bound to arise in a great maritime conflict is evident from an official statement in the name of the Minister of Defence, published in the newspapers on 22 September 1939. This said that officers and men of the Royal Naval Reserve and Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, including officers on the retired list, were being called up by personal summons as and when required. Retired officers, pensioners, and Royal Fleet Reserve men of the Royal Navy would also be called up if and when required. In due course those not required for service in the New Zealand Naval Forces would be placed at the disposal of the Admiralty and sent to England or elsewhere as directed from [London](#).

Regarding former ratings of the Royal Navy, not pensioners and not Royal Fleet Reserve men, there was at present no service for which they could be re-entered. The naval authorities were well aware that there was a large number of these men in New Zealand keen to offer their services. Due announcement would be made should there be an opportunity to enter some of them. When New Zealand requirements had been settled it was intended to ask the Admiralty whether it wished the remainder, if volunteers, to be sent overseas for service in the Royal Navy. In the meantime, these men should continue in their ordinary occupations, unless they wished to volunteer for military service, which they were quite free to do.²

After announcing that the Admiralty had asked for volunteers from yachtsmen

and ex-merchant marine officers for commissions in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, the statement said, with regard to 'other persons wishing to undertake naval service', that 'so far as can be foreseen at present, all the naval requirements for the defence of the Dominion can be met from the established naval reserves and perhaps from a few of the ex-naval men resident in New Zealand and it is not anticipated that there will be any question

¹ Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, telegram of 8 September 1939 to High Commissioner for the [United Kingdom](#) in New Zealand.

² Author's italics.

of recruiting other men for naval war service.' The ordinary peacetime recruiting for the New Zealand Naval Forces (that is, for long service irrespective of the duration of the war) would be continued, and applications for entry should be made 'only by men wishing to join the Navy for long service.'

Emphasis to this clear discouragement of eager volunteers for naval war service was given by the concluding passage of the statement, that 'the Naval Department is working at very high pressure and the naval authorities, therefore, hope that the public will be good enough to refrain from writing to offer their services.' Events were soon to be more compelling than easy words. Within a few months Navy Office had been obliged to start several recruiting schemes to meet not only the needs of the New Zealand naval forces but the calls of the Admiralty as well. As the pressure on New Zealand's limited resources of manpower increased, the Navy found itself competing with the other services.

The modern method of increasing the manpower of the Navy in time of war and reducing it when peace comes without inflicting unnecessary hardship is to do the expanding, not in the ranks and ratings of the service itself, but in the far more elastic and temporary Royal Naval Reserve and Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. In the 1914–18 war this was done to some extent, but not sufficiently, as was evident from the drastic retrenchment of Royal Navy officers by means of the 'economy axe' in the nineteen-twenties. In the Second World War, such was the numerical expansion of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve that towards the end of the conflict

the percentages of executive officers in the three categories were approximately: Royal Navy, 14 per cent; Royal Naval Reserve, 12 per cent; Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, 74 per cent. In the case of ratings, the needs of the Navy were largely met by the enlistment of men for the period of 'hostilities only'.

Simultaneously with the statement of the Minister of Defence on behalf of Navy Office, an announcement 'regarding those persons wishing to proceed to the [United Kingdom](#) with the object of offering themselves for military service there' was made by the acting Prime Minister (Hon. P. Fraser).¹ Advice had been received, he said, that the British Government's policy was 'to expand [the armed forces] by means of a controlled intake' and it 'could not, therefore, at present accept volunteers for either the infantry or the artillery.' It would, however, welcome certain classes of technical experts as follows: for naval service: (a) telegraphists and signalmen, artificers, scientists (electrical and wireless telegraphy) and skilled electrical workmen; (b) yachtsmen and ex-merchant service

¹ This announcement appeared in the New Zealand newspapers of 22 September 1939.

officers suitable for RNVR commissions. For military service: (a) electricians, fitters, mechanics, instrument mechanics, and motor transport drivers: (b) officers with qualifications as above; (c) medical officers. The New Zealand Government would arrange for the selection and medical examination of qualified men, who were invited to apply to the nearest Army recruiting office. Those selected would be given free transport to the [United Kingdom](#) and 'guaranteed at least the same treatment in respect of pay, allowances and pensions as if they had enlisted in the appropriate rank in the New Zealand forces.'

Following this announcement, Navy Office called for applications from young men between the ages of 18 and 25 years, qualified to hold technical ratings as engine-room artificers, electrical artificers, shipwrights, joiners, blacksmiths, plumbers, painters, telegraphists, and signalmen. This produced a fair response and, on 3 November 1939, the Naval Secretary reported to the Minister of Defence that 367 applications had been received, from whom 68 'possibles' had been provisionally selected. The Minister was also informed that some 800 other applications for naval

service 'previously received had also been sorted and classified.'

The opinion that 'no appreciable claims upon the manpower of the Dominion will be necessary for naval purposes in New Zealand' was expressed by the Chief of Naval Staff (Commodore Horan) in a memorandum for the Council of Defence at the end of November 1939. The requirements of men for service in the New Zealand naval forces were limited by the warships and auxiliary vessels and defended port services maintained by the [New Zealand Government](#). The vessels for which manning must be provided were the [Leander](#), Achilles, Monowai, and Wakakura, two groups of three minesweepers and three danlayers (partly manned by merchant service hands), and HMS Philomel, depot ship and training establishment. The seagoing ships were fully manned and as much dilution of active-service officers and ratings on loan from the Royal Navy by reservists as was possible had been effected. As RNVR personnel became more experienced and training reached a more advanced stage, further dilution would be made. Since an increase in the number of warships maintained by the [New Zealand Government](#) was not contemplated, except the three small vessels (Kiwi, Moa, and Tui) under construction in the [United Kingdom](#), and as the staffs of the various naval services at the main ports were 'now stabilised', it was not anticipated that there would be any major naval requirements which could not be met from the existing reserves and the normal annual intake of approximately 140 recruits for long service.



The explosion of a depth-charge dropped by a destroyer in the Hauraki Gulf

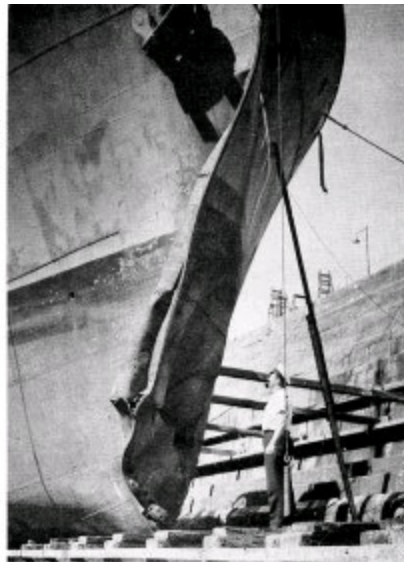
The explosion of a depth-charge dropped by a destroyer in the [Hauraki Gulf](#)



The remains of the Japanese submarine I-1 sunk off Guadalcanal by the New Zealand corvettes *Moa* and *Kiwi*

The remains of the Japanese submarine I-1 sunk off **Guadalcanal** by the New Zealand corvettes **Moa** and **Kiwi**

Damage to the bows of HMNZS *Kiwi* caused by ramming the Japanese submarine I-1

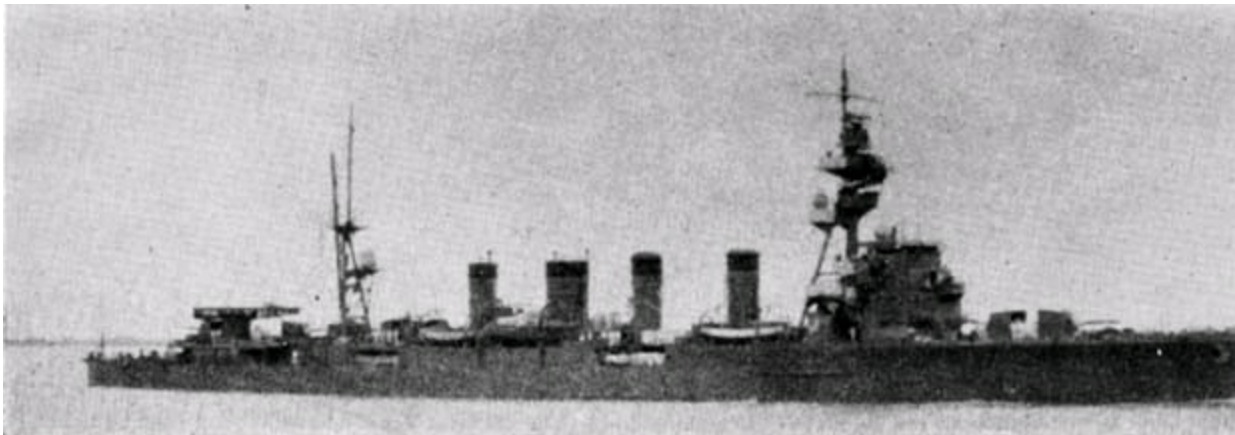


Damage to the bows of HMNZS Kiwi caused by ramming the Japanese submarine I-1

The ship's company of HMNZS *Kiwi*, led by Lt-Cdr G. Bridson, on left, marching through the streets of Auckland



The ship's company of HMNZS *Kiwi*, led by Lt- **Cdr G. Bridson**, on left, marching through the streets of **Auckland**



The Japanese light cruiser *Jintsu*
The Japanese light cruiser Jintsu



After the action off Kolombangara, cement was mixed for temporary repairs to the *Leander*. This photograph was taken near Tulagi Beach

After the action off **Kolombangara**, cement was mixed for temporary repairs to the **Leander**. This photograph was taken near **Tulagi Beach**

Burial service at sea, after Kolombangara



Burial service at sea, after **Kolombangara**



Gun crews resting after the action

Gun crews resting after the action

Leander in Calliope Dock, Auckland, showing torpedo damage



Leander in Calliope Dock, Auckland, showing torpedo damage



HMNZS *Gambia*

HMNZS Gambia



The *Gambia* bombarding Kamaishi in Japan, August 1945

The *Gambia* bombarding Kamaishi in [Japan](#), August 1945



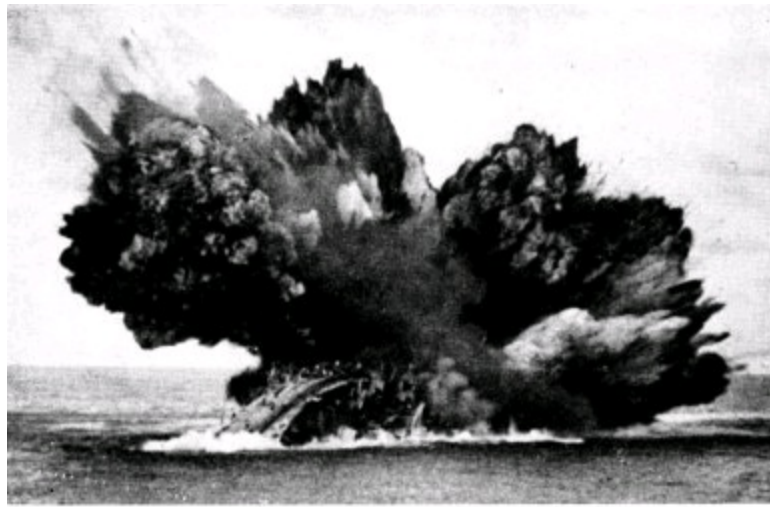
Steam jets clearing ice from anchor chains and windlass of a destroyer in a northern convoy

Steam jets clearing ice from anchor chains and windlass of a destroyer in a northern convoy

The escort carrier HMS *Nairana* in heavy winter seas during a convoy to Russia

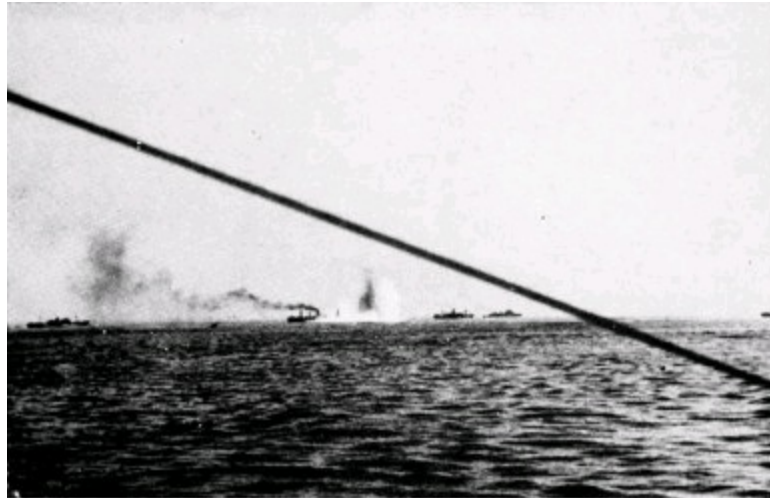


The escort carrier HMS *Nairana* in heavy winter seas during a convoy to [Russia](#)



HMS *Barham* torpedoed by a U-boat in November 1941. She sank within five minutes

HMS Barham torpedoed by a U-boat in November 1941. She sank within five minutes



A Malta convoy attacked in August 1942.
The photograph was taken from HMS *Victorious*

A Malta convoy attacked in August 1942. The photograph was taken from HMS Victorious



HM Submarine
Proteus at Ports-
mouth

HM Submarine Proteus at Portsmouth



A British midget submarine under way. A member of her crew is in the hatchway

A British midget submarine under way. A member of her crew is in the hatchway



A Hurricane making low-wind speed trials in the Mediterranean

A Hurricane making low-wind speed trials in the Mediterranean

A Seafire after a crash-landing on HMS *Hunter* during the Salerno Gulf operations, September 1943



A Seafire after a crash-landing on HMS Hunter during the Salerno Gulf operations, September 1943



Pilots of HMS *Battler* being briefed for the Salerno Gulf operations

Pilots of HMS Battler being briefed for the Salerno Gulf operations

A deck-landing officer on HMS *Illustrious* guiding the pilot of an aircraft



A deck-landing officer on HMS Illustrious guiding the pilot of an aircraft



The smoke is from a German bomber destroyed by two Wildcat fighters piloted by New Zealanders from the escort carrier HMS *Biter*, in the Atlantic, February 1944

The smoke is from a German bomber destroyed by two Wildcat fighters piloted by New Zealanders from the escort carrier HMS *Biter*, in the Atlantic, February 1944



Lt E. S. Erikson, one of the pilots who shot down the bomber

Lt E. S. Erikson, one of the pilots who shot down the bomber



Pilots being briefed for an attack on the battleship *Tirpitz* in April 1944

Pilots being briefed for an attack on the battleship *Tirpitz* in April 1944

Barracuda bombers and their escort approaching Alten Fjord to attack the *Tirpitz*



Barracuda bombers and their escort approaching Alten Fjord to attack the *Tirpitz*



Looking down from a naval aircraft on to the flight deck of HMS *Indomitable* in Far Eastern waters

Looking down from a naval aircraft on to the flight deck of HMS *Indomitable* in Far Eastern waters

A Japanese suicide aircraft (*kamikaze*) blowing up after skidding into the sea during an attack on HMS *Indomitable* in Japanese waters



A Japanese suicide aircraft (*kamikaze*) blowing up after skidding into the sea during an attack on HMS *Indomitable* in Japanese waters



A near miss on HMS *Victorious* by a *kamikaze*, as seen from HMS *Indomitable*

A near miss on HMS *Victorious* by a *kamikaze*, as seen from HMS *Indomitable*

Damage to HMS *Formidable* by a *kamikaze* bomber



Damage to HMS *Formidable* by a *kamikaze* bomber



HMNZS *Achilles* oiling a destroyer off Japan

HMNZS *Achilles* oiling a destroyer off Japan

The White Ensign and the American flag being hoisted at the occupation of the Yokosuka Naval Base in August 1945. A landing party from HMNZS *Gambia* has mounted guard



The White Ensign and the American flag being hoisted at the occupation of the Yokosuka Naval Base in August 1945. A landing party from HMNZS *Gambia* has mounted guard

After outlining what was being done to meet the requests of the Admiralty, the memorandum stated that of the 60 officers and 662 ratings of the New Zealand Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, 30 officers and 187 ratings were available to be placed at the Admiralty's disposal. It was very desirable that early action should be taken because these men were extremely keen to serve and felt strongly that their peacetime training was not being made use of. They were inclined to resent the offer of commissions in the RNVR to yachtsmen and ex-merchant service officers.

The Admiralty was informed to that effect on 5 December 1939 and it was suggested that, as far as possible, the RNVR officers and ratings should be employed as a New Zealand unit to man a group of minesweepers or other small craft or, alternatively, that the lower seamen ratings, who were new entries, should serve as guns' crews in defensively equipped merchant ships. The message emphasised the 'undesirability of recruiting men from civil life for RNVR commissions until the surplus of New Zealand RNVR had been absorbed.' Regarding the Admiralty's request for telegraphists, signalmen, artificers, and artisans, it was not thought that more than fifty would be available after selected applicants had undergone trade tests and medical examination. ¹

About three weeks later the Admiralty asked whether ten experienced yachtsmen could be selected from those in New Zealand wishing to serve in the Royal Navy. The Admiralty explained that it was desired to form a pool of ten

temporary officers suitable as first lieutenants in minesweepers and patrol craft in [Malaya](#), and no suitable RNVR officers could be spared from the [United Kingdom](#) for this purpose. ² A reply was made that this request had been 'received with surprise' and drew the attention of the Admiralty to the previous message, which laid special stress on the desire of the Government and the Naval Board to mobilise and appoint New Zealand RNVR officers before calling for civilian volunteers for commissions in the Imperial Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. The Naval Board, therefore, proposed forthwith to nominate ten lieutenants or sub-lieutenants from the twenty executive officers who were available. ³

Another month passed. On 3 February 1940 the Prime Minister informed the New Zealand High Commissioner in [London](#) that the Government was disappointed not to have received replies from the Admiralty to its several telegrams regarding men for service in the Royal Navy. The most important question outstanding was whether

¹ Governor-General to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, telegram of 5 December 1939.

² High Commissioner for New Zealand in [London](#) to Prime Minister, telegram of 28 December 1939.

³ Prime Minister to High Commissioner, telegram of 2 January 1940.

or not the Admiralty desired to avail itself of the offer of New Zealand RNVR officers and ratings. The first section of artisan ratings was ready to sail and rare opportunities for their passage to England were being lost. All those concerned were voicing their keen disappointment with the lack of news and some of the best of the many yachtsmen who had volunteered for naval service were joining the Army. The Government could not understand the apparent disregard by the Admiralty of the New Zealand response to the request of the British Government to contribute to the naval effort, especially in view of the fact that the third contingent of naval volunteers from [Newfoundland](#) were reported to have landed in England.

Four days later a reply was received that the Admiralty would take over the

surplus New Zealand RNVR personnel. All officers should be sent to the [United Kingdom](#) as soon as possible. As the majority of lower ratings were comparatively new entries who had done no sea training, it was unlikely that they could be employed as a unit. The Admiralty wanted experienced yachtsmen as temporary officers for service with minesweepers and other craft in [Malaya](#), not officers of the New Zealand RNVR who could all be employed to greater advantage in the [United Kingdom](#). The Admiralty confirmed that ten yachtsmen should be selected and appointed as 'probationary temporary sub-lieutenants RNVR'. Trained ratings should be sent to the [United Kingdom](#) as soon as possible; but it was preferable that new entries and RNVR ratings should complete their early training and technical courses in New Zealand before going to England.

Meanwhile, considerable dissatisfaction with the delay and uncertainty was being voiced by yachtsmen and other volunteers for naval service. The feeling of many was expressed by a newspaper correspondent, who said there were sufficient men in New Zealand with years of seafaring and yachting experience to supply to England 'at least 1000 of the 10,000 men said to be required for service in small craft'. Were 'all these fully qualified men of the sea to be forced to join the infantry and cast aside their years of specialised training when England was asking for just such men?' The Minister of Defence, in a public statement on behalf of Navy Office, replied that New Zealand's naval requirements and the requests of the Admiralty so far had been fully met. If, and when, the Admiralty asked for more men, New Zealand would comply to the best of her ability.

At a conference at [Wellington](#) on 13 February 1940 to prepare plans for a national recruiting campaign, the acting Prime Minister said the people would have to participate in the greatest effort the country had ever made. The Government had decided that the situation could be met by voluntary enlistment. The problem of man-power had to be dealt with efficiently and effectively. There was to be no exempted industry, but men might have to be told they could not be spared. A National Register was to be compiled on the basis of information obtained by means of special Social Security forms. Naval requirements were very briefly mentioned by the Minister of Defence in his survey of recruiting for the armed forces. The total registrations for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to date were more than 27,000 and the Third Echelon was nearly completed. Already 4300 had applied to

join the Air Force. No figures were given for the Navy, but the Minister said Great Britain's request for men for naval service was being met.

Actually, the number about to be sent overseas, including the RNVR officers and ratings, was approximately 300. In addition to these and the men already serving in the New Zealand naval forces, sixty-five ratings of the RNVR had been drafted to twenty-five defensively equipped merchant ships by April 1940. But the period of 'twilight war' was nearly ended. The Admiralty was soon to step up its requests for men, and in a few months half a dozen naval recruiting schemes were in operation in New Zealand.

A draft of 28 officers and 357 ratings under the command of Commander R. Newman, RNZNVR, sailed from [Wellington](#) on 2 May 1940. The draft included 25 officers and 219 ratings of the RNZNVR and 56 artisan and signal ratings recruited for service in the Royal Navy, as well as 3 officers and 82 ratings from the [Achilles](#) who were reverting to the Royal Navy.

The ten experienced yachtsmen asked for by the Admiralty were entered under what was called Scheme 'Y' and commissioned as sub-lieutenants RNVR. More than 250 affirmative replies were received by Navy Office to a circular letter sent to each of the 500-odd yachtsmen who had already volunteered, and selection committees were set up to interview applicants. Unfortunately, owing to the high cost of living in [Malaya](#), the matters of private means and the relatively low rates of pay and allowances were factors that had to be taken into account. Much misunderstanding and heartburning arose when a number of candidates had to withdraw on that account, and baseless charges of 'old school tie' and 'bank balance' favouritism were made against the selection committees, whose duty it was to appraise applicants of the position. Actually, the final selection was made by the Minister of Defence, in his capacity as chairman of the Naval Board, assisted by the Second Naval Member. The ten yachtsmen so chosen were five from [Auckland](#), two from [Wellington](#), and one each from [Napier](#), Dunedin, and Hokitika. They sailed from [Auckland](#) on 29 April 1940 for [Australia](#) and thence to [Singapore](#).

At the beginning of September 1940 the Rear-Admiral, [Malaya](#), asked for a further twelve yachtsmen. They were selected from the list of volunteers and sailed from [Wellington](#) for [Singapore](#) on 25 October. When, in February 1941, he asked for

another twelve yachtsmen, Rear-Admiral, [Malaya](#), said 'it had been a most successful experiment and it is estimated that we could take about twelve similar gentlemen every four months as long as the [Singapore](#) building programme continues.... The present system of training is six weeks ashore and then to sea. If space is available, as many as possible are sent to cruisers for a short period.'

It was not thought practicable to send twelve experienced yachtsmen every four months. Scheme 'A' had taken thirty-three men and the delay in announcing a definite recruiting policy had allowed the Army and Air Force to benefit at the expense of the Navy. A full quota of twelve men for the third draft was authorised and selected but at the eleventh hour two withdrew and only ten sailed on 29 April 1941. In November 1941 another twelve yachtsmen were asked for and chosen, but when the Japanese invaded [Malaya](#) their departure was postponed and finally cancelled after the fall of [Singapore](#). They saw service elsewhere. Of the thirty-two 'Y' scheme officers who saw service in Malayan waters during those distressful days, fourteen died and seven as prisoners of war suffered at the hands of the Japanese.

The first clear-cut proposal for recruiting men in New Zealand on a broader basis came from the Admiralty in May 1940 and led to the institution of Schemes 'A' and 'B', so called because the sections outlining the proposal were marked 'A' and 'B' in the Admiralty memorandum sent to New Zealand, [Australia](#), and [Canada](#).¹ Under Scheme 'A' the Admiralty wanted men between the ages of 30 and 40 holding yachtmasters' certificates, or having equivalent knowledge and being otherwise suitable, who would be granted direct commissions in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Scheme 'B' proposed the 'enrolment of potential candidates for commissions as ordinary seamen with a view to their promotion to commissioned rank after a period of service.'

The memorandum explained that it was the policy of the Admiralty to obtain future requirements of temporary RNVR officers by the promotion of ratings from the lower deck. They would accept the enrolment of candidates from the Dominions as 'hostilities only' seamen under the same conditions as for 'hostilities only' ratings of the Royal Navy. Candidates must be between the ages of 20 and 30 years, preference being given to those between 20 and 25. They should be selected by a board of naval officers as

potentially suitable for commissioned rank. Sea experience or a knowledge of yachting was not essential, though it might be taken into account. A standard of education was required at least up to the level of 'school certificate' or the corresponding Dominion examination, with a knowledge of mathematics. These ratings would be enrolled and would receive pay at Royal Navy rates as from the date of sailing from the Dominion, their passages being accepted as a charge to Imperial funds. On arrival in England they would undergo a course of preliminary training as ordinary seamen and then be drafted to sea for a period of three months. At the end of that time they would be eligible to appear before a selection board with a view to receiving further training to fit them to be officers. If they passed this course successfully, they would be granted temporary commissions in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and would serve under the ordinary conditions for that force. If not accepted for a commission, they would continue to serve as 'hostilities only' ratings for the period of the war. The Admiralty would accept up to twenty-five such ratings a month from each Dominion for, at present, six months.

After the Naval Board had discussed the Admiralty's proposal, several important matters were referred to the Minister of Defence. One was whether the principle of supplementing Royal Navy rates of pay, allowances, disability awards, and pensions to New Zealand rates, which was being done for New Zealanders already in the Imperial forces, should be maintained. Another question was whether the cost of passages to England should be defrayed by the [United Kingdom](#) or by New Zealand. A further point was the position of ratings already serving in the New Zealand Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Officer rank in that force was invariably reached from the 'lower deck', which was the principle on which Scheme 'B' was based. It was, therefore, only fair that RNVR ratings at present serving should be given an opportunity of reaching officer rank through Scheme 'B' equal to that offered to civilians now to be recruited. War Cabinet authority to supplement Royal Navy rates of pay, allowances, etc., to New Zealand rates by payment in New Zealand, and for the costs of passages of men to the [United Kingdom](#) to be borne by New Zealand, was given on 27 August 1940.

Formal approval to proceed with both schemes was given by War Cabinet on 6 June 1940. The Admiralty was informed to that effect and asked that New Zealand RNVR ratings be considered equally with the civilians about to be recruited under Scheme 'B' for commissions in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (Imperial).¹ On 18 July the High Commissioner for New Zealand reported that this

¹ Governor-General to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, telegram of 7 June 1940.

had been agreed to by the Admiralty. In the meantime, advertisements in the principal newspapers had called for applications for enlistment under both schemes and an interviewing board of two retired RN officers was appointed.

Under Scheme 'A' the Admiralty had asked for fifty fully qualified yachtsmen, but only thirty-three were actually selected and commissioned as probationary temporary sub-lieutenants RNVR. They sailed in four drafts between 11 August 1940 and the end of that year. On arrival in England they went to HMS King Alfred, a shore training establishment, where they went through various courses before receiving seagoing appointments. At the end of three months they were promoted lieutenants RNVR, with the exception of some under the age of 30 years who had to wait rather longer.

When recruiting for Scheme 'B' closed at the end of June 1940, 1039 had applied, of whom 608 were eligible and 592 were interviewed. Of these, 307 were not recommended and 150 finally accepted. Between 11 August 1940 and 18 January 1941, five drafts, totalling 157 and including ten RNVR ratings, sailed for the [United Kingdom](#), thus completing the quota asked for by the Admiralty.

In the third week of August 1940 messages were received by Commodore Parry from the First and Second Sea Lords of the Admiralty suggesting that New Zealand should, if possible, supply crews for some of the fifty old destroyers which were being obtained from the [United States of America](#) in return for 99-year leases of naval and air bases in British possessions in the [Atlantic](#). [Australia](#) and [Canada](#) were being asked for similar assistance.

On 22 August the Government replied that the New Zealand naval force would be proud to have the opportunity to man some of the destroyers, but no fully or partly trained officers and men were available. From the beginning of the war it had been the Government's policy to replace as many as possible of the men on loan from the Royal Navy by New Zealand reserves, re-entries, and new entries. It was commissioning HMS Monowai entirely by New Zealand officers and men, except the captain and two other officers, as well as minesweepers and other small craft. The Government had also made available the whole of the New Zealand RNVR not required for service in New Zealand and had retained only a small number to provide reliefs in case of casualties and for further manning requirements for small craft. As, however, the Government desired to do everything in its power to assist the Royal Navy to the maximum possible extent in respect to personnel, it suggested that a special recruiting scheme might be started. ¹

¹ Governor-General to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, telegram of 22 August 1940.

Expressing its gratitude for the 'considerable number of men already sent to England' the Admiralty said the recruitment in New Zealand of certain tradesmen ratings, telegraphists, and signalmen for the Royal Navy might be expanded to cover the entry of seamen and stokers and, possibly, cooks, writers, and supply ratings, within the maximum capacity of Philomel to give 'hostilities only' training. The probable intention would be to employ such men in Eastern and Near Eastern waters and so save shipping transport for [United Kingdom](#) ratings. ¹

A realistic and forward-looking recruiting and training policy was initiated by Commodore Parry as Chief of Naval Staff in August 1940. He pointed out that the normal flow of active-service ratings had not been increased and that from the war point of view it was most desirable that this should be done. Apart from the probability that additional ships would be commissioned in New Zealand for local defence purposes, the [United Kingdom](#) was 'crying out' for trained men. To the possible objection that the entry of untrained men would not relieve the situation for some time, he replied that the Prime Minister of Great Britain had said that the war would be a long one, and therefore trained ratings a year or two hence would be of

great value. Whether additional entries should be for long or short service or for 'hostilities only' would depend upon the strength of the post-war forces to be maintained by New Zealand. It was of the utmost importance that New Zealand should continue to expand her naval forces after the war, one of several reasons being the 'inevitable exhaustion of Great Britain and her consequent inability to maintain a post-war Pacific Fleet.'

Summing up, Commodore Parry said that New Zealand should immediately increase her capacity for training naval ratings, the building of new barracks should be expedited, the necessary instructors selected or obtained from the [United Kingdom](#), and that long-service ratings only should be entered (this was modified later) and the time under training reduced to a minimum.

At a conference at [Auckland](#) on 1–2 October 1940, attended by the First and Second Naval Members, the Director of Recruiting, the Director of Naval Reserves and other officers, it was agreed that, while the recruitment of 'hostilities only' ratings for service in the Royal Navy would be additional to the entry and training of continuous service ratings for the New Zealand naval forces, the two systems could be dovetailed into each other so far as training was concerned.

It was planned to train about 200 'hostilities only' ratings at a time, making a total of some 600 a year, in addition to about 120

¹ Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Governor-General, telegram of 5 September 1940.

continuous service ratings, as well as the artificers and artisans asked for by the Admiralty. The 'hostilities only' ratings were to be entered in the New Zealand naval forces and lent to the Royal Navy on completion of training, excepting a few who might be employed in New Zealand ships. A proposal to use the RNVR headquarters at [Auckland](#), [Wellington](#), [Christchurch](#), and Dunedin for training purposes was rejected in favour of setting up a self-contained training establishment on Motuihi Island in [Auckland](#) harbour.

Six weeks passed before War Cabinet 'approved in principle', and on 11

December 1940 the Chief of Naval Staff was given authority to proceed with the scheme. It was not before time, for in January 1941 the Admiralty advised that steadily increasing manning requirements arising from the new construction programme and heavy unforeseen commitments, all involving severe strain on the resources of trained ratings, were causing concern. The Admiralty would therefore be 'extremely grateful for further assistance, particularly as the manning of a third cruiser by New Zealand was envisaged; but it was fully realised that provision of the necessary personnel would require strenuous and sustained effort over a considerable period.' In the meantime, the Minister of Defence had approved entries of about twenty stokers, twenty telegraphists from the Post and Telegraph Department, and thirty-six signalmen.

The name chosen for the new training establishment was Tamaki, a shortened form of Tamaki-Makau-Rau, the ancient Maori name of the [Auckland](#) isthmus. Commander Dennistoun, DSO, RN (retd) ¹ was appointed in command of HMNZS Tamaki, which was commissioned on 20 January 1941. The old wooden steamer Onewa of 75 tons was purchased for use in transporting men and stores between the island and the [Devonport](#) base. She was renamed Tamaki and gave good service for the next five years. The dual task of organising the new establishment and training the first entries of recruits was carried through in the face of many difficulties. The accommodation in the existing buildings was satisfactory neither in degree nor in kind, and much improvisation was necessary to make the best of it. During the next two years new buildings and equipment, an adequate water supply, drainage, roading, and other amenities were provided at a cost of about £90,000. When training started the total staff was only 42, but by September 1941 that number had been more than doubled, and in March 1945 the complement was 150.

The first term started with 178 lads in training as seamen, stokers, artificers, signalmen, telegraphists, and supply branch ratings. There

¹ Captain G. H. Dennistoun, DSO, OBE, RN (retd); born [Devon](#), England, 23 Sep 1884; entered RN 1899; transport officer, SS [Tahiti](#) (Main Body, [1 NZEF](#)) 1914; Senior Naval Officer, Lake Nyasa Gunboat Flotilla (Central Africa), 1915–18; retired 1922; HMNZS Tamaki, 1941–46.

was a good response to recruiting, and before the end of February 1941 a total of 1850 had volunteered and applications were coming in continuously. In June the first drafts of ratings had arrived at [Singapore](#) and [Ceylon](#) and in England and were well reported on. The training syllabus for all classes was largely of a practical nature to give the lads a good grounding in the duties they would perform at sea. All were examined in every subject during the term and those showing special promise were eligible to have a CW form ¹ opened for them. From the beginning of 1942 all drafts of naval airmen (Scheme 'F') and ordinary seamen entered under Scheme 'B' were given a short course of disciplinary training in Tamaki before going overseas. At the beginning of June 1944 HMNZS Muritai was assigned to Tamaki as a seagoing training ship.

As the principal shore training establishment, HMNZS Tamaki was conspicuously successful and an important part of the country's war effort. From January 1941 till the end of hostilities, more than 6000 lads, all volunteers, passed through Tamaki. They represented about 60 per cent of the New Zealanders who saw active naval service in many parts of the world. Their number could and should have been very much greater in what was the greatest maritime struggle in the troublous history of mankind. At the outbreak of war eager volunteers for naval service were positively discouraged, and a whole year allowed to pass before a policy of recruiting and training was adopted.

In July 1939 the Admiralty had offered facilities for the entry of candidates from the Dominions as officers of the short-service Air Branch of the Royal Navy. The New Zealand allocation for 1940 was three for pilot duty and two for observer duty. The period of training was eighteen months for pilots and twelve months for observers. In December 1939 the Admiralty informed Navy Office that no short-service commissions in the Air Branch would be granted in wartime. Selected candidates were all to be entered as Naval Airmen, 2nd class (hostilities only), with a view to selection for temporary commissions in the Air Branch of the RNVR at the end of their training. It was anticipated that a high proportion would receive commissions. Entry on this basis was offered to the New Zealanders whose applications had been forwarded in August. Three men had been sent to England for entry as Naval Airmen when, in April 1940, Navy Office asked the Admiralty whether any more were wanted. After a month's delay the Admiralty asked how many were likely to be

available. It was essential that the standards of

¹ A CW form is a record sheet used in the case of a rating recommended for promotion to commissioned rank.

education and physical fitness should be maintained and that entries must be prepared to serve either as pilots or observers as required.

The Royal New Zealand Air Force was willing to undertake final selection and medical examination and the Chief of Air Staff thought it could supply twenty a month by calling for volunteers from its own lists of approved candidates waiting to be called up, without prejudice to the flow of men to the Air Force. Accordingly, the Admiralty was offered twenty candidates a month for twelve months, with the proviso that no training could be given in New Zealand. A few days later, the Chief of Air Staff informed Navy Office that 'the Government were anxious to expedite the despatch of candidates for entry as Naval Airmen and would be prepared to send up to 250 in one or more drafts, if and as required.' This was passed to the Admiralty, who gratefully accepted the offer of twenty a month as a permanent figure, but asked that the second and third drafts should be stepped up to forty each.

The Admiralty message also contained two important policy statements. First, it was made clear that it was not intended to train any rating pilots and the new entries would have to measure up to allround officer standards. Second, candidates who failed to qualify as either pilot or observer would be offered transfer to air gunner or some other technical rate in which they would be eligible to earn commission by service.

On 24 June 1940 a recruiting circular for what was later designated Scheme 'F' was drafted. On entry, recruits would be rated Naval Airmen, 2nd class, and go to England to join HMS St. Vincent, a training establishment at Gosport, Portsmouth. After initial naval training there they would be advanced to acting Leading Airmen and selected to undergo training as pilot or observer. All who successfully passed these courses would be granted temporary commissions in the Air Branch of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Those not qualifying either as pilots or observers would be offered transfer to air gunner or some other technical rating and be eligible

to gain commissioned rank under the conditions applicable to the Navy generally.

The New Zealand Air Board had a long waiting list for entry for the Royal Air Force. As the qualifications for the Fleet Air Arm were in most respects identical, it was decided to select air entries for the Navy from those [RAF](#) candidates who wished to be considered. Pay and allowances would be at Royal Navy rates, but the Government would supplement them by payment in New Zealand of the difference between them and the higher New Zealand rates. The first draft of twenty sailed on 9 July 1940, and was followed by a draft 38 strong in August, a third of 37 in September, and a fourth of 22 in October.

A draft of eighteen sailed in the [Rangitane](#) from [Auckland](#) on 25 November. The ship was sunk by the German raiders [Orion](#) and [Komet](#) two days later and her passengers and crew taken as prisoners. The naval air ratings were travelling in civilian clothes, but were booked and shown in the passenger list as naval personnel. They had been instructed: (a) if boarded by enemy warships, no attempt should be made to conceal their naval status; and (b) if naval personnel are survivors of a torpedoed ship and are picked up by an enemy ship, an attempt to conceal naval status may be made.

When the raiders and their supply ship went to [Emirau Island](#) and landed some 500 of their 675 prisoners, the [Komet](#) released all hers except twelve Royal Air Force men in uniform, who were transferred to the [Orion](#), in which five of the naval air ratings were held. She later transferred all her prisoners to a ship which took them to [Europe](#). The other thirteen naval air ratings were released on parole from the [Komet](#), whose captain regarded prisoners as a hindrance. They returned to New Zealand with other survivors of the sunken ships. ¹

In October 1940 the Admiralty asked that the monthly quota of Fleet Air Arm entries be increased to forty, provided this could be done without relaxation of the general standard for potential officers. This was arranged with the Air Department, and by the end of May 1941 five more drafts, totalling 234, had sailed for England. Over the ten months to September 1941, the commitment of forty a month had been met. In July 1941 the High Commissioner reported that eight New Zealand airmen had been discharged as unfit for pilot duties. Fleet Air Arm trainees were required to be up to Royal Navy 'officer standard'. Consequently, the weeding out at the training

establishments left those who did not measure up to that standard without the prospect of pilot training for the Fleet Air Arm and there was no provision for a rating equivalent to the sergeant pilot of the Royal Air Force.

The Naval Board then decided to take over from the Air Department the final selection of candidates for the Fleet Air Arm. The main purpose of the change was to ensure as far as possible that all new entries were suitable for commissioned rank. Approval for the recruiting of 480 candidates was given by War Cabinet on 13 October 1941, but as it did not seem possible to continue to send forty a month if the higher standard were to be maintained, the quota was arbitrarily reduced to twenty a month. In March 1942 the High Commissioner reported that flying training was being held up by severe winter conditions, so that there was congestion

¹ See [Appendix IV](#).

in HMS St. Vincent and New Zealand drafts were having to wait there a long time. Scheme 'F' was therefore suspended.

A Naval Board memorandum of 26 March 1941 gave authority for the award of temporary commissions in the New Zealand naval forces to 'hostilities only' ratings under conditions similar to those approved by the Admiralty for the Royal Navy. Although the ratings under training in Philomel and Tamaki would be those primarily concerned, the avenue of promotion to commissioned rank would be open to all ratings serving under 'hostilities only' engagements. Ratings so recommended would be drafted to sea if not already serving afloat, and would be eligible to appear before a selection board provided they had served at least three months at sea and were still recommended by their commanding officer.

Selected candidates would undergo an officers' training course of sixteen weeks in [Australia](#), at the conclusion of which those successful would be commissioned sub-lieutenants RNZNVR. Those unsuccessful would be drafted to sea without a second chance for a commission, though with every opportunity for a higher rating. This was almost identical with Scheme 'B' except that it provided for service only in the New Zealand naval forces.

On 15 May 1941 War Cabinet approval was given to reopen recruiting for Scheme 'D' at the rate of twenty-five a month, the position to be reviewed at the end of six months. The first draft of twenty-five ratings under this dispensation sailed for the [United Kingdom](#) on 22 July 1941. By the end of that month advertisements had drawn only about seventy-five suitable candidates and the scheme was expanded to take in married men with one child. The quota of 150 had been filled by December 1941, making a total of 335 Scheme 'B' men sent overseas since August 1940. When the Admiralty indicated that it would welcome twenty-five a month for 1942, the Minister of Defence approved of Scheme 'B' being continued.

Approval was given by War Cabinet on 13 October 1941 for increased numbers of ratings to be entered for hostilities only to a total of 2300 a year. They included 375 ordinary seamen, 75 stokers, 190 wireless mechanics, 240 ordinary seamen (RDF), 36 writers, 36 supply assistants, 36 cooks, 600 signalmen and telegraphists, 300 Scheme 'B' and 240 Scheme 'F' ratings.

The needs of local defence measures after the entry of [Japan](#) into the war, however, compelled considerable recasting of manpower allocations. On 31 March 1942 the Naval Secretary informed the Minister of Defence that the numbers of extra officers required for local defence totalled 110 for sea service and 105 for harbour and shore service. Since it was clear that recourse to direct entry must be made to meet local needs, he proposed that Scheme 'B' be diverted for this purpose. This was approved by the Minister, who expressed the view that 'preference should be given to serving men to qualify for commissions.' During the year only two drafts of Scheme 'B' ratings, totalling forty-eight, were sent to the [United Kingdom](#).

In July 1942 the High Commissioner reported that the Admiralty would welcome further drafts of Scheme 'B' ratings. He was informed that it was doubtful if many more would be available 'as all males outside essential industry and within Scheme "B" age group have been conscripted for military service'. The Naval Secretary, however, suggested to the Army Secretary and the Air Secretary that details of the scheme might be made known and applications invited for transfer to the Navy. He also asked the Air Secretary that those awaiting entry into the Fleet Air Arm scheme should be given an opportunity to transfer to Scheme 'B'. The reply was made that a considerable overseas expansion programme proposed for the [RNZAF](#) would strain

its manning position to the utmost and make it impossible to release any men for the Navy. The Army was more co-operative in facilitating transfers of men to Scheme 'B' and there was a fair response to an appeal for recruits made in the newspapers.

When the High Commissioner reported in August 1942 that to meet the expansion of the Fleet Air Arm it had become necessary to increase the intake of naval airmen for training as pilots and observers, Scheme 'F' drafts, suspended since March, were recommenced forthwith. The Minister of Defence, however, reduced Fleet Air Arm commitments to a total of 100, to be sent away at the rate of ten a month. The flow of applicants was not sufficient to maintain the quota at the previous standard. From September 1942 to the end of March 1943 the authorised total was 70 and the number actually drafted 49, though 69 were entered. From April 1943 to March 1944, during which period the monthly quota was again twenty, a total of 159 was drafted, making a total deficit over both periods of 102.

It seems incredible that the Navy's modest requirements could not be filled, especially in view of the Air Force's expansive recruiting programme for 1943. The Air Force's proposed intake for pilots' courses was 3040 and the estimated output of partly trained pilots was 2080, of whom well over half would go to [Canada](#) under the Empire Air Training Scheme and the others complete their training in New Zealand. The intake of observer recruits would be 800, of whom 676 were expected to reach the required standard in initial training and go to [Canada](#).

There is evidence that in 1943 the Air Force did not comb its resources very thoroughly for volunteers for the Fleet Air Arm or, at least, that its attitude towards many would-be volunteers was not encouraging. The Director of Naval Recruiting pointed out that, during the first six or seven months of the current recruiting year, it had been necessary to cancel five of the nine Scheme 'F' classes scheduled and that only ninety recruits had been entered. He thought that the annual quota could 'easily be met if either the Navy did its own recruiting or the [RNZAF](#) took more active steps to meet our requirements.'

Without informing the Air Department of its intention, the Navy then decided to do its own recruiting for Scheme 'F'. At the same time the Naval Secretary in a memorandum to the Air Secretary hinted that there had been a lack of co-operation on the part of the [RNZAF](#). It was believed that there was an ample supply of men to

meet the Navy's requirements, but 'if it became a known fact that volunteers for the Fleet Air Arm were liable to be held in the Air Force it would deter those men who wish to join the Navy from applying for the Fleet Air Arm.' As the [RNZN](#) was a voluntary service, it did not appear equitable that a man who volunteered for the Fleet Air Arm should be retained in the [RNZAF](#) against his will. A few days later the RNZAF Director of Manning got approval for forty-three applicants for the Fleet Air Arm to appear before the naval selection committee.

On 24 January 1944 the Air Department cabled [RNZAF](#) headquarters in [London](#) that, owing to the manpower situation, the 'competition' of the [RNZN](#) in recruiting for the Fleet Air Arm was being felt and would 'eventually affect our ability to carry out Empire Air Training Scheme commitments.' It was suggested that the British Air Ministry should be consulted 'as to necessity for maintaining priority for [RAF](#) requirements over Fleet Air Arm.' Navy Office had no knowledge of this till April 1944, when it was informed that the Admiralty was reducing pilot entries for the Fleet Air Arm for 1944; but 'in view of the quality of New Zealand candidates, the Admiralty would gladly accept the full quota or a reduced number.'

The Navy's Scheme 'F' recruiting advertisements brought a good response, and by the end of April 227 applications had been received. From then on there were always sufficient recruits to fill the quota of 240 a year. For administrative reasons the full commitment for Scheme 'F' was not met during the year 1944–45, for which the total naval recruiting quota was reduced from 2300 to 1300. When a further reduction to 770 was proposed for 1945–46, it was suggested that the full quota for Scheme 'F' should be maintained.

The strain on the manpower of New Zealand at that time was severe. The total strength of the armed forces (including 124,000 in the Home Guard) in May 1943 was 262,160, or 16 per cent of the mean population. The Army (excluding the Home Guard) had reached its maximum at nearly 125,000 in July 1942 and stood at 94,000 in May 1943. The Royal New Zealand Air Force numbered 36,700 at the latter date and attained a peak of nearly 42,000 a year later. It is remarkable, however, that from October 1942 to August 1945 the number of [RNZAF](#) personnel in New Zealand was never fewer than 20,000, and from June 1943 to August 1944 was well in excess of 30,000. The New Zealand naval forces, which numbered 8460 in May 1943, passed the 10,000 mark in February 1944 and reached a peak of 10,649 in July

1945.

In July 1943 the commanding officer of *Philomel* reported that it was no longer practicable for ratings recommended for commissioned rank to get seagoing training in a cruiser on the New Zealand station.¹ The Naval Board decided that ratings who passed the selection board at the beginning of September would go to [Australia](#) for training courses at Flinders Naval College. Other recommended ratings who had not had the necessary sea training would be sent to the [United Kingdom](#) as Scheme 'B' candidates. During the twelve months ended March 1944, a total of 314 Scheme 'B' ratings was recruited and drafted overseas.

In August 1944 the Minister of Defence received reports of dissatisfaction amongst Scheme 'F' ratings training in the [United States](#). It was stated that only 22 out of 66 had passed a course at St. Louis and that the authorities had indicated their intention to eliminate more, and possibly half of those training at Pensacola. It was also reported that the elimination of Scheme 'B' ratings training in the [United Kingdom](#) was excessively high. The Minister expressed doubt that the sending of further drafts was justified.

It was pointed out to the Minister that, while all recruits sent overseas were medically fit and appeared likely to qualify for commissions, some were bound to be found unsuitable during their training. Of 988 Scheme 'F' men entered up to April 1944, 522 had been commissioned and 241 were still under training. That 79 per cent of those who had completed training had been commissioned was regarded as satisfactory.

Reference to the High Commissioner in [London](#) elicited the reply that there was a shortage of pilots in the Fleet Air Arm, and that the high rate of elimination during training had caused much concern to the Admiralty, which had made representations to the [United States](#) authorities. As New Zealanders had 'provided so many fine pilots for the Naval Air Arm the Admiralty would very much regret

¹ The [Achilles](#) and [Leander](#) had both been damaged in action and sent to England and the [United States](#) respectively for refitting.

a complete stoppage of drafts and hoped that unless the manpower situation compelled their discontinuance, New Zealand would continue sending Scheme "F" candidates for training.' Regarding Scheme 'B', the Admiralty would be pleased to have further drafts 'on the same numerical basis as at present'.

Because of a shortage of trained pilots in the Naval Air Arm, the Admiralty had arranged to get volunteers from the Royal Air Force. It suggested that if there were surplus pilots in New Zealand they should be offered transfer to the RNZNVR on loan to the Naval Air Arm. Accordingly, War Cabinet authorised the Naval Board to call for up to one hundred volunteers from the [RNZAF](#) in the [United Kingdom](#) and [Canada](#). By the end of March 1945, eighty-eight New Zealand pilots had been transferred.

The end of Scheme 'F' came in June 1945, when the High Commissioner reported that there were seventy-six New Zealand ratings in barracks. As the Admiralty was about to close down the training of 'hostilities only' recruits, the continuance of Scheme 'F' was not justified. The Admiralty expressed its thanks for the great assistance given by the scheme, which had 'provided a large number of flying officers of the very highest character and fully justified its inception.'

From July 1940 to June 1945, 1066 Scheme 'F' recruits were drafted overseas. The maximum number of New Zealand pilots and observers shown as on active service in the Fleet Air Arm at any one time was 456 in May 1944, when a number must have been on foreign-service leave and a proportion of the 145 casualties recorded had been lost. Assuming that none of the 260 recruits drafted from New Zealand after January 1944 was in time to reach active service and that 75 per cent of those who went through the training courses were successful, it would appear that at least 605 New Zealanders served as first-line pilots and observers in the Fleet Air Arm.

Recruiting for Scheme 'B' ceased at the beginning of August 1945 when a draft awaiting passage was cancelled. During the five years from August 1940, forty-six classes totalling approximately 1100 Scheme 'B' ratings were sent overseas. Nine ratings transferred in England to the Fleet Air Arm, in which they gained commissions. Conversely, forty-four Scheme 'F' ratings were transferred to Scheme 'B' classes and there gained commissions. Scheme 'B' commissions totalled approximately 690. Three ratings transferred to the engineering branch and four to

the Special Branch, RNZNVR, were also commissioned, and two others were appointed schoolmasters in Royal Navy training establishments.

The recruitment of women for naval service was first discussed by the Naval Board in May 1941, but approximately twelve months passed before the organising of what became the Women's Royal New Zealand Naval Service was started. Hitherto all women in the Navy Department were employed in a civilian capacity, mainly on clerical duties (but some on highly responsible work) under the control of the Public Service Commissioner. Some had already replaced naval ratings, notably in the offices of the naval officers-in-charge at the four main centres and in the supply and secretariat branches in HMNZS Philomel. Proposals for staffing the new sick quarters in Philomel to a greater extent by women had been prepared, and the replacement of some of the male staff in the Naval Stores Office and the Armament Supply Depot was in progress. A proportion of these civilian employees afterwards joined the Wrens and were given an antedated seniority which made them eligible for earlier promotion. Those who did not join the WRNZNS were moved to other branches in accordance with the general principle that uniformed and civilian employees should not be mingled.

There was considerable discussion of the conditions of service in the WRNZNS, which was finally modelled largely on the British pattern. At a conference in August 1941, one of the main points discussed was whether women could be asked to work at night. If night employment were approved, it would be possible to replace a considerable number of telegraphists and signal ratings by Wrens. In the event, Wrens were employed with no limitations on the times of duty in approximately forty-four hours a week, which if considered necessary might be extended with no additional payment.

The establishment of the WRNZNS was approved by War Cabinet on 11 April 1942 and the appointment of [Miss R. Herrick](#), of Hastings, as Director, and of [Miss F. H. Fenwick](#), of Wellington, as Deputy Director, on 18 May. The Prime Minister was informed on 15 October that the King had been graciously pleased to approve the designation of the service as the Women's Royal New Zealand Naval Service.

The WRNZNS Emergency Regulations of 18 November 1942 set out the basis on which the organisation was constituted part of the Royal New Zealand Navy. Wrens

were required to serve for the duration of the war and twelve months thereafter unless previously discharged, and they might volunteer to serve overseas. Members of the WRNZNS were subject to the provisions of the Naval Defence Act 1913, the Naval Discipline Act, and King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions. The regulations for the general administration of the WRNZNS were contained in Navy Order 769 of 18 March 1943. Many of the privileges enjoyed by [RNZN](#) officers and ratings in respect of leave, travelling warrants, fare concessions, etc., were granted to the WRNZNS.

From the start the build-up of even such a small organisation as the WRNZNS was hampered by the cumbersome and, to the naval authorities, unsatisfactory system of recruitment. At first this was carried out through the Women's War Service Auxiliary, and from November 1942 by manpower officers of the National Service Department, which had to balance the demands of 'essential industry' against the needs of the armed services. One factor which made it difficult to give the WRNZNS all the women it needed was the high standard of selection.

Up to January 1943, 870 applications for the WRNZNS had been received, of which 350 had been rejected for various reasons and 330 were under consideration. In September 1943 an acute shortage was developing. There were some 4000 vacancies for women in essential industry and the release of women within the age group for the armed forces had to be restricted. By October an additional 300 Wrens were required and only 183 applications were held by the Navy Department.

Government approval for the recruitment of 189 more women for the WRNZNS was given in February 1944, but even this small quota was not filled. A year later nearly every establishment in which Wrens were employed was short of its complement. Manpower officers were directed to give priority to volunteers for the WRNZNS, but owing to the shortage of recruits and losses by discharges, the Wrens continued to be about 200 below the authorised establishment of 700. They attained a peak strength of 519 in October 1944; approximately seven hundred served during the war.

The first WRNZNS rating was entered as a writer at [Lyttelton](#) on 4 July 1942. By the end of that year the number had grown to 155. Nearly all entrants underwent a short disciplinary course in HMNZS *Philomel* to learn something of naval customs,

traditions, procedure and generally acquiring the art of behaving like a Wren.' As their numbers increased, mainly at [Auckland](#) and [Wellington](#), it became necessary to have superintendents to control the administrative side of the service in those areas. [Miss J. Duthie](#) was appointed to [Auckland](#) and [Mrs E. Fitch](#) at [Wellington](#), both with the rank of second officer. At Wellington a hostel was established for Wrens working away from their home towns. At Auckland a private hotel was taken over for the same purpose, and later additional accommodation was provided in the former Army barracks at Mount Victoria. Some Wrens working in small, isolated groups in other districts lived in small houses bought or rented for the purpose and did their own housekeeping.

The Wrens quickly settled into the routine of the Navy and proved themselves able and adaptable in their varied and exacting duties. Their morale was always high and the men did all they could to help them over the difficult stages. In the first issue of the Wrens' magazine in November 1943, the Chief of Naval Staff, Commodore Sir Atwell Lake ¹ wrote: 'Wrens are playing a fundamental part in many spheres of naval activity and have applied themselves to the work that they are efficiently carrying out with zeal and enthusiasm.... By their bearing and loyalty and sincere dedication to duty they have proved that they take a pride in themselves, in their uniform, in their ship and in the Service.... I am very proud of the Wrens.'

At the four main centres Wrens served as signal distributing and regulating officers and as writers, supply assistants, motor-transport drivers, coders, book correctors, cooks, stewards, and dental and sick-berth attendants. Those in the last-mentioned category underwent a three months' qualifying course and wore the Geneva Cross badge. At Auckland the commodore's barge was manned entirely by Wrens and its spick and span turn-out was the admiration of the Navy and the city. From the writers' branch a few Wrens were promoted fourth officer as captains' secretaries, and a third officer became secretary to the Chief of Naval Staff. In Navy Office Wrens were employed as plotters in the operations branch. Four were commissioned and took over the important day and night watch-keeping duties as merchant shipping officers.

Wrens proved themselves efficient visual signallers, coders, and telegraphists at the various ports and at [Waiouru](#) naval wireless telegraph station. The degaussing ranges and radar and visual signalling stations at [Wellington](#) and [Auckland](#) were

staffed by Wrens, who also manned the launches under the technical and administrative control of their own officers. Others carried out highly specialised work in the torpedo servicing branch at [Auckland](#). Wrens also operated the DEMS cinema projector and a Leading Wren was instructor in the 'dome', in which films were shown to male ratings in training as gun crews of merchant ships. Wrens worked in three daily eight-hour watches as plotters in the [Wellington](#) control room of the radio direction-finding network, and eight others manned a wireless station near [Blenheim](#) where 'very highly specialised and secret' work was performed.

When the Admiralty sought in January 1945 the loan of 200 Wrens for duty in the Australian bases of the [British Pacific Fleet](#), the request could not be met as their strength was approximately that number below establishment and barely forty applications to join were in hand. That the WRNZNS was the only New Zealand women's service which did not send some of its members overseas

¹ Captain Sir Atwell Lake, Bt, CB, OBE, RN, US Legion of Merit; born England, Feb 1891; entered RN Jan 1904; Grand Fleet, 1914–18; Captain, Dec 1942; Chief of Staff, C-in-C Portsmouth, 1939–41; Chief of Naval Staff, NZ, Jun 1942–Jul 1945.

was a great disappointment to Wrens, particularly those who had done long and good service at home. When hostilities ceased in August 1945, many Wrens were drafted to Navy Office to assist in demobilisation and general stock-taking. By the end of 1946 the WRNZNS had ceased to exist, but it was reconstituted in May 1947 as a permanent part of the Royal New Zealand Navy.

A scheme for the direct entry of New Zealand cadets for future service as commissioned officers in the Royal New Zealand Navy was started in 1940, the lads selected being sent to England for training in the Royal Navy. The first entries were one in the executive branch and two in the supply branch. Of these, Paymaster Sub-Lieutenant Watkinson, [RNZN](#), ¹ lost his life when HMS Hood was sunk in action with the German battleship Bismarck on 24 May 1941, and Midshipman McPherson, [RNZN](#), ² was lost in HMS Neptune when that ship was sunk by mines in the [Mediterranean](#) on 19 December 1941. The total number of direct-entry cadets from 1940 to 1944 was eighteen, of whom eleven were in the executive branch, four in the engineering

branch, and three in the supply branch. This system of direct entry has been continued since the war.

¹ Paymaster Sub-Lieutenant S. Watkinson, [RNZN](#); born Barrow-in-Furness, England, 9 Oct 1919; student; first direct entry as officer in NZ Naval Forces; killed in action 24 May 1941.

² [Midshipman B. E. McPherson, RNZN](#); born Dunedin, 4 Sep 1923; cadet, Dec 1940; midshipman Sep 1941; killed on active service 19 Dec 1941.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 27 – ORGANISATION OF NAVAL STAFF

CHAPTER 27

Organisation of Naval Staff

THE test of war quickly revealed that the staff organisation at Navy Office was inadequate to cope with the increasing pressure of work and the many matters calling for action. The position during the 'precautionary' and 'alert' stages and immediately after the outbreak of war was made difficult by the recall to England by the Admiralty in August 1939 of the Staff Officer (Intelligence), Lieutenant-Commander T. Ellis, RN. His duties had to be taken over by the Staff Officer (Operations), Lieutenant-Commander E. K. H. St. Aubyn, DSC, RN, who had only recently arrived in New Zealand. He was assisted by two RNVR officers for operations and intelligence duties and an RNR officer as merchant shipping officer.

It was on official record that Lieutenant-Commander St. Aubyn had to deal not only with operations and intelligence, but with a wide variety of other matters. In the result he built up a job which could more accurately be described as Staff Officer (Everything). In practice, however, this had the effect that the odd jobs took up too much of his time, to the detriment of his purely operational duties. As Commodore Parry commented later, it bore out the well-known fact 'that when one officer was charged with operational duties, as well as administrative duties, the latter inevitably eclipsed the former.'

In October 1939 Commodore J. W. Rivett-Carnac, commanding officer of the *Leander*, had completed two and a half years' loan service as Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron and was due for relief. The New Zealand Government proposed that he should be succeeded by Commodore H. E. Horan, who would retain the appointment of Chief of the Naval Staff and First Naval Member of the Naval Board. While this was a reversion to the former organisation which combined those offices with the seagoing appointment (and which had been found unsatisfactory), the Government was prepared to accept it as a 'temporary war measure, particularly as from his sixteen months' experience at Navy Office, Commodore Horan would be in a favourable position to give decisions and tender advice by signal'. Horan's suggestion that 'in his opinion the Second Naval Member and the Naval Secretary ... were conversant with his policy and opinions and well qualified to represent his views whenever he was temporarily out of touch with

Wellington', ¹ was doubtless inspired by his keen desire to return to sea service.

The Admiralty agreed to the proposal, and on 1 January 1940 Commodore Horan relieved Commodore Rivett-Carnac, who returned to England. This left Navy Office with only two Royal Navy executive officers – Captain A. B. Fanshawe, Second Naval Member, and Lieutenant-Commander St. Aubyn.

Soon after the return of the [Achilles](#) to New Zealand in February, the Government, with the full concurrence of both officers, proposed to the Admiralty that Captain W. E. Parry should remain in command of the [Achilles](#) and, on the departure of the [Leander](#), should become Commodore 2nd class as Chief of the Naval Staff, First Naval Member, and Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron. Commodore Horan would relinquish that rank and remain in command of the [Leander](#). The Admiralty concurred in the Government's proposal, and Parry took over his new appointments on 1 May 1940.

At that time the Admiralty was experiencing an acute shortage of trained staff officers – one of the many effects of the drastic cutting down of Royal Navy establishments during the 'disarmament years'. On 12 June 1940 it requested the relief 'from local resources' of Lieutenant-Commander St. Aubyn to enable him to take the appointment of Staff Officer (Intelligence) to the Commander-in-Chief China Station. When it was pointed out by the Navy Board that there was no suitable officer in New Zealand to replace St. Aubyn and that his withdrawal would leave Navy Office with only one Royal Navy executive officer and no trained staff officer at all, the Admiralty replied that Commander G. F. Hannay, RN, (ret'd) would be sent out to fill the vacancy. This was accepted by the Naval Board, who informed Admiralty that, in view of increased operational activity due to the presence of a raider in the [Pacific](#) and minelaying in New Zealand waters, it was not possible to release St. Aubyn immediately. Commodore Parry, however, arranged that he should be relieved temporarily by Lieutenant-Commander E. A. Nicholson, RN, Squadron Signal Officer in HMS [Achilles](#), pending the arrival of Commander Hannay, who assumed duty in September. Lieutenant-Commander St. Aubyn left [Wellington](#) for [Singapore](#) on 19 July 1940.

It was evident that a considerable build-up of Navy Office organisation was urgently needed, and Parry lost no time in setting about this task. In a minute dated

27 June 1940 he pointed out that the existing arrangements 'violated the one great principle of staff

¹ Governor-General to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, telegram of 11 October 1939.

organisation, namely, that operations should be divorced from administration.' In a small organisation this was not always possible and it was, therefore, all the more important to ensure that the 'operational side is not swamped by the administrative side.' For that reason he was inclined to think that it was a mistake for the Chief of the Naval Staff to have reverted to the combination of his duties with those of Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron.

Commodore Parry also pointed out that it was a cardinal principle of naval staff organisation that operations and intelligence should be separated from material and technical matters. In this respect the organisation in Navy Office was fundamentally unsound and, under existing conditions, becoming unworkable. It was, therefore, essential to have a staff officer for technical duties to deal with such important matters as minesweeping, counter-measures to magnetic mines, taking up and equipping vessels required as minesweepers, etc., and the defensive equipment and degaussing of merchant ships. Accordingly, representations were made to the Minister of Defence, who approved the appointment of Commander Boyle, RN (retd),¹ as Staff Officer for Technical and Material Duties as from 17 July 1940.

The course of events confirmed Commodore Parry's opinion that the duties of Chief of the Naval Staff were not compatible with the command of a seagoing cruiser, and in September 1940 he represented to the Government that the decision taken in October 1939 to combine the appointments of Chief of the Naval Staff and Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron should be reconsidered and that the former should be permanently at [Wellington](#). He pointed out that from 10 June until 23 September the [Achilles](#) had been at sea for sixty-six days. He had, therefore, been available for direct consultation by the War Cabinet only on twelve days when the ship was at [Wellington](#), and by teleprinter or long-distance telephone on twenty-one days at [Auckland](#), out of 106. During that period a number of important questions had arisen from the operations of a German raider in New Zealand waters

and the increased possibility of [Japan](#) entering the war, on most of which he had not been able to give any verbal statement to War Cabinet, whose meetings he had attended only once.

Parry felt very strongly that a commanding officer should not have to leave his ship for prolonged periods, especially when she was normally at four hours' or even shorter notice for steam and he had to take immediate action in an emergency. The right place for a

¹ Captain A. D. Boyle, RN (ret'd); born [Christchurch](#), 1889; entered RN 1903; Lieutenant in HMS New Zealand, 1912–17; retired 1920; first commanding officer, Canterbury Division, RNZNVR.

captain of his seniority in wartime was certainly at sea. He would be very sorry to give up command of his ship and her magnificent body of officers and men, but would gladly carry out whichever duty the Government might desire. In view of the attitude of [Japan](#), which might be very critical for New Zealand, he was definitely of opinion that neither Captain Fanshawe as Second Naval Member, nor Captain N. T. P. Cooper as Naval Secretary, should be relieved. The Admiralty had given no reason for doing so, and neither had yet served his full term in New Zealand. The work of Navy Office had already been impeded by not having the Chief of the Naval Staff permanently at [Wellington](#), and the loss of these two officers would inevitably slow up all work for some time.

Commodore Parry's views were accepted by the Government. In a telegram dated 27 September 1940, it informed the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs that it felt obliged to reconsider the combination of the offices of Chief of the Naval Staff and Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron. Since Commodore Parry had held those appointments, the Government had found it more and more necessary to have him available for consultation at [Wellington](#). On the other hand, his frequent absence at sea had created difficulties that were no longer to be accepted with equanimity. Consequently, the Government felt the need for the Chief of the Naval Staff to be dissociated from duties afloat so that he would be available at all times for the conduct of naval operations in association with War Cabinet and the other Chiefs of Staff at [Wellington](#).

Accordingly, the Government proposed for the early concurrence of the Admiralty that Commodore Parry should relinquish command of the [Achilles](#) and be relieved by Captain H. M. Barnes, RN, commanding officer of HMS Philomel and Captain-in-Charge, [Auckland](#). It was also proposed that the appointment of Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron should lapse for the time being and that Captain Barnes should take command of the [Achilles](#) as a private ship. The Admiralty's assent to these proposals was received on 15 October 1940, and the broad pendant of Commodore Parry was struck in the [Achilles](#) at sunset that day. Lieutenant-Commander Bingley, RN, ¹ Naval Control Service Officer at [Auckland](#), was appointed temporarily to succeed Captain Barnes. Lieutenant-Commander Nicholson, from the [Achilles](#), was appointed for duty in Navy Office as Station Signal Officer and for anti-submarine duties, and Paymaster Lieutenant G. H. Ashby, RN, as secretary to the Chief of Naval Staff.

¹ Captain D. A. Bingley, OBE, RN (retd), US Legion of Merit; born England, 17 Jun 1893; entered RN Aug 1906; served World War I; retired 1919; farmer.

Commodore Rotherham, RN, ¹ arrived from Simonstown, South Africa, in January 1941 and assumed duty as Commanding Officer HMS Philomel, Naval Officer-in-Charge, [Auckland](#), and Director of Recruiting, with Commander Bingley as his Chief Staff Officer and Naval Control Service Officer. In May 1942 Bingley was appointed Captain Superintendent HMNZ Dockyard, and Commander Elworthy, RN, ² Commanding Officer of Philomel and Director of Naval Recruiting. Commodore Rotherham, who was in ill health, was relieved in June 1943 by Commodore Dowding, DSC, RN, ³ as Naval Officer-in-Charge, Auckland District.

From the beginning of the war Captain Morris, RN, ⁴ had combined his duties as Director of Naval Reserves with those of officer in charge of the Naval Control Service and the staff for port duties at [Wellington](#). He was, in fact, Naval Officer-in-Charge, [Wellington](#), but it was not until November 1941 that his appointment in that capacity, to date from 20 January 1941, was gazetted. He was relieved as NOC in July 1942 by Captain R. E. Jeffreys, RN, who was succeeded a year later by Captain A. D. Boyle.

The inadequate staffing of the merchant shipping section of Navy Office was a matter that had engaged the attention of Commodore Parry from the time he took up his appointment as Chief of the Naval Staff. After his return from [Singapore](#) on 10 November 1940, he discussed the question with the Chief of the Air Staff, who agreed that the existing organisation was unsatisfactory and generally agreed with his conclusions. Accordingly, in a memorandum dated 14 November, Parry took the matter up with the Minister of Defence, to whom he emphasised the great importance of the functions of the merchant shipping staff. It was essential, he said, that the position at sea of every warship and merchant ship, of whatever nationality, in the [Pacific](#) should be known as accurately as possible at any moment. The main reason for this was so that naval and air force units could, at any time, be given complete information of the general shipping situation and detailed information of the whereabouts of ships in the areas in which they were to operate. Furthermore, it was equally essential that this information should be available to the Chief of the Naval Staff and Chief of the Air Staff and their operational staff officers, so that, when the presence of a raider was suspected, or a suspicious ship was reported, it would be

¹ Captain E. Rotherham, RN; born England, Apr 1892; entered RN 1905; served World War I; Captain, Jun 1933; died 1947.

² Commander J. C. Elworthy, OBE, RN (retd); born NZ 15 Jan 1907; entered RN 1921; retired 1935.

³ Captain W. K. D. Dowding, DSC, RN (retd); born [Scotland](#), 28 Nov 1891; entered RN 1904; served World War I; Captain, Jun 1935; retired list, 1944.

⁴ Captain E. G. Morris, RN (retd); born [London](#), Sep 1886; entered RN 1901; served World War I; retired 1933; died Jul 1949.

possible from the 'plot' to identify the suspected ship and plan their operations accordingly.

Another important aspect was that it was essential for warships operating in

defence of trade to have correct and up-to-date information of shipping in the New Zealand Station area. For this purpose cruisers at sea maintained a shipping 'plot' compiled from signals despatched by Navy Office, enabling them not only to know where friendly vessels might be met, but also obviating the necessity to close an unidentified ship for investigation and thereby risking serious damage if the vessel proved to be a raider. The merchant shipping section also acted as the centre in New Zealand for the collection of information from New Zealand ports and those in adjacent stations. This was exchanged between the naval authorities of those stations and the Far Eastern Combined Bureau, which acted as the controlling authority for shipping intelligence in the [Far East](#) and the [Pacific](#). The average daily number of merchant ships plotted was as follows: prior to November 1940, 107 (including 35 coastal); since 1 November 1940, 136 (including 36 coastal). In addition, an average of forty ships daily, principally foreign, which passed through the northern part of the New Zealand Station, had not hitherto been plotted owing to lack of staff and time, but, Commodore Parry said, should have been and must be in the future. Furthermore, the positions of British and foreign warships should also be shown on the wall chart in the Central War Room at Navy Office.

The many duties enumerated involved a great deal of careful plotting and clerical work that must be done at once and continuously if the merchant shipping section was to function efficiently. The 'staff' hitherto provided had been one RNR officer with part-time assistance from an officer of the intelligence 'staff'.

Commodore Parry stated that, in the interest of efficiency and to minimise the risk of loss of shipping or failure to track a raider in the area for which the New Zealand Naval Board was responsible, the staff must be increased so that the merchant shipping section could be manned continuously day and night. For this purpose it was necessary that there should be one officer in general charge and three officers in addition, so as to provide four watchkeepers. ¹ This was approved by the Minister of Defence on 27 November 1940 and three RNR officers were entered and appointed as watchkeepers to assist Lieutenant Blampied, RNZNR, ² who had taken over the duties

¹ Grim evidence in support of Commodore Parry's demand was forthcoming a few days later when the small steamer Holmwood and the

16,000-ton liner [Rangitane](#) were sunk by German raiders which had been patrolling the trade routes east of New Zealand for three weeks.

² Lieutenant-Commander R. Blampied, MBE, RNZNR; born Guernsey, [Channel Islands](#), 10 Apr 1904; master mariner in service of Union SS Co. of NZ, 1924–40 and 1945–52; died 1 Nov 1952.

of Merchant Shipping Officer at the beginning of the month. In August 1941 Paymaster Lieutenant-Commander Norman, RNZNVR, ¹ was appointed as first assistant to Staff Officer (Operations).

Although arrangements had been made on the outbreak of hostilities for the establishment of a Central War Room and Combined Intelligence Bureau, it was not until September 1940 that this organisation was set up in Navy Office by direction of the Chiefs of Staff. On the naval side it included the merchant shipping section and an intelligence section of two officers, under the Staff Officer (Operations and Intelligence). The latter section was responsible for all intelligence, both [Pacific](#) and internal, as well as for security. In respect of aliens, disaffected persons, and subversive activities it worked in close co-operation with the Police Department and the Security Intelligence Bureau, which came into being about that time. One Army officer and two officers of the [RNZAF](#) were accommodated in the Combined Intelligence Bureau.

This arrangement, though an improvement, was little more than a stop-gap. In March 1941 Commodore Parry raised with the Admiralty the difficulties caused by his having only one staff officer, apart from the signal officer, who was fully occupied as such. With the present rapid developments, the institution of convoys owing to raider activities, preparations for the possible entry of [Japan](#) into the war and so on, he was much disturbed by this lack of trained staff officers. A separate staff officer for intelligence duties must be restored, not only because there was full-time work for him in the Combined Intelligence Bureau, but to enable Commander Hannay to concentrate on his duties as Staff Officer (Operations). On 2 April Commodore Parry cabled to the Admiralty: 'Every day that passes convinces me more than ever of the importance, not only to New Zealand, but to Imperial Naval interests of an early appointment as Staff Officer (Intelligence) at [Wellington](#), vacant since August, 1939.'

Two days later the Admiralty replied that Lieutenant-Commander Beasley, RN,² had been appointed. He took up his duties in Navy Office on 16 July 1941.

After some delay, War Cabinet in October 1941 approved the establishment of a Combined Operational Intelligence Centre at Navy Office under the general direction of Lieutenant-Commander Beasley, whose title was changed to Director of Naval Intelligence, [Wellington](#). The new organisation was staffed by five RNZNVR

¹ Paymaster Lieutenant-Commander G. H. Norman, RNZNVR; born Westport, 1895; Union SS Co., 1911–44; served [1 NZEF](#), 1917–19; Secretary, New Zealand Shipowners' Federation, 1944–53.

² Lieutenant-Commander F. M. Beasley, RN; born England, 2 Aug 1903; entered RN 1916; HMS Ark Royal, 1938–40.

officers (four of whom were watchkeepers) one Army officer, one [RNZAF](#) officer, and a civilian. Lieutenant-Commander Barker, RN, (ret'd),¹ was appointed in charge of a general intelligence section responsible for all matters relating to the security of naval establishments, wharves, docks, shipping, and other vital points, as well as naval censorship.

Naval intelligence officers were appointed to four area headquarters in the Dominion, each of which had a combined intelligence centre. In December 1941 a staff officer for operations and intelligence was appointed under the Naval Officer-in-Charge, [Fiji](#), where a Combined Intelligence Centre for the three services was also established. Later, another naval officer was appointed for intelligence duties only. This organisation was superseded when the Fiji Islands passed to the operational control of the United States Commander of the [South Pacific Area](#) (comsopac), and a New Zealand naval liaison officer was then appointed to the staff of the [United States](#) officer-in-command at [Suva](#).

Close co-operation with the Americans was maintained by the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre. After the transfer of comsopac headquarters from [Auckland](#) to [Noumea](#) in July 1942 there was a rapid and elaborate build-up of the [United States](#) intelligence organisation. In January 1943 Lieutenant-Commander

Brackenridge,² from Combined Operational Intelligence Centre, [Wellington](#), was appointed New Zealand liaison officer on the staff of comsopac. From the beginning of 1944, when the tide of war had ebbed beyond the limits of the New Zealand Station, the need for much of the Combined Operational Intelligence Centre organisation no longer existed and it was considerably reduced. Lieutenant-Commander Beasley was succeeded as Director of Naval Intelligence by Lieutenant-Commander Barker, who was followed in September 1944 by Lieutenant-Commander Brackenridge. When the last was appointed in March 1945 as British naval intelligence liaison officer on the staff of the United States Commander-in-Chief, [Pacific](#) (cincpac), the duties of Director of Naval Intelligence were taken over by Lieutenant-Commander Cheyne, RNZNVR.³

For a long time it had been obvious that the staffs of the naval officers in charge at [Wellington](#) and [Auckland](#) were inadequate. They were, in fact, smaller than those prescribed by the Admiralty for a port of the lowest category. The staff of the naval officer-in-

¹ Lieutenant-Commander H. S. Barker, RN (retd); born NZ Sep 1893; entered RN 1901; served World War I; HMS Warspite, 1916–19; HMS Chatham, 1920–21; retired 1923; company director.

² Lieutenant—Commander W. W. Brackenridge, VRD, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), Jan 1912; sales manager.

³ Lieutenant-Commander R. A. C. Cheyne, [RNZN](#); born [Wellington](#), 9 Dec 1916; chemist; served in Coastal Forces, RN, 1941–42; transferred [RNZN](#) Oct 1946.

charge

of a defended port consisted of: (a) that required for port duties, including the defences; (b) a naval control service for the routing of ships, organisation of convoys and other matters affecting shipping; and (c) a DEMS staff for the arming of merchant ships, fitting of paravanes, degaussing, etc., and the training of DEMS ratings in the use of the equipment. In all other defended ports in the British Empire

the naval control service and the DEMS staff were separate organisations, but at [Wellington](#) and [Auckland](#) all their duties were combined.

The Chief of the Naval Staff considered it imperative that their functions should be entirely separate. The necessity for this, and the inadequacy of the existing staffs to cope with their many duties, had become increasingly clear since the institution of modified convoys as a protection against raiders, and because of the increasing numbers of ships passing through New Zealand waters and the additional DEMS work, principally in connection with the permanent degaussing of ships ordered by the Admiralty. Moreover, in the event of war with [Japan](#), [Wellington](#) was to become a convoy assembly port, and this necessitated the preparation of plans for the institution of a full convoy system in the South-West Pacific. Plans to that end were under discussion with the Australian naval staff. In addition, plans were being prepared to provide for the trans- [Pacific](#) routeing of ships in co-operation with the [United States](#) naval authorities at [San Francisco](#).

All this was stressed in a memorandum to the Minister of Defence, in which the Chief of Naval Staff proposed the appointment of nine additional officers at [Wellington](#) — six for the Naval Control Service and three for port duties; and four more at [Auckland](#) — three for the naval control service and one for DEMS duties. To assist the Staff Officer (Operations) at Navy Office, the senior merchant shipping officer was to take over the arranging of convoys and routeing of shipping, an additional watchkeeping officer being appointed. To enable the Chief of Naval Staff to make full and proper use of his secretary in dealing with plans, operations, and other matters, it was intended to relieve that officer of the work connected with naval personnel, including recruiting and drafting, by the appointment of a paymaster lieutenant RNZNVR as Naval Assistant (Personnel). ¹ On the administrative side, additional staff was to be provided for the Assistant Naval Secretary. All these proposals were approved by War Cabinet on 31 October 1941 and put into effect forthwith.

There were two changes in the Naval Board in the latter part of 1941. Paymaster Captain N. T. P. Cooper, RN, was relieved on

¹ Paymaster Lieutenant-Commander G. H. Lloyd Davies, RNZNVR, was

appointed. Born Wellington, 13 Apr 1912; accountant.

2 September by Paymaster Captain Beall, OBE, RN,¹ and on 13 December Commander Yeatman, RN,² assumed duty with the acting rank of captain as Second Naval Member in place of Captain Fanshawe, RN, who had held that appointment since September 1938.

The need of the expert knowledge and administrative services of an engineer officer and naval constructor at Navy Office was met by the appointment of Engineer Rear-Admiral Bodell,³ who took up his duties on a civil basis in August 1941. Three months later Engineer Lieutenant-Commander Earnshaw, RN (retd),⁴ was appointed, also on a civil basis, as engineer overseer, becoming Assistant Director of Naval Engineering in October 1942. Mr J. H. Narbeth, RCNC,⁵ was promoted Chief Constructor but remained at Devonport Dockyard, which was in process of considerable expansion and whose staff was commensurately increased.

The absence from New Zealand of the Chief of Naval Staff, who was attending a conference at [Singapore](#) when [Japan](#) entered the war, emphasised the need of an officer to act as his deputy. In response to an urgent signal, the Admiralty nominated Commander Stirling-Hamilton, RN,⁶ whose appointment as Deputy Chief of Naval Staff was approved by War Cabinet on 28 December 1941. He travelled from [Singapore](#) by air and assumed duty at Navy Office on 19 January 1942.

At the instance of the Chief of Naval Staff, Lieutenant-Commander J. A. Smyth, RNZNVR, had been appointed Staff Officer (Anti-Submarine), and Lieutenant-Commander E. A. Nicholson, RN, as Staff Communications Officer, the latter being succeeded in January 1942 by Lieutenant-Commander the Hon. [N. A. J. W. E. Napier](#), RN. Lieutenant-Commander P. P. E. Green, RN, from the [Achilles](#), was appointed temporarily as Staff Officer, Torpedo and Mining, and was succeeded in October 1942 by Lieutenant-Commander W. H. Minchall, RNZNVR. Other staff appointments were Commander G. C. A. Whitelock, RN (retd),

¹ Captain (S) N. H. Beall, OBE, RN; born England, 1893; entered RN 1906; Commander, Jul 1930; secretary to Admiral Sir James Little, KCB, in various appointments, May 1930-Jan 1940; died 1947.

² Captain M. J. Yeatman, RN; born England, Dec 1895; entered RN 1908; served in destroyers, 1914–18; Commander, 1931; HMS Impregnable, Boys' Training School, 1937–39; HMS Sandwich, 1939–41.

³ Engineer Rear-Admiral G. W. Bodell, US Bronze Star; born N. Ireland, Jul 1878; entered RN Jul 1901; destroyers and Malta Dockyard, 1914–18; Engineer Captain, Dec 1927; retired Jul 1933.

⁴ Engineer Lieutenant-Commander W. Earnshaw, RN, US Bronze Star; born [Christchurch](#), Jul 1881; marine engineer; served RN 1916–19; Director of Naval Engineering 1945–46.

⁵ Royal Corps of Naval Constructors.

⁶ Captain Sir Robert W. Stirling-Hamilton, Bt, RN (retd); born [Scotland](#), Apr 1903; entered RN 1916; served in submarines; Naval Attaché, [Bangkok](#), Jul 1941; DCNS, NZ, 1942–43; Captain, Dec 1944; Deputy Chief of Staff, C-in-C [British Pacific Fleet](#), 1944–46.

Local Defence, and Commander H. M. Montague, RN (retd), Boom Defence.

New Zealand was fortunate to have had the services of Commodore Parry as Chief of Naval Staff during a critical period of the war. When he took up that appointment he found Navy Office ill prepared to cope with many urgent problems and needs. By the time [Japan](#) entered the war in December 1941, he had organised an adequate and balanced naval staff, as well as a sound recruiting and training scheme. His foresight in these and many other matters was confirmed by the march of events. When the time for his departure came, the Government was loth to lose him.

In August 1941 the Government had accepted the Admiralty's nomination of Commodore Sir Atwell Lake to succeed Commodore Parry. But in February 1942, when the swift tide of Japanese conquest was in full flood, the Prime Minister made urgent representations to the Admiralty that the latter should remain in New Zealand. ¹ In view of the grave situation in the [Pacific](#), 'the corresponding importance

of the naval and other defence measures in New Zealand and [Fiji](#) and the continually increasing complexity and volume of the naval work involved', the Government did not wish to lose the services of Commodore Parry, who had been responsible for the considerable expansion of the Royal New Zealand Navy and was in close touch with all that was being done. It had discussed the matter with Vice-Admiral Leary, USN, commander of the Anzac Area, who considered it 'most undesirable' that Commodore Parry should be lost to New Zealand at this juncture and that he should retain his post as Chief of Naval Staff. The Government held the view that both officers could well be employed on the New Zealand Station, one possibility being the appointment of Commodore Lake as Naval Officer-in-Charge, [Fiji](#), 'which appeared likely to become a key point in [Pacific](#) naval strategy.' If the Admiralty felt it would not be proper to vary Lake's appointment as Chief of Naval Staff, the Government would feel it desirable to have Parry as their representative with Vice-Admiral Leary.

The reply was received that Commodore Parry was 'definitely wanted by the Admiralty because of his particular qualifications', and the proposal to extend his period of service in New Zealand 'presented great difficulties.' The Admiralty was prepared to allow him to remain for two months after the arrival of Commodore Lake, who had been most highly recommended by the Commander-in-Chief Portsmouth and who, because of his varied experience, was considered to be entirely suitable for the New Zealand appointment.

¹ Prime Minister to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, telegram of 25 February 1942.

To this the Prime Minister replied that the Government felt that the 'immediate urgent requirements' could best be met by retaining Commodore Parry, who 'could not render better service than in his present post.' The Prime Minister 'earnestly begged for reconsideration of this matter which is of such importance to us'. The Admiralty, however, adhered to its decision. Commodore Lake, who travelled by way of the [United States](#), where he had discussions with Admiral King and his staff, arrived at [Wellington](#) on 10 April 1942. He assumed duty as Chief of Naval Staff on 16 June and Parry sailed for England. Commodore Lake served as Chief of Naval Staff and First Naval Member of the Naval Board until 12 July 1945, when he was

relieved by Commodore Faulkner, DSC, RN. ¹

During the war, and especially after the outbreak of hostilities against [Japan](#), there was a great expansion in the communications branch of the Royal New Zealand Navy. In Navy Office, [Wellington](#), the centre of communications in New Zealand, a large civilian staff supervised by naval officers and ratings handled an increasing volume of world-wide traffic. From early in 1942 the total number of signal 'groups' handled rose to 1,250,000, a figure that was maintained until shortly before VJ Day. The cipher office, dealing with the ciphering and deciphering of messages, and the coding office, under the charge of the port wireless telegraph officer, were linked with the W/T station and were an important part of the Empire chain of naval communications.

A staff of skilled operators recruited from the Post and Telegraph Department operated teleprinter circuits to HMNZ Dockyard, Auckland Combined Headquarters, [Waiouru W/T Station](#), Purewa W/T Station, [Auckland](#), HMNZS [Cook](#), [Wellington](#), the General Post Office, [Wellington](#), and a morse line to [Lyttelton](#). Over these circuits passed all overseas traffic, a large number of high-priority signals of the New Zealand section of the direction-finding net, as well as a large volume of administrative traffic within New Zealand. At one period, Navy Office ranked as the sixth largest telegraph office in the Dominion. Besides operating local port wave wireless stations at [Auckland](#), [Wellington](#), and [Lyttelton](#), the Navy in November 1944 took over the former American naval W/T station at Purewa, [Auckland](#), which provided communications with the United States Commander, [South Pacific Area](#), and other American naval authorities in the [Pacific](#).

A major feature of the great wartime development of the naval communications system was the building of the wireless telegraphy

¹ Captain G. H. Faulkner, DSC, RN; born England, 27 Apr 1903; entered RN 1906; served in destroyers, World War I; Captain, Dec 1935; HMS [Berwick](#), 1941–43; Chief of Staff to C-in-C South [Atlantic](#), 1943–45.

station at [Waiouru](#) on a plateau in the approximate centre of the [North Island](#). It comprises an accommodation camp, a receiving station, and two transmitting

stations. The aerial system covers an area of more than twenty acres. Some of the most modern high-power transmitting plant is installed there and the station also uses high-speed receiving equipment. The Waiouru station was commissioned in July 1943 and at the peak period of the war had an establishment of about 150 officers and ratings, of whom more than eighty were Wrens. In every watch [Waiouru](#) handled tens of thousands of code groups. A dozen or more circuits were manned simultaneously and teleprinter land lines fed the signals to the coders and cipherers at Navy Office.

The station's main achievement was in broadcasting for the [British Pacific Fleet](#) in Japanese waters. It was found that the American circuits were too heavily loaded to handle traffic for the Admiralty and this task was taken over by [Waiouru](#). The station handled practically all the traffic between Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, Commander-in-Chief British Pacific Fleet, and the British Government, including important messages on political and other questions. In addition, a large proportion of the messages of a similar nature between Admiral Earl Mountbatten, Supreme Commander South-East Asia, and the British Government passed through [Waiouru](#). On 30 October 1951 [Waiouru](#) W/T Station was designated HMNZS Irirangi.

A naval barracks with accommodation for some 200 officers and ratings was built at [Lyttelton](#) and commissioned as HMNZS [Tasman](#) on 20 January 1944 by Commander T. S. Critchley, Naval Officer-in-Charge, [Lyttelton](#). [Tasman](#) was used as a training establishment for telegraphists and for the accommodation of the staff and pool of ratings held at [Lyttelton](#). A signal training school was established at Dunedin, the first class from HMNZS Tamaki entering in June 1943. During the first twelve months six classes totalling 144 ordinary signalmen went through the school, of whom 121 passed the final examination. Later, the training of telegraphists was transferred to Tamaki and that of signalmen from Dunedin to [Tasman](#).

It was fortunate that the Government had approved in 1935 a three-year plan for the reconstruction and modernising of the naval base and dockyard at [Devonport](#). By September 1939 many of the works had been completed and others nearly so. But it soon became apparent that the equipment and staff organisation were inadequate to deal expeditiously and efficiently with the many demands of the war. Hitherto, the dockyard had been looked upon as a small repair base. Now it was called upon not only to equip minesweepers and auxiliary craft but to convert and fit

out the Monowai as an armed merchant cruiser. These and many other tasks were added to when the [Achilles](#) returned from the [River Plate](#) for repair of battle damage and a major refit. There was a shortage of berthage for ships, and store accommodation was insufficient for the large quantities of material arriving.

In 1942 a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into and report upon the state of efficiency and control of the naval base and other matters relating to production and staff. The Commission made many recommendations (not all of which were adopted) for improving the layout of the repair shops and machinery and increasing the facilities of the base which, it said, had grown 'in a piecemeal and promiscuous way without any thoroughly well-considered long-range plan.' But that was not entirely the fault of the Navy Department, which over many years had had to plan and work on a strictly limited budget. In their entirety the recommendations of the Commission amounted to a long-term scheme, including the construction of a new dry-dock, the rebuilding of the barracks, the removal of the fuel-oil tanks, and other proposals, all of which would have cost some millions of pounds.

Nevertheless, a major programme of works, some of which were already in progress, greatly increased and improved the facilities of the dockyard and base. A traffic tunnel was driven through the adjacent hill to Shoal Bay, where reclamation provided ground for a complete storeyard with the necessary buildings. Underground storage tanks for fuel-oil were constructed, new workshops, wharves, and stores were built in the main area, and the Calliope dock was lengthened a second time to provide for larger cruisers.

Though these and many other works were in progress during the war and were not completed till 1947, the dockyard coped successfully with a vast amount of work, including damage repair to the [Leander](#), major refits of the [Achilles](#) and [Gambia](#) and numerous ships of the United States Navy and the [British Pacific Fleet](#), as well as repairs and refits of minesweepers and auxiliary vessels. HM Dockyard, [Devonport](#), though not of great size, is now one of the best-equipped in the south-west [Pacific](#).

The development and prospective expansion of the anti-submarine and minesweeping forces called urgently for the provision of base facilities at [Wellington](#). The matter was raised in October 1941, when it was decided to establish a base at [Shelly Bay](#), on the east side of Evans Bay. The scheme provided for dredging and

reclamation, the construction of two wharves, slipways for launches, a cable tank and an underground petrol tank, and the erection of workshops and stores, administrative offices, living quarters for 31 officers and 260 ratings (later 38 officers and 350 ratings), and other buildings at an estimated cost of £230,000. The War Cabinet had already approved the construction of an armament depot with magazines above [Shelly Bay](#) and it was now proposed to establish a mining depot there. ¹

The Commissioner of Defence Construction informed the Prime Minister that it would take up to eighteen months to complete the works. In view of the 'tremendous programme' of urgent defence works in hand, a more unfortunate time could not have been chosen for the task. He proposed a modified scheme which could be completed in half the time. The Naval Board held out for the full scheme and also proposed the taking over of the women's borstal buildings on Mount Crawford, above [Shelly Bay](#), as barracks for naval ratings.

On 17 November 1942, thirteen months after the matter was first raised, War Cabinet gave authority for £314,000 for the construction of the [Shelly Bay](#) base as shown in the Naval Board's plan. It was directed that work proceed to complete the wharfage in the southern bay, but that further consideration be given to the question of wharfage in the northern bay in relation to a suggested wharf near the patent slip on the west side of Evans Bay. Actually, neither of these wharves was built, that in the southern bay being found sufficient for all requirements; nor was the borstal building ever used.

Slow progress was made with the [Shelly Bay](#) works during 1943 and there were many alterations and additions to the original plans. In the meantime a temporary base for motor-launches was constructed on the west side of Clyde Quay in Lambton harbour at a cost of more than £10,000. It came into operation early in 1943. On 27 February 1944, Commander Taylor, DSC, RNZNVR ² was appointed Officer-in-Charge Shelly Bay. Though much work remained to complete it, the base was formally commissioned as HMNZS [Cook](#) on 1 June 1944, when the temporary base at Clyde Quay was closed down.

The question of custodianship of the disused borstal buildings was argued for about two years. The Treasury said it appeared that, as the Navy was not using the

buildings, the expenditure of more than £100,000 on building a new borstal at Takapu Road was not warranted. In August 1946 Treasury ruled that since the old borstal had been taken on charge by Navy Office it was the Navy's responsibility. The property was transferred back to the Prisons Department in 1947. A return compiled after the war showed that expenditure on the [Shelly Bay](#) base from 1942 to 1947 amounted to £370,109, making with £17,354 for the Works Department's administrative charges a total of £387,463.

¹ The mining depot was ultimately built at Mahanga Bay, on the west shore of the outer harbour.

² Captain F. E. Taylor, DSC, RNZNVR; born England, Jan 1902; commanded HM minesweepers Ash and Springtide, 1940–43; CO Wellington Division, RNZNVR, since 1946.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 28 – DEVELOPMENT OF RADAR

CHAPTER 28

Development of Radar

RADIO direction-finding, or radar, more than any other scientific factor contributed to the victory of the [United Nations](#) in the Second World War. This device, the 'most novel and versatile weapon of the century, with almost limitless applications in sea, air and land warfare', was developed soon after [Hitler's](#) accession to power in February 1933.

At that time there was no known means of detecting the approach of aircraft at a distance and of observing and plotting their course in thick weather or by night. But scientists engaged in radio research in [Britain](#) conceived the idea that aircraft might be detected and located by an improved apparatus of the kind already built to receive radio echoes from the ionosphere. By the end of 1935, experimental work was sufficiently advanced to warrant the establishment of five radio-location stations on the east coast of England — the first operational radar system in the world. The chain of stations was rapidly extended to give complete cover to the whole of the east and south-east coasts. The detection of ships from aircraft and of aircraft from ships, the screening of harbours against the approach of small craft, the supplying of gunnery data to batteries, and the control of searchlights by radar with the certainty of instant illumination of aircraft targets were accomplished facts in September 1939. Thereafter, under the stimulus of war, came fantastic developments in radar. Theoretical prediction was generally ahead of experiment, which, in turn, was often ahead of production. The first great operational test and success of radar came in the Battle of [Britain](#) in 1940, when the timely information given by the coastal stations enabled the 'few' [RAF](#) fighters to be directed by ground control to the interception and defeat of the [Luftwaffe](#).

Naval radar brought about what has been described as the 'greatest revolution in Naval tactics since the change from sail to steam.' Range-finding by visual means was supplanted by radar apparatus of extreme precision which enabled guns to open fire at greater ranges and engage unseen targets, both ships and aircraft, the ranges being accurate to within a few yards. Radar enabled the cruisers [Suffolk](#) and [Norfolk](#) to shadow the battleship [Bismarck](#) for thirty-one hours in May 1941, a feat which German official records have described as 'most surprising and of decisive

importance'. In mid-winter darkness in the Arctic in December 1943, the Scharnhorst was brought to action by means of radar and sunk by radar-controlled gunfire. The application of radar to anti-submarine warfare was the most important single factor in bringing about the defeat of the U-boat.

Radar came to New Zealand in the closest secrecy immediately after the outbreak of war. Early in 1939 the Dominions were invited to send physicists to England to receive information about a 'new secret technique of a most important character concerning defence.' The Prime Minister decided that [Dr E. Marsden](#), Director of Scientific Development, should go on this mission, and he arrived in England at the end of April 1939. He was given every facility for the study of radar technique and the various types of apparatus then developed. He returned to New Zealand in October 1939 with an ASV set, ¹ a quantity of equipment and much technical information.

The development of radar in New Zealand was largely owing to the initiative and enthusiasm of Dr Marsden and a small group of young scientists. In respect to the Navy, they were strongly supported by Commodore Parry, who appreciated the great tactical importance of radio direction-finding. The Admiralty was preoccupied with the major problems of design and production and of equipping the ships of the Royal Navy, so that the early development of radar in New Zealand was largely a matter of self-help and improvisation; but remarkable success was achieved.

Soon after his return from England, Dr Marsden initiated work on the design of a radar set for shipboard installation, primarily for the detection and location of other ships. This was developed mainly by Professor F. W. G. White at Canterbury University College, but some of the work was done in the small radio development laboratory at Wellington East Post Office, where three young New Zealand scientists — [C. W. N. Watson-Munro](#), [E. R. Collins](#), and [I. K. Walker](#) — worked on the aerial and indicator systems. In Christchurch, Professor White was ably assisted by Mr [T. R. Pollard](#), lecturer in radio physics at [Canterbury College](#), and Messrs [D. M. Hall](#) and [F. A. McNeill](#) of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

Working in the deepest secrecy and with inadequate facilities, the scientists soon produced their first naval radar set. They used British developmental data and components mostly scraped from local sources. Valves of specially powerful design

for radar work were later supplied by Admiralty, but these were in 'painfully short

¹ ASV: aircraft to surface vessel — a type of radar used in aircraft.

supply'. At the end of May 1940 the set was installed in HMS [Achilles](#) by the scientists, with the aid of the assistant torpedo officer, Lieutenant Harper, RNVR. ¹ There was little space for housing the apparatus, which was regarded at that time by some officers with questioning eyes as a cumbrous gadget of doubtful utility.

Shortly afterwards, at the request of Professor White, Lieutenant Harper was seconded for duty with the RDF Branch at [Christchurch](#), where his scientific knowledge and naval experience proved of great value to the small team of scientists who worked on an improved radar set to give increased range, greater accuracy of range and bearing indication, and automatic transmission. In January 1941 Professor White reported to Navy Office that Lieutenant Harper had been responsible for the design of the ranging gear and produced excellent results. He suggested that Harper be employed on future radar design, though he should go to sea for a time when the new set was installed. This set, which worked on 73 centimetres, was tested at Godley Head, [Lyttelton](#), and fitted into the [Achilles](#) in February-March 1941. After the preliminary trials at sea, Lieutenant Harper reported that its performance was exactly as expected. An increase in range was apparent, range-taking was straightforward, and its accuracy appeared to be within fifty yards.

From these experimental sets were evolved the SWG (ship warning, gunnery) and SW (ship warning) sets which were installed in the [Achilles](#) in August 1941. After a week's trials, the ship's radar officer reported that the performance of the SWG set had been greatly improved by the modifications. In a daylight exercise with the [Aquitania](#) at from 15,000 to 20,000 yards, the contrast between the radar range plot and the optical range-finders in the director control tower was most marked. The radar set produced a regular plot of perfect consistency, whereas the range-finder varied up to 500 yards either side of the mean. The radar plot would, therefore, greatly increase the accuracy of gunfire at those ranges. The SW set, in almost continuous operation during the week, functioned satisfactorily with only minor interruptions. Seamen boys were trained to assist the radar operators when continuous watch was being kept.

The Chief of Naval Staff, Commodore Parry, considered that the radar sets were of sufficient value to ships to warrant going into production as soon as possible, naval requirements to be met being increased range and more accurate direction, and a radar range-finder to give a plot with a maximum range of 12,000 yards against aircraft.

¹ Lieutenant S. D. Harper, RNVR; born England, 1913; research engineer, British Post Office; Radar Officer, Navy Office, [Wellington](#), 1941–42.

HMNZS [Leander](#) was fitted with SWG and SW sets during her refit at [Auckland](#) in October—November 1941. These were non-standard in that they were laboratory-made equipments produced by adaptation of such components as were available. A cabinet-mounted SW set was supplied to the [Leander](#) in September 1943. HMNZS [Monowai](#) was fitted with a laboratory-made SW set in December 1941 and with a production model SWG set some months later. The [Walrus](#) amphibian aircraft carried by the cruisers were fitted with British ASV sets at different times.

In congratulating the New Zealand Naval Board on the fitting of radar sets in the [Achilles](#), the Admiralty in August 1941 said there was no material development comparable in importance to radar. It was its considered opinion that ships not so equipped were placed at a very serious tactical disadvantage. As it would be some time before any radar sets could be supplied from the [United Kingdom](#) for fitting in ships on the [China](#) and East Indies stations, the Admiralty would take advantage of the Naval Board's offer to send spare sets as they became available to [Singapore](#), [Colombo](#), and [Bombay](#) for equipping ships at those bases.

A Radio Physics Board, later known as the Radio Development Board, had been set up in April 1941 to formulate policy regarding all radar questions, including priority in development and production. The Board comprised the Chiefs of Staff of the three services, the Director of Scientific Development, the Director-General of the Post and Telegraph Department, and the Secretary of the Organisation for National Security. At the same time, Lieutenant Harper was appointed for duty in Navy Office as RDF officer responsible for the organisation of naval radar. Later in the year he was joined by five other officers, one of whom, Electrical Lieutenant

Marklew, RNZNVR, ¹ took over the duties of RDF officer when Harper reverted to the Royal Navy in February 1942.

In September 1941 the Radio Development Board decided that the order of priority in the development and production of radar equipment was to be (a) ships and aircraft, (b) coastwatching, and (c) coast defence. Three SW and three SWG sets were to be provided for the cruisers on the New Zealand Station. The Chiefs of Staff considered it of major importance to equip HM ships in the [Far East](#) as soon as possible, 'as it is almost certain they will be first in contact with the enemy'. The Board, therefore, recommended that New Zealand should endeavour to produce a minimum of five SW and five SWG sets a month to meet the Admiralty's urgent requirements. These recommendations were approved by War Cabinet on 24 September 1941.

¹ Lieutenant-Commander E. J. Marklew, MBE, RNZNVR; born [Bristol](#), England, 4 Oct 1898; Assistant Engineer (Communications), Signal and Electrical Branch, NZ Railways.

This somewhat ambitious programme was compromised, not only by the onslaught of [Japan](#) in December 1941 but by delays due to the late arrivals of components and material, shortage of labour, and other factors. Sets were completed behind schedule only after immense effort to procure and convert sufficient component parts. Nevertheless, the devoted labours of the Radio Development Laboratory and the production effort of the radio industry combined to make the output of radar equipment in New Zealand a remarkable and worthwhile performance. New Zealand-built radar equipment was equal in standard to contemporary British and [United States](#) sets.

Lieutenant-Commander G. C. F. Whitaker, RN, from the [Singapore](#) base, arrived in New Zealand in November 1941 to discuss and provide for the radar requirements of the [China](#) and East Indies stations, as far as New Zealand production was concerned. It was arranged to supply him with sets of constructional drawings to facilitate the fitting of ships at [Singapore](#), and that the Radio Development Laboratory should take immediate steps to procure the material for thirty SW and thirty SWG sets. In December, however, Whitaker reported from [Australia](#) that he

had asked the Commonwealth Naval Board to supply forty Australian-built SW sets, which were to be used as well as the New Zealand SWG sets, especially in destroyers. The New Zealand Naval Board then informed the Commanders-in-Chief East Indies Station and Eastern Fleet that New Zealand would give priority to the production of SWG sets.

By November 1942 fifteen complete SWG sets had been shipped to [Australia](#), of which nine had been sent on to [Ceylon](#) for the Eastern Fleet. One of these was lost when the Hauraki was captured by a Japanese raider in the [Indian Ocean](#) in July 1942. The Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet informed the New Zealand Naval Board in November that he did not need more than the eight sets already received, since deliveries from England had been increased.

A decision of the Chiefs of Staff Committee to establish sixteen radar coastwatching stations in New Zealand, controlled and manned by the Navy, had been approved by War Cabinet in July 1940. These stations were sited on headlands and islands around the coast to give maximum cover to the principal harbours, the approaches to Cook Strait and Foveaux Strait, and other focal areas. The ultimate complement of each station was one officer, eight or nine seamen operators, and two mechanics. The stations were self-contained units with good living quarters, storage for food, water and oil, and diesel-driven electric generators. The first was in operation in January 1941 and the others had been completed by March 1942. A radar coastwatching station built on Mbengga Island to cover the shipping approaches to [Suva, Fiji](#), came into operation in April 1942. The radar was installed but not operated by the Royal New Zealand Navy.

The manning of the stations was discussed with the Naval Secretary by the Director of Scientific Development, who said that the men selected should be bright, intelligent types with an educational background of at least matriculation standard and, preferably, with some knowledge of or interest in radio. What was designated Scheme 'R' was submitted to the Minister of Defence in September 1940. The Navy proposed that candidates should be engaged on a civilian basis at a wage equivalent to naval pay and allowances. After a technical course of one month at Auckland University College, those who passed the tests would be entered in the New Zealand naval forces as telegraphists (Special Branch) to join HMS Philomel for the second part of the course, which would include some disciplinary training.

The Naval Secretary stated that it was proposed to enter twenty candidates to form the first class and that the total number 'required eventually' would be approximately forty. It is not known how this figure was arrived at, but it was inadequate for the manning of the proposed stations. A few days later the Minister of Defence was informed that 'it is now fairly certain that extensive RDF installations will be necessary in all warships and that an RDF branch of the New Zealand Naval Forces will in any case be necessary for service afloat. For this reason the rates of pay should be related to the scale of Naval pay generally'.

As there were many more recommended candidates for service in the Royal Navy under Scheme 'B' than could be accepted, and as they had the required educational qualifications, it was proposed to offer a number of them entry under Scheme 'R'. This was done by a confidential circular letter which outlined the scheme but did not disclose the nature of the duties, though it vaguely mentioned radio and indicated that those passing the course would serve as telegraphists at 'certain coast stations'.

The first class, numbering eighteen, started on 2 December 1940 and spent about ten weeks at Auckland University College instead of four weeks there and four weeks in HMS Philomel as originally planned. No naval instructor was available at that time, certainly not for radar theory, but the [DSIR](#) lecturer at Auckland University College, Mr [H. D. Dobbie](#), B.Sc., was well qualified as an instructor. At first, facilities for either practical work or demonstration were very limited. A New Zealand-built ASV radar set lent by the Air Force was set up in Philomel in January 1941, but the bulk of the laboratory equipment was not received until September 1941, in time for the fourth and last class.

In the early stages of the war, the [United Kingdom](#) authorities met the growing demands for technicians required by the rapid expansion of radar by recruiting large numbers of skilled radio mechanics. The first appeal to New Zealand for assistance was made to the Prime Minister by the High Commissioner for the [United Kingdom](#) in August 1940. Both mechanics with good practical and theoretical knowledge and officers who had a University scientific degree or its equivalent, as well as practical knowledge, were wanted. Recruitment was to be for the Royal Air Force.

The Air Department had already sent three radio physicists and thirty-three radio mechanics to England and was aiming to make twenty trained mechanics available every six weeks from the new electrical and wireless school at [Wigram](#), when another more urgently worded telegram was received by the British High Commissioner. This stated that radar in all three services had assumed even greater importance. It could play a vital part in meeting the problem of the night bomber and attacks on merchant shipping and had been given the highest priority by the British Cabinet. Large numbers of radio mechanics would be needed to maintain radar apparatus in production or being rapidly developed. Further assistance from New Zealand would be of the greatest value.

At the beginning of May 1941, the Prime Minister informed the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs that all men offering as radio mechanics in response to the recent appeal were being entered for service in the Royal Air Force. So far, about 600 had volunteered and were being examined by the RNZAF Radio Mechanics Selection Committee. But it seemed clear that the need existed in all three services for radio mechanics. After outlining the Naval Board's Scheme 'R', the Prime Minister said the Government wished to know if any quota of volunteers should be allocated to each of the three services or whether the present procedure should be continued.

A reply was received that recruiting of RDF men for service in the Royal Navy should be separate from that for the other services. The Admiralty informed the New Zealand Naval Board that the Royal Navy was 'dangerously short of trained RDF operators in the Battle of the [Atlantic](#)' and asked for assistance by the release of 'trained operators for service afloat rather than in shore stations'. The Royal Navy had started new branches called wireless mechanics and air fitters (RDF) to maintain wireless and RDF equipment both afloat and on shore, and in the Fleet Air Arm respectively. Requirements for the new branches would be about 2300 men during the next eighteen months. The Admiralty asked that a special effort be made to 'enlist the maximum possible number of suitable men forthwith for loan to the Royal Navy'. It thought the New Zealand ratings under training would be most suitable as wireless mechanics. Some weeks earlier the Admiralty had indicated that it would be 'glad to receive up to twenty trained RDF operators in any two months and twenty untrained men every month'. This was a modest request for only 360 men a year, but six months passed before War Cabinet approval was given to recruit men for RDF

service in the Royal Navy, and by that time there had been important changes in both organisation and requirements.

In September 1940 the rating of Seaman (RDF) was created in the Royal Navy for the operation (and later, the maintenance) of RDF equipment. In addition to seaman's pay, qualified operators received non-substantive pay of 3d. a day. They were eligible for advancement to leading seaman (RDF) after six months, and petty officer (RDF) after a further twelve months, the latter subject to the passing of an examination after a course designed to fit them for maintenance duties. In May 1941 a wireless mechanics branch was instituted for the duration of the war. Ratings in this branch were given specialised training in the maintenance and repair of RDF equipment ashore and afloat. Their pay was 9d. a day more than that of the seaman's branch.

At the beginning of July 1941 the Naval Board recommended, and the Minister of Defence approved, that the New Zealand naval RDF stations afloat and ashore be organised on lines similar to those in the Royal Navy. There would be two classes of ratings, namely, RDF operators and RDF wireless mechanics. The former would undergo a training course in HMS Philomel and the latter receive specialised training at Auckland University College. Radio direction-finding operators would be entered in the special section of the seaman branch and receive the non-substantive rate of 3d. a day in addition to their ordinary pay. Men for RDF maintenance duties would be entered as wireless mechanics, their pay being on the same basis as in the Royal Navy. Ratings serving under Scheme 'R' would be transferred to the wireless branch.

Approval to recruit the RDF operators asked for by the Admiralty was first sought from the Minister of Defence on 24 May 1941. Four weeks later he was reminded of this and asked to authorise further courses of training for classes of twenty ratings at Auckland University College. Another reminder at the end of June was accompanied by a statement that 120 seamen (RDF) were needed as operators in the New Zealand cruisers and coastwatching stations. Approval 'in principle' was accordingly sought to train seamen (RDF) in classes of twenty, one month's disciplinary training in HMNZS Tamaki to be followed by one month's practical instruction in a school which it was proposed to establish at Mount Victoria, [Auckland](#).

A more urgent note was sounded on 28 July 1941 when the Naval Secretary informed the Minister of Defence that a message from the Admiralty said it would be very glad to have twenty wireless mechanics and twenty ordinary seamen (RDF) every two months. The Admiralty attached 'so much importance to having these men that, if absolutely necessary, they recommend they be provided at the expense of reduction in the number of ratings being trained in seamen, stoker and accountant branches.'

The first of the ratings trained at Auckland University College were drafted to coastwatching stations in March 1941 on a basis of one leading hand and four operators. In June the complement was increased to seven, an additional watch of two men to be added if circumstances necessitated continuous twenty-four-hour watchkeeping. In accordance with the Naval Board's decision, the ratings trained at Auckland University College were transferred to the wireless mechanics branch as from July 1941. One draft of ten men lent to the Royal Navy left for England that month. The fourth and last class to be trained at Auckland University College was entered in September 1941. Three months later, fifteen candidates were entered and commissioned as sub-lieutenants for radar duties in the Eastern Fleet. They were given a short course of training in HMNZS Philomel and sailed for Colombo in February 1942. From time to time other candidates with scientific and radio qualifications were similarly entered for radar duties.

In the meantime, the Chiefs of Staff Committee had submitted to War Cabinet a comprehensive scheme for the training of wireless mechanics for the Navy and Army at the Air Force electrical and wireless school at [Wigram](#), which was to be enlarged for the purpose. As finally approved on 8 September 1941, the scheme provided for an output of 240 wireless mechanics a year, of whom 190 would be for the Navy and 50 for the Army. The authority given by War Cabinet on 13 October 1941 for increased numbers of ratings to be entered in the Royal New Zealand Navy for hostilities only, included the 190 wireless mechanics as well as 240 ordinary seamen (RDF) a year. At that time Commodore Parry wrote: 'After a lengthy struggle I have managed to get approval from War Cabinet to train a surplus of radio mechanics and RDF operators beyond our own needs....'

The training of naval recruits as wireless mechanics at the electrical and

wireless school at [Wigram](#) began in October 1941. The basic course was fifteen weeks, later reduced to thirteen weeks, and was followed by a fortnight, later increased to one month, in HMNZS Philomel for practical training on naval RDF and wireless equipment. The wireless mechanics branch of the Royal New Zealand Navy was formally instituted by a Navy Order promulgated in November 1942.

Of approximately 270 wireless mechanics trained for naval service up to the end of 1942, more than 150 were drafted overseas, 25 were promoted to commissioned rank, and the remainder served in New Zealand or the South Pacific area. Ten classes had been trained when it became necessary to get fresh authority to continue recruiting on the same basis. Three classes had already been entered in aerodrome defence units in anticipation of Cabinet approval, but it was so long before a Government decision was reached that, by the time the Navy was in a position to take them over, most of the men had been taken by the Air Force and the others by the Army.

The Rear-Admiral commanding HMS Assegai, the training establishment at [Durban](#), reported in August 1943 that 'the New Zealand radar ratings and radio mechanics are giving excellent service with the Fleets and it may be recorded here that a high standard of intelligence and keenness has always been found to exist amongst the New Zealand men who have passed through this establishment'. It was found, too, that the wireless mechanics in New Zealand stations kept the equipment working satisfactorily with no assistance and very limited facilities.

The classes for training ordinary seamen (RDF) began in October 1941. The course was three weeks' disciplinary training in Tamaki and three weeks' technical instruction in Philomel. For the latter purpose a school was built on Mount Victoria overlooking [Auckland](#) harbour, but it was not completed till February 1942. The initial equipment was a radar set lent by the Air Department, and naval-type coastwatching and ship sets were installed later. A total of 240 ratings completed the course during the first twelve months, and by November 1942 about half of them had been drafted overseas for service with the [British Eastern Fleet](#) and elsewhere, the others being absorbed by local commitments.

In October 1942 arrangements were made for forty seamen (RDF) to serve in coastal stations of the [RNZAF](#) in which the Navy had a special interest because they

were able to detect and plot movements of ships and small craft. The RNZAF then decided that three of its first ten stations would be staffed by members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, and that the proportion so staffed would later be increased to six of the sixteen stations authorised.

It was considered that at such stations the Navy could employ members of the Women's Royal New Zealand Naval Service, and the [RNZAF](#) was requested to provide training for them. Five weeks later, the Air Secretary replied that the date for accepting WRNZS ratings for training 'rests on the result of a WAAF recruiting campaign'. The Navy, however, had its Wren volunteers waiting and proposed that, irrespective of recruiting Waafs, their training should start immediately. No reply was received and, after another month's delay, the Navy suggested that sufficient Wrens to operate fully one or more stations be trained and commence duty, and that when Waafs were available to replace them they could be transferred to other stations. Nearly another month passed before the Air Department replied, ignoring the last suggestion and stating that the first class of Wrens was to report on 14 May 1943 to the new training school for radio operators at [Levin](#) and that a second class would be accepted in July. The first class of Wrens completed its training and reported in July at [Rongotai](#) for duty. It was then decided that, in view of the improved strategic situation, it was not necessary for the Navy to provide operators for the Air Force stations, which were being reduced.

In the meantime, the possibility of employing Wrens in naval radar stations was being discussed. The major difficulties were those of accessibility and accommodation and the fact that, as no Wrens had been trained as mechanics, it would be necessary to retain male radio mechanics at the stations. The most accessible station with the best facilities was at Takapuna, and nine Wrens were drafted there for radar and degaussing duties. Six were lent to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research for the radar experimental station on Mount Victoria, [Wellington](#), where they did excellent service. The others were trained as telegraphists for service at [Auckland](#) and [Waiouru](#).

When Dr Marsden, Director of Scientific Development, visited Admiral Halsey, Commander of the [South Pacific Area](#), at [Noumea](#) in February 1943, he was authorised by the Prime Minister to discuss 'the question of the best use of New Zealand scientific resources in the Allied war effort in the South Pacific.' This offer

was 'cordially and gratefully accepted' by COMSOPAC, who asked for specific radar equipment and officers and men for its installation, operation, and maintenance.

Accordingly, three of the seven SWG radar sets held in store at [Sydney](#) as surplus to the requirements of the [British Eastern Fleet](#) were sent to [Noumea](#), but had to be returned to New Zealand for reconditioning. The first of these was installed in March 1943 on Mount Ouen Toro overlooking the Amedee entrance to [Noumea](#) roadstead, where it was linked to a [United States](#) coastal battery of four 6-inch guns.

COMSOPAC had also asked for two mobile microwave surface warning sets, a number of which were mounted on motor trucks adapted for the purpose in New Zealand. The first of these, known as ME1, arrived at [Noumea](#) early in April and was sent forward to Banika Island, in the Russell Group, 30 miles north-west from [Guadalcanal](#), where it was attached to a coastal battery of the 10th Defence Battalion, [US Marines](#). When the second SWG set from New Zealand arrived at Banika Island on 10 June 1943, ME1 set was moved across to Pavuva Island, but was later sent back to [Guadalcanal](#) as unserviceable.

In the meantime, preparations for the landing of American troops to capture Munda Point airfield on the south-west coast of [New Georgia](#) were being completed. The second mobile microwave set, ME2, was to be used to detect any attempt by the Japanese to reinforce their position by night. Unfortunately, the set was destroyed when LST 340, the landing craft in which it was loaded, was bombed and burnt out off Lunga, [Guadalcanal](#). A spare microwave set designated ME3, already on its way from New Zealand, replaced ME2 and arrived at Lombari Island, off the north coast of [Rendova](#), in time for the successful landing there on 30 June 1943.

About this time COMSOPAC asked for more New Zealand SWG sets and another mobile microwave set, bringing the total up to eight of the former and three of the latter, manned by 128 New Zealand officers and ratings. It was apparent that a forward workshop and store was necessary if these requirements were to be met in anything like reasonable time. Accordingly, a large hut known as Base 1 was erected at [Noumea](#) and fitted out with complete workshop, store, and office. Later, a temporary store and workshop was established under canvas at Camp Adams, Koli Point, on [Guadalcanal](#).

Lieutenant Hunter, RNZNVR,¹ the officer originally sent to [Noumea](#) to install the SWG sets, devised a time-saving method of mounting them on trailers which would enable the sets to be completely assembled in the workshop and towed to previously prepared sites. He visited New Zealand to get the trailers, and saved more time by making use of Army trailers already constructed which required but slight modification. In addition to the eight SWG sets asked for by COMSOPAC, two others were assembled as spares.

The third New Zealand SWG set, last of the non-trailer sets, was stationed on Savo Island and went into operation on 29 September 1943. It worked with a four 6-inch-gun coastal battery of the United States Army covering the strait between Savo Island and Cape Astrolabe on [Florida Island](#). The mobile microwave set ME3 was moved across Blanche Strait from Lombari Island to a

¹ Lieutenant W. E. Hunter, RNZNVR; born NZ 1914; radio technician.

hill close to Munda Point airfield, which had been wrested from the Japanese on 5 August after a long struggle. At the beginning of November, microwave set ME4 arrived from [Noumea](#) and was stationed at Visuvisu Point at the north end of [New Georgia](#). A fifth naval microwave set was assigned to the 3rd New Zealand Division for its amphibious operations in the northern [Solomons](#). By the middle of December 1943 the trailer-mounted SWG sets at [Noumea](#) were ready for service. One had been shipped to [Guadalcanal](#) and was operating with an American coastal battery covering the channel between Cape Esperance and Savo Island.

It had been intended that the other New Zealand sets and their crews were to be employed in the northern areas, but by the close of November 1943 the hard-fought campaign in the Solomon Islands had ended except for mopping-up operations.

Reviewing the position in December 1943, the Radar Planning Board of COMSOPAC came to the conclusion that the latest American sets were arriving in numbers more than sufficient to meet requirements, and as a consequence the New Zealand naval shore-based radar could be reduced considerably. It was decided that the SWG sets at the [Russell Islands](#), Savo Island, and Cape Esperance and

microwave ME4 at Visuvisu Point would remain in operation in the meantime, and that ME3 would be withdrawn from [Munda](#) airfield to [Guadalcanal](#) immediately. The SWG set on Ouen Toro was replaced by an American set after nine months of good service as an integral part of the defences of [Noumea](#). Base 1 at [Noumea](#) was to be closed down as it became redundant, but Base 2 at Lunga, [Guadalcanal](#), would continue to serve the ships of the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla and any other British-fitted ships in the area. A few months later the remaining New Zealand radar sets were withdrawn from the Solomon Islands, which had become a 'back area'.

During the relatively short period they were in the Solomon Islands the Royal New Zealand Navy's shore-based radar sets and their crews gave valuable service to the [United States Forces](#). They were landed and operated during the active bombing by the Japanese of the islands on which they were stationed. The crews lived in poor quarters under conditions of extreme discomfort in the heat, excessive humidity, and almost daily thunderstorms of the tropical climate. They were constantly assailed by clouds of mosquitoes and other insects and had to contend with countless myriads of ants and other crawling creatures. One of their worst troubles, however, was the deterioration in the insulation and fittings of their radar gear due to the torrential rains and high humidity.

The siting of the radar stations was extremely difficult because of the hard coral formations over which the sets had to be landed, frequently under enemy bombing, the deep mud on often steep gradients, and the high forest growth matted with dense undergrowth. Portable tubular steel towers 60 feet high were used to give the antennae of the radar sets a clear range over the jungle and coconut groves. All told, 13 officers and 173 ratings of the Royal New Zealand Navy served with the radar sets under COMSOPAC. There were many cases of sickness, mostly malaria, but only one death, that of a seaman who was accidentally killed.

A radar workshop was established at [Auckland](#) where, during 1943, the latest types of equipment were fitted in the [Leander](#) and the five ships of the 25th Minesweeping Flotilla. The inspection and repair of radar equipment in numerous warships and merchant vessels was also carried out at [Auckland](#) and [Wellington](#).

At the beginning of 1943 the duties of RDF officer at Navy Office were taken over by Lieutenant-Commander Giles, RNZNVR, ¹ who had been released by the

Admiralty at the request of the Government. Later in the year, however, when Giles went to [Washington](#), Lieutenant-Commander Marklew again assumed the duties of senior RDF officer which he carried out with great efficiency till 1946.

Owing to the great advance in naval radar the Admiralty found it necessary in 1943 to change the system and classification of radar sets and their operation. Hitherto the practice had been to recruit men as radar operators and train them solely for that purpose. But as the numbers of radar sets in ships increased to double figures and each performed a separate function, it was found that the over-crowded ships could no longer accommodate all the operators required if they were employed solely on radar duties.² For this reason it was decided that all radar operators would be transferred to the seaman branch and trained in seamanship as well as for radar duties. This procedure was adopted in the Royal New Zealand Navy in 1944.

Altogether seventy-six naval radar sets of various types, as well as other equipment, were produced in New Zealand during the war. At the request of the Admiralty six microwave sets mounted on trucks were supplied in 1945 to the [British Pacific Fleet](#). The Commander-in-Chief reported that they were 'excellently designed and highly efficient'. Two of them went to [Singapore](#) and two to [Hong Kong](#). A large number of New Zealand radar officers and ratings served in ships of all types in the [British Pacific Fleet](#).

¹ Commander B. T. Giles, VD, RNZNVR, US Legion of Merit; born [Wellington](#), 10 May 1909; Naval Member, NZ Joint Staff Mission, and Naval Attaché, [Washington](#), 1943–45; company director; killed in aircraft accident, [Singapore](#), Mar 1954.

² The numbers of radar control and plot ratings borne in the New Zealand cruisers at the beginning of 1945 were 61 in the [Gambia](#) and 65 in the [Achilles](#).

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THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHAPTER 29 – NEW ZEALANDERS IN THE ROYAL NAVY

CHAPTER 29

New Zealanders in the Royal Navy

ABOUT 7000 New Zealand officers and ratings served with the Royal Navy for varying periods during the Second World War. The peak was reached in September 1944 when the total strength of the Royal New Zealand Navy was 10,635, of whom 1242 officers and 3659 ratings, a total of 4901, were serving overseas in ships and establishments of the Royal Navy. New Zealanders saw active service in ships of every type from battleships and aircraft-carriers to submarines, motor-launches, and landing craft and in every sea from Spitzbergen in the Arctic to Cape Horn and from [Iceland](#) to the shores of [Japan](#). They took part in every major naval engagement or operation and in countless minor actions, as well as in the ceaseless patrols and sea drudgery that make up so great a part of naval warfare. A majority of them were 'hostilities only' men from farm, factory, office or college, and all gave a good account of themselves.

It has been an exceedingly difficult task to compress within the limits of a single chapter even the barest outline of their performance. The most that could be attempted was to indicate by categories of ships something of the wide scope of their varied service in a maritime war that encompassed the world. The story of naval warfare is one of ships rather than of individuals. In any case, the available personal records of New Zealanders who served in the Royal Navy are scanty and incomplete, and the several appeals made to them for details of their service evoked a somewhat meagre response.

To the possible objection that those mentioned in this narrative are mainly those who received decorations, it can be replied that they are truly representative of all who served. In the nature of warfare it is certain that for every man who is awarded a decoration there are scores who equally deserve one. As one authority has said, gallantry in the King's ships in time of war must, from the nature of the case, be rewarded rather differently from that shown in other forces. A ship fights as a unit. Unless she is gravely damaged, or unless there are exceptional circumstances, it is difficult for any individual to distinguish himself personally in an action. Naval decorations are therefore most frequently of a representative nature, except in those cases in which, by reason of detached service, a man is working or

fighting alone. It is the ship or unit rather than the man which is recognised by a decoration. A sailor wears his honours not merely in token of his own bravery or devotion to duty but that of his shipmates.

Many New Zealand officers and ratings of the Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve saw much arduous service in minesweepers overseas. The sweeping of mines in the fairways of sea traffic was a ceaseless task which employed 4205 officers and 52,850 men, 63 per cent of whom were of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. More than 20,000 mines were swept during the war by 1533 mine-sweeping vessels, 263 of which were sunk and 74 seriously damaged.

In July 1940, after their arrival in England in company with the Second Echelon, [2 NZEF](#), fourteen officers of the pre-war RNZNVR were appointed to ten minesweeping and anti-submarine vessels of the Tree class. They were organised as follows:

24th M/S A/S Group: Acacia, Commander R. Newman (senior officer) in command; Lieutenant A. G. Newell, first lieutenant. Birch, Lieutenant-Commander F. G. Tidswell, in command; Lieutenant J. E. Finch, first lieutenant. Deodar, Lieutenant-Commander P. G. Connolly, in command; Lieutenant J. H. Seelye, first lieutenant. Bay, Lieutenant P. Phipps, in command. Pine, Lieutenant C. G. Palmer, in command.

25th M/S A/S Group: Ash, Commander F. E. Taylor (senior officer) in command; Lieutenant J. Lennox King, first lieutenant. Chestnut, Lieutenant-Commander J. A. Smyth, in command. Walnut, Lieutenant-Commander G. Bridson, in command. Blackthorn, Lieutenant J. G. Hilliard, in command. Hickory, Lieutenant R. E. Harding, in command. A number of New Zealand ratings served in these ships, as well as in the anti-aircraft ship Alynbank which frequently accompanied them on convoy escort duties.

At that time England was under threat of invasion, the Battle of [Britain](#) was at its peak, and great damage was being done by enemy raids on harbours and shipping. Scarcely a day passed without some ports having to be closed because of mining by aircraft. It was in these circumstances that the Commander-in-Chief Portsmouth described the Channel convoys as being 'vital to the life of the south of England.' When the 24th Group sailed from the [Thames](#) on 11 September 1940 with

its first westbound convoy, an attack by fifty German aircraft nearly wrecked the destroyer *Atherstone* and damaged the *Bay*, which was under repairs for a month. On 22 October while sweeping off [Portland](#), the *Hickory* hit a mine and sank in three minutes with a loss of twenty lives. The survivors, including Lieutenant Harding,¹ who had a leg broken, were rescued

¹ Commander R. E. Harding, OBE, VRD, [RNZN](#); born Guildford, England, 23 Jul 1910; traveller; joined RNZNVR 1928; Commander, Mar 1946; transferred to [RNZN](#), Mar 1946.

by the *Pine* at considerable risk to that ship. Four days later Lieutenant Finch¹ took command of the *Chestnut*, which was sunk by a mine off the North Foreland on 30 October.

The Channel convoys had frequently to run the gauntlet of gunfire from the heavy batteries mounted by the Germans on the French coast. The *Deodar* and *Blackthorn* were damaged when their eastbound convoy was shelled in the Strait of [Dover](#) on 27 December 1940. The *Ash*, then commanded by Lieutenant Newell,² was sunk by a mine in the [Thames](#) estuary on 5 June 1941. In nine months the New Zealanders in the *Tree* sweepers sailed with fifty-two convoys, in which only four merchant ships were lost by striking mines. During that period the *Birch* and *Pine* took part in five minesweeping operations. For good service and leadership and gallantry under enemy attack, Commander Newman was awarded the DSO and Lieutenant-Commanders Connolly and Tidswell³ and Lieutenants Phipps, Palmer,⁴ and Hilliard received the DSC. Newman, Tidswell, Phipps, Hilliard, and Newell were also mentioned in despatches. Telegraphist Leckie,⁵ who was serving in the *Acacia*, was awarded the DSM in March 1941. He lost his life in *HMS Neptune* in December 1941.

In October 1941 Palmer was appointed in command of *HMS Cromarty*, a unit of the 14th M/S Flotilla which took an important part in the capture of Diego Suarez, a French naval base in Madagascar. They escorted and swept the assault ships into Courrier Bay and accounted for nearly sixty mines, the *Cromer* and *Cromarty* being described as the 'outstanding ships in the gallant 14th Flotilla.' Palmer was awarded a mention in despatches for his part in the operations. Another New Zealand officer

mentioned in despatches was Lieutenant Lennox King,⁶ gunnery officer of the destroyer Anthony and formerly of the Ash. When the assault on Antsirane was held up, the Anthony made a bold dash into Diego Suarez Bay and landed a party of [Royal Marines](#) from HMS [Ramillies](#) to create a diversion in the enemy's rear, this being the 'principal and direct cause of the collapse of the French defence.' The exploit of the Anthony was the subject of a special Order of the Day by Rear-Admiral E. N. Syfret, commanding the British force.

¹ Lieutenant G. W. Finch, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 27 Apr 1920; bank officer; Coastal Forces, RN, 1941–44.

² Lieutenant A. G. Newell, VRD, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Portsmouth, England, 18 Nov 1912; warehouseman.

³ Commander F. G. Tidswell, DSC, VRD, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born England, 11 Jan 1905; company director.

⁴ Commander C. G. Palmer, DSC and bar, VRD, RNZNVR, m.i.d. (2); born [Auckland](#), 30 Apr 1910; company manager.

⁵ Leading Telegraphist J. C. Leckie, DSM, RNZNVR; born Dunedin, 14 Apr 1915; killed on active service 19 Dec 1941.

⁶ Lieutenant-Commander J. Lennox King, VRD, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 23 Mar 1914; bank officer; transferred to [RNZN](#), 1952.

During the next six months the 14th M/S Flotilla was employed with the Eastern Fleet based at Kilindini, [East Africa](#). In September 1942 Palmer in the Cromarty and the New Zealanders in the Illustrious took part in the capture of Majunga and other places which completed the occupation of Madagascar.

In October 1942 the 14th M/S Flotilla entered the [Mediterranean](#) and joined the Inshore Squadron, co-operating with the Eighth Army in its victorious advance westward from [El Alamein](#). The flotilla had swept forty-six mines off Mersa Matruh

when the Cromer was blown up on 6 November with the loss of her commanding officer and most of the ship's company, including one New Zealander, Leading Telegraphist Leigh,¹ of [Christchurch](#). Commander G. Irvine, RNR, formerly of [Masterton](#), took over as senior officer of the flotilla, with Lieutenant-Commander Palmer as second in command. During the next six months the flotilla kept pace with the Army and swept the approaches to ten ports along 1800 miles of the North African coast as far as [Sousse](#), besides escorting convoys of supply ships, including one to [Malta](#). At Tripoli in February 1943 the flotilla was inspected by Mr Churchill and General Montgomery, the latter also making a special visit to congratulate the ships' companies on their performance as a vital link in the chain of operations. For his part, Palmer was awarded a bar to his DSC.

Palmer's division of four sweepers took part in the invasion of [Sicily](#) in July 1943 and swept the approaches to Syracuse, Augusta and [Catania](#), and the Strait of Messina. Off Syracuse on 12 July the division attacked and captured the Italian submarine Bronzo with thirty-six of her crew. For his services Palmer was again mentioned in despatches. At that time Lieutenant L. R. Philpot, RNZNVR, was navigating officer of HMS Poole in Palmer's division and later Lieutenant P. C. Sheffield, RNZNVR, joined her as first lieutenant. In September the division opened the port of [Crotona](#) in the southern approach to the Gulf of [Taranto](#), sweeping 100 mines in seven days. While the division was clearing the Strait of Bonifacio between [Sardinia](#) and [Corsica](#), the Cromarty struck a mine and sank with the loss of five officers and twenty ratings. A New Zealand rating, Telegraphist Ian Millar, escaped injury, but Lieutenant-Commander Palmer was seriously wounded and spent more than a year in hospital before being invalided back to New Zealand.

After more than a year in command of the minesweepers in the Tees-Hartlepool area, Commander Newman went out to [Alexandria](#) at the beginning of 1943 and took command of HMS Aberdare as

¹ Leading Telegraphist F. W. J. Leigh, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 8 Apr 1921; P and T cadet; killed on active service 6 Nov 1942.

senior officer, 2nd M/S Flotilla. He was promoted captain in June 1943. During that year the flotilla swept minefields outside Mersa Matruh and other harbours in

Libya, and off Malta and the south coast of Sicily. From January to September 1944 the flotilla was engaged in sweeping an inshore channel from Taranto round the heel of Italy and thence up the Adriatic coast as far north as Ancona. Captain Newman was awarded a bar to his DSO for his services in charge of all minesweeping in the Adriatic. He was appointed Naval Officer-in-Charge, Wellington, in June 1945 and was awarded the CBE on his retirement a year later.

As senior officer of 20th Trawler Group (in command of HMS Negro), Lieutenant-Commander Cameron, RNZNVR, ¹ who had already been mentioned in despatches, was awarded the DSC in October 1943 for good service in minesweeping, mainly in the Gulf of Bone, during the North African campaign. Cameron gained a bar to his DSC for his part in Operation ANTIDOTE – the clearance of a channel two miles wide and 100 miles in length along the coast of Tunisia in May 1943, when nearly 200 mines were swept. In September 1945 he was awarded a second mention in despatches for minesweeping service. Commander A. D. Holden, OBE, RNZNR, who was senior officer of the New Zealand 25th M/S Flotilla from 1940 to 1944, received the DSC for minesweeping service as senior officer 18th M/S Flotilla off the coast of Germany in 1945.

Most of the New Zealanders who were in Far Eastern waters when Japan crashed into the war have unhappy memories of that hard period and its tragic aftermath; but their record is one of stouthearted endurance in the face of hopeless odds and is brightened by many acts of heroism and self-sacrifice. Some forty officers and ratings lost their lives in the dark days following the fall of Hong Kong and Singapore and forty-seven were taken prisoner, of whom ten died in captivity. Of the six serving in the Prince of Wales and Repulse, Chaplain the Rev. W. G. Parker, RN, ² and Joiner Morgan, RNZN, ³ of the former ship were among the 840 officers and men who died when those ships were sunk on 10 December 1941.

Lieutenant Goodwin ⁴ and Dixon ⁵ of Wellington and Telegraphists J. A. Rix, of Dunedin, H. T. Franklin, of Whakatane, R.

¹ Commander R. S. Cameron, DSC and bar, RNZNVR, m.i.d. (2); born Auckland, 2 Jan 1907; bank officer.

² Rev. W. G. Parker, Chaplain RN; born [Wellington](#), 1905; killed on active service 10 Dec 1941.

³ Joiner K. H. W. Morgan, [RNZN](#); ex-RN; born England, 13 May 1915; killed on active service. 10 Dec 1941.

⁴ Lieutenant-Commander R. B. Goodwin, OBE, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 15 Jul 1902; civil servant.

⁵ Lieutenant-Commander H. C. Dixon, MBE, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 24 Apr 1908; radio engineer.

Lynneberg, of [Wellington](#), and M. Stewart, of Dunedin, were taken prisoner when [Hong Kong](#) capitulated on 25 December 1941 after a stout defence. Goodwin, who was commanding officer of ML10 of the Second ML Flotilla, was lying wounded in hospital at the time. He made a remarkable escape in July 1944 when he broke out of Shamsuipo Camp, swam to the mainland and, eleven days later, got clear of the Japanese lines and met friendly Chinese who escorted him to Waichow. For this exploit he was awarded the OBE and was commended by the Commander-in-Chief British Pacific Fleet for his service in the rescue and care of prisoners of war in 1945.

¹ Dixon, who was assistant wireless officer at [Hong Kong](#), relieved the tedium and hardship of prison life by making a radio set in each of the three camps in which he was held from time to time. This he did at great risk and by ingenious and laborious improvisations. When the Japanese discovered the third set, Dixon and other officers were sentenced to a long term of solitary confinement in filthy conditions. He was awarded the MBE after his release in August 1945. Stoker Burton, [RNZN](#), ² who was serving in the old destroyer *Thracian*, was killed after her crew joined the troops fighting in the centre of the island a week before the surrender. Three of the telegraphists survived the hardships of prison life, but Murdo Stewart ³ was drowned when the transport *Lisbon Maru* in which he was being taken to [Japan](#) was torpedoed and sunk in October 1942. Commander Montague, RN (ret'd), ⁴ who was farming in New Zealand before the war and was in charge of the boom defences of [Hong Kong](#), escaped with others to [China](#) on the day of the surrender. He was boom defence officer in New Zealand in 1942.

Two days before the surrender of [Singapore](#) in February 1942 a prepared plan to evacuate some 3000 nominated persons was put into effect. Those ordered to go included surplus staff officers, technicians, 'key' men, nurses, and others. A good proportion of the New Zealand telegraphists and supply ratings and those serving in the boom-defence vessels had sailed on 10 February and reached [Batavia](#) safely. Those who sailed on the 13th were not so fortunate, their ships being sunk by the Japanese and many being killed or taken prisoner. Rear-Admiral E. J. Spooner and Air Vice-Marshal Pulford, with five staff officers and twenty-six other ranks and

¹ See also Hongkong Escape, [R. B. Goodwin](#) (Arthur Barker Ltd.).

² Stoker E. G. Burton, [RNZN](#); born [Wellington](#), 20 Jun 1915; farmhand; killed in action 19 Dec 1941.

³ Telegraphist M. Stewart, [RNZNVR](#); born [Scotland](#), 11 Oct 1920; railway porter; died while p.w. 10 Oct 1942.

⁴ Commander H. M. Montague, OBE, RN (ret'd); born England, 15 Sep 1888; sheep farmer.

ratings, left in ML310, commanded by Lieutenant Bull, [RNZNVR](#). ¹ When nearing Bangka Strait two days later, the launch was attacked by aircraft and a destroyer and it was decided to beach her on Tjibea Island and land the staff party. Later the Japanese boarded the launch, wrecked her machinery, and ordered the crew ashore. A native prahu was made seaworthy and in it Bull, with two ratings and two natives, made a passage of seven days to Merak, in [Java](#), where arrangements were made to send help to those on the island. Lieutenant Bull was awarded the DSC and Able Seaman Hill ² the DSM for courage and devotion to duty. In the event nineteen officers and ratings, including two New Zealanders, died of disease on Tjibea Island and others were taken prisoner. Able Seaman Oldnall ³ and seven others spent some weeks repairing a prahu and in it reached [Singkep Island](#) only to be captured by the Japanese. Assistant Cook [Mitchell](#) ⁴ and several other ratings who survived the sinking of HMS Kung Wo and other ships made a boat journey of two weeks to [Batavia](#).

After picking up the survivors of a sunken ship at [Singkep Island](#), ML32, commanded by Lieutenant Herd ⁵ with Lieutenant W. A. Bourke as first lieutenant, went aground when taking cover from Japanese aircraft. She was refloated next day but was taken by a Japanese cruiser and destroyer off [Muntok](#), all on board becoming prisoners of war. Herd was awarded a mention in despatches in December 1945.

Sub-Lieutenant D. C. Findlay and Assistant Cook B. G. Taylor ⁶ were on board HMS Changteh when she was sunk soon after leaving [Singapore](#). About forty men got away in a lifeboat and made their way down the coast of [Sumatra](#). Taylor was one of three men who swam and waded four miles up a muddy estuary in a vain search for drinking water. All but ten of the boatload were brought to safety. They were suffering from hunger and exposure when they arrived at Rengat, on the Indragiri River in [Sumatra](#), where they found Findlay and others, including two New Zealand ratings who had made the journey from [Singapore](#) in a landing barge. The whole party were taken to [Padang](#), where they were embarked in HMS Danae for [Tjilatjap](#) in [Java](#). Taylor, who was awarded the BEM for his courage and resourcefulness, lost his life with other New

¹ Lieutenant-Commander H. J. Bull, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 17 Aug 1913; merchant.

² Able Seaman L. B. Hill, DSM, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 22 Sep 1920; clerk.

³ Able Seaman H. R. Oldnall, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 26 Dec 1918; leather-maker.

⁴ Cook [B. A. Mitchell](#), RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 13 Apr 1922; farmhand; served HMS Marguerite, Persian Gulf, 1942–43.

⁵ Lieutenant L. H. Herd, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born England, 12 Jul 1901; barrister and solicitor.

⁶ Assistant Cook B. G. Taylor, BEM, [RNZN](#); born Dunedin, 18 Jan 1923; shop assistant; killed on active service 1 Mar 1942.

Zealanders in the destroyer Stronghold which was sunk on 1 March after leaving [Tjilatjap](#).

Lieutenant Derbidge, ¹ of [Christchurch](#), left [Singapore](#) on 13 February in HMS Li Wo, commanded by Lieutenant T. Wilkinson, RNR, who had a crew of eighty-four men, mostly survivors of sunken ships. The Li Wo mounted one 4-inch gun for which she had only thirteen rounds, and two machine guns. She had survived several air attacks when, near Bangka Island, she sighted a convoy escorted by a heavy cruiser and destroyers. Since escape was impossible, the Li Wo attacked a transport which she set on fire and rammed, but was herself sunk, most of her crew being drowned. Ten survivors were made prisoners, but a few, including Derbidge, escaped by clinging to a badly damaged lifeboat. He and some others landed on Bangka Island, where a fortnight later they were attacked by bandits who wounded Derbidge and three of his companions and took all their food. Finally they were captured by Japanese and Derbidge died while being taken to [Muntok](#). Lieutenant Wilkinson, who went down with his ship, was posthumously awarded a Victoria Cross and Derbidge a mention in despatches, awards also being made to eight others.

When she arrived at Rengat with the survivors of a sunken ship, HMS Tanjong Penang, a small tug commanded by Lieutenant Basil Shaw, RNZNVR, ² was ordered back to an island 68 miles from [Singapore](#), where she picked up survivors from three other ships. She had 150 women and children on board when she put to sea and was attacked and sunk by Japanese warships. Lieutenant Studholme ³ was killed and Lieutenant Gerard, ⁴ first lieutenant of the Tanjong Penang, weakened by wounds, was drowned. Shaw, who got many women and children on to rafts, went in a dinghy as guide, but lost contact with them in bad weather. He and an English rating landed on Bangka Island with a Malay seaman and were captured and shot by the Japanese. Lieutenant MacMillan, ⁵ who was killed when his command, ML1062, carrying fifty passengers, was sunk by a Japanese cruiser after a hopeless resistance, was awarded a posthumous mention in despatches. HMS Fanling, commanded by Lieutenant Upton ⁶ and carrying a number of army staff officers, was intercepted

¹ Lieutenant E. N. Derbidge, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Christchurch](#), 27 Jul 1910; clerk; died while p.w. 3 Mar 1942.

² Lieutenant B. Shaw, RNZNVR; born England, 1 Jul 1905; farmer; killed while p.w. 21 Feb 1942.

³ Lieutenant G. Studholme, RNZNVR; born [Timaru](#), 3 Sep 1908; clerk; killed on active service 17 Feb 1942.

⁴ Lieutenant E. S. Gerard, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 4 Nov 1908; journalist; killed on active service 17 Feb 1942.

⁵ Lieutenant C. E. MacMillan, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 20 Jan 1920; salesman; killed in action 16 Feb 1942.

⁶ Lieutenant J. P. Upton, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 14 April 1913; solicitor; killed in action 16 Feb 1942.

by a Japanese cruiser in Bangka Strait. She opened fire with her fourpounder gun but was quickly sunk. Upton was killed in action, but Able Seaman Hood ¹ swam ashore and made his way to [Padang](#), where he was taken prisoner. He was lost later when the Japanese ship in which he was being taken to [Singapore](#) was torpedoed and sunk. More than sixty ships, including the gunboats Dragonfly, Grasshopper, and Scorpion, and in many of which New Zealanders were serving, were sunk by the Japanese after leaving [Singapore](#).

An officer and several New Zealand ratings in the destroyers Electra and Jupiter were killed on 27 February and eleven ratings in the cruiser [Exeter](#) and the destroyer Encounter were taken prisoner on 1 March when their ships were sunk in action in the [Java](#) Sea. One of the latter, Signalmen I. F. G. Shipman, RNZNVR, of [Timaru](#), while in a prison camp was an eye-witness of the explosion of the second atomic bomb that dropped over [Nagasaki](#) on 9 August 1945. Other New Zealand officers and ratings were killed in the destroyer Stronghold, HMS Anking, and other vessels after the evacuation of [Java](#). A few reached [Fremantle](#) and Colombo after many

adventures.

Many New Zealanders saw service with Arctic Ocean convoys to North Russia. The passage of a Russian convoy was one of the most hazardous and arduous operations of the war at sea. The ships were exposed to attack by U-boats throughout the run and for 1400 miles were within range of German aircraft, with the added risk of forays by the Tirpitz, Scharnhorst, and other heavy ships. From 1942 onward the convoys were run mainly during the winter months, when the long hours of darkness reduced the risk of air attack. The task of shepherding a convoy of slow, heavily laden ships through bitter Arctic gales and snowstorms was a grim ordeal. Weather damage was often severe. Several escort aircraft-carriers buckled the fore-end of their flight deck 60 feet above the waterline and one recorded a heavy sea which rolled the whole length of the deck.

From August 1941 to May 1945 more than forty convoys totalling 792 ships were sailed outward and 739 returned; some sailed independently. Sixty-two ships were sunk on outward passages and twenty-eight on the return journey, with a loss of 829 lives. The Royal Navy lost two cruisers and seventeen other ships, with 1840 officers and men. At this great price some four million tons of supplies valued at £428,000,000 were delivered to [Russia](#).

Of all the New Zealanders who sailed with Russian convoys in ships of the Home Fleet, probably none had a ruder initiation than two drafts of 'B Scheme' candidates for commissions who were

¹ Able Seaman C. S. Hood, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 26 Feb 1917; bootmaker; died while p.w. 26 Jun 1944.

serving their preliminary sea-time in the cruisers [Trinidad](#) and [Edinburgh](#). There were seventeen of them in the [Trinidad](#) when she sailed from Loch Ewe on 20 March 1942 with two destroyers as escort to a convoy of nineteen ships, two of which were sunk by German bombers on the 28th. Another was sunk next morning when three enemy destroyers raided the convoy in thick weather. In a series of brief skirmishes one destroyer was sunk and the others damaged. The [Trinidad](#) was hit by a torpedo but, assisted by her destroyers, arrived at Murmansk in the afternoon. Her casualties

included one New Zealander, Ordinary Seaman Dick,¹ who was killed. Fourteen ships of the convoy arrived safely, two more having been sunk by U-boats.

After making temporary repairs, the [Trinidad](#) sailed from Murmansk on 13 May, escorted by two destroyers. Next day she was badly damaged and set on fire in an attack by thirty-five German bombers. Three hours later the cruiser had to be abandoned and was sunk by one of her destroyers. Eighty-one lives were lost, but the sixteen New Zealanders were among those saved.

On 30 April 1942 HMS [Edinburgh](#), acting as close cover to a convoy escorted by six destroyers, four corvettes, and a trawler, was hit by two torpedoes from a U-boat about 180 miles north-east from the North Cape of [Norway](#). Her stern was blown off, but she was able to steam at slow speed. Next day the convoy was attacked by three German destroyers, one ship being sunk. Five times the enemy was driven off by the escort destroyers, the senior officer of which in HMS [Bulldog](#) was a New Zealander, Commander Maxwell Richmond, OBE, RN,² who was awarded the DSO and the USSR Order of the Red Banner for this action. Next morning the Germans turned their attention to the [Edinburgh](#), which was being towed by a Russian tug. The tow was slipped and in the ensuing action the crippled cruiser was hit by four torpedoes and had to be abandoned and sunk. Two officers and fifty-six ratings were lost, the New Zealanders being among those saved. One German destroyer was sunk, the others escaping in a damaged condition. In the Home Fleet force which was covering the convoy, the destroyer [Punjabi](#) was sunk in collision with the flagship [King George V](#) in a dense fog off [Iceland](#) on 1 May. Most of the destroyer's company was saved, but one New Zealander, Lieutenant [Piggin](#),³ was lost.

¹ Ordinary Seaman A. C. Dick, [RNZN](#); born [Bellaught](#), Northern Ireland, 31 Mar 1917; oil company employee; killed in action 29 Mar 1942.

² Rear-Admiral M. Richmond, DSO, OBE, Croix de Guerre, Order of the Red Banner; born [Wellington](#), 19 Oct 1900; entered RN, 1918; CO HMS [Basilisk](#), evacuation of [Dunkirk](#), 1940; Captain, 1942; Rear-Admiral, 1954.

³ Lieutenant S. F. [Piggin](#), [RNZNVR](#); born [Auckland](#), 28 Mar 1917; clerk; killed on active service 1 May 1942.

Two New Zealanders who sailed with several convoys during 1942 were mentioned in despatches. Sub-Lieutenant J. A. Foster, ¹ who was serving in the corvette Honeysuckle, gained his award for his part in the defence of a convoy which for six days at the end of May was under attack by more than 240 aircraft and several U-boats, seven out of thirty-five ships being lost. The other was Leading Seaman Hudson ² in the destroyer Wheatland, one of the escorts in September of the biggest convoy sailed to [Russia](#). It numbered thirty-nine ships, of which twenty-seven arrived at Archangel after prolonged attacks by German aircraft. Hudson was in charge of a multiple pom-pom which shot down two bombers. His commanding officer reported that though Hudson was 'officially on the sick list with a sprained ankle, he insisted on manning his gun whenever attack was due and was an inspiration to his gun's crew.'

The successful defence against heavy odds of convoy JW 51B in the darkness and snowstorms of Arctic winter is one of the brightest pages in the proud record of Russian convoys. Fourteen merchant ships escorted by the destroyers Onslow, Captain R. St. V. Sherbrooke (Captain D, 17th Flotilla), Obedient, Obdurate, Orwell, Oribi, and Achates, corvettes Rhododendron and Hyderabad, minesweeper Bramble, and trawlers Vizalma and Northern Gem, sailed from Loch Ewe on 22 December 1942. There were New Zealanders, some of them veterans of the Arctic passage, in several of the escorts and the covering ships.

At 8.30 a.m. on 31 December, when the convoy was about 220 miles north-west from Kola Inlet, three German destroyers were sighted and an hour later the heavy cruiser [Admiral Hipper](#) ³ appeared out of the gloom. Captain Sherbrooke detailed part of his escort force to screen the convoy with smoke and moved out with the Onslow and Orwell to engage the Germans. The enemy destroyers took no active part in the proceedings. The [Admiral Hipper](#), cautious of torpedo attack, kept her distance but was hit several times. At 10.20 she opened up on the Onslow, which was hit three times in rapid succession and badly damaged. Captain Sherbrooke was severely wounded and lost the sight of his left eye, but continued to fight his ships until another hit compelled the Onslow, badly on fire, to withdraw to the head of the convoy. ⁴

The fires in the Onslow were successfully fought by parties

¹ Lieutenant J. A. Foster, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 19 Oct 1919; telegraphist.

² Petty Officer H. F. C. Hudson, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 17 Jul 1918; tinsmith.

³ [Admiral Hipper](#), 12,000 tons; eight 8-inch, twelve 4·1-inch guns; twelve torpedo-tubes; 32 knots.

⁴ Captain Sherbrooke was awarded the Victoria Cross for his valorous defence of the convoy.

organised and led by Lieutenant Lewis King, RNZNVR, ¹ who was awarded the DSC for his courage and leadership. Of his work Captain Sherbrooke wrote as follows:

Although Lieutenant King, a young Reserve Officer, had been first lieutenant in the leader for one month only, he exercised complete control when the ship was seriously damaged by three 8-in. shells. A fire raged as a result of two hits forward; the forward fire and repair party had been wiped out; the ship had to remain at action stations and had suffered a 20 per cent loss in personnel through casualties. Despite these severe handicaps, by personal demonstration he showed his untrained assistants exactly what he required and the serious fires were under control in remarkably short time. Nearly the whole forepart of the ship was on fire at one time or another; nevertheless, after four hours he was able to report to the bridge that all fires were extinguished and a collision mat in place over the hole in the ship's side. He continued unceasingly to attend to the safety of the ship and the welfare of the ship's company. Her safe arrival in harbour 24 hours later is testimony to his sound judgment and untiring efforts. In courage and leadership he set a fine example to his men and that their morale remained as high as ever is a tribute to their first lieutenant.

After disabling the *Onslow*, the [Admiral Hipper](#) concentrated on the *Achates* and quickly crippled her, killing her captain and some forty others. But, 'faithful as the

fidus Achates of Virgil's epic', the little ship carried on laying smoke to screen the convoy until she sank about two hours later, eighty-one of her crew being rescued by the Northern Gem.

During the morning the covering cruisers Sheffield (flagship of Rear-Admiral R. L. Burnett) and Jamaica had been working down from the northward, tracking various ships by radar. At 11.30 they sighted and opened fire on the pocket battleship Lutzow ² which was hit several times before she turned away. Next they met two destroyers, one of which was sunk by the Sheffield. Meanwhile the Obedient, Obdurate, and Orwell were holding the [Admiral Hipper](#) and her silent destroyers off the convoy, which was briefly shelled by the Lutzow. During the next hour the Sheffield and Jamaica sighted first the Lutzow, then two destroyers, and finally the [Admiral Hipper](#), all of which disappeared in the gloom after a brief exchange of fire.

Admiral Tovey, Commander-in-Chief Home Fleet, summed up this weird battle of the Barents Sea with the understatement 'that an enemy force of at least one pocket battleship, one heavy cruiser and six destroyers, with all the advantage of surprise and concentration, should be held off for four hours by five destroyers and driven from the area by two 6-inch cruisers without any loss to the convoy is most creditable and satisfactory.'

¹ See p. 364.

² Lutzow, 14,000 tons; six 11-inch, eight 5·9-inch guns; 26 knots. This ship sank the minesweeper Bramble which had been sent to round up stragglers from the convoy.

In his report Rear-Admiral Burnett said his action was fought largely with the use of radar, which enabled his cruisers to track the enemy ships, approach them undetected, and hit them almost immediately. It was this skilful use of radar that earned a DSC for Instructor Lieutenant Hogben, [RNZN](#), ¹ who was serving in HMS Sheffield. Her commanding officer reported that Hogben 'displayed great coolness and the highest ability. His duty as officer-in-charge of the plotting office was, in the conditions of visibility, of vital importance, the success of the tactics employed by the force being greatly dependent upon the accuracy and precision of the plot. All this

was provided by him in full measure.'

The outward and homeward convoys in December 1943 were covered by two forces of the Home Fleet — Duke of [York](#) (flag of Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser), [Jamaica](#), and four destroyers, and the cruisers [Belfast](#) (flag of Rear-Admiral Burnett), [Norfolk](#), and [Sheffield](#). There were New Zealand officers and ratings in the ships named and in the destroyer [Scorpion](#), as well as in several of those escorting the convoys. On 26 December the German battle-cruiser [Scharnhorst](#), which had put to sea to attack the outward convoy, was intercepted and shadowed by the [Belfast](#)'s radar, twice engaged by the cruisers, and finally brought to action and sunk by Admiral Fraser's force.

Many New Zealand officers of the Fleet Air Arm, as well as radar and telegraphist ratings, served in the escort aircraft-carriers which from 1942 onward sailed with Russian convoys. In March 1944 the aircraft of HMS [Chaser](#) sank three U-boats on three successive days. During the homeward passage of a convoy in April, aircraft of the [Tracker](#) sank two U-boats and five aircraft were shot down by fighters from the [Activity](#). Lieutenant (A) Wallace,² of the latter ship, to whose fighter direction this success was due, was awarded a mention in despatches. At the end of the month the [Activity](#) and [Fencer](#) sailed with another homeward convoy of fortyfive ships which was attacked for three days by a large group of U-boats; but only one ship was lost. The [Fencer](#)'s [Swordfish](#) sank three U-boats in two days. Sub-Lieutenants (A) Gilbert³ and Temm⁴ of the [Activity](#) were mentioned in despatches for their part in attacks on U-boats. [Swordfish](#) of 825 Squadron in the [Vindex](#) sank U-354 in August and assisted in sinking U-394 ten days later.

¹ Lieutenant-Commander G. L. Hogben, DSC, RN, US Bronze Star; born [Auckland](#), 14 Apr 1916; Rhodes Scholar. As an Admiralty meteorologist, he was one of the team which worked out the weather forecasts for the invasion of [Normandy](#) in June 1944.

² Lieutenant (A) D. R. Wallace, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Tasmania](#), 30 Mar 1919; salesman.

³ Sub-Lieutenant (A) J. McE. Gilbert, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 21

Oct 1920 clerk.

⁴ Sub-Lieutenant (A) P. E. Temm, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Taupiri, 16 Jun 1920; clerk.

In the New Year honours list 1945, Lieutenant O'Connor ¹ was awarded the DSC for 'good service and outstanding devotion to duty' in HMS Whitehall, in which he had sailed with five Russian convoys. Lieutenant (A) Burgham ² of HMS Nairana was awarded the DSC and Lieutenant (A) O'Shea ³ of the Campania a mention in despatches for good service with convoys in December 1944. Burgham took off from the snow-covered deck in failing twilight to intercept an unknown number of enemy aircraft, but was unable to find them and landed on the wildly heaving deck in total darkness. O'Shea showed 'outstanding skill' in his control of deck landings in difficult conditions. Swordfish of the Campania's 813 Squadron, which had destroyed U-921 in September, sank U-365 on the December voyage.

For their part in successful attacks in bad weather on numerous torpedo aircraft during the passage of convoys in February 1945, Lieutenant (A) Quigg ⁴ of the Nairana and Sub-Lieutenant (A) Armitage ⁵ of the Campania were awarded the DSC. Quigg's aircraft was badly damaged in one attack, but by good flying he reached the vicinity of his carrier before he force-landed in the sea; he was picked up by a destroyer. Signaller Cragg, RNZN, ⁶ lost his life when the sloop Lapwing escorting a March convoy was torpedoed and sunk off the Kola Inlet. The frigate Loch Shin of the 19th Escort Group sank two U-boats and badly damaged another in that locality on 29 April. Sub-Lieutenant Horspool, RNZNVR, ⁷ was killed when HMS Goodall was torpedoed. Lieutenant Hazard, RNZNVR, ⁸ of HMS Loch Shin, was awarded a mention in despatches for good service as group navigator. From August 1944 until May 1945, when the war with [Germany](#) ended, 260 merchant ships sailed in outward convoys to [Russia](#) with the loss of only two ships, and 245 sailed homeward, of which seven were lost.

From first to last some hundreds of New Zealand officers and ratings saw service in the Battle of the [Atlantic](#) in destroyers, corvettes, and other vessels escorting convoys across the [Atlantic](#) and to and from North Russia, Gibraltar, Sierra Leone, and the [Mediterranean](#). They took part in many convoy battles with packs

¹ Lieutenant R. M. J. O'Connor, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Timaru](#), 14 Sep 1914; clerk.

² Lieutenant (A) A. R. Burgham, DSC, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Onehunga](#), 30 Oct 1920; draughtsman.

³ Lieutenant (A) J. W. R. O'Shea, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 11 Oct 1920; public servant.

⁴ Lieutenant (A) J. A. Quigg, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Oamaru](#), 14 Dec 1918; clerk.

⁵ Sub-Lieutenant (A) O. K. Armitage, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Kawhia](#), 20 Jun 1920; clerk.

⁶ Signalman W. C. Cragg, [RNZN](#); born [Blenheim](#), 6 Jan 1925; clerk; killed on active service 20 Mar 1945.

⁷ Sub-Lieutenant G. N. Horspool, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 9 May 1924; clerk; killed on active service 29 Apr 1945.

⁸ Lieutenant D. L. Hazard, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Hamilton](#), 16 Jan 1920; civil servant.

of U-boats in the grim months of 1941–42 and in the successful counter-offensive that destroyed nearly 500 U-boats in the next two years.

Typical of such service was that of Lieutenant-Commander Holm, ¹ of [Wellington](#), who, as first lieutenant of HMS Lavender and later commanding officer of the Crocus and the Burdock, spent two and a half years on convoy escort duties, mainly to and from [Freetown](#), Sierra Leone. One task in the Crocus was escorting the tow from the [West Indies](#) of a large floating dock which broke its back in heavy weather and had to be sunk by depth-charges. On 6 October 1942 the Crocus fought a spirited action near [Freetown](#) with U-333, which she rammed twice and damaged

by gunfire and depth-charges. The U-boat was classified as 'probably sunk' but actually escaped with the loss of twelve men killed. Lieutenant-Commander Holm was awarded the DSC and Sub-Lieutenant Baylis,² of [Auckland](#), was mentioned in despatches. Later in the month the *Crocus* rescued the survivors of the *Nagpore*, one of twelve ships lost in a convoy of forty-one ships during a four-day attack by a pack of U-boats. She also took part in the rescue of 1500 survivors of the *Empress of Canada*, which was torpedoed and sunk in the South [Atlantic](#) on 13 March 1943. Other New Zealanders who served with Holm in the *Crocus* and *Burdock* were Lieutenants C. S. Evans of [New Plymouth](#) and J. Harrison of Hastings.

In February 1943 the destroyers *Wheatland* and *Easton* made a depth-charge attack on the Italian submarine *Asteria* in the [Mediterranean](#) and forced it to surface. The crew offered surrender, but the submarine sank, forty-six survivors being rescued. Sub-Lieutenant Ryan, RNZNVR,³ anti-submarine control officer in the *Wheatland*, to whom 'was due to a large part the credit' for this successful action, was awarded the DSC. Sub-Lieutenant Wilson,⁴ who was anti-submarine control officer in the frigate *Ness*, gained a DSC for his 'skill and efficiency' when that ship sank the Italian submarine *Da Vinci* off the Azores in May 1943. Lieutenant Markwick,⁵ gunnery officer in the corvette *Nasturtium*, was awarded a mention in despatches for 'courage, cheerfulness and untiring devotion to duty' in more than eighteen months of convoy escort duty in the [Atlantic](#) and [Mediterranean](#).

Some New Zealanders were privileged to serve in sloops of the famous Second Escort Group — *Starling*, *Woodpecker*, *Wild Goose*, *Magpie*, and *Kite* — commanded by Captain F. J. Walker, CB, DSO,

¹ Lieutenant-Commander J. F. Holm, DSC, RNZNR; born [Wellington](#), 29 Dec 1912; master mariner and company director.

² Lieutenant G. T. S. Baylis, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Palmerston North](#), 24 Nov 1913.

³ Lieutenant A. B. Ryan, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Invercargill](#), 4 Oct 1916; school-teacher.

⁴ Lieutenant J. O. Wilson, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 16 Feb 1915; librarian.

⁵ Lieutenant T. K. M. Markwick, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 4 Jun 1912; accountant.

RN, who has been described by Sir Winston Churchill as 'our most outstanding U-boat killer.'¹ On one patrol between 29 January and 24 February 1944, these ships achieved the 'most outstanding success of the war on U-boats' by sinking six of them in ten days — three within seventeen hours. This remarkable performance was marred by the loss of the *Woodpecker*, fortunately without loss of life. After her stern had been blown off by a torpedo, she was towed for seven days and might have been saved but for a heavy gale, in which she capsized and sank near the Scilly Isles. Petty Officer Wood, [RNZN](#),² who was serving in the *Woodpecker*, was awarded the British Empire Medal 'for outstanding courage, enterprise and devotion to duty.' His commanding officer reported that Wood 'was a tower of strength throughout.... No matter what the work in hand, he was always there and, largely due to his vigilance, the towing cable did not part.'

A New Zealand officer and Telegraphist E. P. Edgecombe of [New Plymouth](#) served in HMS *Loch Killin*, which joined the Second Escort Group in 1944 and took part in the destruction of four U-boats. The U-333 was sunk by the *Loch Killin* and *Starling* near the Scilly Isles on 31 July 1944. This was the first successful use of the 'squid', a three-barrelled mortar thrower which discharged its bombs ahead of the attacking ship. In the Bay of Biscay a week later the *Loch Killin* disposed of U-736 in the second successful 'squid' attack. The U-boat surfaced under the frigate and hung there for five minutes before slipping aft and sinking. Three officers, including the captain, and sixteen men were picked up. Sub-Lieutenant Harding, RNZNVR,³ of the *Loch Killin*, was awarded a mention in despatches for good service as plotting officer. On 10 August the *Wren* and *Loch Killin* depth-charged U-608, which had been sunk by a Liberator bomber, and picked up the whole crew. The *Loch Killin* made another kill on 16 April 1945 when she sank U-1063 off Start Point in the [English Channel](#).

Lieutenant Penty, RNZNVR,⁴ was officer of the watch in the frigate [Bickerton](#) on

25 June 1944 when a U-boat was detected off Start Point. His promptness in 'initiating the appropriate measures' was largely responsible for the quick destruction of U-269 by one very accurate depth-charge attack which forced it to surface, mortally damaged. Penty was awarded a mention in despatches.

HMS Rupert, one of several Captain class frigates of the Twenty-first Escort Group, destroyed four U-boats — U-965, U-722, U-1021

¹ Churchill: [The Second World War](#), Vol V, p. 11.

² Petty Officer A. Wood, BEM, [RNZN](#); born [London](#), 25 Nov 1908; joined RN Jul 1924; transferred to [RNZN](#), 1937; served in [Achilles](#) at [River Plate](#).

³ Sub-Lieutenant D. P. B. Harding, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Feilding, 14 Mar 1922; student.

⁴ Lieutenant E. F. Penty, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Wairoa, 12 Mar 1919; farmer.

and U-1001 — in British coastal waters between 27 March and 8 April 1945. Lieutenant (E) Lockie, RNZNR, ¹ an engineer officer in the Rupert, was awarded a mention in despatches for his resourcefulness in repairing damage to the ship's machinery caused by the shock of depth-charge explosions during the attacks.

On her first operational patrol HMS Loch Glendhu, of the Eighth Escort Group, disposed of U-1024 in a position south of the Isle of Man on 12 April 1945. After a ship in convoy had been torpedoed, the Loch Glendhu made asdic contact with the U-boat, which was forced by depth-charge attacks to surface. When its crew began to abandon ship, a party from the Loch Glendhu under her gunnery officer, Lieutenant Cole, RNZNVR, ² boarded the U-1024, which was taken in tow by the Loch More but sank during the night, the boarding party and thirty-eight prisoners being recovered. Cole was awarded the DSC for his good work.

In about eighteen months' service in the Royal Navy, Lieutenant-Commander Bourke, RNZNR, ³ took part in the destruction of a number of U-boats. He was

making his first convoy escort as commanding officer of the frigate Bayntun in January 1944 in company with the Canadian corvette Camrose when U-757 was detected by radar and forced by gunfire to dive. It was destroyed after a long hunt and three depth-charge attacks. For his part in this action Bourke was awarded the DSC. In February 1945 the Bayntun and other ships of the Tenth Escort Group patrolling off the Shetland Islands sank U-1279, U-989, and U-1278 within a fortnight, the last-mentioned being destroyed by the Bayntun alone. In each case the U-boats were first detected by the Bayntun whose 'A/S team displayed really exceptional alertness and skill'. Bourke gained a bar to his DSC and Sub-Lieutenant Webster,⁴ anti-submarine control officer in the Bayntun, was awarded the DSC. After the end of hostilities in May 1945, the Bayntun was present when the Tenth Escort Group took the surrender of eighteen German U-boats from bases in [Norway](#).

The corvette Asphodel, one of the escorts of a Sierra Leone convoy, was torpedoed and sunk by a U-boat at 1.30 a.m. on 9 March 1944 about 390 miles west-north-west from Cape Finisterre. There were only five survivors, one of whom died after rescue, Lieutenant Halliday,⁵ commanding officer of the Asphodel, and Lieutenant

¹ Lieutenant (E) J. B. Lockie, RNZNR, m.i.d.; born [Sydney](#), 6 Apr 1909; engineer.

² Lieutenant A. B. Cole, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 27 Apr 1915; civil servant.

³ Captain L. P. Bourke, DSC and bar, [RNZN](#); born [Australia](#), 5 Apr 1905; master mariner; transferred to [RNZN](#), Mar 1946.

⁴ Sub-Lieutenant W. K. Webster, DSC, RNZNVR; born [New Plymouth](#), 4 Jun 1922; law student.

⁵ Lieutenant A. M. Halliday, RNZNVR; born Somerset, England, 6 Dec 1913; merchant service officer and farmer; killed on active service 9 Mar 1944.

Bruorton ¹ being among those who lost their lives. In the Strait of Gibraltar on 19 February 1945, U-300 was seriously damaged by depth-charges dropped by the patrol yacht Evadne. When the U-boat was surprised by two trawlers two days later, the captain decided to abandon ship and he and forty of his crew were picked up as prisoners. Lieutenant Millener, ² anti-submarine control officer in the Evadne, was awarded the DSC for his skill and efficiency in holding contact with the U-boat during the first attack.

After serving for twelve months on convoy escort duties in the corvette Jasmine, Lieutenant Tattersfield ³ spent eighteen months in the battleship Valiant in the [Mediterranean](#). He was awarded a mention in despatches for his skill and devotion to duty as fighter director and air plotting officer while the Valiant was covering the landings in [Sicily](#) and at [Salerno](#). During nearly two years' service in the cruiser Bermuda, Lieutenant Newman ⁴ worked up a most efficient fighter direction organisation. In October 1943 he directed from his ship fighters of 19 Group, Coastal Command, which shot down two German bombers and damaged another in the Bay of Biscay. Newman was awarded the DSC in June 1944.

Some hundreds of ratings saw service as DEMS gunners in merchant ships of all types and from time to time in those of Allied nations. Among the first to leave New Zealand were Able Seamen R. J. Craig, G. J. Lynch, and W. M. Wheeler, who were in the Blue Star Line steamer Doric Star when she was sunk by the [Admiral Graf Spee](#) in the South [Atlantic](#) on 2 December 1939. After eleven weary weeks on board the supply tanker Altmark, they were released with some 300 other seamen when that notorious ship was apprehended by HMS Cossack in Josing Fjord, [Norway](#), in February 1940. Lynch, ⁵ who took part in the combined operation against Dieppe in August 1942, was killed in a gun accident four months later. Leading Seaman Maud, ⁶ of [Auckland](#), who was in the Port Hobart when she was sunk by the Admiral Scheer in the [Atlantic](#) on 24 November 1940, spent four and a half years as a prisoner in [Germany](#). Not a few others had the melancholy experience of seeing their ships sunk by U-boats, and four lost their lives — Able Seamen Carter ⁷ and McQueen ⁸ of [Wellington](#) in the

¹ Lieutenant H. F. W. Bruorton, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 21 Dec 1912; accountant; killed on active service 9 Mar 1944.

² Lieutenant P. G. Millener, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 15 Aug 1916; accountant.

³ Lieutenant J. W. Tattersfield, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 4 Sep 1916; clerk.

⁴ Lieutenant M. L. Newman, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 14 Nov 1915; accountant.

⁵ Able Seaman G. J. Lynch, RNZNVR; born [Waikino](#), 5 Sep 1920; printer; accidentally killed 27 Dec 1942.

⁶ Leading Seaman W. D. Maud, RNZNVR; born [New South Wales](#), 24 Sep 1917; compositor.

⁷ Able Seaman E. J. Carter, RNZNVR; born [London](#), 8 Aug 1913; storeman; killed on active service 19 Dec 1940.

⁸ Able Seaman A. S. McQueen, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 22 Nov 1919; storeman; killed on active service 19 Dec 1940.

New Zealand Shipping Company's [Rotorua](#) in December 1940, and Able Seamen Hartnett ([Wellington](#)) ¹ and Stilton ([Auckland](#)) ² in one of the missing boats of the same company's [Opawa](#) in February 1942. Petty Officer Wireless Mechanic Bruce Alexander, ³ of [Wellington](#), died when the transport [Empress of Canada](#) was sunk by an Italian U-boat in the South [Atlantic](#) on 13 March 1943 with a loss of 395 lives out of 1892 on board, including about 500 Italian prisoners of war.

New Zealand ratings serving in numerous ships of the [Mediterranean Fleet](#) during the grim months of 1941–42 took part in the evacuation of British troops, including the 2nd New Zealand Division, from [Greece](#) in April and in the battle for [Crete](#) in May 1941. Able Seaman Beck, ⁴ who was in the cruiser [Phoebe](#), was awarded the DSM for courage and devotion to duty during the evacuation of [Greece](#). 'As coxswain of a motor cutter, he handled his boat in difficult circumstances with

conspicuous success at Nauplia [[Navplion](#)] in bringing off considerable numbers and at [Kalamata](#) in placing lights on the breakwaters and running special trips.' Five weeks later Beck showed like qualities at [Sfakia](#), to which the [Phoebe](#) made two runs during the evacuation of [Crete](#). Able Seaman W. D. Diehl,⁵ who was also serving in the [Phoebe](#), was killed when that ship was torpedoed off [Bardia](#) in August 1941 while escorting destroyers and minesweepers carrying troops to relieve an Australian brigade at [Tobruk](#). His brother Able Seaman A. E. Diehl,⁶ was one of the many New Zealanders lost in HMS Neptune in December 1941. Petty Officer Radio Mechanic W. M. Harray was in the infantry landing ship Glenroy at the evacuation of [Greece](#). She was carrying part of the last reinforcements for [Crete](#) when she was badly damaged by German aircraft and ordered back to [Alexandria](#). The Glenroy was taking troops to [Tobruk](#) in November 1941 when she was torpedoed and had to be beached off Mersa Matruh.

On 22 May, two days after the landings of airborne troops on [Crete](#), the destroyer [Greyhound](#) and cruisers [Gloucester](#) and [Fiji](#) were sunk off the western end of the island. The [Fiji](#) had survived some twenty attacks in four hours and had fired nearly all her anti-aircraft ammunition when she was finally sunk with heavy loss of life by

¹ Able Seaman E. S. Hartnett, RNZNVR; born [Hamilton](#), 7 May 1916; P and T Dept; killed on active service 6 Feb 1942.

² Able Seaman G. E. J. Stilton, [RNZN](#); born [Auckland](#), 1 Jun 1907; joined [RNZN](#), 1923; killed on active service 6 Feb 1942.

³ Petty Officer Wireless Mechanic B. Alexander, [RNZN](#); born [Wellington](#), 21 Dec 1915; NZBS operator; killed on active service 13 Mar 1943.

⁴ Able Seaman A. D. Beck, DSM, RNZNVR (joined 1933); born [Christchurch](#), 30 Nov 1915; lithographer.

⁵ Able Seaman W. D. Diehl, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 28 Dec 1919; NZ Railways employee; killed in action 27 Aug 1941.

⁶ Able Seaman A. E. Diehl, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 18 Jul 1921; foundry worker killed on active service 19 Dec 1941.

three bombs dropped by a single aircraft. One of the survivors, Chief Petty Officer Booth, [RNZN](#), ¹ was awarded the DSM. As action quartermaster in the lower steering position, said his citation, 'he performed his duties without fault throughout the long and trying action which ended with the loss of the ship. Rudder orders were frequent and often drowned by the noise of gunfire and bomb explosions. He made no mistake and remained cheerful, even when the ship listed 25 degrees, lighting was failing and near compartments being flooded. His performance was one that demanded physical and mental endurance of a high order. His conduct and fine leadership were an inspiration to those about him.'

When the destroyers [Kelly](#) and [Kashmir](#) were sunk next morning, New Zealanders in the [Kipling](#) assisted in the rescue of 279 survivors of the first-mentioned ship, including Captain Lord Louis Mountbatten. Ordinary Seaman Urquhart, [RNZN](#), ² was lost in the [Kelly](#). His chum, Ordinary Seaman John Raymond, ³ survived, but was killed when the cruiser [Galatea](#), in which he was then serving, was torpedoed and sunk 30 miles west of [Alexandria](#) on 14 December 1941. When the destroyer [Gurkha](#), one of the escorts of a convoy from [Alexandria](#) to [Malta](#), was torpedoed by a U-boat off [Sidi Barrani](#) in January 1942, Able Seaman William Armstrong, RNZNVR, ⁴ regardless of fiercely burning oil on the water, jumped overboard and secured a line round an injured officer, who was then hauled to safety. For this act of gallantry, Armstrong was awarded the British Empire Medal. Engine-Room Artificer Canning, ⁵ of [Lyttelton](#), was one of eighty men who lost their lives in HMS [Naiad](#), flagship of Rear-Admiral Vian, which was sunk by a U-boat in March 1942 between [Sollum](#) and Mersa Matruh.

Of the many New Zealanders who served in the invasion of North Africa in November 1942, probably none had a more hazardous part than those in the destroyers [Broke](#) and [Malcolm](#), whose task was to break into [Algiers](#) harbour and prevent the sabotage of twenty-five French ships and the port facilities. As they steamed in, the [Malcolm](#) was badly hit in a boiler-room and had to withdraw. At her fourth attempt the [Broke](#) cut through the boom, landed her American troops, and sent boarders away to secure the ships. Sub-Lieutenant Harris, RNZNVR, ⁶ who was

in charge of the party, was taken

¹ Chief Petty Officer H. P. Booth, DSM, [RNZN](#); born Panmure, [Auckland](#), 4 Dec 1909; joined [RNZN](#) as boy, 5 Dec 1924; killed in action at St. Nazaire, 28 Mar 1942.

² Ordinary Seaman R. C. Urquhart, [RNZN](#); born [Te Puke](#), 18 May 1920; radio serviceman; killed on active service 23 May 1941.

³ Ordinary Seaman J. Raymond, [RNZN](#); born Waipawa, 28 Feb 1915; orchardist; killed on active service 14 Dec 1941.

⁴ Lieutenant-Commander W. Armstrong, BEM, [RNZNVR](#); born [Auckland](#), 11 Feb 1915; salesman.

⁵ Engine-Room Artificer S. R. Canning, [RNZN](#); born [Lyttelton](#), 5 Mar 1919; brass finisher; killed on active service 11 Mar 1942.

⁶ Lieutenant R. W. Harris, DSC, [RNZNVR](#); born [Christchurch](#), 23 Jul 1920; student.

prisoner but was released after the capture of [Algiers](#). He was awarded the DSC for his good leadership and served later in Coastal Forces. Ordinary Seaman Crombie, ¹ of [Christchurch](#), was killed in action, but his chum, A. P. Gurnsey, lived to be commissioned and command a landing craft in the invasion of [Normandy](#).

One of the most brilliant actions of the war was fought in the [Mediterranean](#) in March 1942 during the passage of convoy MW 10, the commissioned supply ship Breconshire and three merchant ships, from [Alexandria](#) to [Malta](#), escorted by four small cruisers and seventeen destroyers. New Zealand officers and ratings were serving in several of the escorts. On 22 March attacks by some 150 aircraft were successfully fought off. The Italians then made two attempts to cut off the convoy, first by one 8-inch and three 6-inch cruisers, and later by one battleship, two 8-inch and four 6-inch cruisers, and a few destroyers. Both attacks were frustrated by the bold and vigorous tactics of Rear-Admiral Vian. The convoy was screened by smoke

and the enemy attacked with torpedoes and gunfire. The battleship was torpedoed and hit by gunfire and set on fire and two cruisers were damaged. Sub-Lieutenant Hardingham ² of the destroyer Southwold (she was sunk by aircraft while screening the Breconshire off [Malta](#) next day) was awarded a mention in despatches for having encouraged his gun crews throughout the action 'by word and his own personal example.' Leading Seaman Mackenzie ³ of the destroyer Beaufort was also mentioned in despatches, his commanding officer reporting that 'this rating is captain of X gun which on all occasions has been first on the target. This is entirely due to his personal leadership and example'

Several New Zealanders took part in a series of destroyer actions in the [English Channel](#) between 27 August and 23 October 1943. In one of these actions German E-boats had their biggest success of the year when they sank the cruiser Charybdis and damaged the destroyer Limbourne in the early hours of 23 October. The latter had her bows blown off and, after unsuccessful attempts to tow her, had to be sunk by two torpedoes. Sub-Lieutenant Allen, RNZNVR, ⁴ who was in the Limbourne, was awarded a mention in despatches for good service as plotting officer in action.

Other New Zealanders survived the sinking of the cruiser Spartan and destroyer Inglefield by glider bombs ⁵ off the [Anzio](#) beach-heads

¹ Ordinary Seaman W. D. Crombie, [RNZN](#); born [Scotland](#), 27 Dec 1921; draughtsman; killed in action 8 Nov 1942.

² Lieutenant-Commander J. F. W. Hardingham, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 15 Jun 1916; journalist.

³ Petty Officer W. Mackenzie, [RNZN](#), m.i.d.; born Frankton Junction, 19 Mar 1917; joined [RNZN](#) Oct 1933; served in [Achilles](#) at [River Plate](#).

⁴ Lieutenant J. E. Allen, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 31 Jan 1914; school-teacher.

⁵ The so-called glider bomb was released from an aircraft which controlled its flight by means of wireless.

in [Italy](#) in February 1944. One of them, Sub-Lieutenant Rumbold, RNZNVR, ¹ was mentioned in despatches for coolness and devotion to duty when the Inglefield was sunk. As officer of quarters aft 'he kept all his guns in action after the ship was struck, firing at the parent aircraft and second and third glider bombs, and might have been instrumental in causing these to miss.'

During the night of 1–2 November 1944 the destroyers Avon Vale and Wheatland engaged and sank three German-manned Italian torpedo-boats in Quarnarolo Channel, off the coast of [Yugoslavia](#). Able Seaman William Coulson, RNZNVR, ² who was serving in the Avon Vale, was awarded the DSM for 'great courage and most outstanding devotion to duty'. His commanding officer reported that Coulson 'continued to load the bow pom-pom with complete disregard for the enemy's fire and all the other unpleasantness around him, not least of which was the blast from the forward 4-in. twin guns which blew him off the pom-pom more than once. In addition, this rating had to put up with a continual cascade of water over the bows. The fact that he continued to load the gun at all is quite remarkable.' In the New Year honours list 1944, Electrical Artificer Pitt, [RNZN](#), ³ was awarded the DSM for 'hard work and devotion to duty over a long period' in HMS Laforey. During 1943 this destroyer took part in many operations in the [Mediterranean](#), including the capture of the islands of Pantellaria and Lampedusa and the landings in [Sicily](#) and at [Salerno](#), besides sinking the Italian submarine Ascianghi which had torpedoed the cruiser [Newfoundland](#) off Syracuse.

While patrolling in the Gulf of Genoa on the night of 17–18 March 1945 the destroyers Meteor and Lookout intercepted three German-manned Italian torpedo-boats. Two were sunk and the third escaped under cover of smoke. Stoker Petty Officer Sim, [RNZN](#), ⁴ who was in charge of the after boiler-room of the Meteor during the action, was awarded a mention in despatches. A similar award was made to Leading Seaman Fairthorne, [RNZN](#), ⁵ who, during his two years' service in HMS Lewes, kept the electrical installation of that 24-year-old destroyer in good working order.

When his ship HMS Syvern and the Kos XXII (formerly Norwegian whale catchers), which had been employed as anti-submarine escort vessels based on [Suda Bay](#), were destroyed by German aircraft while attempting to leave [Crete](#), Lieutenant

¹ Lieutenant J. S. Rumbold, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Reefton, 5 Mar 1920; barrister.

² Able Seaman W. Coulson, DSM, RNZNVR; born England, 16 Mar 1921; miner.

³ Electrical Artificer H. B. Pitt, DSM, [RNZN](#); born [Ruawai](#), 23 Sep 1921; telegraph mechanician.

⁴ Chief Stoker N. G. Sim, [RNZN](#), m.i.d.; born [Timaru](#), 3 Nov 1914; joined [RNZN](#) May 1934; served in [Achilles](#) at [River Plate](#).

⁵ Leading Seaman D. Fairthorne, [RNZN](#), m.i.d.; born [Christchurch](#), 22 Oct 1918; joined [RNZN](#) Sep 1934; served in [Achilles](#) at [River Plate](#).

⁶ Lieutenant S. G. Jervis, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 23 Feb 1912; clerk.

and others of the ships' companies made their way across the island to [Sfakia](#) where, two days later, he reported the loss of the ships to the naval officer-in-charge. Jervis was put in charge of about sixty seamen and marines, and this party, together with some 1600 troops, was evacuated by [HMAS Perth](#) in the early hours of 30 May 1941. Jervis, who had previously served with other New Zealanders at [Singapore](#), spent the next twelve months in HMS Valiant, which was in company with the Barham when that battleship, on 25 November 1941, was torpedoed by a U-boat and blown up with the loss of 862 officers and men. One of the survivors was Roy Bowden, of [Auckland](#), who was serving as a supply rating in the Barham. Jervis served in the destroyer Oribi from March 1943 to April 1944, during which period she escorted convoys to North Russia and relieved the Norwegian garrison in Spitzbergen after an attack on that Arctic outpost by the German battleship Tirpitz.

In May 1943 the Oribi took part in one of the grimmest convoy actions in the

Battle of the [Atlantic](#). An outward-bound convoy of forty-two ships was attacked for several days by a large pack of U-boats which sank thirteen ships. Five U-boats were sunk by the escort vessels and a sixth by a Canadian aircraft. The Oribi rammed and sank U-531. Lieutenant Jarvis was awarded the DSC for his skilful work as anti-submarine control officer in holding contact with the U-boat. 'Despite the losses sustained by the convoy, it was an undoubted victory for the escorts,' reported the Commander-in-Chief Western Approaches. It marked the end of large-scale attacks by U-boats and proved to be a turning point in the Battle of the [Atlantic](#). Forty-one U-boats were sunk during that month.

Jarvis later served in HMS Scarborough which laid channel buoys for the invasion of [Normandy](#) and escorted convoys during the great operation. He was first lieutenant in HMS Brissenden which, in company with another destroyer, sank a German tanker and its armed escort off Bordeaux in November 1944, and in HMS Redpole with the [British Pacific Fleet](#).

Nine New Zealand ratings were serving in HMS Hecla, destroyer depot ship, which was badly damaged off Cape Agulhas, South Africa, on 15 May 1942 when she struck one of the numerous mines laid a few days earlier by a German raider. A merchant ship of 7000 tons in the convoy of nineteen ships was sunk an hour later in the same minefield. Twenty-six were killed and more than one hundred injured in the Hecla, which was towed to Simonstown by HMS Gambia. Leading Radio Mechanic Shaw, [RNZN](#), ¹ of [New Plymouth](#), was one of those killed. After being repaired, the Hecla went to the [Mediterranean](#). On 11 November 1942 she was torpedoed

¹ Leading Radio Mechanic D. W. Shaw, [RNZN](#); born [New Plymouth](#), 23 Jul 1919; bank clerk; killed on active service 15 May 1942.

by a U-boat and sank with heavy loss of life about 180 miles west of Gibraltar. Able Seaman Roland Fitzgerald ¹ was one of those killed. One of the survivors was Commander (E) O. J. Gerard, OBE, RN, a New Zealander who had served in the Hecla since March 1940. Another was Able Seaman F. J. E. Lemberg, [RNZN](#), of [Palmerston North](#), who later served in the gunboat Scarab during the invasion of [Sicily](#) and [Italy](#). The Scarab was commanded by Lieutenant Ewan Cameron, ² of

[Christchurch](#), who lost his life when the steamer *Nellore* in which he was returning to New Zealand on leave was torpedoed and sunk in the [Indian Ocean](#) on 30 June 1944. Lieutenants Rowan,³ of [Gisborne](#), and R. L. Simpson,⁴ of [Christchurch](#), were also lost after the sinking of the *Nellore*.

Of all the New Zealanders in the Royal Navy none served with greater distinction than those in Coastal Forces, the modern counterpart of the small, fast sailing craft that sortied from English ports to harry the enemy in wars of earlier centuries. No fewer than 1560 coastal craft — harbour-defence launches, motor torpedo-boats, motor gunboats, and motor minesweepers — were built during the war. At the peak period of 1944 some 3000 officers and 22,000 ratings were serving in Coastal Forces, which were almost entirely a preserve of RNVR 'hostilities only' personnel. A higher proportion of newly commissioned New Zealand Reserve officers from HMS King Alfred chose service in Coastal Forces than in any other branch of the Royal Navy. The greater part of the strength of these little ships was in Home waters and the [Mediterranean](#), but many flotillas also operated from bases in West and South Africa, the [West Indies](#), [Iceland](#), and the [Indian Ocean](#). These little ships fought in countless actions in the Narrow Seas and the [Mediterranean](#) and were used as minelayers, minesweepers, anti-submarine escort vessels, and smoke-layers for the protection of convoys. They also found a wide range of duties in combined operations — as headquarters ships, navigational leaders, flank patrols, and ferries for small raiding parties and secret agents.

One of the 'aces' of Coastal Forces, a young New Zealander with a truly remarkable record, was Lieutenant-Commander Macdonald, DSO, DSC.⁵ He joined the RNZNVR in 1938 and as an able seaman served from September 1939 to July 1940 as a DEMS gunner⁶ in the

¹ Able Seaman R. Fitzgerald, [RNZN](#); born Geraldine, 9 Jun 1917; killed on active service 11 Nov 1942.

² Lieutenant E. Cameron, RNZNVR; born Dipton, 23 Feb 1910; clerk; killed on active service 30 Jun 1944.

³ Lieutenant G. A. Rowan, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 11 Jun 1916;

engineer, P and T Dept; killed on active service 30 Jun 1944.

⁴ Lieutenant R. L. Simpson, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 28 May 1912; accountant; killed on active service 30 Jun 1944.

⁵ Lieutenant-Commander G. J. Macdonald, DSO, DSC and two bars, m.i.d. (2); born [Wellington](#), 30 Sep 1921; civil engineer.

⁶ DEMS: Defensively equipped merchant ship.

Trienza, trading from [Australia](#) to Nauru Island. At the end of 1940 he went to England in that capacity and, after a course in HMS King Alfred, was promoted midshipman in May 1941.

Macdonald, then a sub-lieutenant serving as first lieutenant in MTB31, gained his DSC in a successful action in the [English Channel](#) on the night of 3–4 March 1942 when a strongly-escorted merchant ship was sunk. MTB31 was attacked by three German E-boats and set on fire forward and in the engine-room. Though his wounded commanding officer gave the order to abandon ship, Macdonald remained by her, fighting the fires and jettisoning depth-charges and the remaining torpedo to lighten her. He also dived overboard to assist the chief motor mechanic who was in difficulties, and he materially helped in the ultimate salvaging of the boat when assistance arrived.

While serving in command of MTB241 and as senior officer of the 21st MTB Flotilla, Macdonald was awarded a bar to his DSC in July 1943, the citation mentioning no fewer than nine actions in four months in which he had taken a leading part. He was promoted acting lieutenant on 14 September 1943 and confirmed in that rank on 1 October, having then turned 22 years of age. A second bar to his DSC was awarded in July 1944 for his 'brilliant initiative' as leader of his flotilla in two actions and in seven successful mine-laying expeditions. In one action when his own boat was sunk, he transferred to another and continued the attack 'in spite of intense fire and an addition to the enemy convoy escort of a further four armed trawlers.'

'Lieutenant Macdonald is a likeable and fearless young New Zealander who has always been outstanding in action,' reported the Captain, Coastal Forces, The Nore. 'Cool and level-headed, he has the knack of making quick decisions and inspiring his flotilla mates with a fine confidence; the result being that they follow him into action with the sure knowledge that they are on top of the job. This attitude of mind is half the battle in these short, fierce. Coastal Forces actions.... His leadership, cool courage and unflagging keenness to get at the enemy after 4 ½ years of war are an inspiration, not only to his flotilla officers and men, but to us all.'

Macdonald was awarded the DSO in September 1944. The citation stated that MTBs 225, 234, and 244 were handled with great courage and skill on the night of 4–5 July 1944 in three gallant attempts to attack a heavily escorted enemy transport until it took refuge in port. On turning homeward the MTBs met a convoy of six ships and, though day had broken, in face of intense fire sank two by torpedoes and damaged two others by gunfire. Macdonald was awarded a mention in despatches for his leadership in a successful action on the night of 20–21 July 1944 against an enemy patrol off the Dutch coast in which one trawler was sunk and another probably destroyed. Lieutenant Plank,¹ who had taken command of MTB 244 that morning, was also mentioned in despatches for his skilful handling of his boat, especially after she had been damaged in this, his first, action. A second mention in despatches came to Macdonald after an attack on an enemy convoy on 14 September 1944 which resulted in the sinking of the larger of two ships guarded by a numerous and well-armed escort. 'It is not mere chance that casualties under his leadership are small,' said the citation. 'Experience, skill and true courage are great assets.'

Of the several New Zealanders in the destroyers and motorlaunches which carried out the daring raid on St. Nazaire on 28 March 1942, two were killed and another taken prisoner. The raid achieved its main object of immobilising the great Normandie dock, the only one in [Europe](#) outside [Germany](#) large enough to take the battleship Tirpitz. The lock gate was rammed by the destroyer [Campbelltown](#) and wrecked when that ship and her cargo of five tons of explosives blew up some hours later. Commando troops landed from her and the motor-launches destroyed the dock machinery and many of the port facilities. Chief Petty Officer H. P. Booth, DSM, [RNZN](#), who gained his decoration for service in HMS [Fiji](#) off [Crete](#),² was killed in the

Campbelltown. Telegraphist Newman,³ of Wellington, was serving in one of the motor-launches which was sunk after landing its troops. He was four hours in the water before he was found by the Germans and spent just over three years as a prisoner of war. Sub-Lieutenant O'Connor, RNZNVR,⁴ was killed in MTB74 which fired two torpedoes⁵ at the lock gate in the Old Entrance to the St. Nazaire Basin. O'Connor was serving as an ordinary seaman in HMS Ark Royal in May 1941 when she took part in the chase of the German battleship Bismarck which was torpedoed by her aircraft. The boat was set on fire and lost while trying to assist another burning motor-launch on her way out of the river. Able Seaman L. T. Ebert, of New Brighton, and Ordinary Seaman Mitford-Burgess were in the destroyer Tynedale which, with the Atherstone, escorted the raiding force from Falmouth. Mitford-Burgess,⁶ who was commissioned later that year, had taken part in

¹ Lieutenant G. J. Plank, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Christchurch, 11 Dec 1915; store manager.

² See pp. 485– 6.

³ Telegraphist R. H. Newman, RNZNVR; born Nelson, 12 Jun 1920; telegraphist, P and T Dept.

⁴ Sub-Lieutenant A. F. O'Connor, RNZNVR; born Auckland, 23 Apr 1920; cadet, P and T Dept; killed in action 28 Mar 1942.

⁵ Each torpedo contained 1800 pounds of explosive and was fitted with a delay-action device. They exploded about 36 hours later.

⁶ Lieutenant R. A. Mitford-Burgess, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Tolaga Bay, 21 Jul 1921; brewer.

sixty-three Coastal Forces operations, including fourteen minelays and six actions, when, as first lieutenant of MTB244, he was awarded a mention in despatches for good service in an action on 4 July 1944 off the Texel in which the 21st MTB Flotilla, commanded by Lieutenant-Commander G. J. Macdonald, sank two

ships in a convoy and damaged others. ¹

There were New Zealanders in several of the destroyers and motor-launches which took part in the raid on Dieppe (Operation Jubilee) on 19 August 1942, when some 6000 troops were landed on the beaches under heavy fire. The naval casualties totalled 643 and more than 3000 soldiers were killed, wounded, or missing. Lieutenant Nees, ² who commanded ML230 of the 11th ML Flotilla, was awarded a mention in despatches for his part in this operation. He received a second mention in November 1944 and was subsequently awarded the DSC for his able handling of the 150th HDML Group in a variety of operations from the landing in [Normandy](#) in June 1944 to the capture of [Walcheren](#) in November 1944.

Among others in the Dieppe raid were Sub-Lieutenants J. F. Mallitte and H. G. Duffel-Intemann of MGB80, Able Seaman G. J. Lynch, Telegraphist F. J. O'Brien in MGB50, ³ and Telegraphist R. N. Mitchell and Petty Officer Motor Mechanic, later Sub-Lieutenant (E), D. E. W. Gillies. Mitchell and Gillies were in ML214 which escorted landing craft carrying Canadian troops from [Shoreham](#). Their motor-launch was badly damaged by the gunfire of German aircraft and returned on one engine with the last convoy. For Mitchell, ⁴ who had previously served for nine months in the Admiralty tanker Ennerdale, Dieppe was the first of five major combined operations in which he took part. In November 1942 he joined No. 6 Naval Beach Signals whose job was to land with the first wave of assault troops and establish shore-to-ship radio communication. This unit was attached to the American 141st Armoured Signals Company for the landings at [Oran](#) in the invasion of North Africa in November 1942, and to the 50th Division, Eighth Army, for the invasion of [Sicily](#) in July 1943 and of [Italy](#) in September 1943. Mitchell was awarded a mention in despatches for 'gallantry, skill, determination and undaunted devotion to duty' during the landing of the Allied armies in [Normandy](#) in June 1944. His commanding officer reported that Mitchell, under heavy fire on the beach, 'got his set working without delay and passed his messages ... setting a fine example....' Mitchell ended his war

¹ See p. 491.

² Lieutenant-Commander H. M. Nees, DSC, RNZNVR, m.i.d. (2); born Dunedin, 28 Feb 1908; factory manager.

³ MGB: Motor Gunboat.

⁴ Telegraphist R. N. Mitchell, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Waiau, 14 May 1922; clerk.

service as telegraphist in an [RNZAF](#) crash-boat based on [Emirau Island](#) in the [Pacific](#).

As senior officer, 50th ML Flotilla, Lieutenant M. C. Waylen, ¹ commanding ML103, took part in the first minelaying operation by motor-launches off enemy ports in the [English Channel](#). He was mentioned in despatches in January 1942 and, after completing twenty-four 'lays', was awarded the DSC. Lieutenant Mills, ² commanding ML293 in the 5th ML Flotilla, was awarded a mention in despatches for good work in sweeping a minefield in the [Dover](#) command in 1943. Able Seaman Horsefall, ³ one of many New Zealand ratings in Coastal Forces, was awarded the DSM for good service in action in the Strait of [Dover](#) on the night of 12 May 1942. He was a gunner in MGB13 which, with five others, attacked a German raider escorted by four torpedo-boats, eight minesweepers, and ten or more E-boats. Two of the escorts were sunk and the raider was forced to put into Boulogne. Horsefall had been in action against German torpedo-boats the night before. Petty Officer Fraser ⁴ was badly wounded and taken prisoner when MGB78 was sunk in action off the Hook of [Holland](#) on 3 October 1942. As first lieutenant, later commanding officer, of ML106 and finally senior officer 51st ML Flotilla, Lieutenant Drake ⁵ had taken part in thirty-four successful minelaying operations in enemy waters in the North Sea when he was awarded the DSC in July 1944. Lieutenant Messenger, ⁶ commanding ML206 of the 1st Minesweeping ML Flotilla, was awarded a mention in despatches for good service in the sweeping of French Channel ports and their approaches in September 1944. A like award was made to Lieutenant Bullock, ⁷ commanding officer of ML217, for efficient work during the [Normandy](#) landings and in minesweeping off Ostend, the mouth of the Schelde, and the port of [Rotterdam](#).

An attempt by strong forces of German E-boats to attack a convoy off the East Coast on the night of 21 March 1945 was frustrated in a series of brisk actions by the escort of three destroyers and the corvette Puffin, which was commanded by

Lieutenant-Commander Miller ⁸ who was awarded the DSC. Five nights later the Puffin, patrolling off Lowestoft, rammed a German midget submarine, which blew up.

¹ See p. 334.

² Lieutenant E. M. Mills, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Waimate, 13 Mar 1919; student.

³ Able Seaman A. Horsefall, DSM, [RNZN](#); born [Wellington](#), 26 Jun 1920; joined [RNZN](#) May 1936.

⁴ Petty Officer E. A. Fraser, [RNZN](#), ex-RN; born [Glasgow](#), 19 Nov 1918.

⁵ Lieutenant W. C. Drake, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 4 Mar 1919; bank officer.

⁶ Lieutenant R. M. Messenger, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 24 Oct 1913; clerk.

⁷ Lieutenant L. Bullock, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Christchurch](#), 5 Dec 1916.

⁸ Lieutenant-Commander A. S. Miller DSC, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 7 Mar 1899 civil engineer.

In the early hours of 14 February 1944 five MTBs sighted two trawlers and a flak ship off the Dutch coast and Lieutenant Rout, ¹ commanding MTB455, was detached to make a torpedo attack. He closed to about 600 yards and made two hits on the flak ship. In the ensuing mêlée one of the trawlers was hit repeatedly and MTB444 was badly damaged, her commanding officer and three men being mortally wounded. On their way back the MTBs encountered two forces of E-boats, several of which were damaged in high-speed actions. For his 'skill, coolness and devotion to duty' in these affairs Rout was awarded the DSC. Later in the month he led five boats of his flotilla in a night action off the Hook of [Holland](#) in which one enemy

trawler was destroyed and others damaged. For this action Rout was awarded a mention in despatches. Lieutenant Atkinson,² as first lieutenant and gunnery control officer of MTB611, was awarded the DSC for 'skill, coolness and courage' in several actions in the [English Channel](#) during the first half of 1944.

Close to the western entrance to Cherbourg harbour in the early hours of 12 May 1944, four MTBs fought a spirited action with three trawlers escorting two merchant ships. One of the latter was torpedoed and set on fire and two trawlers were damaged. In this action Lieutenant Watson³ was in command of MTB453 and [Sub-Lieutenant Natusch](#)⁴ was first lieutenant of MTB454. When the Oerlikon magazine in his boat caught fire, [Natusch](#) threw several pans of ammunition overboard and so prevented a serious explosion, an act for which he was awarded the DSC. On two nights in June during the [Normandy](#) landing operations, Watson fought in six separate actions with enemy light forces attempting to raid the supply routes and inflicted severe damage on several E-boats. For this and previous good service he was awarded the DSC. Lieutenant Wright,⁵ in command of MTB772, took part in numerous actions off the French, Dutch, and Belgian coasts during 1944. He was awarded the DSC for skill and courage in fighting his ship with three others in an engagement on 22 December when two E-boats were sunk and others damaged.

In three actions off the Dutch coast in June 1944, the 58th MTB Flotilla sank eight German vessels. Sub-Lieutenant Gordon,⁶ navigating officer of the flotilla, who was killed in action less than a month later, and Lieutenant Goldsmith,⁷ first lieutenant of MTB723, were

¹ Lieutenant M. V. Rout, DSC, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Nelson](#), 29 Jan 1919; student.

² Lieutenant T. E. Atkinson, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Levin](#), 30 Nov 1919; student.

³ Lieutenant N. Watson, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Otaki](#), 15 May 1918; valuer.

⁴ [Sub-Lieutenant G. K. Natusch](#), DSC, RNZNVR; born Hastings, 7 Feb

1921; architect.

⁵ Lieutenant C. J. Wright, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Napier](#), 19 Sep 1910; dentist.

⁶ Sub-Lieutenant J. W. Gordon, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Taumarunui, 21 Nov 1920; law clerk; killed in action 20 Jul 1944.

⁷ Lieutenant C. G. Goldsmith, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 13 Nov 1919; bank officer.

mentioned in despatches. Earlier, the 58th Flotilla had been based in the Shetland Islands, whence it made frequent sweeps to Norwegian waters. Lieutenant Harton ¹ and the members of his MGB's crew were mentioned in a special order of the day by the Commander-in-Chief, The Nore, for their rescue in bad weather of the crew of a crashed aircraft. Lieutenant Jack Forgie, ² commanding ML1415, and Sub-Lieutenant Nisbett, ³ in command of ML1409 of the 149th HDML Flotilla, performed many arduous duties, including the escort of convoys in the [Normandy](#) assault area from 5 June to the end of August 1944, for which the former was awarded the DSC and the latter a mention in despatches.

From 1942 onward many New Zealanders served in Coastal Forces in the [Mediterranean](#) and took part in the landings in North Africa, [Sicily](#), [Italy](#), and southern [France](#). After the surrender of [Italy](#) they operated against enemy shipping in the Gulf of Genoa, in the Adriatic, where they swept mines and co-operated with Yugoslav partisans, and in the [Aegean Sea](#). One of their first awards was a mention in despatches to Able Seaman Thom, ⁴ serving in ML1028 of the Inshore Squadron, which opened up North African ports for the Eighth Army. Similar awards were made to Sub-Lieutenant Green, ⁵ first lieutenant of ML1146, for resolution and skill in salvaging a Catalina aircraft near Gibraltar in November 1942, and to Sub-Lieutenant Raper, ⁶ commanding MTB375 of the 7th Flotilla, for good service in action with enemy light forces off Viareggio in the Gulf of [Venice](#). Lieutenant Carter, ⁷ commanding officer of ML569, was awarded the DSC for good work in clearing shallow minefields in the Gulf of Frejus during the landings in Southern France in August 1944. When one launch stranded in a minefield, he towed her to safety and

carried medical aid to others lost in his area.

Lieutenant Lassen,⁸ one of the seventeen New Zealanders serving in HMS [Trinidad](#) when she was lost in the Arctic in May 1942,⁹ achieved an outstanding record in the [Mediterranean](#). He was awarded the DSC for good service while in temporary command of MTB77 in two successful actions with E-boats in the Strait of Messina in July 1943. Lassen was in command of MTB404 when he was mentioned in despatches for his part in an action in the Gulf

¹ Lieutenant N. W. Harton, RNZNVR; born [Te Kuiti](#), 29 Jan 1917; accountant.

² Lieutenant J. Forgie, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 3 Jan 1918; clerk.

³ Lieutenant L. C. Nisbett, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Hamilton](#), 28 Jun 1921; electrician.

⁴ Able Seaman R. F. Thom, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 31 Jul 1921; iron-worker.

⁵ Lieutenant B. J. Green, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Waihi](#), 22 Aug 1916; school-teacher.

⁶ Sub-Lieutenant J. S. Raper, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 11 Aug 1920; telegraphist.

⁷ Lieutenant M. R. Carter, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 19 Feb 1915; clerk.

⁸ Lieutenant E. H. G. Lassen, DSC and bar, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Oxford, 26 Dec 1916; farmer.

⁹ See p. 476.

of [Venice](#) on 7 February 1945. In company with two other boats of the 28th MTB Flotilla, he attacked a large merchant ship escorted by a corvette and E-boats. Lassen torpedoed and sank the corvette and the merchant ship was badly damaged by a torpedo from MTB406. Four nights later he destroyed a 5000-ton ship with two torpedoes. Lassen was awarded a bar to his DSC for another successful action on 15 March, when a convoy of five armed lighters was shadowed for ninety minutes and all were sunk by torpedoes seven miles off [Venice](#). Lieutenant Woodhouse ¹ gained a DSC a month later in a night action in the Gulf of [Venice](#), in which five out of eight lighters were destroyed by three boats of the 28th Flotilla. Woodhouse was in command of MTB410 which sank two lighters with two torpedoes.

Lieutenant Newell, ² commanding MTB315, was awarded the DSC and Lieutenant Broad, ³ first lieutenant of MTB266, a mention in despatches for their part in a skilful and determined attack on an enemy convoy off [Bizerta](#) on 1 April 1943 when two out of three merchant ships were sunk. Newell, in company with three other MTBs on patrol in the Strait of Messina on the night of 17 July 1943, attacked an Italian cruiser making for [Taranto](#). The cruiser sank MTB316 with all hands and was narrowly missed by two torpedoes from MTB315. One hit was claimed by MTB260, but the cruiser got clear away at high speed. Both Newell and Broad, the latter then in command of MTB266, and Telegraphist Cleary ⁴ of MTB315 were subsequently mentioned in despatches for good service in the Aegean. At the time of the German invasion of [Leros](#) in November 1943 they destroyed two lighters carrying some 300 troops. Broad was killed in action on 9 March 1944. Sub-Lieutenant Ward, ⁵ commanding ML1154, and his first lieutenant, D. G. Watts, ⁶ were killed when their boat was destroyed by a mine off [Bizerta](#) in May 1943.

For more than twelve months from the end of 1943, support for the guerrillas in [Crete](#) and other islands was given by the landing of agents and arms and supplies from coastal craft. Lieutenant Logan, ⁷ in command of ML355 based at [Tobruk](#), was one of several

¹ Lieutenant A. O. Woodhouse, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Napier](#), 18 Jul 1916; barrister and solicitor.

² Lieutenant L. E. Newell, DSC, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Napier](#), 28 Mar

1917; optician.

³ Lieutenant J. N. Broad, RNZNVR, m.i.d. (2); born Dunedin, 22 Dec 1919; draughtsman; killed in action 9 Mar 1944.

⁴ Telegraphist R. D. Cleary, [RNZN](#), m.i.d.; born Otane, 12 Nov 1921; clerk, P and T Dept.

⁵ Sub-Lieutenant L. R. Ward, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 3 Jun 1918; school-teacher; killed on active service 14 May 1943.

⁶ Sub-Lieutenant D. G. Watts, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 2 Aug 1920; draughtsman; killed on active service 14 May 1943.

⁷ Lieutenant R. A. Logan, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 23 Aug 1912; printer.

New Zealanders employed in this traffic. He was awarded the DSC after making eleven trips to [Crete](#), where he landed some sixty agents and evacuated about one hundred persons, besides unloading an average of one ton of supplies each time. Logan also took part in the removal from [Crete](#) of a German general captured by a British party. Lieutenant Pearson, ¹ who carried out eight missions to [Crete](#) and other islands in the Aegean, was also awarded the DSC.

Hardly had the German evacuation of the Aegean islands and [Greece](#) begun in September 1944 when Coastal Forces flotillas were sent in to sweep the heavily mined approaches to the many harbours. Lieutenant Russell, ² commanding ML580, was awarded the DSC for his courage and good service in leading minesweeping formations on each break-through in opening up the ports in the Gulf of [Corinth](#). Lieutenant Findlay, ³ first lieutenant of M1866, who had served at [Singapore](#) in 1941 ⁴ and had taken part in sweeping the ports of [Piraeus](#) and [Salonika](#) and the approaches to the Dardanelles, was awarded a mention in despatches. Sub-Lieutenant Lamb ⁵ was killed when ML101 was blown up by a mine off [Salonika](#) in November 1944. Lieutenant Finch, ⁶ commanding ML577, was awarded a mention in despatches for meritorious service and leadership in operations in heavily mined

waters in the northern Adriatic over a period of six months. Lieutenant Bird ⁷ commanded MGB643, which with three others supported destroyers bombarding Lussin Island in the Adriatic and carried out attacks on E-boats and a bridge in a defended harbour. He, too, was awarded a mention in despatches. A like award was made in the case of Lieutenant Hart, ⁸ of HMS Antwerp, who was in charge of an armed party which landed on the island of Kithera, between [Crete](#) and [Greece](#), and by his initiative and tact quelled the activities of corruptive elements who were terrorising the loyal inhabitants.

One of the earliest combined operations in which New Zealanders took part was the highly successful raid on the German-controlled fish-oil factories in the Lofoten Islands, off the north-west coast of [Norway](#), on 4 March 1941. The raiding force, which was covered by ships of the Home Fleet, consisted of five destroyers and some 600 commando troops embarked in the fast assault ships Queen Emma and Princess Beatrix. Lieutenant-Commander George, RNZNVR, ⁹

¹ Lieutenant R. C. Pearson, DSC, RNZNVR; born Balclutha, 11 Sep 1919; bank officer.

² Lieutenant G. M. S. Russell, DSC, RNZNVR; born Dunedin, 6 Jan 1914; accountant.

³ Lieutenant D. C. Findlay, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 1 Apr 1920; clerk.

⁴ See p. 473.

⁵ Sub-Lieutenant B. E. Lamb, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 23 Jul 1923; clerk; killed on active service 29 Nov 1944.

⁶ See p. 469.

⁷ Lieutenant D. G. E. Bird, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Sydney](#), 12 Jan 1915; company manager.

⁸ Lieutenant D. S. Hart, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 16 Mar 1915; school-teacher.

⁹ Lieutenant-Commander H. J. C. George, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 1 Jan 1898; barrister and solicitor.

of [Auckland](#), as flotilla officer led a naval landing party which attacked Brettesnes. In addition to the oil factories, about 18,000 tons of enemy shipping was destroyed, 314 Norwegian volunteers were brought off, and some 200 German prisoners and twelve Norwegian 'quislings' were captured. New Zealanders, one of whom was Lieutenant Lewis King, RNZNVR, in HMS Onslow, ¹ also took part in a successful raid on Vaagso Island on the south-west coast of [Norway](#) on 27 December 1941. Fish factories, oil tanks, and other shore stations and 16,000 tons of shipping were destroyed and many Germans killed or taken prisoner. As senior flotilla officer, Lieutenant-Commander George also commanded naval landing craft in an attempted night raid on the Ardour River, near Bayonne, in April 1942 and another near Boulogne in June 1942. Subsequently, he served with the [Royal Australian Navy](#) and, as senior flotilla officer in HMAS Manoora, took part in 1943 in landing operations in [New Guinea](#). From January 1944 till the end of the war, he was in the combined operations division of the staff of Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander South-East Asia.

Among those who took part in the invasion of [Sicily](#) in July 1943 was Lieutenant Chute, ² commanding LCI(L) 128, ³ who landed his troops without loss under heavy fire. While backing off the beach his vessel was hit in the wheelhouse and set on fire, the coxswain being killed and six others wounded. Chute and his men fought the fire for some hours and saved the ship, which was towed back to [Malta](#). Chute was awarded the DSC. Lieutenant Donovan ⁴ of LCT549, and Sub-Lieutenants Ballinger ⁵ of LST319 and Holmes-Edge ⁶ of LCT445, were mentioned in despatches for good service in the landings at [Salerno](#) on 9 September.

Outstanding among the many New Zealanders in landing craft in the invasion of [Normandy](#) on 6 June 1944 was Lieutenant Glover, ⁷ who was awarded the DSC for 'exemplary courage and the utmost determination.' He was in command of LCI(S)

516. After landing part of a commando at Ouistreham and extricating his vessel from beach obstructions, he took her alongside another which was sinking and embarked nearly 200 soldiers in a craft designed to carry one hundred. Glover then returned to the beach and landed them successfully. Unbeaching again, he found a brother officer in

¹ See pp. 364 and 478.

² Lieutenant K. T. I. Chute, DSC, RNZNVR; born Barry, Wales, 16 Feb 1908; farmer.

³ Landing craft were of many types. LCI(S), Landing Craft (Small); LCI(L), Landing Craft (Large); LST, Landing Ship, Tank – a twin-screw vessel fitted with doors and a ramp in the bows; LCA(HR), Landing Craft, Assault (Hedgerow), the 'hedgerow' being a battery of mortars firing rocket bombs; LCM, Landing Craft, Mechanised.

⁴ Lieutenant L. K. Donovan, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Ngapara, 31 Oct 1914; store manager.

⁵ Lieutenant M. A. Ballinger, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Woodend, 22 Mar 1919; clerk.

⁶ Lieutenant L. S. Holmes-Edge, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Dunedin, 11 Jun 1919; clerk.

⁷ Lieutenant D. J. M. Glover, DSC, RNZNVR; born Dunedin, 9 Dec 1912; printer and publisher.

difficulties with his craft nearly awash to the bridge. Her crew was taken off a few minutes before she sank. For some days Glover worked 'indefatigably and cheerfully, despite damaged rudders and battered propellers.'

Lieutenant Cramond, ¹ who fought on shore with a Royal Navy beach commando, was awarded a mention in despatches and the French Croix de Guerre.

He led his men with 'great zeal till he was wounded.' Sub-Lieutenant Ingham,² in command of LCI(L) 110, gained the DSC for landing troops on the beach under heavy fire. His craft was hit several times and damaged by near misses and underwater obstructions. Ingham had done good work in command of LCI302 in [Sicily](#) and [Italy](#), and his LCI110 was 'one of the hardest working and best run ships in her squadron.'

After twenty-four hours in his small craft under tow, Sub-Lieutenant Gibbs,³ of LCA(HR)708 of the 590th Flotilla, reached his firing position and discharged his bombs successfully. Lieutenant Prebble⁴ was in command of LCI(L) 243, one of seven craft which landed the Black Watch and Gordon Highlanders near Courselles. His cool and skilful handling of his ship got his 203 soldiers ashore in good heart and dry. His craft lost kedge and ramps and was damaged by beach obstructions, but he got off and later made seven trips in the build-up operations. He had previously commanded LCI(L) 101 in the [Mediterranean](#), and when that craft was lost on the Calabrian coast in [Italy](#) he kept his crew together in the hills until they were picked up some weeks later. Lieutenant Buchanan⁵ was a watchkeeping officer in LCI(L) 243 on D Day, and during the subsequent build-up 'his coolness and excellent spirit under fire were a fine example to all on board and his good seamanship and resource did much to minimise damage to 243 when she was bumping among a group of wrecked vessels in the swell.' Gibbs, Prebble, and Buchanan were each mentioned in despatches.

By the end of July, eight weeks after D Day, more than 1,600,000 troops, 1,697,000 tons of supplies, and 344,000 vehicles had been carried safely across the Channel and landed on the beaches. Five of the New Zealanders engaged in this task were mentioned in despatches. They were Lieutenants Pascoe⁶ and Bourke⁷ and Sub-

¹ Lieutenant R. McK. Cramond, RNZNVR, m.i.d., Croix de Guerre; born [Brisbane](#), 27 Dec 1919; bank officer.

² Lieutenant J. F. Ingham, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Petone](#), 31 Dec 1920; cadet, P and T Dept.

³ Sub-Lieutenant G. G. G. Gibbs, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Stratford, 1 Jul 1920; draughtsman.

⁴ Lieutenant N. S. Prebble, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Marton, 11 Oct 1913; farmer.

⁵ Lieutenant H. M. Buchanan, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Invercargill](#), 27 May 1919; bank officer.

⁶ Lieutenant S. T. Pascoe, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Waihi](#), 27 Mar 1917; civil servant.

⁷ Lieutenant T. J. Bourke, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Lower Hutt](#), 22 Mar 1915; wool scourer.

Lieutenants

Seers, ¹ Sunderland, ² and Carr-Clark. ³ Up to 16 July, Pascoe, in command of LCT632, had completed eleven voyages across the Channel and three days in the ferry service from transports to the shore, his craft being mined on the beach and severely damaged. Seers, who commanded LCT760, made twenty-seven beachings in twenty-two days in June, during which he weathered a strong gale. By 3 August Bourke, who commanded LCT925, had completed fifteen and Sunderland, in command of LCT1086, fourteen voyages to the beaches, which represented nearly fifty days' sea-keeping, loading and unloading under difficult conditions. Carr-Clark, in LST214, made numerous voyages to [France](#) with troops, tanks, and stores. Sub-Lieutenant Twomey, ⁴ one of those who took part in the landings in southern [France](#) in August 1944, was awarded the DSC. He was in command of an LCM which he took within close range of enemy machine-gun nests and for two hours provided a smoke screen to cover landing craft going in to the beaches. He was under heavy fire the whole time and his craft was hit repeatedly. Many served in landing craft until the end of the war in [Europe](#) and afterwards in Eastern waters on the coasts of [Burma](#) and [Malaya](#).

Two ratings, Signalmen H. M. Lambert, of Hastings, and W. G. Mack, served eleven months in HMS Northway,⁵ one of seven large vessels known as Landing Ships, Dock. From D Day till the end of February 1945 the Northway made forty-seven voyages to the Continent and carried 3240 passengers and 1027 landing craft of various types. She then went out to the Eastern Fleet, based at Trincomalee. One rating, Electrical Artificer C. D. Turner, of [Auckland](#), spent a month preparing scuttling charges in HMS Centurion, an old battleship of the First World War, which was one of fifty-three obsolete ships sunk to form a breakwater outside the artificial harbours ('Mulberries') off the [Normandy](#) beaches. Ten New Zealand ratings⁶ lost their lives off the [Normandy](#) beaches on the night of 20 July when the destroyer [Isis](#) was sunk, either by a mine or a 'human torpedo'. The ship was at anchor at the time and her loss was not known till next morning, when twenty survivors were picked up by a minesweeper.

¹ Sub-Lieutenant D. G. Seers, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [London](#), 11 Apr 1920; student.

² Sub-Lieutenant T. M. Sunderland, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Havelock North, 6 Aug 1920; shepherd.

³ Sub-Lieutenant K. I. Carr-Clark, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 31 Jul 1922; student.

⁴ Lieutenant-Commander B. L. Twomey, DSC, [RNZN](#); born [Wellington](#), 7 Dec 1918 schoolmaster; transferred [RNZN](#), Jul 1946.

⁵ LSD Northway; length, 458 ft; breadth, 72 ft; load displacement, 7700 tons; twin-screw turbine drive; speed, 15 knots. These ships were virtually mobile floating docks and carried numbers of loaded landing craft or amphibious vehicles, embarking and unloading them by flooding tanks.

⁶ These ratings were Able Seamen C. E. Robson and A. I. Wasley, of Palmerston; Ordinary Seamen T. J. Brandon and A. K. Jordan ([Auckland](#)), M. E. Johnston (Otahuhu), G. C. C. Munro ([Wanganui](#)), T. E. Brand (Clive), D. A. Nunn ([Wellington](#)), and R. D. Dyer (Dunedin); Petty Officer Radio

A check of the sparse records available indicates that approximately two hundred New Zealanders served as volunteers in submarines during the war. Many of them were ratings – seamen, stokers, and telegraphists – but a fair number of officers commissioned under Scheme 'B' served as first lieutenants and navigators in submarines and one achieved command. They took part in many war patrols off the coast of [Norway](#), in the [Mediterranean](#), and in Eastern waters. At the time of the Japanese invasion of [Malaya](#) in December 1941, Sub-Lieutenants H. C. Robjohns, A. L. Cato, C. E. Fisher, and P. W. Smith had arrived to serve as liaison officers in Dutch submarines in the [Netherlands East Indies](#). Smith, ¹ who lost his life on 28 February 1942 when HMS Anking was sunk by the Japanese after the evacuation of [Java](#), was awarded a posthumous mention in despatches for his gallantry in swimming away, badly wounded, from a crowded raft to make room for another man. Robjohns, who was also in the Anking, was one of several New Zealanders picked up by a small Dutch ship. He subsequently served in the Dutch submarine O-19 and in British submarines. Cato ² was killed in HMS Jupiter in the Battle of the [Java](#) Sea.

Able Seaman Spencer, ³ of [Nelson](#), lost his life in the Tetrarch which, after a successful commission in the [Mediterranean](#), disappeared with all hands between [Malta](#) and Gibraltar while on passage to England. Leading Seaman Thurlow, RNZNVR, who served for twelve months in the [Mediterranean](#) as a gunlayer in the Otus, Una, and Unison, was one of the survivors of the submarine depot ship Medway when she was torpedoed and sunk by a U-boat between [Alexandria](#) and [Haifa](#) on 30 June 1942. Able Seaman Speed, ⁴ of [Wellington](#), who saw some exciting patrols in the [Mediterranean](#), was accidentally killed in October 1942 while serving in the Parthian, which was lost off [Sicily](#) in August 1943.

Strange adventures were shared by Stoker Petty Officers Bruce Bennett ⁵ and P. E. Le Gros, ⁶ who served together in submarines for more than four years. Much of that time was spent in the [Mediterranean](#) in the Torbay, which they joined in March 1941 at the start of her first commission. During the next two years, under Commander A. C. Miers, VC, DSO, RN, the Torbay sank more than

¹ Sub-Lieutenant P. W. Smith, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Wairoa, 5 Dec

1915; dairy factory worker; killed on active service 28 Feb 1942.

² Lieutenant A. L. Cato, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 23 Nov 1915; clerk; killed in action 27 Feb 1942.

³ Able Seaman K. H. Spencer, [RNZN](#); born [Wellington](#), 10 Oct 1919; joined [RNZN](#) Oct 1935; killed on active service 2 Nov 1941.

⁴ Able Seaman F. A. Speed, RNZNVR; born Reefton, 13 Mar 1921; electrical fitter; accidentally killed 13 Oct 1942.

⁵ Stoker Petty Officer B. E. Bennett, DSM, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 3 Jun 1921; plumber.

⁶ Stoker Petty Officer Mechanic P. E. Le Gros, [RNZN](#), m.i.d.; born Taumarunui, 26 Apr 1918; fireman, NZ Railways.

twenty enemy supply ships and small craft. At the end of one patrol in the [Aegean Sea](#) in August 1941 she took off from [Crete](#) 130 British soldiers, including 50 New Zealanders and Australians, and landed them at [Alexandria](#). Three months later the [Torbay](#), in company with the [Talisman](#), landed a commando of forty on the Libyan coast near Apollonia to attack Rommel's headquarters, an affair in which Lieutenant-Colonel G. C. T. Keyes, son of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Keyes, lost his life and won a posthumous Victoria Cross. On 4 March 1942 the [Torbay](#) had completed a 26-day patrol in the Ionian Sea when four large troopships with a powerful escort were sighted. Being unable to get in an attack, the [Torbay](#) trailed them into Corfu harbour at dusk but found they had gone on. She surfaced in the moonlight to charge her batteries and at daybreak torpedoed and sank two supply ships of 5000 and 8000 tons. She was hunted by a destroyer (at which she fired torpedoes) and some forty depth-charges were dropped, but, after seventeen hours in the harbour, the [Torbay](#) made her escape through the long narrow channel. Commander Miers was awarded the Victoria Cross, and twenty-three awards were made to members of the crew of the [Torbay](#), Bennett receiving the DSM and Le Gros a mention in despatches. Both New Zealanders subsequently served in the [Trespasser](#), [Templar](#),

and Stoic and, in 1945, the surrendered German U-776.

To Lieutenant-Commander Thode,¹ of [Auckland](#), fell the distinction of being the only RNZNVR officer to attain command of a submarine during the war. In October 1941 he was appointed navigating officer in the *Proteus*, in which he served for six months under Lieutenant-Commander P. S. Francis, DSO, RN, who handled her with 'dash and distinction'. On six patrols in the [Aegean Sea](#), off the west coast of [Greece](#) and in the Gulf of [Taranto](#), the *Proteus* sank three troopships, a tanker, and a supply ship. On her fifth patrol off the coast of [Greece](#), the *Proteus* attacked an Italian destroyer which she had mistaken for a submarine. When the destroyer attempted to ram her, the *Proteus* turned towards the enemy and the two ships collided head-on. A large hole was torn in the destroyer's bow, and the port forward hydroplane of the *Proteus* was sheared off and other gear distorted and she was forced to return to [Alexandria](#). For his part in these patrols Thode was awarded a mention in despatches.

After serving in several submarines (one of which, H-33, he commanded for three months) employed in training officers and men for anti-submarine duties in the Battle of the [Atlantic](#), Thode

¹ Lieutenant-Commander C. P. Thode, RNZNVR, m.i.d. (2); born [Auckland](#), 11 Mar 1911; company director.

did two war patrols in the *Ultor* and *Tuna* off the North Cape of [Norway](#) covering the passage of Russian convoys. In July 1944 he was appointed to command the *Scythian*, then building at Greenock. After trials and working up, he took the *Scythian* out to Trincomalee, whence, between February 1945 and the end of the war, he carried out a number of patrols in the Strait of Malacca. Targets were scarce, but on her first three patrols the *Scythian* sank twelve vessels by gunfire, for which service Thode was again mentioned in despatches. He had completed four years as a submariner when he paid off the *Scythian* in England in October 1945.

At the end of July 1943 there were only four submarines, three Dutch and one British, on the East Indies Station, but seven released from duty in the [Mediterranean](#) were on their way there. The Admiralty then decided that all new

submarines and all except a few of those in service should join the Eastern Fleet. Thus it came about that many New Zealand submariners, officers and ratings, found themselves in Eastern waters during 1944–45. From November 1944 to 20 August 1945, the thirty-one British submarines operating from [Ceylon](#) and [Fremantle](#) made fifty-four war patrols of an average duration of thirty-three days. In the first months of 1944 the Tally Ho sank the Japanese cruiser Kuma and two U-boats. During the last nine months of the war British submarines sank eleven Japanese warships and 112 merchant vessels and laid a number of minefields.

The Tantalus, one of the submarines based at [Fremantle](#), carried out six patrols between April 1944 and February 1945, four of them in shallow water in Malacca Strait, well watched by Japanese anti-submarine vessels and aircraft. Two patrols of 52 and 55 days by the Tantalus east of [Singapore](#) were by far the longest by a British submarine up to that time. Targets were hard to find, but the Tantalus sank two large merchant ships and a number of coasters and small craft. Leading Stoker Berwick, [RNZN](#),¹ who served in the Tantalus on these and other patrols, was awarded a mention in despatches. A like award was made to Petty Officer Wickman² for his devotion to duty in the Sea Rover, in which as torpedo gunner's mate he 'always kept the torpedoes in an efficient state in readiness for instant action.' From February 1944 to April 1945 the Sea Rover made five war patrols in the Malacca Strait- [Burma](#) coast area and the [Java](#) and Banda Seas, during which she destroyed a goods train by gunfire, sank six merchant ships and several junks, and carried out a minelay and an air-sea rescue mission. One patrol of thirty-seven

¹ Mechanician R. A. Berwick, [RNZN](#), m.i.d.; born Hobart, 19 Feb 1920.

² Commissioned Gunner T. H. Wickman, [RNZN](#), m.i.d.; born [Napier](#), 20 Oct 1917; joined [RNZN](#) as boy, Sep 1933; served in [Achilles](#) at [River Plate](#), Dec 1939.

days was the longest period at sea on war duty by an S-class submarine up to that time.

A few New Zealanders saw service in midget submarines, which were known officially as X craft. One was Lieutenant Westmacott, DSC, RN,¹ who in September

1944 was detailed to destroy a large floating dock at Bergen, in [Norway](#). He was then in command of X24, with Sub-Lieutenant Derek Purdy, RNZNVR,² as his first lieutenant, a diver and an engine-room artificer being the other members of the crew. X24 was towed from the Shetland Islands to Norwegian waters by the submarine Sceptre. Very bad weather was experienced on passage and Purdy was swept overboard and drowned. After slipping the tow and passing through some 30 miles of narrow fjords, X24 arrived at Bergen on 11 September. Two delay-action charges were placed under the dock and X24 got away unmolested to rejoin the Sceptre that night. The dock was badly damaged and broken in two by the explosions.

At the end of July 1945 the midget XE5 commanded by Westmacott made a gallant attempt to cut the [Hong Kong–Singapore](#) cable. The craft spent three and a half days in the strongly defended waters of [Hong Kong](#) and made four passages between the harbour and the open sea. Westmacott was awarded a bar to his DSC – he had received the DSO for his Bergen exploit. In the meantime XE4, commanded by Lieutenant M. H. Shean, RANVR, had succeeded in cutting the [Hong Kong–Saigon](#) and [Singapore–Saigon](#) cables, one foot of each being brought back. Shean was awarded a bar to the DSO he had gained for his attack in X24 on the Bergen dock in April 1944.

A New Zealand Reserve officer who saw more than twelve months' service in midget submarines was Lieutenant W. J. Lanyon Smith, RNZNVR.³ He was first lieutenant of XE3 which, under the command of Lieutenant Ian Fraser, RNR, made a successful attack on the Japanese heavy cruiser Takao in Johore Strait, [Singapore](#), on 31 July 1945. Finding the ship aground or nearly so, the XE3 after forty minutes managed to place herself under the cruiser amidships, where she was jammed for a quarter of an hour. The diver, Leading Seaman J. J. Magennis, RN, had to squeeze through the hatch, which could not be fully opened, and after scraping the plates clear of barnacles secured the limpet mines in pairs under the ship's keel. After the withdrawal, Magennis again left the midget to clear a limpet carrier that had failed to release.

¹ Lieutenant-Commander H. P. Westmacott, DSO, DSC and bar, RN; born [Christchurch](#), 31 Mar 1921; entered RN 1934.

² Sub-Lieutenant D. N. Purdy, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 26 Dec 1923; grocer; drowned on active service 9 Sep 1944.

³ Lieutenant-Commander W. J. L. Smith, DSO, [RNZN](#); born Gore, 1 Dec 1922; school-teacher transferred to [RNZN](#), Jun 1946.

Both Lieutenant Fraser and Seaman Magennis were awarded the Victoria Cross for their gallantry. Lieutenant Smith was awarded the DSO for 'skill in handling and controlling his craft on her 80 mile trip. The mechanical efficiency of the craft was greatly due to his organisation and personal supervision.' The midget XE1 which was to have attacked another cruiser nearby was delayed by enemy small craft and mined the Takao under the same difficult conditions. A New Zealander, Captain W. R. Fell, OBE, RN, commanding the 14th Submarine Flotilla in HMS Bonaventure, was in charge of these midget operations.

Other New Zealand-born officers of the Royal Navy in the submarine arm were Lieutenant P. R. H. Allen, a son of Sir Stephen Allen, of [Morrinsville](#), who died when the Upholder, commanded by Lieutenant-Commander M. D. Wanklyn, VC, DSO, DSC, was lost in the [Mediterranean](#) in April 1942, and Lieutenant A. O. Baker, who died in the Turbulent, commanded by Commander J. W. Linton, DSO, DSC, and sunk off [Sardinia](#) in March 1943. Lieutenant-Commander L. E. Herrick, DSC, RN, of Hastings, served in submarines throughout the war. He gained his DSC in the Tigris, 'one of the most redoubtable submarines' that operated in the Bay of Biscay in 1940–41. He subsequently served in P34 of the 5th Flotilla and the Uproar of the 10th Flotilla, based at [Malta](#). Two brothers from [Timaru](#), Lieutenant A. G. Tait, RN, and Lieutenant J. F. Tait, RNZNVR, also saw much service in submarines. The latter had previously served in the cruiser Arethusa and the destroyer Ithuriel escorting convoys to [Malta](#). During the passage of the August 1942 convoy the Ithuriel rammed and sank an Italian submarine.

The prospect of active service in the air as well as at sea drew more than a thousand young New Zealanders into the air branch of the RNZNVR, of whom 738 achieved commissioned rank before the war ended. New Zealand naval airmen numbered more than 10 per cent of the officers of the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal

Navy. In the big carriers of the [British Pacific Fleet](#) their proportion was much higher. They served with distinction in every one of the fifty-odd aircraft-carriers commissioned during the war and in all the Royal Navy air stations, including those in the [West Indies](#). Besides the airmen, many New Zealand ratings served in the carriers as seamen, telegraphists, and radar operators and mechanics.

In proportion to their total strength, the losses of New Zealanders in the Fleet Air Arm were heavy: 152 were killed and many wounded. Their awards for gallantry and outstanding performance included one DSO, thirty-nine Distinguished Service Crosses and two bars, one DFC, three MBEs, forty-eight mentions in despatches, and two letters of commendation. But their awards and decorations measured but a small part of their achievement and standing in the service. That was summed up by Admiral Sir Philip Vian, who commanded the aircraft-carriers of the [British Pacific Fleet](#), when he informed the New Zealand Naval Board: 'I consider the pilots from New Zealand second to none and to have ever excelled in the offensive spirit.'

First of the many New Zealanders who served in HMS [Victorious](#) was Lieutenant(A) Napper, DSC. ¹ He joined her as an air engineer officer in February 1941, when she commissioned at her builders' yard on the Tyne, and was with her for an eventful two years and eight months. The [Victorious](#) had barely completed her trials in May 1941 when she took part in the chase of the German battleship Bismarck, which was hit by a torpedo from one of the carrier's aircraft. There were New Zealanders in other ships engaged in the hunt. One was Paymaster Sub-Lieutenant Stanley Watkinson, [RNZN](#), ² who died when HMS Hood was sunk in action with the Bismarck, with the loss of all but three of her ship's company. Some New Zealand 'Scheme B' ratings were serving in the Sikh and other destroyers which shadowed and attacked the Bismarck the night before she was sunk. At the beginning of September 1941 the [Victorious](#) and other ships of the Home Fleet covered the passage of the first convoy taking supplies to North Russia. After service at the Admiralty and in [Melbourne](#), Napper was appointed to HMS Pioneer in 1945 as air engineer on the staff of the Rear-Admiral, Fleet Train, [British Pacific Fleet](#).

Another of the first New Zealanders commissioned in the Fleet Air Arm was Lieutenant (A) Holden, ³ who left New Zealand in 1939. He joined HMS Repulse in August 1941 as pilot of a Walrus amphibian (700 Squadron) and was one of the 796 survivors of her company of 1309 when she and the Prince of Wales were sunk by

Japanese aircraft off [Malaya](#) on 10 December 1941. After that, Holden spent thirteen months in the cruiser Enterprise on convoy escort duty in the [Indian Ocean](#). Sub-Lieutenant (A) Elwood,⁴ of 803 Squadron, HMS Formidable, one of the first New Zealanders to serve in that carrier, was lost on 1 August 1942 in the course of a sweep by the Eastern Fleet in the Bay of Bengal.

The first escort aircraft-carrier was HMS Audacity, formerly the German merchant ship Hannover, of 5500 tons, which had been

¹ Lieutenant-Commander (A) A. B. Napper, DSC, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Melbourne](#), 8 Sep 1913; engineer.

² Paymaster Sub-Lieutenant S. Watkinson, [RNZN](#); born Barrow-in-Furness, England, 9 Oct 1919; clerk; killed in action, 24 May 1941.

³ Lieutenant-Commander (A) G. M. Holden, [RNZN](#); born [Wellington](#), 28 Nov 1920; student; transferred to [RNZN](#), Jul 1946.

⁴ Sub-Lieutenant (A) D. N. Elwood, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 3 Sep 1917; commercial traveller; killed on air operations 1 Aug 1942.

captured by HMS [Dunedin](#) in 1940. Fitted with a flight deck and carrying six fighters, the Audacity made her first convoy voyage in September 1941. She was torpedoed and sunk three months later after taking an active part in the destruction of four U-boats. The only New Zealanders in the Audacity were Telegraphists J. W. Rutledge, of [Christchurch](#), and J. G. Stapleton, of [Invercargill](#), both of whom were rescued after two hours in the sea. But before long New Zealand pilots joined escort carriers in ever-increasing numbers as new ships were commissioned.

The second of the type, HMS Avenger, was the first to sail with a Russian convoy, that of September 1942. In ten days, often in fog and snow squalls, her fighters shot down eight German aircraft and damaged fourteen, and thrice attacked U-boats. Two of the New Zealand pilots serving in the Avenger at that time, Lieutenants (A) Cowper¹ and Latter,² lost their lives when the ship was sunk during the invasion of North Africa in November 1942.

During the first half of 1942 New Zealand airmen in the [Victorious](#) took part in a sweep down the coast of [Norway](#), an attack on the battleship Tirpitz, and the covering of two convoys to [Russia](#). Others in the carriers Eagle and Argus covered the flying of reinforcements of Spitfires and the passage of a supply convoy to [Malta](#) in June, when four out of six ships were sunk. A number of New Zealanders were serving in squadrons of the Fleet Air Arm which, under continuous enemy attack, shared with the Royal Air Force in the defence of [Malta](#), as well as making frequent strikes at enemy shipping and airfields. Sub-Lieutenant (A) Cramp, ³ of 830 Squadron, was awarded the DSC for 'gallantry in circumstances of extreme hazard.' At a critical stage in the passage of the June 1942 convoy, he led from [Malta](#) a flight of four Albacores in a strike on an Italian force of two cruisers and five destroyers and hit one of the cruisers. Sub-Lieutenant (A) Morrison ⁴ of 828 Squadron gained a DSC for 'great bravery, skill and determination' in torpedo and dive-bombing attacks on enemy shipping. He had taken part in more than twenty operations from [Malta](#) up to June 1942.

Two other New Zealand pilots who served in 828 Squadron at [Malta](#) were awarded the DSC for successful attacks on enemy ships and other targets. They were Sub-Lieutenants (A) White, ⁵ of

¹ Lieutenant (A) V. H. G. Cowper, RNZNVR; born [Havelock](#), 15 Sep 1917; store manager; killed on active service 15 Nov 1942.

² Lieutenant (A) M. S. Latter, RNZNVR; born [Blenheim](#), 11 Oct 1917; shepherd; killed on active service 15 Nov 1942.

³ Lieutenant (A) J. A. Cramp, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Hamilton](#), 31 May 1922; salesman.

⁴ Lieutenant (A) J. C. Morrison, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 10 Jan 1918; clerk; killed 15 Dec 1943 on operation over [Rabaul](#) while serving on loan with [RNZAF](#).

⁵ Lieutenant (A) C. T. White, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 17 Jun

1920; motor engineer.

Cheviot, and Pratt,¹ of [Christchurch](#), who arrived at [Malta](#) in August 1942. During his six months' service at Hal Far airfield, White made twenty-four operational sorties in Hurricanes and Albacores. On 4 September 1942 he torpedoed and wrecked a 6000-ton ship off Cape Spartivento, [Sardinia](#), and on 10 November he and Pratt took part in a torpedo attack on three Italian cruisers and five destroyers, each hitting and damaging one of the cruisers. Later in that month White torpedoed and sank an escort destroyer, a 4000-ton ammunition ship, which blew up in a terrific explosion off Pantellaria, and a 3000-ton supply ship west of [Sicily](#). Both White and Pratt took part in a number of strikes against [Sousse](#) and [Sfax](#) in [Tunisia](#), as well as against enemy airfields in [Sicily](#) and [Sardinia](#). Pratt was killed during an operational flight on 19 January 1943. Sub-Lieutenants (A) C. D. Jacobsen of 830 Squadron, L. P. McManus of 828 Squadron, and O. G. Richards² took part in many strikes from [Malta](#). Richards was killed in March 1943 during a strike by four Albacores on a convoy of four ships.

New Zealand was also well represented in the Fleet Air Arm squadrons which patrolled and fought over the [Western Desert](#) and the [Mediterranean](#) during the North African campaigns. The squadrons were attached to HMS Grebe, the naval air station at Dekheila, near [Alexandria](#). Sub-Lieutenant (A) Brunt³ of 826 Squadron, a 'most determined fighter', was awarded the DSC for his part in a close-range attack under heavy fire on an enemy convoy in July 1942: his aircraft was thrice damaged by flak that month. Lieutenant (A) P. Fell, RNVR, who served with 806 Squadron in the [Western Desert](#), was one of the first New Zealanders to join the Fleet Air Arm in 1939 and one of the first pilots to fly fighters from [Takoradi](#), on the Gold Coast, across [Africa](#) to Egypt. He was a 'founder' member of 1839 Squadron in HMS Indomitable. His brother served as an observer in the Fleet Air Arm.

New Zealand airmen and a number of ratings serving in the fleet carriers Indomitable and Illustrious took part in Operation IRONCLAD, the capture of Diego Suarez, in Madagascar, in May 1942. Sub-Lieutenant (A) Meiklejohn,⁴ an observer in 829 Squadron in the Illustrious, was killed with two others when their aircraft was shot down while bombing the French batteries at Antsirane. They were buried with full military honours by the French prior to the

¹ Sub-Lieutenant (A) E. F. Pratt, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 4 Aug 1918; clerk, NZ Railways; killed on air operations 19 Jan 1943.

² Sub-Lieutenant (A) O. G. Richards, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 12 Jun 1920; journalist; killed on air operations 14 Mar 1943.

³ Lieutenant (A) A. Brunt, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Christchurch](#), 14 Aug 1918; commercial traveller.

⁴ Sub-Lieutenant (A) A. R. Meiklejohn, RNZNVR; born [Helensville](#), 5 May 1917; clerk; killed on air operations 6 May 1942.

capture of the town. Sub-Lieutenant (A) Alexander, ¹ also of 829 Squadron, was awarded the DSC for 'bravery and enterprise' in air attacks, and Sub-Lieutenant (A) Montgomery ² was mentioned in despatches for 'outstanding leadership, zeal and devotion to duty' as armament officer of Fleet Air Arm squadrons in later operations in Madagascar. Five New Zealand ratings were serving in the aircraft-carrier [Hermes](#) when she and her escorting destroyer [Vampire](#) were sunk by Japanese aircraft off [Ceylon](#) on 9-April 1942. One of them, Stoker Peter, ³ was among the 300 who lost their lives.

The Malta convoy of August 1942, in which nine out of fourteen merchant ships and four escort vessels were lost, was covered as far as the narrows of Skerki Channel by the aircraft of three carriers. The Eagle was sunk soon after the Furious had flown off thirty-six Spitfires for [Malta](#), but the New Zealanders in her were among the 900-odd officers and men saved. The Indomitable was hit three times and her fighters had to fly-on to the [Victorious](#), whose aircraft fought more than twice their own number. The sixty fighters available after the loss of the Eagle destroyed thirty-nine enemy aircraft at a cost of thirteen. Lieutenant (A) Pennington ⁴ and Sub-Lieutenant (A) Richardson, ⁵ both of 809 Squadron in the [Victorious](#), were awarded the DSC and Sub-Lieutenant (A) Long, ⁶ of 885 Squadron, was mentioned in despatches. Pennington showed 'great dash and initiative in combats with superior numbers of enemy fighters and bombers. Though his aircraft was hit early in the action and the air gunner wounded, he carried out further patrols and helped to

account for four enemy aircraft.' Richardson's presence of mind, coolness, and accurate direction as observer enabled his pilot to escape from many tight corners. This was Long's first combat operation and, though his aircraft was damaged, he partly disabled two enemy bombers. Lieutenant A. B. Napper, air engineer in the [Victorious](#), who had previously been mentioned in despatches, was awarded the DSC for his 'tireless devotion to duty in repairing damaged and unserviceable aircraft, besides assisting in the operation of aircraft on deck.' Chief Petty Officer Walker, [RNZN](#),⁷ who was serving in the *Indomitable*, was awarded the DSM for 'bravery

¹ Lieutenant (A) H. H. Alexander, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Lower Hutt](#), 20 Aug 1918 draughtsman.

² Lieutenant-Commander (A) E. F. L. Montgomery, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Te Puke](#), 2 Jan 1917; clerk.

³ Stoker W. J. Peter, [RNZN](#); born Kaitangata, 19 Dec 1920; orchardist; killed on active service 9 Apr 1942.

⁴ Lieutenant-Commander (A) F. A. J. Pennington, DSC and bar, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 17 Aug 1916; salesman; killed in aircraft accident off [Ceylon](#), 24 Apr 1944.

⁵ Lieutenant (A) R. M. Richardson, DSC, RNZNVR; born Johnsonville, 25 Mar 1922; clerk.

⁶ Lieutenant (A) A. S. Long, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Dunedin, 25 Apr 1918; boat-builder.

⁷ Boatswain [F. E. Walker](#), DSM, [RNZN](#), m.i.d.; born [London](#), 7 May 1901; joined RN Jan 1916.

and dauntless resolution' when the ship was bombed and aircraft caught fire in the hangar. He had previously served in the cruiser [Naiad](#) during the operations in Norwegian waters in 1940 and the battle for [Crete](#) in May 1941, as well as with 806

Squadron, Naval Air Arm, in the [Western Desert](#).

After taking part with other carriers in the invasion of North Africa in November 1942, the [Victorious](#) went out to [Pearl Harbour](#) early in 1943 for duty with the United States Pacific Fleet. For most of her six months in the South Pacific she was in company with the USS *Saratoga*, and the British and American squadrons operated from each other's carriers. In one operation in which the New Zealand airmen took part, most of the torpedo and dive-bombers were in the *Saratoga* and most of the fighters in the [Victorious](#). In the two years ended 15 May 1943, the [Victorious](#) steamed nearly 118,000 miles and her aircraft made 5505 deck landings and completed 7715 flying hours. She returned to England at the end of September 1943.

From the end of 1942 onward many New Zealanders served in the escort carriers with [Atlantic](#) and Russian convoys. The convoys were guarded by more numerous and formidable surface escorts than ever before and support groups of carriers, corvettes, and frigates were able to seek out and destroy the U-boats wherever they were found – 237 of them were sunk in 1943 – and merchant ship losses decreased by 59 per cent compared with those for 1942.

Additional air protection for convoys was given by the so-called merchant aircraft-carriers, or MAC ships, nineteen of which went into service during 1942–43. They differed from the catapult-armed merchant vessels (CAM ships) which launched, but could not recover, defensive fighter aircraft. The MAC ships were carriers of grain in bulk or oil tankers fitted with flight decks, the former having small hangars to house their four *Swordfish* aircraft. The grain ships were uniformly named *Empire Macdermott*, *Empire Macandrew*, and so on. The MAC ships retained their mercantile status and carried cargoes in the convoys they helped to defend. In addition to their Merchant Navy crews, they carried ten Fleet Air Arm officers, a naval surgeon, and twenty naval ratings to service the aircraft. Among the New Zealanders who served in MAC ships were Lieutenants (A) A. H. Adams, R. C. Ahearn, T. R. Chadwick, J. B. Chrisp, R. E. Cocklin, A. L. Foubister, P. T. Gifford, O. C. Johnston, J. H. McK. Lawrence, J. L. Nicholls, C. E. Plummer, E. A. Pratt, A. W. Robertson, A. W. Shore, and W. D. Squire. Petty Officer (A) Brian Stacey,¹ of 836 Squadron, was awarded a

¹ Petty Officer (A) B. Stacey, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 17 Dec 1923; clerk.

mention in despatches for 'skill, determination and devotion to duty over a long period' in MAC ships.

While on convoy duty in the North [Atlantic](#), aircraft of the escort carriers *Biter*, *Archer*, *Vindex*, *Campania*, and *Nairana* took part in the destruction of six or seven U-boats. In February 1944 two New Zealand pilots in the *Biter*, Lieutenants (A) Erikson ¹ and Dimes, ² took off in heavy weather and made a skilful attack on a large four-engined bomber which was shot down in flames by the former. Both pilots landed on their carrier under difficult conditions. Erikson was awarded the DSC and Dimes a mention in despatches. Lieutenant (A) Martin, ³ second in command of 896 Squadron in the *Pursuer*, and Sub-Lieutenant (A) A. R. Burgham, ⁴ senior pilot of 835 Squadron in the *Nairana*, were also mentioned in despatches for shooting down German bombers. Leading Airman Ferguson, ⁵ air gunner in a *Swordfish* of the *Nairana*, was killed with his pilot when their aircraft crashed while landing on in March 1944.

New Zealanders who served in naval air stations on the coasts of the [United Kingdom](#) took an active part in anti-submarine patrols and, particularly on the East Coast and in the [English Channel](#), in the constant offensive against German E-boats. Lieutenant (A) Fisher, ⁶ senior officer of 841 Squadron based at [Dover](#), was awarded the DSC in November 1943 for skill and determination in attacks on E-boats, of which he had sunk three and damaged at least six others.

Of the many New Zealanders with the naval forces at the Allied landings at [Salerno](#) in [Italy](#) in September 1943, more than sixty were Fleet Air Arm pilots in the seven aircraft-carriers engaged. As the landings were made beyond effective fighter range from the nearest Allied airfields, air cover over the beaches was provided by a force commanded by Rear-Admiral Vian, consisting of the carriers *Unicorn*, *Hunter*, *Attacker*, *Stalker*, and *Battler*, escorted by the cruisers *Euryalus*, *Scylla*, and *Charybdis*, and ten destroyers. This force was itself covered by fighters from the *Formidable* and *Illustrious*. Owing to delays in making captured airfields operational, Admiral Vian's carriers had to give cover for three and a half days instead of the twenty-four hours originally planned.

Ten air combats, of which seven were fought by fighters from

¹ Lieutenant (A) E. S. Erikson, DSC, RNZNVR; born Munsala, [Finland](#), 10 Mar 1918; electroplater.

² Lieutenant (A) W. C. Dimes, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 5 Feb 1918; draughtsman.

³ Lieutenant (A) A. C. Martin, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Te Awamutu](#), 8 Jul 1916; clerk.

⁴ See p. 480.

⁵ Leading Airman W. G. Ferguson, [RNZN](#); born New Brighton, 26 Apr 1917; civil servant; killed on air operations 4 Mar 1944.

⁶ Lieutenant (A) R. J. Fisher, DSC, RNZNVR; born Te Karaka, [Gisborne](#), 15 Jun 1917; school-teacher.

the Unicorn, resulted in two enemy aircraft being destroyed and four damaged. No British fighter was lost in combat, but ten crashed. A New Zealand pilot from the Stalker, Sub-Lieutenant (A) Donald Cameron, ¹ made a forced landing behind the German lines and was captured. He escaped five days later and made his way on foot to [Naples](#), where he arrived after the capture of that city. He was awarded a mention in despatches. Sub-Lieutenant (A) Heath, ² 'a most efficient and capable section leader' in the Battler, who, 'apart from his squadron leader carried out more sorties during the operation than any other pilot in the squadron', was also mentioned in despatches.

Lieutenant-Commander (A) F. A. J. Pennington, formerly of the [Victorious](#), who was in command of 834 Squadron in the Hunter, gained a bar to his DSC for his 'outstanding leadership' in sorties from the ship and later from a captured airfield. The six pilots of his squadron completed fifty-one sorties without damage to their aircraft. Pennington subsequently served in the Hunter in the [Indian Ocean](#) and was

killed in an aircraft accident near Colombo in April 1944. Lieutenant (A) Bisman,³ of [Invercargill](#), who was in Pennington's squadron at that time, was accidentally killed two months later.

In February 1944 the first of a long series of strikes on German shipping in the leads through the numberless islands off the coast of [Norway](#) was made by aircraft from the Furious, which was covered by the battleships Anson and Richelieu (French), two cruisers, and seven destroyers. Lieutenant (A) Durrant,⁴ one of nine or ten New Zealanders who took part in this operation, was awarded the DSC for skill and determination in attacks by his squadron on superior numbers of enemy aircraft, one of which he shot down.

At that time there were indications that the German battleship Tirpitz, lying in an arm of Alten Fjord where she had been damaged by midget submarines in September 1943, had been sufficiently repaired to go to sea. Accordingly, an attack on her by carrier-borne aircraft (Operation TUNGSTEN), planned to coincide with the passage of a Russian convoy, was carried out on 3 April 1944. The strongly escorted carrier forces included the Victorious, Furious, Emperor, Searcher, Fencer, and Pursuer, in whose aircrews there were about sixty New Zealanders, seven of whom flew in the Barracuda bombers of 827 and 830 Squadrons. The attack was made in two strikes and the enemy was caught napping. Eight

¹ See p. 401.

² Sub-Lieutenant (A) M. L. Heath, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Ngatimoti, Nelson](#), 7 Sep 1916; tobacco farmer.

³ Sub-Lieutenant (A) R. T. Bisman, RNZNVR; born [Invercargill](#), 20 Feb 1920; salesman; killed in aircraft accident 29 Jun 1944.

⁴ Lieutenant (A) R. W. Durrant, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Feilding](#), 5 Oct 1919; clerk.

certain and five probable hits, mostly by 1600-pound armour-piercing bombs, were made on the Tirpitz, which was burning fiercely when the last bombers left her.

Five aircraft were lost with nine officers and men. Mr Churchill next day congratulated the pilots and aircrews on 'this most brilliant feat of arms.' The First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, also sent his congratulations. Sub-Lieutenant (A) Herrold, ¹ senior pilot of 827 Squadron, HMS Furious, who piloted one of the bombers, and Lieutenant (A) Harrison, ² leader of a fighter squadron from the Searcher, were awarded the DSC.

Three weeks later the same carrier force, in which the Striker had replaced the Fencer, struck at a convoy of five German merchant ships and five escort vessels off Bodo, sinking two of the former and damaging the others and one of the escorts. One torpedo-bomber, piloted by Sub-Lieutenant (A) Herrold, and four fighters were lost. Two aircraft from the [Victorious](#), one piloted by Sub-Lieutenant (A) Farrer ³ of 831 Squadron and the other navigated by Sub-Lieutenant (A) Ryan, ⁴ an observer of 829 Squadron, found their way in extremely bad weather into Bodo harbour and successfully bombed two merchant ships. Farrer's aircraft was badly damaged by flak but he got back to his ship. He had previously served in 826 Squadron in the [Western Desert](#) and was accidentally killed while on a course in England in August 1945. Later in the day six Corsairs from the [Victorious](#) carried out a reconnaissance over the Narvik area and two of them set fire to a tanker in Vaags Fjord. For their part in these operations and in the attack on the Tirpitz, Lieutenant (A) Gledhill ⁵ and Sub-Lieutenant Farrer of the [Victorious](#) and Lieutenant (A) Armitage, ⁶ senior observer of 830 Squadron in the Furious, were awarded the DSC; Lieutenant (A) Emerson, ⁷ senior pilot of 827 Squadron, Sub-Lieutenant L. J. Ryan of the [Victorious](#), and Sub-Lieutenant (A) Perrett ⁸ of the Pursuer were mentioned in despatches.

A successful strike on two German convoys escorted by flak ships near Kristiansund was made on 6 May when aircraft from the Furious and Searcher sank three ships, damaged one of the escorts,

¹ Sub-Lieutenant (A) J. D. Herrold, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Waiuku](#), 26 Feb 1922; student; killed on air operations 26 Apr 1944.

² Lieutenant (A) R. J. Harrison, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Nelson](#), 7 May 1917; school-teacher.

³ Lieutenant (A) M. C. Farrer, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Hamilton](#), 4 Jun 1922; student; killed in aircraft accident 27 Aug 1945.

⁴ Sub-Lieutenant (A) L. J. Ryan, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Te Aroha](#), 21 Feb 1921; clerk.

⁵ Lieutenant (A) J. A. Gledhill, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 11 Nov 1921; draughtsman.

⁶ Lieutenant (A) J. E. Armitage, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Napier](#), 31 May 1918; salesman.

⁷ Lieutenant (A) H. R. Emerson, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 10 Feb 1917; salesman.

⁸ Lieutenant-Commander (A) N. Perrett, RNZNVR, m.i.d. (2); born [Palmerston North](#), 6 Mar 1920; factory manager; transferred to RN, Sep 1946.

and shot down two enemy fighters. Sub-Lieutenants (A) Edney ¹ and St. George ² were mentioned in despatches. After damaging three ships in a convoy in the same area two days later, aircraft from the Searcher and Emperor bombed a fish-oil factory and storage tanks near Aalesund. Five German aircraft were shot down. A posthumous mention in despatches was awarded to Sub-Lieutenant (A) Cranwell ³ of the Emperor, who was drowned after baling out from his damaged aircraft. Lieutenant (A) Hill, ⁴ flight deck officer in the Emperor, was awarded the MBE and Sub-Lieutenant (A) Hoare, ⁵ a fighter pilot in that ship, gained a DSC in a similar operation in company with the Striker the following week. Sub-Lieutenants (A) Rivett ⁶ and Rawstron ⁷ of the [Victorious](#) and Rowe ⁸ of the Furious, who took part in a number of operations in Norwegian waters, were mentioned in despatches.

The New Zealanders in the Indefatigable, Formidable, and Furious, as well as others in the escorting cruisers and destroyers, took part in a second attack on the Tirpitz on 17 July 1944. Because of a dense smoke screen which filled the fjord up to 800 feet, bombing was 'blind' through the smoke where the heaviest flak indicated

the position of the ship. In the last week of August aircraft from the same carriers made four attacks on the Tirpitz, while others from the Trumpeter and Nabob in the supporting force carried out diversionary sweeps. Four certain and four probable hits and two near misses on the battleship were reported, a U-boat and nineteen ships were damaged, seven enemy aircraft destroyed, and much damage was done to airfields and shore stations. Eight aircraft were lost in these attacks, in which the New Zealanders of the several carriers played a notable part.

The Commander-in-Chief Home Fleet strongly recommended the 'highest posthumous award' in the case of Lieutenant-Commander (A) Archibald Richardson,⁹ of 1840 Squadron, HMS Indefatigable, 'whose most conspicuous gallantry and inflexible determination to inflict the maximum amount of damage upon the enemy, without any regard to his own safety, resulted during his third attack on

¹ Lieutenant (A) S. W. Edney, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Sydney](#), 18 Feb 1919; fitter-turner; killed in aircraft accident in [Atlantic](#), 17 May 1944.

² Lieutenant (A) C. St. George, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Taranaki, 19 May 1921; clerk.

³ Sub-Lieutenant (A) R. A. Cranwell, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 3 Aug 1919; warehouseman; killed on air operations 8 May 1944.

⁴ Lieutenant (A) D. C. Hill, MBE, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 29 Jan 1920; clerk.

⁵ Lieutenant (A) T. H. Hoare, DSC, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 13 Jun 1919; clerk.

⁶ Lieutenant (A) M. Rivett, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born England, 24 Oct 1919; shepherd.

⁷ Lieutenant (A) G. A. Rawstron, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Christchurch](#), 25 Jun 1920; civil engineer.

⁸ Lieutenant (A) D. E. Rowe, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Queenstown, 30 Oct 1919; accountant.

⁹ Lieutenant-Commander (A) A. Richardson, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Gisborne](#), 20 Mar 1917; electrical engineer; killed on air operations 24 Aug 1944.

the Tirpitz in the sacrifice of his life.' The commanding officer of the *Indefatigable*, in his recommendation, said that Richardson 'led his squadron of Hellcats in a most determined and courageous manner which has been an inspiration, not only to pilots in his own squadron, but to everyone in his ship....' The award of the Victoria Cross was considered, but that of a posthumous mention in despatches was made. Sub-Lieutenants (A) Percy, ¹ a member of Richardson's squadron, and Derek Morten, ² of 1841 Squadron in the *Formidable*, were awarded the DSC. Sub-Lieutenant (A) Woodward, ³ of 1841 Squadron, was missing after one attack on the Tirpitz. Though the Fleet Air Arm strikes did not achieve a decisive result, they set the pattern for the attacks with 12,000-pound bombs by Lancasters of the Royal Air Force which finally disposed of the ship. Her end came in their third attack on 12 November 1944 when, badly damaged and on fire, she capsized and sank at Tromsø.

From then on till the end of hostilities against [Germany](#), New Zealanders continued to take part in the frequent air strikes against shipping in the Norwegian leads, which they mined from time to time to force the convoys out into the open sea. Those who had served in the *Furious* in many operations left her with regret when she paid off into reserve in September 1944 after more than twenty-five years of service as an aircraft-carrier. Lieutenant (A) Shaw, ⁴ of 1771 Squadron, HMS *Implacable*, was killed on 26 October 1944 in the first of three strikes by that newly-commissioned ship. Lieutenant (A) Duff ⁵ and Sub-Lieutenant (A) Canter, ⁶ both of 882 Squadron, HMS *Searcher*, were awarded the DSC for skill and daring as fighter escorts for bombers in five operations off the coast of [Norway](#). Lieutenant (A) Hugh Morrison, ⁷ senior pilot of 882 Squadron, was killed on 5 May 1945 in the last offensive naval operation (code name JUDGMENT) in the war against [Germany](#). Aircraft from the *Searcher*, *Queen*, and *Trumpeter*, which were supported by the cruisers *Norfolk* and *Diadem* and five destroyers, attacked the U-boat base at

Kilbotn, north-west of Narvik. The enemy's depot ship [Black Watch](#) was blown up and a tanker was also destroyed. Morrison, who was shot down by flak, was awarded a posthumous mention in despatches.

During the period from April 1944 to the end of the war in

¹ Sub-Lieutenant (A) W. Percy, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Port Chalmers](#), 8 Aug 1920; clerk.

² See p. 395.

³ Sub-Lieutenant (A) C. E. Woodward, RNZNVR; born [Whakatane](#), 22 Sep 1921; clerk; killed on air operations 24 Aug 1944.

⁴ Lieutenant (A) R. M. Shaw, RNZNVR; born Ararimu, [Auckland](#), 27 Sep 1919; school-teacher; killed on air operations 26 Oct 1944.

⁵ Lieutenant (A) A. R. Duff, DSC, RNZNVR; born Dunedin, 31 Jul 1919; clerk.

⁶ Lieutenant (A) P. J. M. Canter, DSC, RNZNVR; born Prebbleton, 16 Dec 1921; civil servant.

⁷ Lieutenant (A) H. Morrison, RNZNVR, m.i.d. (2); born [Masterton](#), 18 Mar 1918; farmer killed on air operations 5 May 1945.

[Europe](#), New Zealanders served in the naval air squadrons lent to Coastal Command, Royal Air Force, for convoy protection, antisubmarine and other duties. A number of them, including the Seafire squadrons of No. 3 Naval Fighter Wing based at Lee-on-Solent (HMS Daedalus) were among the 6500-odd combat aircraft that played a decisive part in the invasion of [Normandy](#). From D Day onward they gave close cover to the troop and supply convoys on the cross-Channel routes and in the assault areas, laid smoke screens, and spotted for naval bombardments. Lieutenant (A) Rapson ¹ was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his 'skill and keenness

during a long and arduous period of duty with his squadron' in Coastal Command, in which he made nine successful night attacks on enemy light craft.

Many New Zealanders served in the 300 British warships that took part in the landings of American and French troops in the south of [France](#) (Operation DRAGOON) on 15 August 1944. There were some fifty New Zealand airmen in the escort carriers Emperor, Khedive, Attacker, Hunter, Pursuer, Searcher, and Stalker which provided fighter cover for the operation. Lieutenant-Commander (A) Reece,² who commanded 807 Squadron in the Hunter, Lieutenant (A) Gowan,³ a flight leader of 879 Squadron in the Attacker, and Lieutenant (A) Jellie,⁴ of 800 Squadron in the Emperor, were awarded the DSC for skill and leadership in dive-bombing and strafing missions. Gowan, who was injured in a flight-deck accident, had not long before been shot down in [Italy](#). He baled out and landed behind the enemy lines, but, 'by the exercise of initiative and common sense', made his escape within a week. The award of mention in despatches was made to Lieutenant (A) T. H. Hoare, DSC, senior pilot of 800 Squadron in the Emperor, Lieutenant (A) N. Perrett of the Pursuer, and Sub-Lieutenants (A) Howden,⁵ a section leader of 879 Squadron in the Attacker, Graham,⁶ a flight leader of 807 Squadron in the Hunter, Moore,⁷ of 809 Squadron in the Stalker, and Steven,⁸ of 899 Squadron in the Khedive.

In September 1944 the seven escort carriers mentioned in the preceding paragraph, with supporting cruisers and destroyers, were

¹ Lieutenant (A) L. J. Rapson, DFC, RNZNVR; born [Oamaru](#), 29 Nov 1917; clerk.

² Lieutenant-Commander (A) L. G. C. Reece, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Kohukohu](#), 9 Aug 1918; clerk.

³ Lieutenant (A) R. A. Gowan, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Ireland](#), 6 Dec 1919; clerk.

⁴ Lieutenant (A) J. H. Jellie, DSC, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Southport, England, 6 Nov 1920; clerk.

⁵ Sub-Lieutenant (A) J. M. Howden, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Auckland](#), 21 Apr 1920; clerk.

⁶ Sub-Lieutenant (A) L. D. Graham, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Matiere](#), 21 Dec 1921; butcher.

⁷ Sub-Lieutenant (A) G. J. T. Moore, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 16 Mar 1923; student.

⁸ Sub-Lieutenant (A) G. Steven, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Scotland](#), 7 Dec 1921; clerk.

formed into a special force to hamper the German withdrawal from the Aegean Islands, [Crete](#), and [Greece](#). Their aircraft sank many enemy ships and small craft and damaged harbour installations and land transport. Lieutenant (A) Jellie, DSC, a 'most fearless and sound leader', who had then completed two years' service in 800 Squadron, HMS Emperor, was awarded a mention in despatches. Sub-Lieutenant (A) Spencer, ¹ of 800 Squadron, was killed in action over [Khalkis](#), in [Greece](#), on 11 October 1944.

At the beginning of 1945 these and other escort carriers moved into the [Indian Ocean](#). From April, after the [Victorious](#) and other fleet carriers had passed into the [British Pacific Fleet](#), the escort carriers of the East Indies Fleet took part in air strikes on [Sumatra](#) and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as well as in the capture of [Rangoon](#) and the sinking of the Japanese heavy cruiser Haguro in Malacca Strait. Sub-Lieutenant (A) Foxley, ² of 808 Squadron, HMS Khedive, was awarded the DSC for his skilful and successful leadership in combat with Japanese aircraft during a strike on airfields in [Sumatra](#).

Of Lieutenant (A) J. R. Cowan, ³ who was awarded the MBE in June 1945, it was recorded that 'exceptionally outstanding as an instructor in the School of Naval Air Warfare, he has contributed in a marked degree to its success. He has experimented with and produced modifications for the gyro gunsight and its camera.... In addition, he is a pilot of more than average ability who practises and demonstrates in the air

what he preaches on the ground.'

When he was commissioned in December 1943 after serving for two voyages in the [Akaroa](#) and nine months in the destroyer Meteor, Sub-Lieutenant Rynd, RNZNVR,⁴ volunteered for service in the Bomb and Mine Disposal Organisation. On completion of training courses he was appointed assistant BMD officer to RN Party 1503, which went to [Normandy](#) at the end of August 1944. A few days later the party entered Boulogne with the Canadian troops and started to clear the town and harbour. Rynd was then ordered to Calais, where he made a preliminary examination and rendered safe the scuttling charges in numerous small craft. An urgent call from the French then took him to Etaples, the main fishing port of the Pas de Calais, where he worked with six men of the [Royal Marines](#) and some fishermen. At a special ceremony in the Town Hall at Boulogne, Rynd was invested by the French naval commandant with

¹ Sub-Lieutenant (A) C. D. Spencer, RNZNVR; born [Auckland](#), 16 Nov 1920; warehouseman; killed on air operations 11 Oct 1944.

² Sub-Lieutenant (A) R. S. Foxley, DSC, RNZNVR; born [Gisborne](#), 3 Sep 1920; sheep-farmer.

³ Lieutenant (A) J. R. Cowan, MBE, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 5 Jan 1918; school-master.

⁴ Sub-Lieutenant P. F. Rynd, RNZNVR, Croix de Guerre, m.i.d.; born [Wellington](#), 3 Jun 1920; clerk; now Chaplain to seamen.

the Croix de Guerre with Silver Star, his citation reading: 'He has accomplished almost unaided in one week the work of mine clearance in the port of Etaples, diving many times daily to unhook submerged mines. His courageous action has permitted the use with a minimum of delay of the fishing port, until then closed to all navigation'. By the end of December the party had cleared Boulogne and the adjacent coast of more than 1200 mines and bombs and numberless demolition charges and booby traps, including 35 buried 11-inch shells, a total of some 200 tons

of explosives. For his services Rynd was awarded a mention in despatches. After a period of rest in England, Rynd went to Antwerp and thence to Terneuzen on the Schelde, where he acted as harbour-master for some weeks. At the end of hostilities his party went to [Rotterdam](#), where the Germans had done a thorough job of mining but, under the terms of surrender, had demolished nothing. German seamen and Dutch 'collaborators' were employed to clear the port area. In September 1945 Rynd was appointed assistant BMD officer for Northern Ireland and the west of [Scotland](#), where his work for four months was to render safe mines that had broken adrift from their moorings.

As a counter to the German menace in [Persia](#) troops were landed in August 1941 and secured the oil refineries at Abadan, the naval base at Khorramshar, and the railway terminal at Banda Shahpur. The British naval force captured eight enemy merchant ships at the last-mentioned port. Paymaster Lieutenant Campbell, ¹ of [Wellington](#), who was serving in the Australian merchant cruiser Kanimbla, was awarded the MBE for his services on this occasion. Telegraphist M. J. Rutherford, of [Lyttelton](#), spent twelve months in HMAS Gawler, one of eight Australian corvettes in the [Mediterranean](#). Other New Zealand ratings served as signalmen in Dutch and Greek destroyers.

New Zealand radar officers and ratings saw considerable service in ships of the Home and Mediterranean Fleets and, more numerous, in those of the Eastern and British Pacific Fleets. From 1943 onward, many did duty as port radar officers round the [Indian Ocean](#) from [Fremantle](#) to Kilindini and [Durban](#). Others were stationed at Addu atoll in the Maldivian Islands, in the Persian Gulf, and at Simonstown and [Freetown](#). Wherever they served, they achieved a sound record of efficiency.

Two weeks after joining HM Signal School at Portsmouth in 1940, Lieutenant B. T. Giles, ² was selected to take charge of the fitting of radar in destroyers, a pioneer task on which he was

¹ Paymaster Lieutenant F. B. Campbell, MBE, RNZNR; born [Christchurch](#), 1917; purser, Union SS Co.

² See p. 463.

employed for fourteen months and which included the supervision of trials at sea and off the enemy coasts. In recommending him for promotion, the captain of the Signal School described Giles as an officer of 'exceptional ability, enthusiasm and driving force' who had 'organised and carried through this work independently with conspicuous success'. The rapid fitting of radar in destroyers was 'largely due to his untiring energy and technical skill and his inspiring leadership of the special party of officers formed to carry out this work.' Giles also earned the high commendation of Rear-Admiral Coastal Forces, on whose staff he served as radar officer for nearly twelve months. Another specialist was Commander Elliott ¹ (a partner with Giles in civil life), who was largely concerned with the development of radar in submarines and the training of officers and ratings in its operation in those craft.

Lieutenant McNaught ² was radar officer in the anti-aircraft cruiser [Cairo](#) which sailed with two convoys to [Malta](#) in 1942. She was twice in action with two Italian cruisers and four destroyers during the passage of the June convoy in which four out of six ships were sunk. The [Cairo](#) was sunk in August when nine out of fourteen ships of the convoy were lost. McNaught served for thirteen months in 1944–45 in HMS [Norfolk](#), flagship of Rear-Admiral R. McGrigor, First Cruiser Squadron, and was awarded a mention in despatches for good service in an action in Norwegian waters in January 1945, when a convoy of eight German ships was destroyed.

While serving as port radar officer at Kilindini, Lieutenant Lissant-Clayton ³ was mentioned in despatches for salvaging valuable radar equipment under difficult and dangerous conditions from the German submarine U-852. This U-boat had been attacked by aircraft of the [Aden](#) command and driven ashore about 50 miles south of [Cape Guardafui](#) on 2 May 1944. Five officers, including the captain, and 39 ratings were taken prisoner. ⁴

The five months' service of Lieutenant Bisson ⁵ as radar officer in HMS [Warspite](#) covered that veteran ship's bombardments of the [Normandy](#) coast, [Brest](#), Le Havre, and Walcheren Island. For his 'indefatigable zeal with the ship's radar equipment' he was awarded

¹ Commander K. L. Elliott, RNZNVR; born [Wellington](#), 13 Apr 1913; company director.

² Lieutenant R. S. McNaught, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born Hastings, 23 Jul 1918; clerk.

³ Lieutenant J. Lissant-Clayton, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Gisborne](#), 17 Jan 1911; electrical engineer.

⁴ U-852 was the submarine which on 13 March 1944 sank the Greek steamer Peleus near Ascension Island in the [Atlantic](#). Nothing was known of the steamer's loss until three survivors of her crew of 35 were picked up 25 days later. They reported that U-852 rammed the rafts and wreckage deliberately to drown the crew, who were also machine-gunned in the water. In October 1945 Heinz Eck, commander of U-852, three other officers, and one rating were tried by a military court at [Hamburg](#) on charges of murder. Eck and two officers were sentenced to death and shot, the fourth officer to life-imprisonment, and the rating to 15 years' imprisonment.

⁵ Lieutenant G. E. Bisson, RNZNVR, m.i.d.; born [Napier](#), 23 Nov 1918; barrister and solicitor.

a mention in despatches. Bisson afterwards served in the [Queen Elizabeth](#) and [Nelson](#) as squadron radar officer, Third Battle Squadron, Eastern Fleet. Lieutenant J. A. Pollok, of [Invercargill](#), was radar officer in HMS [Ramillies](#) for two years, including the invasion of [Normandy](#) and southern [France](#), and afterwards in HMS Indefatigable in the [British Pacific Fleet](#). Lieutenant J. J. Staunton, of [Christchurch](#), served at [Freetown](#), in the Eastern Fleet, and on the staff of Rear-Admiral 15th Cruiser Squadron.

Those who have been mentioned in this narrative were in no way different from the thousands of other New Zealanders who served at sea. Obviously it was not possible to mention all who served in the Royal Navy, and there seemed to be no other way to give some account of their service in all kinds of ships in many seas. Most of the work of the Navy is done by ships and men that are never in the news. Of New Zealanders who fought at sea, including those in the Royal New Zealand Navy, it can be said: 'Their memory is linked for ever with the Royal Navy whose child they were, of whose traditions they were so proud and whose long annals, rich

with romantic and splendid feats of arms, contains no brighter page than theirs'.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

APPENDIX I — THE FIRST NEW ZEALAND NAVY

Appendix I

THE FIRST NEW ZEALAND NAVY

[The origins of the present New Zealand Navy are related in the text. There was an earlier New Zealand Navy which flourished and was actively engaged from 1846 until the end of the Maori Wars, when it disappeared, almost without trace. I am indebted to Mr F. H. McCluskey, of [Wellington](#), who referred me to the paper by Mr [Herbert Baillie](#) on The First New Zealand Navy, printed in Volume 53 of the Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute in 1921 and, with the permission of the Royal Society of New Zealand, reproduced as [Appendix I](#). Mr McCluskey has also supplied the account of the training ship Amokura, printed as [Appendix IX](#)— Editor-in-Chief.]

ART. III.— The First New Zealand Navy; with some Episodes of the Maori War in connection with the British Navy.

By [Herbert Baillie](#)

[Read before the Wellington Philosophical Society, 21st October, 1919; received by Editor, 21st September, 1920; issued separately, 27th June, 1921.]

The early volumes of the Illustrated London News contain many illustrations of New Zealand scenes and incidents. I was particularly interested in those shown in the issue of the 30th January, 1864, among which was one of "the gunboat 'Pioneer' at anchor off Meremere, on the [Waikato](#), reconnoitring the native position." On looking into the subject of New Zealand's first navy I found that New Zealand had about that time quite an imposing fleet, which was manned from ships of the British Navy then on the station. On further search I found that the colony possessed a gunboat as far back as 1846. In the early days of settlement many requests had been made to the Mother-country to provide the colony with one or two armed vessels, but without success. It has been difficult to piece together the story of New Zealand's first navy from newspaper and official records and personal narratives, the censor having

apparently been at work even in those far-off days.

An official statement of "Revenue and Expenditure for 1846" contains the item, "Purchase, &c., gunboat for Porirua Harbour, £100 17s. 11d." A newspaper records the information that H.M.S. "Calliope's" pinnace and two whaleboats had been sent to [Porirua](#), and in a later issue it is mentioned that the "Tyne's" long-boat had been lengthened for service. The "Tyne" was a barque which had ended her voyage from [London](#) to [Wellington](#) on the rocks off Sinclair Head, Cook Strait, on the 3rd July, 1845. McKillop in his Reminiscences says, "A ship's boat had been purchased and converted into a gunboat by the carpenters of the 'Calliope' mounting a 12-pounder carronade." A brass gun was also placed aboard. The "Calliope" took the boat to [Porirua](#) on the 11th July, 1846. Midshipman McKillop was installed in command. He says that he secured the addition of six more bluejackets and two gunners lent by the officer in command of the Royal Artillery detachment then stationed at [Wellington](#). McKillop came into contact with the [Maori](#) at the Pauatahanui head of the harbour on the 17th July; shots were exchanged, but, as he had "taken the precaution of lashing the men's beds up in their hammocks and fastening them round the boat, making a bullet-proof breastwork, which afforded great protection to the crew," no damage was sustained, except that the brass gun burst at the first shot. For meritorious work at Porirua Midshipman McKillop received great praise from Lieut.-Governor Grey, and was promoted to be mate of H.M.S "Driver."

The gunboat was used for some time at [Porirua](#) on patrol duty, and was then taken early in 1847 to [Wanganui](#), where it was commanded by Lieutenant Edward Holmes, H.M.S. "Calliope," who was assisted by Naval Cadet H. E. Crozier, of the same ship. Crozier accidentally wounded a native chief with a pistol, and this was the direct cause of the Gilfillan murders. The natives demanded the surrender of the youth, which, of course, was refused. Crozier was replaced by Midshipman John Carnegie. During the months of April and May, 1847, good work was done by the gunboat. On the 19th May, in consequence of the gunboat being injured from its own firing, Lieutenant Holmes moved his 12-pounder on board the "Governor Grey", a [Wanganui](#)-built schooner of 35 tons, from whose unbarricaded deck he continued to fight until the enemy retired.

Captain J. H. Laye, 58th Regiment, who commanded the forces at that time,

reported to the Governor, "To Lieutenant Holmes I am exceedingly obliged; the efficiency of the gunboat under his command (which was exposed to the fire of the enemy the whole of the day), his alertness with her at all times, and cordial co-operation, I am only too happy to bear testimony to."

In a despatch from [Wanganui](#) dated the 21st February, 1848, Major Wyatt, O.C., states, "The repairs to the gunboat are progressing."

On the outbreak of hostilities in the Taranaki Province in 1860 the Government advertised for two vessels suitable for gunboat service. In April the schooner "Ruby," 24 tons, recently launched from a shipbuilder's yard, was purchased by the Defence authorities, renamed "Caroline", and armed with a 32-pounder gun, and a supply of ammunition from H.M.S. "Elk." The cost of the schooner was £630; the cost of stores, fittings, and the cannon, £300. Mr. Smyth, of H.M.S. "Niger," who had distinguished himself at the attack on Waireka, near [New Plymouth](#), was appointed to the charge of the gunboat. He hoisted the pennant on the 14th April, 1860, and sailed from [Auckland](#) for Manukau on the 17th April. Mr. Hannibal Marks, "an old, experienced, and dauntless seaman, who knew every nook and inlet of the coast," was appointed pilot and sailing-master, being later appointed to command. The vessel acted as guard-ship on the Manukau Harbour, also being used as a despatch-boat between that port and [New Plymouth](#). Later, she was transferred to [Auckland](#), where she was chiefly used as a despatch-boat. I can find no record of her being engaged in any action. Her commission ended on the 12th October, 1863, and she was sold out of the service, the purchaser being Captain Davidson. Her name was changed back to "Ruby," and for many years she traded between [Wellington](#) and Kaikoura. She was wrecked off Jackson Head in 1879.

An urgent call for help had been sent to [Australia](#), and in reply the Government of Victoria had lent its warship, the steam-sloop "Victoria," Captain Norman, which arrived at [New Plymouth](#) on the 3rd August, 1860, bringing Major-General Pratt, C.B., Commander of the Forces in [Australia](#), and his staff. General Pratt took command of the troops in Taranaki until the arrival of Lieut.-General Cameron in May, 1861, when he returned to [Australia](#) in the "Victoria." The "Victoria" also brought a detachment of troops from [Australia](#) during this period, and was engaged on the coast on various duties, including the transferring of refugees from [New Plymouth](#) to other ports. Officers and men from this vessel took part in some of the Taranaki land

engagements.

On the 28th March, 1860, Captain Peter Cracroft, H.M.S. "Niger," with a force of sixty men and a 24-pounder rocket-tube, landed and captured the Maori pa at Waireka, Taranaki, incidentally relieving a party of Volunteers who were in difficulties. This is the action in which Seaman William Odgers won the first Victoria Cross to be awarded for service in New Zealand. He was the first man to enter the pa, and he hauled down the Maori flag. He was promoted to be a warrant officer by the Admiralty on the 26th June, 1860, and the Cross was presented to him on parade at [Devonport](#), England, July, 1862. Lieutenant Blake, who, with some men of the "Niger," took an active part in the military operations, was promoted to be commander for his services, later taking command of H.M.S. "Falcon" on the New Zealand station. The "Niger" had shelled the Warea Pa on the 20th March.

A Naval Brigade under Captain (later Commodore) F. Beauchamp Seymour, afterwards Lord Alcester, was stationed at Waitara, where Captain Seymour was wounded, June, 1860, at the attack on the Puketakauere Pa. The brigade, which was in service 1860–61, was composed of men and officers from H.M. ships "Niger," "Pelorus," "Cordelia," "Iris," "Elk," and the Victorian steam-sloop "Victoria."

In 1862 the Government purchased the paddle-steamer "Avon" for £2,000. This steamer, which was 60 ft. in length, 14 horse-power, 27 tons register, and drawing 3 ft. of water, had been brought from England in sections and put together at [Lyttelton](#) in 1861. She had been engaged in the trade between [Lyttelton](#), Heathcote, and [Kaiapoi](#). On the 22nd November she left [Lyttelton](#) in charge of Lieutenant Easter with a crew of fifteen men from H.M.S. "Harrier," in tow of that vessel. Lieutenant Easter retained command until the close of the [Waikato](#) War. Mr. Ellis, who is still living (1920) in [Auckland](#), was engineer. The vessels arrived on the 26th November at [Onehunga](#), where the "Avon" was refitted and armoured for service on the [Waikato](#) River. She assisted in the rescue of survivors from the wreck of H.M.S. "Orpheus," on the Manukau bar, 7th February, 1863, the men being transferred from the steamer "Wonga Wonga," which happened to be crossing the bar at the time of the disaster.

The "Avon" was towed to the [Waikato](#) Heads on the 25th July, 1863, by H.M.S. "Eclipse," Commander Richard C. Mayne. Thirty men were transferred from the

"Eclipse," and Commander Mayne took the "Avon" up the river to the Bluff—a little below where Mercer now stands. On the 6th August Captain Sullivan, H.M.S. "Harrier," senior naval officer in New Zealand, took the vessel on a reconnaissance as far as Meremere, where the [Maori](#) opened fire, which, on completion of observations, was replied to from the "Avon's" 12-pounder Armstrong gun and a 12-pounder rocket-tube.

While the "Avon" was being fitted at [Onehunga](#) four large barges were brought overland from [Auckland](#). These were also armoured with an iron-plate covering, and pierced for rifles and sweeps, or oars, this work being done under the superintendence of Captain Mercer, R.A., who was later killed at Rangiriri.

The "Avon" was on service during the course of the [Waikato](#) War. On the 18th February, 1864, through striking a snag in the Waipa River, she became partly submerged. She was used for a time as a coal-hulk at [Port Waikato](#), which in those days was a busy place, with building and repairing shops. Later the "Avon" was renamed "Clyde," and was occupied in mercantile trading in the run between Tamaki and the [Thames](#). In 1876 her paddles were dismantled and twin screws substituted. She was broken up in [Auckland](#) about 1883.

In 1860 a small paddle-steamer, the "Tasmanian Maid," 53 tons register, 36 horse-power, which had been trading between [Nelson](#), [Wairau](#), and [Wellington](#), was sent over by the [Nelson](#) people to bring the women and children from [New Plymouth](#) if necessary. She was then used as a despatch-boat between [New Plymouth](#), [Waitara](#), and [Onehunga](#). In 1862 she was engaged in trade from [Auckland](#) to [Coromandel](#), and about [Auckland Harbour](#). In June, 1863, she was purchased by the Government for £4,000. She was renamed "Sandfly," and armoured, being also armed with two 12-pounder Armstrong guns. Lieutenant Hunt, H.M.S. "Harrier," hoisted the pennant on the 23rd June, 1863, and his crew consisted of twenty-two men from the warships. On the 12th October Captain Marks, of the gunboat "Caroline," was transferred to the "Sandfly," while Lieutenant Hunt was transferred to the paddle-steamer "Lady Barkly," which had been purchased by the Government and partially plated, when it was decided that she was unfit for service, as intended, on the [Waikato](#) River. She was used for transport work in and from the [Manukau Harbour](#). The "Lady Barkly" is still (1920) running on the coast as a screw-steamer

under the name "Hina." The "Sandfly" was stationed on the east coast of the [North Island](#), her headquarters being [Auckland](#). She took part in the blockade of the Firth of [Thames](#) and the [Tauranga](#) campaign. She captured on the 31st October the cutter "Eclair," a vessel of about 20 tons, owned by the [Maori](#), and loaded with provisions. In 1865 the "Sandfly" was sold by the Government, after a short service about Cook Strait transporting troops to [Wanganui](#), and doing a little survey work for the Cook Strait submarine cable. The new owners changed her name back to "Tasmanian Maid," and she was wrecked off [New Plymouth](#) on the 16th January, 1868.

In 1863 the Imperial Commissariat Department purchased the 80-horse-power steamer "Alexandra" for transport work. She cost £13,000, and was also wrecked somewhere near [New Plymouth](#), 9th August, 1865. In 1863 the Government owned a sailing gunboat, "Midnight," but I have not been able to trace her commission, except that she appears to have been on service on the east coast, north of [Auckland](#).

In a memorandum dated 20th October, 1863, the Minister of Defence stated, "Towards the end of 1862 the Government determined to place a small steamer on the [Waikato](#), and after some inquiry the 'Avon' was purchased for the purpose. Her draught of water is too great to be available as is desirable; but, notwithstanding this disadvantage, the vessel has been of great service. The importance of having a suitable steamer for the navigation of the [Waikato](#) determined the Government to have such a vessel constructed in [Sydney](#), and after many delays and much anxiety the gunboat 'Pioneer' has been obtained—a vessel, it is believed, well adapted for the purpose." The "Pioneer" was launched from the shipyard of the Australian Steam Navigation Company, Pyrmont, [Sydney](#), on the 16th July, 1863, having been under construction for a period of about seventeen weeks, the superintending engineer of the work being Mr. T. Macarthur, of the company's staff. A report in a local paper, the *Empire*, says, "Yesterday morning there was launched from the A.S.N. Co.'s patent slip, Pyrmont, a rifle gunboat for the [New Zealand Government](#), and intended for the service of the inland waters of the [Waikato](#) district. She is intended to carry 300 men, on a light draft of water. Her dimensions are 140 ft. in length, 20 ft. beam, 8 ft. 6 in. depth of hold, and draws only 2 ft. 6 in. of water. She will be propelled by an overhanging stern wheel, 12 ft. diameter, 7 ft. broad, driven by two engines, each 30 horse-power. She is constructed of 3/8 in. iron, which is pierced for rifles, and

which will render her ball-proof. She is fitted with watertight compartments. The boilers were placed 54 ft. forward of the engines for the purpose of keeping the vessel on an even keel." The Empire of the 15th September further reports, "On the vessel's trial trip her speed was tested from Fort Denison to Bradley's Head, a distance of 1 mile and 150 yards. A smart N.E. breeze prevailed, but with this disadvantage the distance was run down in 8 minutes 12 seconds, and up in 6 minutes 53 seconds, giving a speed of nearly 9 knots, with 32 revolutions per minute, with 60 lb. on pressure of gauge, and a very small consumption of coal. Her speed exceeded the builder's expectations by one mile per hour. She is fitted with two sliding keels—one forward, one aft. The officers' cabins are situated aft, and the soldiers' apartments forward; they are very large and lofty. She has a flush deck, on which are placed two cupolas, 12 ft. in diameter and 8 ft. high, each pierced for rifles and 24-pounder howitzers. The commander's station was in a turret above the engine-room, which was also shot-proof and placed aft." She was provided with space for the storage of 20 tons of coal, and it is interesting to note that while on the [Waikato](#) she used local coal, being the first steamer to do so. The Hon. (later Sir) Francis Dillon Bell, a member of the Ministry, represented the [New Zealand Government](#) on the occasion of the "Pioneer's" trial. For the trip to New Zealand the stern wheel was removed, and three masts provided to carry sail. The cost of construction was £9,500.

After shipping a supply of ammunition, consisting of 60 cases shot and shell, 600 cartridges for 24-pounders, 1,000 tubes, 10,000 Terry's rifle cartridges, 12,000 caps, and 18,000 revolver-cartridges, the "Pioneer," in tow of H.M.S. "Eclipse," left [Sydney](#) on the 22nd September, reaching [Onehunga](#) on the 3rd October, after a rough trip. The officers attached to the vessel for the trip were Lieutenant G. R. Breton, late of H.M.S. "Iris"; Lieutenant O'Callaghan, H.M.S. "Miranda"; and Mr. Jeffrey, engineer; with a crew of twenty-five men. On the 24th October the "Pioneer," with two companies of seamen from H.M.S. "Curaçoa," was towed by H.M.S. "Eclipse" to the [Waikato](#). At the same time the four armoured barges, or gunboats, were also taken to the river. While on active service each of the gunboats was in charge of an officer from H.M.S. "Curaçoa." I am informed by Admiral Hammick (then a sub-lieutenant), who was in charge of one, which was named the "Ant," that one was commanded by Midshipman C. S. Hunt, who had been saved from H.M.S. "Orpheus" when that vessel was wrecked on the Manukau bar; another was in charge of Midshipman F.

Hudson. The fourth, which was named the "Midge," was commanded by Midshipman Foljambe. Mr. Foljambe in his *Three Years on the Australian Station* (1868) tells us that the boat was armed with a 12-pounder gun and a 4.4 in. brass Cohorn mortar, and carried a complement of seven men. These boats were used in the different operations on the [Waikato](#) and its branches, and also in carrying stores. Mr. Foljambe was the father of the late Governor-General of New Zealand, Lord Liverpool.

On the 29th October the "Pioneer," piloted by Mr. Chandelers, and flying the broad pennant of Commodore Sir William Wiseman ("Curaçoa"), after landing at Whangamarino, which commanded the Maori position at Mere-mere, two 40-pounder Armstrong guns, brought by the "Curaçoa" from [Sydney](#), conveyed Lieut.-General Cameron, commander of the troops in New Zealand, on a reconnaissance. Shots were exchanged, but no damage was sustained by the vessel, which returned to headquarters. On the 31st October the "Pioneer" again proceeded up the river as far as Rangiriri, the Maori stronghold. A spot about six miles above Meremere was selected as a landing-place for a force of 640 men and twenty-one officers, with two 12-pounder Armstrong guns. This force was embarked on the "Pioneer" on the 1st November, and landed without opposition. During the afternoon it was found that the [Maori](#) had abandoned their position at Meremere, which was then occupied by a party of 250 seamen, under Commander Mayne ("Eclipse"), and 250 men of the 12th and 14th Regiments, under Colonel Austin, from Koheroa. This force was reinforced next day by detachments from the 12th, 14th, 18th, and 70th Regiments, amounting to 500 men.

On the 20th November General Cameron, with a force of 860 men, attacked Rangiriri. To assist in the operations an additional 300 men of the 40th Regiment were embarked on the steamers, to be landed at a selected point, so that they might make an attack on the rear of the main line of the Maori entrenchments while the main body attacked in front. Owing to the wind and current the "Pioneer" and "Avon," with two of the gunboats, were not able to reach the landing-place decided upon. After a preliminary barrage by the Royal Artillery 12-pounders, under Captain Mercer, and the naval 6-pounder, under Lieutenant Alexander ("Curaçoa"), the main body attacked the main line of entrenchments and drove the enemy to the centre redoubt, while the party of the 40th Regiment, who had been landed sufficiently

near to reach their position, were able to pour a heavy fire on a body of [Maori](#), who were driven from their position and fled towards the Waikare Lake, where a number of them were drowned. The centre redoubt, still holding out against the troops, was attacked by a party of thirty-six men of the Royal Artillery, under Captain Mercer, who was mortally wounded, then by a party of ninety seamen under Commander Mayne, who was wounded. Both attempts were unsuccessful, as was another by a party of seamen under Commander Phillimore ("Curaçoa"), who used hand-grenades. As it was now nearly dark, the General decided to wait until daylight, when it was found that the white flag had been hoisted, and 183 [Maori](#) surrendered. Midshipman Watkins ("Curaçoa") and five men of the Naval Brigade were killed; while, in addition to Commander Mayne, Lieutenants Downs ("Miranda") and Hotham ("Curaçoa") (afterwards Admiral Sir C. F. Hotham) and five men were wounded.

In a letter from [Ngaruawahia](#) dated the 4th December Wiremu Tamehana (William Thompson), the Maori leader, said that he had lost all his guns and powder. "It is your side alone which is still in arms—that is to say, the steamer which is at work in the [Waikato](#), making pas as it goes on; when they finish one, they come a little farther and make another. Now, then, let the steamer stay away; do not let it come hither. That is all." But, as the Maori king's flag had been hoisted at [Ngaruawahia](#) in the first place, it was decided that the Queen's flag should fly there.

On the 2nd December General Cameron moved on from Rangiriri. As the outlets from Lake Waikare were not fordable, the troops, with their tents and baggage, were conveyed up the river in boats manned by seamen of the Royal Navy, under Commander Phillimore. The following day the troops again moved on, and encamped abreast of the island of Taipori. Here General Cameron was delayed, waiting for provisions, until the 7th, when he moved the camp about five miles farther up the river, and met the "Pioneer," which had safely passed the last shoal below [Ngaruawahia](#). Next day he went with Commodore Wiseman in the "Pioneer" to [Ngaruawahia](#), which he found to be deserted. He immediately returned to the camp, and, after embarking 500 men of the 40th and 60th Regiments, again proceeded up the river, and landed at [Ngaruawahia](#), where he established headquarters. On the 26th December 300 men of the 50th Regiment left [Onehunga](#) on the transport "Alexandra" and the chartered steamer "Kangaroo" for Raglan. On

the 28th, 250 men of the [Waikato](#) Militia, under Colonel Haultain, embarked on the steamer "Lady Barkly" for the same destination.

The memorandum of the Defence Minister, dated the 20th October, 1863, stated, "But so strongly has the necessity been felt for providing means for commanding the navigation of this important artery of the country, and for preparing means of communication with the military settlers to be located in the [Waikato](#) country, and of transporting the necessary supplies, that two smaller steamboats of very light draft of water have been ordered to be constructed in [Sydney](#). These vessels are being constructed of iron.

They will be brought from [Sydney](#) in sections, on board a vessel laden with coal, direct to the [Waikato](#) River, and put together at the [Waikato](#) Heads. These two boats are also specially designed of great power, so as to be used as tugs, and thus provide means of transporting supplies up the river."

These two boats were named "Koheroa" and "Rangiriri," probably after the two actions fought on the [Waikato](#). The builders were Messrs. P. Russell and Co. A [Sydney](#) newspaper, in describing one of the boats, said, "This boat, which can easily turn in the space of a little more than her own length, may follow the bendings of such a river as the [Waikato](#) in its narrowest part, and may either be used as a steam-tug, towing flats for the conveyance of troops, or may be armed with a gun at each of the singular-looking portholes, which are closed with folding doors, in the middle of the lower deck; while the bulwarks on each side are pierced with twenty or thirty loopholes for rifle shooting." The "Koheroa" was built in less than six weeks from the time the contract was received from Mr. James Stewart, C.E., who had been sent to [Sydney](#) by the [New Zealand Government](#) to superintend the construction. The sections of the "Koheroa" were brought from [Sydney](#) to [Port Waikato](#) by the steamer "Beautiful Star." The first bolt was riveted on the 4th January, 1864, and the vessel was launched on the 15th. I can find no record of these boats being engaged in hostilities, but they were used for transport work for some time.

By the end of January, 1864, General Cameron's headquarters had been moved to Te Rore, on the River Waipa, from which, on the 20th February, with a force that included a naval detachment of 149 men and ten officers, he moved across the Mangapiko River to [Te Awamutu](#), where headquarters were established. During the

last few days of this campaign (February, 1864), while the "Avon" was patrolling the river, a shot reached the vessel and killed Lieutenant Mitchell, H.M.S. "Esk."

From Ngaruawahia Commodore Wiseman and a party of naval and military officers went up the Horotiu River a distance of twelve miles, then transferred to the "Koheroa" and, proceeding twenty-two miles, farther on (to near the site of the present town of [Cambridge](#)), located the Maori position, and returned. This incident ends the story of the British Navy on the [Waikato](#) River, though the steamers were used for some time longer on transport duty. Colonial crews were placed on board, and the Naval Brigade's operations were transferred to the [Tauranga](#) district.

General Cameron transferred his headquarters to [Tauranga](#) on the 21st April, 1864. Reinforcements, which had been sent from [Auckland](#) on H.M.S. "Harrier" and "Esk," arrived at [Tauranga](#) on the 26th April. On the morning of the 27th the [Maori](#) had fired heavily on Fort Colville, but they were shelled out of their position by H.M.S. "Falcon" and the colonial gunboat "Sandfly." Captain Jenkins ("Miranda") took charge of the "Sandfly," which with the "Falcon" pursued the [Maori](#) who were retreating along the beach. Two 12-pounder Armstrong guns had been placed aboard the "Sandfly"; one, from the "Falcon," was manned by "Miranda" men, and the other, from the "Esk," was manned by men from that ship. Both ships shelled the whares at Otomarakau. At 3 p.m. firing ceased, as the enemy had finally disappeared. Captain Hannibal Marks, of the "Sandfly," and Senior Lieutenant Hope, in command of the "Falcon," were mentioned in despatches for "zeal and exertion." The gunners from the "Miranda" and "Esk" were mentioned for the "extraordinary precision of their fire from the 12-pounder Armstrongs."

On the 29th April General Cameron made the attack on [Gate Pa](#), with a force of 1,700 of all ranks, including a Naval Brigade of four field officers, six captains, seven subalterns, thirty-six sergeants, five drummers, 371 rank and file. One hundred and fifty seamen and marines under Commander Hay ("Harrier"), and an equal number of the 43rd Regiment under Lieut.-Colonel Booth, formed the assaulting party. Commander Hay and Lieut.-Colonel Booth fell mortally wounded. Captain Hamilton ("Esk") was killed. The casualties of the Naval Brigade were: Killed or mortally wounded: "Curaçoa"—Lieutenant Hill and one man; "Miranda"—one man; "Esk"—Captain Hamilton and three men; "Harrier"—Commander Hay and three men; "Eclipse"—one man. Wounded: "Curaçoa"—five men; "Miranda"—Lieutenant

Hammick and eight men; "Esk"—Lieutenant Duff and ten men; "Harrier"—four men. Total dead, 12; wounded, 29. Most of the wounded cases were classed as "severe" or "very severe."

For bravery in carrying Commander Hay, when wounded, off the field, Samuel Mitchell, captain of foretop, and captain's coxswain, was awarded the Victoria Cross, which was presented to him by Sir J. Young, Governor of [New South Wales](#), in [Sydney](#) in October.

On the 21st June Colonel Greer, commanding the [Tauranga](#) district, attacked the enemy at Te Ranga, and while this attack was being made a naval force from the "Esk" and the "Harrier" was landed for the protection of the camp. Lieutenant Hotham was mentioned in despatches.

Lieut.-General Sir D. A. Cameron left [Auckland](#) in January, 1865, for [Wanganui](#) on H.M.S. "Falcon," calling at [New Plymouth](#) en route. He arrived at [Wanganui](#) on the 20th January, and on the 5th February moved camp to Waitotara, one and a half miles from the mouth of the river. The paddle-steamer " [Gundagai](#)" entered the river during the evening, bringing provisions for several days. On the 16th February General Cameron marched to the Patea River, which had been entered by the " [Gundagai](#)" and "Sandfly" the day before. The General stated in his report, "They crossed under the most favourable circumstances; but as the latter ["Sandfly"] had not more than a foot to spare at high water, it will not be prudent to bring her into the river again."

This covers, as far as I can discover, the operations of our first naval adventures. The vessels seem to have done good work, and all that was expected of them. It is to be hoped that the "Calliope's" gunboat, the schooner "Caroline," the paddle-steamers "Avon" and "Sandfly," and the river-steamers "Pioneer," "Koheroa," and "Rangiriri," and the men of the British Navy who manned them, will not be forgotten in our histories.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

[SECTION]

[The origins of the present New Zealand Navy are related in the text. There was an earlier New Zealand Navy which flourished and was actively engaged from 1846 until the end of the Maori Wars, when it disappeared, almost without trace. I am indebted to Mr F. H. McCluskey, of [Wellington](#), who referred me to the paper by Mr [Herbert Baillie](#) on The First New Zealand Navy, printed in Volume 53 of the Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute in 1921 and, with the permission of the Royal Society of New Zealand, reproduced as [Appendix I](#). Mr McCluskey has also supplied the account of the training ship Amokura, printed as [Appendix IX](#)— Editor-in-Chief.]

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

ART. III.—THE FIRST NEW ZEALAND NAVY; WITH SOME EPISODES OF THE MAORI WAR IN CONNECTION WITH THE BRITISH NAVY

*ART. III.— The First New Zealand Navy; with some Episodes of the
Maori War in connection with the British Navy.*

By Herbert Baillie

[Read before the Wellington Philosophical Society, 21st October, 1919; received by
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The early volumes of the Illustrated London News contain many illustrations of New Zealand scenes and incidents. I was particularly interested in those shown in the issue of the 30th January, 1864, among which was one of "the gunboat 'Pioneer' at anchor off Meremere, on the [Waikato](#), reconnoitring the native position." On looking into the subject of New Zealand's first navy I found that New Zealand had about that time quite an imposing fleet, which was manned from ships of the British Navy then on the station. On further search I found that the colony possessed a gunboat as far back as 1846. In the early days of settlement many requests had been made to the Mother-country to provide the colony with one or two armed vessels, but without success. It has been difficult to piece together the story of New Zealand's first navy from newspaper and official records and personal narratives, the censor having apparently been at work even in those far-off days.

An official statement of "Revenue and Expenditure for 1846" contains the item, "Purchase, &c., gunboat for Porirua Harbour, £100 17s. 11d." A newspaper records the information that H.M.S. "Calliope's" pinnace and two whaleboats had been sent to [Porirua](#), and in a later issue it is mentioned that the "Tyne's" long-boat had been lengthened for service. The "Tyne" was a barque which had ended her voyage from [London](#) to [Wellington](#) on the rocks off Sinclair Head, Cook Strait, on the 3rd July, 1845. McKillop in his Reminiscences says, "A ship's boat had been purchased and converted into a gunboat by the carpenters of the 'Calliope' mounting a 12-pounder carronade." A brass gun was also placed aboard. The "Calliope" took the boat to [Porirua](#) on the 11th July, 1846. Midshipman McKillop was installed in command. He

says that he secured the addition of six more bluejackets and two gunners lent by the officer in command of the Royal Artillery detachment then stationed at [Wellington](#). McKillop came into contact with the [Maori](#) at the Pauatahanui head of the harbour on the 17th July; shots were exchanged, but, as he had "taken the precaution of lashing the men's beds up in their hammocks and fastening them round the boat, making a bullet-proof breastwork, which afforded great protection to the crew," no damage was sustained, except that the brass gun burst at the first shot. For meritorious work at Porirua Midshipman McKillop received great praise from Lieut.-Governor Grey, and was promoted to be mate of H.M.S "Driver."

The gunboat was used for some time at [Porirua](#) on patrol duty, and was then taken early in 1847 to [Wanganui](#), where it was commanded by Lieutenant Edward Holmes, H.M.S. "Calliope," who was assisted by Naval Cadet H. E. Crozier, of the same ship. Crozier accidentally wounded a native chief with a pistol, and this was the direct cause of the Gilfillan murders. The natives demanded the surrender of the youth, which, of course, was refused. Crozier was replaced by Midshipman John Carnegie. During the months of April and May, 1847, good work was done by the gunboat. On the 19th May, in consequence of the gunboat being injured from its own firing, Lieutenant Holmes moved his 12-pounder on board the "Governor Grey", a [Wanganui](#)-built schooner of 35 tons, from whose unbarricaded deck he continued to fight until the enemy retired.

Captain J. H. Laye, 58th Regiment, who commanded the forces at that time, reported to the Governor, "To Lieutenant Holmes I am exceedingly obliged; the efficiency of the gunboat under his command (which was exposed to the fire of the enemy the whole of the day), his alertness with her at all times, and cordial co-operation, I am only too happy to bear testimony to."

In a despatch from [Wanganui](#) dated the 21st February, 1848, Major Wyatt, O.C., states, "The repairs to the gunboat are progressing."

On the outbreak of hostilities in the Taranaki Province in 1860 the Government advertised for two vessels suitable for gunboat service. In April the schooner "Ruby," 24 tons, recently launched from a shipbuilder's yard, was purchased by the Defence authorities, renamed "Caroline", and armed with a 32-pounder gun, and a supply of ammunition from H.M.S. "Elk." The cost of the schooner was £630; the cost of

stores, fittings, and the cannon, £300. Mr. Smyth, of H.M.S. "Niger," who had distinguished himself at the attack on Waireka, near [New Plymouth](#), was appointed to the charge of the gunboat. He hoisted the pennant on the 14th April, 1860, and sailed from [Auckland](#) for Manukau on the 17th April. Mr. Hannibal Marks, "an old, experienced, and dauntless seaman, who knew every nook and inlet of the coast," was appointed pilot and sailing-master, being later appointed to command. The vessel acted as guard-ship on the Manukau Harbour, also being used as a despatch-boat between that port and [New Plymouth](#). Later, she was transferred to [Auckland](#), where she was chiefly used as a despatch-boat. I can find no record of her being engaged in any action. Her commission ended on the 12th October, 1863, and she was sold out of the service, the purchaser being Captain Davidson. Her name was changed back to "Ruby," and for many years she traded between [Wellington](#) and Kaikoura. She was wrecked off Jackson Head in 1879.

An urgent call for help had been sent to [Australia](#), and in reply the Government of Victoria had lent its warship, the steam-sloop "Victoria," Captain Norman, which arrived at [New Plymouth](#) on the 3rd August, 1860, bringing Major-General Pratt, C.B., Commander of the Forces in [Australia](#), and his staff. General Pratt took command of the troops in Taranaki until the arrival of Lieut.-General Cameron in May, 1861, when he returned to [Australia](#) in the "Victoria." The "Victoria" also brought a detachment of troops from [Australia](#) during this period, and was engaged on the coast on various duties, including the transferring of refugees from [New Plymouth](#) to other ports. Officers and men from this vessel took part in some of the Taranaki land engagements.

On the 28th March, 1860, Captain Peter Cracroft, H.M.S. "Niger," with a force of sixty men and a 24-pounder rocket-tube, landed and captured the Maori pa at Waireka, Taranaki, incidentally relieving a party of Volunteers who were in difficulties. This is the action in which Seaman William Odgers won the first Victoria Cross to be awarded for service in New Zealand. He was the first man to enter the pa, and he hauled down the Maori flag. He was promoted to be a warrant officer by the Admiralty on the 26th June, 1860, and the Cross was presented to him on parade at [Devonport](#), England, July, 1862. Lieutenant Blake, who, with some men of the "Niger," took an active part in the military operations, was promoted to be commander for his services, later taking command of H.M.S. "Falcon" on the New

Zealand station. The "Niger" had shelled the Warea Pa on the 20th March.

A Naval Brigade under Captain (later Commodore) F. Beauchamp Seymour, afterwards Lord Alcester, was stationed at Waitara, where Captain Seymour was wounded, June, 1860, at the attack on the Puketakauere Pa. The brigade, which was in service 1860–61, was composed of men and officers from H.M. ships "Niger," "Pelorus," "Cordelia," "Iris," "Elk," and the Victorian steam-sloop "Victoria."

In 1862 the Government purchased the paddle-steamer "Avon" for £2,000. This steamer, which was 60 ft. in length, 14 horse-power, 27 tons register, and drawing 3 ft. of water, had been brought from England in sections and put together at [Lyttelton](#) in 1861. She had been engaged in the trade between [Lyttelton](#), Heathcote, and [Kaiapoi](#). On the 22nd November she left [Lyttelton](#) in charge of Lieutenant Easter with a crew of fifteen men from H.M.S. "Harrier," in tow of that vessel. Lieutenant Easter retained command until the close of the [Waikato](#) War. Mr. Ellis, who is still living (1920) in [Auckland](#), was engineer. The vessels arrived on the 26th November at [Onehunga](#), where the "Avon" was refitted and armoured for service on the [Waikato](#) River. She assisted in the rescue of survivors from the wreck of H.M.S. "Orpheus," on the Manukau bar, 7th February, 1863, the men being transferred from the steamer "Wonga Wonga," which happened to be crossing the bar at the time of the disaster.

The "Avon" was towed to the [Waikato](#) Heads on the 25th July, 1863, by H.M.S. "Eclipse," Commander Richard C. Mayne. Thirty men were transferred from the "Eclipse," and Commander Mayne took the "Avon" up the river to the Bluff—a little below where Mercer now stands. On the 6th August Captain Sullivan, H.M.S. "Harrier," senior naval officer in New Zealand, took the vessel on a reconnaissance as far as Meremere, where the [Maori](#) opened fire, which, on completion of observations, was replied to from the "Avon's" 12-pounder Armstrong gun and a 12-pounder rocket-tube.

While the "Avon" was being fitted at [Onehunga](#) four large barges were brought overland from [Auckland](#). These were also armoured with an iron-plate covering, and pierced for rifles and sweeps, or oars, this work being done under the superintendence of Captain Mercer, R.A., who was later killed at Rangiriri.

The "Avon" was on service during the course of the [Waikato](#) War. On the 18th February, 1864, through striking a snag in the Waipa River, she became partly submerged. She was used for a time as a coal-hulk at [Port Waikato](#), which in those days was a busy place, with building and repairing shops. Later the "Avon" was renamed "Clyde," and was occupied in mercantile trading in the run between Tamaki and the [Thames](#). In 1876 her paddles were dismantled and twin screws substituted. She was broken up in [Auckland](#) about 1883.

In 1860 a small paddle-steamer, the "Tasmanian Maid," 53 tons register, 36 horse-power, which had been trading between [Nelson](#), Wairau, and [Wellington](#), was sent over by the [Nelson](#) people to bring the women and children from [New Plymouth](#) if necessary. She was then used as a despatch-boat between [New Plymouth](#), Waitara, and [Onehunga](#). In 1862 she was engaged in trade from [Auckland](#) to Coromandel, and about Auckland Harbour. In June, 1863, she was purchased by the Government for £4,000. She was renamed "Sandfly," and armoured, being also armed with two 12-pounder Armstrong guns. Lieutenant Hunt, H.M.S. "Harrier," hoisted the pennant on the 23rd June, 1863, and his crew consisted of twenty-two men from the warships. On the 12th October Captain Marks, of the gunboat "Caroline," was transferred to the "Sandfly," while Lieutenant Hunt was transferred to the paddle-steamer "Lady Barkly," which had been purchased by the Government and partially plated, when it was decided that she was unfit for service, as intended, on the [Waikato](#) River. She was used for transport work in and from the Manukau Harbour. The "Lady Barkly" is still (1920) running on the coast as a screw-steamer under the name "Hina." The "Sandfly" was stationed on the east coast of the [North Island](#), her headquarters being [Auckland](#). She took part in the blockade of the Firth of [Thames](#) and the [Tauranga](#) campaign. She captured on the 31st October the cutter "Eclair," a vessel of about 20 tons, owned by the [Maori](#), and loaded with provisions. In 1865 the "Sandfly" was sold by the Government, after a short service about Cook Strait transporting troops to [Wanganui](#), and doing a little survey work for the Cook Strait submarine cable. The new owners changed her name back to "Tasmanian Maid," and she was wrecked off [New Plymouth](#) on the 16th January, 1868.

In 1863 the Imperial Commissariat Department purchased the 80-horse-power steamer "Alexandra" for transport work. She cost £13,000, and was also wrecked somewhere near [New Plymouth](#), 9th August, 1865. In 1863 the Government owned a

sailing gunboat, "Midnight," but I have not been able to trace her commission, except that she appears to have been on service on the east coast, north of [Auckland](#).

In a memorandum dated 20th October, 1863, the Minister of Defence stated, "Towards the end of 1862 the Government determined to place a small steamer on the [Waikato](#), and after some inquiry the 'Avon' was purchased for the purpose. Her draught of water is too great to be available as is desirable; but, notwithstanding this disadvantage, the vessel has been of great service. The importance of having a suitable steamer for the navigation of the [Waikato](#) determined the Government to have such a vessel constructed in [Sydney](#), and after many delays and much anxiety the gunboat 'Pioneer' has been obtained—a vessel, it is believed, well adapted for the purpose." The "Pioneer" was launched from the shipyard of the Australian Steam Navigation Company, Pyrmont, [Sydney](#), on the 16th July, 1863, having been under construction for a period of about seventeen weeks, the superintending engineer of the work being Mr. T. Macarthur, of the company's staff. A report in a local paper, the *Empire*, says, "Yesterday morning there was launched from the A.S.N. Co.'s patent slip, Pyrmont, a rifle gunboat for the [New Zealand Government](#), and intended for the service of the inland waters of the [Waikato](#) district. She is intended to carry 300 men, on a light draft of water. Her dimensions are 140 ft. in length, 20 ft. beam, 8 ft. 6 in. depth of hold, and draws only 2 ft. 6 in. of water. She will be propelled by an overhanging stern wheel, 12 ft. diameter, 7 ft. broad, driven by two engines, each 30 horse-power. She is constructed of 3/8 in. iron, which is pierced for rifles, and which will render her ball-proof. She is fitted with watertight compartments. The boilers were placed 54 ft. forward of the engines for the purpose of keeping the vessel on an even keel." The *Empire* of the 15th September further reports, "On the vessel's trial trip her speed was tested from Fort Denison to Bradley's Head, a distance of 1 mile and 150 yards. A smart N.E. breeze prevailed, but with this disadvantage the distance was run down in 8 minutes 12 seconds, and up in 6 minutes 53 seconds, giving a speed of nearly 9 knots, with 32 revolutions per minute, with 60 lb. on pressure of gauge, and a very small consumption of coal. Her speed exceeded the builder's expectations by one mile per hour. She is fitted with two sliding keels—one forward, one aft. The officers' cabins are situated aft, and the soldiers' apartments forward; they are very large and lofty. She has a flush deck, on which are placed two cupolas, 12 ft. in diameter and 8 ft. high, each pierced for rifles

and 24-pounder howitzers. The commander's station was in a turret above the engine-room, which was also shot-proof and placed aft." She was provided with space for the storage of 20 tons of coal, and it is interesting to note that while on the [Waikato](#) she used local coal, being the first steamer to do so. The Hon. (later Sir) Francis Dillon Bell, a member of the Ministry, represented the [New Zealand Government](#) on the occasion of the "Pioneer's" trial. For the trip to New Zealand the stern wheel was removed, and three masts provided to carry sail. The cost of construction was £9,500.

After shipping a supply of ammunition, consisting of 60 cases shot and shell, 600 cartridges for 24-pounders, 1,000 tubes, 10,000 Terry's rifle cartridges, 12,000 caps, and 18,000 revolver-cartridges, the "Pioneer," in tow of H.M.S. "Eclipse," left [Sydney](#) on the 22nd September, reaching [Onehunga](#) on the 3rd October, after a rough trip. The officers attached to the vessel for the trip were Lieutenant G. R. Breton, late of H.M.S. "Iris"; Lieutenant O'Callaghan, H.M.S. "Miranda"; and Mr. Jeffrey, engineer; with a crew of twenty-five men. On the 24th October the "Pioneer," with two companies of seamen from H.M.S. "Curaçoa," was towed by H.M.S. "Eclipse" to the [Waikato](#). At the same time the four armoured barges, or gunboats, were also taken to the river. While on active service each of the gunboats was in charge of an officer from H.M.S. "Curaçoa." I am informed by Admiral Hammick (then a sub-lieutenant), who was in charge of one, which was named the "Ant," that one was commanded by Midshipman C. S. Hunt, who had been saved from H.M.S. "Orpheus" when that vessel was wrecked on the Manukau bar; another was in charge of Midshipman F. Hudson. The fourth, which was named the "Midge," was commanded by Midshipman Foljambe. Mr. Foljambe in his *Three Years on the Australian Station* (1868) tells us that the boat was armed with a 12-pounder gun and a 4.4 in. brass Cohorn mortar, and carried a complement of seven men. These boats were used in the different operations on the [Waikato](#) and its branches, and also in carrying stores. Mr. Foljambe was the father of the late Governor-General of New Zealand, Lord Liverpool.

On the 29th October the "Pioneer," piloted by Mr. Chandeler, and flying the broad pennant of Commodore Sir William Wiseman ("Curaçoa"), after landing at Whangamarino, which commanded the Maori position at Mere-mere, two 40-pounder Armstrong guns, brought by the "Curaçoa" from [Sydney](#), conveyed Lieut.-General

Cameron, commander of the troops in New Zealand, on a reconnaissance. Shots were exchanged, but no damage was sustained by the vessel, which returned to headquarters. On the 31st October the "Pioneer" again proceeded up the river as far as Rangiriri, the Maori stronghold. A spot about six miles above Meremere was selected as a landing-place for a force of 640 men and twenty-one officers, with two 12-pounder Armstrong guns. This force was embarked on the "Pioneer" on the 1st November, and landed without opposition. During the afternoon it was found that the [Maori](#) had abandoned their position at Meremere, which was then occupied by a party of 250 seamen, under Commander Mayne ("Eclipse"), and 250 men of the 12th and 14th Regiments, under Colonel Austin, from Koheroa. This force was reinforced next day by detachments from the 12th, 14th, 18th, and 70th Regiments, amounting to 500 men.

On the 20th November General Cameron, with a force of 860 men, attacked Rangiriri. To assist in the operations an additional 300 men of the 40th Regiment were embarked on the steamers, to be landed at a selected point, so that they might make an attack on the rear of the main line of the Maori entrenchments while the main body attacked in front. Owing to the wind and current the "Pioneer" and "Avon," with two of the gunboats, were not able to reach the landing-place decided upon. After a preliminary barrage by the Royal Artillery 12-pounders, under Captain Mercer, and the naval 6-pounder, under Lieutenant Alexander ("Curaçoa"), the main body attacked the main line of entrenchments and drove the enemy to the centre redoubt, while the party of the 40th Regiment, who had been landed sufficiently near to reach their position, were able to pour a heavy fire on a body of [Maori](#), who were driven from their position and fled towards the Waikare Lake, where a number of them were drowned. The centre redoubt, still holding out against the troops, was attacked by a party of thirty-six men of the Royal Artillery, under Captain Mercer, who was mortally wounded, then by a party of ninety seamen under Commander Mayne, who was wounded. Both attempts were unsuccessful, as was another by a party of seamen under Commander Phillimore ("Curaçoa"), who used hand-grenades. As it was now nearly dark, the General decided to wait until daylight, when it was found that the white flag had been hoisted, and 183 [Maori](#) surrendered. Midshipman Watkins ("Curaçoa") and five men of the Naval Brigade were killed; while, in addition to Commander Mayne, Lieutenants Downs ("Miranda") and Hotham ("Curaçoa") (afterwards Admiral Sir C. F. Hotham) and five men were

wounded.

In a letter from [Ngaruawahia](#) dated the 4th December Wiremu Tamehana (William Thompson), the Maori leader, said that he had lost all his guns and powder. "It is your side alone which is still in arms—that is to say, the steamer which is at work in the [Waikato](#), making pas as it goes on; when they finish one, they come a little farther and make another. Now, then, let the steamer stay away; do not let it come hither. That is all." But, as the Maori king's flag had been hoisted at [Ngaruawahia](#) in the first place, it was decided that the Queen's flag should fly there.

On the 2nd December General Cameron moved on from Rangiriri. As the outlets from Lake Waikare were not fordable, the troops, with their tents and baggage, were conveyed up the river in boats manned by seamen of the Royal Navy, under Commander Phillimore. The following day the troops again moved on, and encamped abreast of the island of Taipori. Here General Cameron was delayed, waiting for provisions, until the 7th, when he moved the camp about five miles farther up the river, and met the "Pioneer," which had safely passed the last shoal below [Ngaruawahia](#). Next day he went with Commodore Wiseman in the "Pioneer" to [Ngaruawahia](#), which he found to be deserted. He immediately returned to the camp, and, after embarking 500 men of the 40th and 60th Regiments, again proceeded up the river, and landed at [Ngaruawahia](#), where he established headquarters. On the 26th December 300 men of the 50th Regiment left [Onehunga](#) on the transport "Alexandra" and the chartered steamer "Kangaroo" for Raglan. On the 28th, 250 men of the [Waikato](#) Militia, under Colonel Haultain, embarked on the steamer "Lady Barkly" for the same destination.

The memorandum of the Defence Minister, dated the 20th October, 1863, stated, "But so strongly has the necessity been felt for providing means for commanding the navigation of this important artery of the country, and for preparing means of communication with the military settlers to be located in the [Waikato](#) country, and of transporting the necessary supplies, that two smaller steamboats of very light draft of water have been ordered to be constructed in [Sydney](#). These vessels are being constructed of iron.

They will be brought from [Sydney](#) in sections, on board a vessel laden with coal, direct to the [Waikato](#) River, and put together at the [Waikato](#) Heads. These two

boats are also specially designed of great power, so as to be used as tugs, and thus provide means of transporting supplies up the river."

These two boats were named "Koheroa" and "Rangiriri," probably after the two actions fought on the [Waikato](#). The builders were Messrs. P. Russell and Co. A [Sydney](#) newspaper, in describing one of the boats, said, "This boat, which can easily turn in the space of a little more than her own length, may follow the bendings of such a river as the [Waikato](#) in its narrowest part, and may either be used as a steam-tug, towing flats for the conveyance of troops, or may be armed with a gun at each of the singular-looking portholes, which are closed with folding doors, in the middle of the lower deck; while the bulwarks on each side are pierced with twenty or thirty loopholes for rifle shooting." The "Koheroa" was built in less than six weeks from the time the contract was received from Mr. James Stewart, C.E., who had been sent to [Sydney](#) by the [New Zealand Government](#) to superintend the construction. The sections of the "Koheroa" were brought from [Sydney](#) to [Port Waikato](#) by the steamer "Beautiful Star." The first bolt was riveted on the 4th January, 1864, and the vessel was launched on the 15th. I can find no record of these boats being engaged in hostilities, but they were used for transport work for some time.

By the end of January, 1864, General Cameron's headquarters had been moved to Te Rore, on the River Waipa, from which, on the 20th February, with a force that included a naval detachment of 149 men and ten officers, he moved across the Mangapiko River to [Te Awamutu](#), where headquarters were established. During the last few days of this campaign (February, 1864), while the "Avon" was patrolling the river, a shot reached the vessel and killed Lieutenant Mitchell, H.M.S. "Esk."

From Ngaruawahia Commodore Wiseman and a party of naval and military officers went up the Horotiu River a distance of twelve miles, then transferred to the "Koheroa" and, proceeding twenty-two miles, farther on (to near the site of the present town of [Cambridge](#)), located the Maori position, and returned. This incident ends the story of the British Navy on the [Waikato](#) River, though the steamers were used for some time longer on transport duty. Colonial crews were placed on board, and the Naval Brigade's operations were transferred to the [Tauranga](#) district.

General Cameron transferred his headquarters to [Tauranga](#) on the 21st April, 1864. Reinforcements, which had been sent from [Auckland](#) on H.M.S. "Harrier" and

"Esk," arrived at [Tauranga](#) on the 26th April. On the morning of the 27th the [Maori](#) had fired heavily on Fort Colville, but they were shelled out of their position by H.M.S. "Falcon" and the colonial gunboat "Sandfly." Captain Jenkins ("Miranda") took charge of the "Sandfly," which with the "Falcon" pursued the [Maori](#) who were retreating along the beach. Two 12-pounder Armstrong guns had been placed aboard the "Sandfly"; one, from the "Falcon," was manned by "Miranda" men, and the other, from the "Esk," was manned by men from that ship. Both ships shelled the whares at Otomarakau. At 3 p.m. firing ceased, as the enemy had finally disappeared. Captain Hannibal Marks, of the "Sandfly," and Senior Lieutenant Hope, in command of the "Falcon," were mentioned in despatches for "zeal and exertion." The gunners from the "Miranda" and "Esk" were mentioned for the "extraordinary precision of their fire from the 12-pounder Armstrongs."

On the 29th April General Cameron made the attack on [Gate Pa](#), with a force of 1,700 of all ranks, including a Naval Brigade of four field officers, six captains, seven subalterns, thirty-six sergeants, five drummers, 371 rank and file. One hundred and fifty seamen and marines under Commander Hay ("Harrier"), and an equal number of the 43rd Regiment under Lieut.-Colonel Booth, formed the assaulting party. Commander Hay and Lieut.-Colonel Booth fell mortally wounded. Captain Hamilton ("Esk") was killed. The casualties of the Naval Brigade were: Killed or mortally wounded: "Curaçoa"—Lieutenant Hill and one man; "Miranda"—one man; "Esk"—Captain Hamilton and three men; "Harrier"—Commander Hay and three men; "Eclipse"—one man. Wounded: "Curaçoa"—five men; "Miranda"—Lieutenant Hammick and eight men; "Esk"—Lieutenant Duff and ten men; "Harrier"—four men. Total dead, 12; wounded, 29. Most of the wounded cases were classed as "severe" or "very severe."

For bravery in carrying Commander Hay, when wounded, off the field, Samuel Mitchell, captain of foretop, and captain's coxswain, was awarded the Victoria Cross, which was presented to him by Sir J. Young, Governor of [New South Wales](#), in [Sydney](#) in October.

On the 21st June Colonel Greer, commanding the [Tauranga](#) district, attacked the enemy at Te Ranga, and while this attack was being made a naval force from the "Esk" and the "Harrier" was landed for the protection of the camp. Lieutenant Hotham was mentioned in despatches.

Lieut.-General Sir D. A. Cameron left [Auckland](#) in January, 1865, for [Wanganui](#) on H.M.S. "Falcon," calling at [New Plymouth](#) en route. He arrived at [Wanganui](#) on the 20th January, and on the 5th February moved camp to Waitotara, one and a half miles from the mouth of the river. The paddle-steamer " [Gundagai](#)" entered the river during the evening, bringing provisions for several days. On the 16th February General Cameron marched to the Patea River, which had been entered by the " [Gundagai](#)" and "Sandfly" the day before. The General stated in his report, "They crossed under the most favourable circumstances; but as the latter ["Sandfly"] had not more than a foot to spare at high water, it will not be prudent to bring her into the river again."

This covers, as far as I can discover, the operations of our first naval adventures. The vessels seem to have done good work, and all that was expected of them. It is to be hoped that the "Calliope's" gunboat, the schooner "Caroline," the paddle-steamers "Avon" and "Sandfly," and the river-steamers "Pioneer," "Koheroa," and "Rangiriri," and the men of the British Navy who manned them, will not be forgotten in our histories.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

APPENDIX II – RECORD OF HMS LEANDER

Appendix II

RECORD OF HMS LEANDER

FIRST LEANDER, 1780:

1782: Reduction of Accra and other Dutch forts on the Gold Coast.

The first [Leander](#) was a fourth rate ship of 1000 tons and mounted 52 guns, her complement being 340. In 1783, while on convoy duty in the [West Indies](#), she sighted a French ship of the line and with great daring engaged her more powerful adversary. The enemy, on attempting to board, was repulsed with great slaughter. After two hours' desperate fighting, though reduced to a wreck, three times set on fire, and repeatedly attacked by boarders, she put the Frenchman to flight.

When Nelson made his ill-fated attack on Santa Cruz in 1797 (when he lost his arm), [Leander](#) formed one of his squadron. The following year she fought in the Battle of the [Nile](#) and, a fortnight later, was entrusted by [Nelson](#) to take home the news of his victory. As bad luck would have it, [Leander](#) fell in with a French ship of the line, the *Genereux*, whose broad-side was double and whose crew was treble that of [Leander](#). Nothing daunted, [Leander](#) engaged the enemy. After a gallant action lasting six hours she was forced to surrender. She could not strike her colours as no mast was left standing, so a French Jack was bent on to a boarding pike. Of her crew, already depleted from the Battle of the [Nile](#), 100 were killed or wounded. The captain lost his leg. The *Genereux* had 300 casualties. The captain, Captain T. B. Thompson, was court-martialled for the loss of his ship and subsequently knighted for his gallantry.

The ship's crest and motto are derived from this action.

1799: [Leander](#) was taken from the French by a Russian and Turkish force at the capture of Corfu and was restored to [Britain](#) by the Russian Emperor.

1805: In February [Leander](#) captured the French *Ville de Milan* (48 guns) with her

prize taken a week previously, the British *Cleopatra* (38 guns).

1817: The ship was sold for £2100.

SECOND LEANDER, 1814:

The second *Leander* was a frigate of 1600 tons, mounted 60 guns, and had a crew of 500. She took part in the war against the *United States*. In 1816 she formed part of the punitive expedition against the Dey of *Algiers*, whose pirates were a constant menace to shipping in the *Mediterranean*. The defences of *Algiers* were formidable, the garrison consisting of 40,000 Moors, and the batteries mounted 1000 guns. *Leander's* casualties were heavy, more than a quarter of the ship's company being killed or wounded. As a result of the bombardment, a thousand Christian slaves were set free and the Dey was made to pay an indemnity of nearly half a million dollars.

THIRD LEANDER, 1848:

A fourth rate ship of 2000 tons, carrying 50 guns. She took part in the Crimean War. During the famous charge at Balaclava she was stationed at Eupatoria, a Crimean port, to prevent the Russians landing reinforcements. The ship was converted to steam in 1861.

FOURTH LEANDER, 1882:

A second-class cruiser of approximately 4000 tons, mounting ten 6-inch guns and four torpedo-tubes. In 1900 she did good work during a revolution in *Panama* in protecting the lives and property of foreign residents. In 1904 she was converted into a destroyer depot ship and in that capacity she served at Scapa Flow during the First World War.

FIFTH LEANDER, 1933:

A light cruiser of 7270 tons displacement and 72,000 horsepower, mounting eight 6-inch and eight 4-inch guns. Built at Devonport Dockyard and engined by Vickers-Armstrong Ltd. Launched 1931 and completed 1933. Name ship of a class of

five light cruisers, the others being Achilles, [Ajax](#), Neptune, and [Orion](#).

The ship's motto is Qui Patitur Vincit ('Who suffers, conquers'). The crest consists of 'An arm in armour holding a lance proper between two lotus flowers argent on wavelets or and vert'.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

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THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

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THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

APPENDIX III – RECORD OF HMS ACHILLES

Appendix III

RECORD OF HMS ACHILLES

HMNZS *Achilles* was the seventh ship of that name to serve in the Royal Navy. Her ship's badge bore the helmeted head of Achilles and the motto 'Fortiter in Re, Unyielding in Action'.

The first *Achilles* was a wooden schooner, purchased in 1747 for service in the *West Indies*. In the following year she was taken by two Spanish privateers between *Jamaica* and Martinique in a fierce action in which she lost a large number of her crew killed and wounded.

The second *Achilles*, launched in 1757, was a Fourth Rate of 1234 tons and 61 guns. In 1758 she helped to capture the French *Raisonné*, which was taken into the Royal Navy and which *Nelson* joined as his first ship in 1771. The *Achilles*, in 1759, flew the flag of Rear-Admiral Rodney in the squadron which bombarded Le Havre during the operations of the Seven Years' War. In 1761 the *Achilles* was one of the squadron which captured Belle Isle. She was sold out of the service in 1784.

The third *Achilles* was a small storeship, built in 1781 and sold a few years later.

The fourth *Achilles*, launched at Gravesend in 1798, was a ship of 1930 tons and 74 guns. She was present at Trafalgar, under the command of Captain Richard King, and was the sixth ship in the lee line led by Vice-Admiral Collingwood. The French fleet at Trafalgar included an *Achille*, of 74 guns, which was blown up during the action. The fourth *Achilles* had a long life of 66 years, being finally sold out of the Navy in 1864.

The fifth *Achilles*, launched in 1861, was notable as being one of the first 'ironclads' in the Royal Navy. She was one of the squadron, commanded by Sir Geoffrey Hornby, which in 1871 forced its way through the Dardanelles to Constantinople. The *Achilles* was present at the bombardment of *Alexandria* in 1882.

The sixth [Achilles](#), launched in 1905, was an armoured cruiser of 13,350 tons displacement, mounting six 9·2-inch and four 7·5-inch guns. She was not present at the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916 as she was away refitting at the time. On 16 March 1917, in company with the armed boarding steamer Dundee, the [Achilles](#) sank the German raider Leopard, which was disguised as a Norwegian tramp steamer, north of the Shetland Islands. The [Achilles](#) was broken up in 1919.

The seventh [Achilles](#) was a light cruiser of 7030 tons displacement, 554 ft 6 in in length, and 55 ft 3 in in breadth. She was built by Cammell Laird and Company Ltd. at Birkenhead, being laid down on 11 June 1931, launched on 1 September 1932, and completed on 10 October 1933. Her original armament consisted of eight 6-inch and four 4-inch guns, but she was rearmed in 1943–44 with six 6-inch guns, eight 4-inch anti-aircraft guns, and fifteen 40-mm anti-aircraft guns. She also had eight 21-inch torpedo-tubes in two quadruple mountings. She was fitted with geared turbines driving four propeller shafts and developing 72,000 horsepower for a speed of 32 knots. The [Achilles](#) was on loan to New Zealand from March 1936 to September 1946. She was purchased by [India](#) in 1948 and renamed [Delhi](#) and has since served in the Indian Navy under that name.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

APPENDIX IV – PRISONERS OF WAR AND PAROLE

Appendix IV

PRISONERS OF WAR AND PAROLE

Before they were released from the German raider *Komet*, the prisoners, including the thirteen New Zealand naval airmen and the merchant service officers and men, signed the following undertaking:

We, the undersigned, do hereby give our word of honour and declare solemnly that on our release we will neither bear arms nor undertake military actions against *Germany* and her Allies during the present hostilities. By breach of this promise we realise we are liable to capital punishment.

The New Zealand Naval Board immediately asked Admiralty for a policy statement. Should naval personnel refuse to sign such undertakings? In cases where they had signed, what was the official attitude regarding further naval service?

Since merchant seamen and civilians were also involved, the question was raised at Government level. The New Zealand Government said the undertaking was 'obviously intended in part to be in conformity with Article 6 of The Hague Convention, No. 11, 1907', in connection with which the British Government, earlier in 1940, had expressed the opinion that 'little importance can be attached to any undertakings that such prisoners will not bear arms' and that they had 'reached the conclusion that they cannot in any way regard Article 6 as being binding upon them during the present war.' The New Zealand Government said it was necessary for them to 'consider the effect of such undertakings, for example, in connection with compulsory military service and with service at sea.' The problem as they saw it was a moral and not a legal one, and they were inclined to the view that these people having rightly or wrongly pledged their word in order to obtain their release, their pledge should be honoured and they should not be required, or indeed allowed, to undertake military or naval service. The question of defensively armed merchant vessels was of greater difficulty and, before deciding their policy on this or the general question, they would like to have the views of the British Government. ¹

Fresh arrangements for their passage to England were being made for the thirteen naval airmen before they had arrived back in New Zealand. The main party landed at [Wellington](#) on 18 January 1941, and almost immediately eleven of them — two were sick in [Sydney](#) — were instructed to report for draft at the end of the month. They were included in the nominal list of a draft to sail on 1 February, and on 23 January HMS Philomel was instructed to arrange for their drafting. As late as 26 January a letter was sent to the men while they were on leave informing them that, in view of the

under-

¹ Governor-General to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, telegram of 20 January 1941.

taking

they had signed, the question of their further service in the Royal Navy or other armed forces was under discussion between the New Zealand and British Governments. Pending a decision, the passage arrangements would stand; but if no decision had been reached by the sailing date, or if the decision indicated that they would not be allowed to serve or would be allowed to decline further service, they would be informed and the passage arrangements cancelled.

In the meantime the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, having inquired the exact numbers and categories of men who had signed the parole undertaking, sent a long and detailed statement of the view of the British Government. He said the position was not free from difficulty and had required careful examination.

Most of the statement was concerned with the position of merchant seamen under Article 6 of The Hague Convention No. 11. Naval personnel were, however, considered to be covered by different articles which the British Government had not repudiated and a precedent had already been established. So far as members of the armed forces were concerned, the British Government considered that the position in regard to such undertakings was governed by Article 10 of The Hague Convention No. 4, which laid down the obligations of both individuals and their Governments in precise terms. Article 74 of the 1929 Prisoners of War Convention also required that

no repatriated person should be employed on active military service. In view of these provisions the British Government had given no option to survivors from HMS Hunter from whom similar undertakings were extracted before they were sent to [Sweden](#); but they were being employed in shore establishments, i.e., in a manner which did not require them to bear arms against the enemy. ¹

The naval airmen, therefore, were informed that they would not be allowed to serve in a combatant capacity. There was a possibility that some of them would be employed as ratings in shore establishments, but there was little likelihood of their reaching officer rank. None of them accepted this offer.

The War Cabinet had ruled that none of the men could be discharged until civilian employment was available, and the responsibility for arranging this was passed to the National Service Department which had placement officers throughout the Dominion. The other services were informed of the Government's decision and supplied with nominal lists of the men concerned in case they tried to join the Army or the Air Force in a combatant capacity. This was in accordance with Government policy which required all the services and departments to co-operate in assuring that all servicemen, merchant seamen, and civilians who at any time signed a parole undertaking were debarred from taking part in active service against the enemy. By 13 June 1941 the thirteen naval airmen who had given their parole had either returned to civilian life or joined the Royal New Zealand Air Force in non-combatant capacities.

When the five naval airmen who had been taken to [Germany](#) were released in May 1945 and sent on leave in the [United Kingdom](#) pending repatriation, the High Commissioner reported that one 'Naval airman, 1st class, N.Z.8522 ex-prisoner of war desires to continue training as Naval airman. Request covering approval subject to medical fitness and acceptance by Royal Navy.'

¹ Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Prime Minister, telegram of 12 April 1941.

The Naval Board replied that it had no objection, and in reporting the situation to the man's next-of-kin expressed its appreciation of his example and spirit.

The story ends with an anti-climax as the rating was on his way back to New Zealand in August 1945. He probably withdrew his application or was refused as there was considerable congestion in HMS St. Vincent, which had sufficient men available to undergo flying training courses for up to twelve months ahead. It is of interest, however, that both the rating himself, who had some experience of the medical standard required, and the High Commissioner apparently considered he had a reasonable chance of making the grade even after nearly five years as a prisoner of war.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

APPENDIX V – EXECUTION BY JAPANESE OF FLEET AIR ARM OFFICERS

Appendix V

EXECUTION BY JAPANESE OF FLEET AIR ARM OFFICERS

Sub-lieutenant (A) J. K. Haberfield, RNZNVR, of HMS Indomitable, and Sub-Lieutenant (A) E. J. Baxter, RNZNVR, of HMS Illustrious, were shot down on 26 January 1945 during an attack on the oil refineries at Palembang, Sumatra. They were captured by the Japanese and, in February 1945, sent to Singapore where they were placed in Outram Road gaol. At the end of July 1945 they were executed, together with seven other Fleet Air Arm pilots.

Earlier reports said that the prisoners were missing after the transport in which they were being taken to Japan from Singapore had been sunk by Allied air bombing in the middle of March 1945.

Koh, a Chinese prisoner in Sumatra, said that after his release on 20 February 1945 it was town gossip that the photograph of a well-built, blind-folded pilot prisoner was shown for propaganda purposes at the premises of the Palembang Sumboeng, a local newspaper. From the description it tallied with that of Haberfield. Koh said that Haberfield was admitted to the Palembang Prison on or about 1 February 1945. When he was being interrogated, his requests for food and water were refused. On the seventh day of his confinement Haberfield was taken, blindfolded, to an unknown destination.

Lieutenant Commander L. F. G. Pritchard, RNVR, who was responsible for the investigation of this atrocity, said that in September 1945 it was known that thirty-two pilots had been lost. A report was received that certain British prisoners had been executed and they were thought to be Fleet Air Arm pilots. Investigations were continued for a month and it was found that they were not Fleet Air Arm pilots. The inquiry then had to start afresh.

This time it was begun at Palembang, where it was learned that nine Fleet Air Arm pilots had been sent thence to Singapore. After many people in Singapore had

been interrogated, Captain Toshio Kataoka was found; he said that the men had been shipped to [Japan](#), but on their way the ship was sunk and all were presumed to have been drowned.

'We thought that was the truth, because as a rule in a big centre the Japanese did not execute prisoners of war without a court martial. After a few weeks General Atsuka, who was Chief of the Judicial Department of the 7th Area Army, [Singapore](#), let the cat out of the bag. He did so because he thought we knew that these men had been executed without trial and he did not want his department to be blamed. He gave the rumours he had heard before the Japanese surrender. Within 24 hours we had the whole story, or a good part of it and sent out orders for the arrest of the culprits. They were warned at 6 p.m. that they would be going to [Singapore](#) next day and were not prepared to face the music and committed suicide on 26 December 1945. There were others who were believed to be implicated in the affair and it is possible that they may be brought to trial as accomplices.'

There was no trial before the execution of the prisoners. The two Japanese particularly concerned were Captain Toshio Kataoka, who was the senior officer, and a Captain Ikeda. These men committed suicide.

Kataoka, in a will made before his suicide, said:

We took nine prisoners from Outram Road in a lorry to the beach at the northernmost end of Changi and executed them with Japanese swords. The bodies were put in a boat prepared beforehand and sunk in the sea with weights attached. Now that the responsibility must be borne out publicly, I hereby pay for my deeds with suicide.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

APPENDIX VI – MEMBERS OF NEW ZEALAND NAVAL BOARD

Appendix VI

MEMBERS OF NEW ZEALAND NAVAL BOARD

Naval Adviser to Government

Captain P. H. Hall-Thompson, CMG, RN, May 1914–July 1919

Commander T. A. Williams, CBE, RN, August 1919–March 1921

Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron and First Naval Member

Commodore A. G. Hotham, CB, CMG, RN, March 1921–May 1924

Commodore A. F. Beal, CB, CMG, RN, May 1924–August 1926

Commodore G. T. C. P. Swabey, DSO, RN, August 1926–September 1929

Commodore Geoffrey Blake, CB, DSO, RN, September 1929–April 1932

Rear-Admiral F. Burges Watson, DSO, RN, April 1932–May 1935

Rear-Admiral the Hon. E. R. Drummond, CB, MVO, RN, May 1935–June 1938

Note: Captain I. G. Glennie, RN, commanding officer HMNZS [Achilles](#), served as CCNZS, June–December 1938.

Captain J. W. Rivett-Carnac, DSC, RN, commanding officer HMNZS [Leander](#), served as CCNZS, December 1938–December 1939.

Chief of Naval Staff and First Naval Member

Commodore H. E. Horan, DSC, RN, June 1938–April 1940 (and as CCNZS, December 1939–April 1940)

Commodore W. E. Parry, CB, RN, May 1940–June 1942 (and as CCNZS, May–October 1940)

Commodore Sir Atwell Lake, Bt., CB, OBE, RN, June 1942–July 1945

Commodore G. Faulkner, DSC, RN, July 1945–May 1947

Note: Commander R. W. Stirling-Hamilton, RN, held appointment of Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, January 1942–January 1943.

Second Naval Member

Commander T. A. Williams, CBE, RN, March 1921–April 1922

Captain H. D. Hamilton, RN, April 1922–February 1924

Captain F. A. Somerville, DSO, RN, February 1924–September 1926

Captain C. N. Reyne, RN, September 1926–March 1929

Captain J. S. G. Fraser, DSC, ADC, RN, March 1929–February 1932

Captain C. S. Thomson, ADC, RN, February 1932–August 1934

Captain L. V. Morgan, MVO, DSC, ADC, RN, August 1934–October 1936

Captain R. D. Oliver, DSC, ADC, RN, October 1936–September 1938

Actg Captain A. B. Fanshawe, ADC, RN, September 1938–December 1941

Actg Captain M. J. Yeatman, ADC, RN, December 1941–January 1945

Captain M. Taylor, OBE, ADC, RN, January 1945–May 1947

Naval Secretary

Paymaster Commander J. Siddalls, OBE, RN, March 1921–October 1923

Paymaster Commander R. Butcher, CMG, MVO, RN, October 1923–July 1926

Paymaster Commander E. N. R. Fletcher, MBE, RN, July 1926–July 1929

Paymaster Commander J. V. T. Webster, DSO, RN, August 1929–May 1932

Paymaster Commander R. F. Durman, OBE, RN, May 1932–June 1935

Paymaster Captain E. L. Tottenham, OBE, RN, June 1935–May 1939

Paymaster Captain N. T. P. Cooper, RN, May 1939–September 1941

Paymaster Captain N. H. Beall, OBE, RN, September 1941–June 1944

Paymaster Captain (S) W. J. G. Proffit, OBE, RN, July 1944–December 1947

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

NAVAL ADVISER TO GOVERNMENT

Naval Adviser to Government

Captain P. H. Hall-Thompson, CMG, RN, May 1914–July 1919

Commander T. A. Williams, CBE, RN, August 1919–March 1921

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

COMMODORE COMMANDING NEW ZEALAND SQUADRON AND FIRST NAVAL MEMBER

Commodore Commanding New Zealand Squadron and First Naval Member

Commodore A. G. Hotham, CB, CMG, RN, March 1921–May 1924

Commodore A. F. Beal, CB, CMG, RN, May 1924–August 1926

Commodore G. T. C. P. Swabey, DSO, RN, August 1926–September 1929

Commodore Geoffrey Blake, CB, DSO, RN, September 1929–April 1932

Rear-Admiral F. Burges Watson, DSO, RN, April 1932–May 1935

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Note: Captain I. G. Glennie, RN, commanding officer HMNZS [Achilles](#), served as CCNZS, June–December 1938.

Captain J. W. Rivett-Carnac, DSC, RN, commanding officer HMNZS [Leander](#), served as CCNZS, December 1938–December 1939.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

CHIEF OF NAVAL STAFF AND FIRST NAVAL MEMBER

Chief of Naval Staff and First Naval Member

Commodore H. E. Horan, DSC, RN, June 1938–April 1940 (and as CCNZS, December 1939–April 1940)

Commodore W. E. Parry, CB, RN, May 1940–June 1942 (and as CCNZS, May–October 1940)

Commodore Sir Atwell Lake, Bt., CB, OBE, RN, June 1942–July 1945

Commodore G. Faulkner, DSC, RN, July 1945–May 1947

Note: Commander R. W. Stirling-Hamilton, RN, held appointment of Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, January 1942–January 1943.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

SECOND NAVAL MEMBER

Second Naval Member

Commander T. A. Williams, CBE, RN, March 1921–April 1922

Captain H. D. Hamilton, RN, April 1922–February 1924

Captain F. A. Somerville, DSO, RN, February 1924–September 1926

Captain C. N. Reyne, RN, September 1926–March 1929

Captain J. S. G. Fraser, DSC, ADC, RN, March 1929–February 1932

Captain C. S. Thomson, ADC, RN, February 1932–August 1934

Captain L. V. Morgan, MVO, DSC, ADC, RN, August 1934–October 1936

Captain R. D. Oliver, DSC, ADC, RN, October 1936–September 1938

Actg Captain A. B. Fanshawe, ADC, RN, September 1938–December 1941

Actg Captain M. J. Yeatman, ADC, RN, December 1941–January 1945

Captain M. Taylor, OBE, ADC, RN, January 1945–May 1947

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

NAVAL SECRETARY

Naval Secretary

Paymaster Commander J. Siddalls, OBE, RN, March 1921–October 1923

Paymaster Commander R. Butcher, CMG, MVO, RN, October 1923–July 1926

Paymaster Commander E. N. R. Fletcher, MBE, RN, July 1926–July 1929

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Paymaster Captain E. L. Tottenham, OBE, RN, June 1935–May 1939

Paymaster Captain N. T. P. Cooper, RN, May 1939–September 1941

Paymaster Captain N. H. Beall, OBE, RN, September 1941–June 1944

Paymaster Captain (S) W. J. G. Proffit, OBE, RN, July 1944–December 1947

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

APPENDIX VII – RECORD OF HMS NEW ZEALAND

Appendix VII

RECORD OF HMS NEW ZEALAND

HMS New Zealand was a notable ship that achieved great fame in her short life of ten years. She was the gift of New Zealand to the Royal Navy, in which it was her fortune to serve throughout World War I in company with a host of great ships whose names had been written again and again in British naval history over more than three centuries. She added lustre to the naval traditions of New Zealand and will always be remembered with pride by the people of this island Dominion.

More than half a century has passed since the name of New Zealand was first given to a ship of the Royal Navy. She was one of a group of eight battleships laid down in the early years of the reign of King Edward VII. They were known as the King Edward VII class, but they might well have been called the Empire class. The first to be completed was the King Edward VII. The others were the Britannia, Dominion, Commonwealth, New Zealand, [Africa](#), Hindustan, and Hibernia. They were the immediate predecessors of the famous Dreadnought, prototype of the modern battleship.

Their armament was a mixed one of four 12-inch, four 9.2-inch, ten 6-inch and twelve 12-pounder guns, and four torpedo-tubes. Their displacement was 16,350 tons, on a length of 425 feet. Reciprocating steam engines of 18,000 horsepower gave them a speed of 18 knots.

HMS New Zealand was built in Portsmouth Dockyard. She was launched in February 1904 and commissioned for service on 11 July 1905. She was renamed Zealandia in 1909, when it was decided to give her original name to the Dominion's gift battle-cruiser. She served throughout World War I.

In 1909 there occurred a naval and political crisis in Great Britain. Under her second Navy Act, [Germany](#) had expanded her naval programme and was speeding up the building of ships of all classes. There was opposition in the British Cabinet

when the First Lord of the Admiralty put forward proposals for the building of eight Dreadnought battleships, six cruisers, and twenty destroyers. Unknown to the nation, the Sea Lords of the Admiralty tendered their resignations, a dramatic act that won the day. The programme was agreed to by Cabinet and accepted by the House of Commons.

It was at the height of this crisis that the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Sir Joseph Ward, on 22 March 1909, made his historic offer of 'one first-class battleship and, if necessary, two,' as a gift to the Royal Navy. This offer was warmly supported in New Zealand and gratefully accepted by the British Government.

The ship was designed as a battle-cruiser and built by the Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company at Govan on the Clyde. She was laid down in June 1910 and launched as HMS New Zealand in July 1911. She measured 590 feet in length and 80 feet in breadth and had a displacement of 19,000 tons. Turbine engines of 44,000 horsepower driving four propellers gave her a maximum speed of 26 knots. She had no fewer than 31 coal-burning boilers, which later on were converted to use oil-fuel. She was armed with eight 12-inch and sixteen 4-inch guns and two submerged torpedo-tubes. Her normal complement was some 800 officers and men.

HMS New Zealand was commissioned by Captain Lionel Halsey, RN, on 23 November 1912. Her officers at that time included three New Zealanders, all of them from [Christchurch](#). They were Lieutenants David Boyle and R. C. Garsia and Midshipman H. Anderson. After being inspected by the King, the New Zealand sailed from Portsmouth on 8 February 1913 on a world cruise of more than 50,000 miles. She called at St. Vincent, Ascension Island, St. Helena, [Capetown](#), [Durban](#), and [Melbourne](#) on her way to New Zealand and arrived at [Wellington](#) on 12 April 1913.

The New Zealand and her ship's company were given a magnificent reception in the Dominion and gifts of many kinds were showered upon her. She steamed round both islands, called at or off every port, and showed herself at many isolated parts of the coast. During her stay of more than ten weeks in New Zealand waters, the ship was inspected by nearly half a million people.

After leaving [Auckland](#) on 25 June 1913, the New Zealand called at [Suva](#), [Honolulu](#), Vancouver, [Panama](#), [Callao](#), and [Valparaiso](#). She steamed through the

Strait of Magellan and thence to [Montevideo](#) and [Rio de Janeiro](#), after which she visited the principal islands in the [West Indies](#). She returned to England in November 1913. Nine months later, [Britain](#) was at war with [Germany](#) and HMS New Zealand had been in action in the North Sea.

At dawn on 28 August 1914 a force of British destroyers, led by the small cruisers *Arethusa* and *Fearless* under Commodore R. Tyrwhitt, made a sweep into Heligoland Bight, where they ran into a number of German destroyers and light cruisers. In confused fighting that lasted all the morning, the *Arethusa* and the destroyer *Liberty* were badly damaged. One enemy destroyer was sunk and the cruiser *Mainz* disabled and set on fire. She was sunk later by Commodore Goodenough's cruisers which came to the assistance of Tyrwhitt's force.

The *New Zealand* was with Admiral Beatty's battle-cruiser squadron cruising about 40 miles to the north-westward. Shortly before midday, Beatty decided that it was high time for him to take a hand. His big ships went in at high speed, the *Lion* leading the *Queen Mary*, *Princess Royal*, *New Zealand*, and *Invincible* in that order. They came first upon the cruiser *Koln* and then the *Ariadne*, both of which were quickly sunk by a few salvos. The other German ships escaped into the mist, thus ending an action in which the enemy lost three cruisers and more than 1000 officers and men.

Barely five months later, HMS *New Zealand* was again in action. At daybreak on 24 January 1915, Beatty's battle-cruisers intercepted a powerful German force off the Dogger Bank. The Germans turned for home at high speed, and two hours of hard steaming passed before the British ships got within range. The armoured cruiser *Blucher*, rear ship in the German line, was heavily hit by Beatty's ships before they shifted fire to the enemy battle-cruisers. The *New Zealand*, which was flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Sir Archibald Moore, then engaged the *Blucher* and gave her such a hammering that she lost speed and turned away heavily on fire.

All three German battle-cruisers concentrated on Beatty's *Lion*, which was hit many times and fell astern out of action. A faulty signal made by Beatty at this time caused the other ships to turn away after the *Blucher* and the enemy battle-cruisers escaped. The *Blucher* fought bravely to the last and was finally sunk by torpedoes.

HMS New Zealand was one of the few big British ships that took part in all three major naval actions in the North Sea. In the Battle of Jutland, fought on 31 May 1916, she flew the flag of Rear-Admiral W. A. Pakenham, and her commanding officer was Captain John Green, who had succeeded Captain Halsey when the latter was promoted to flag rank.

When action was joined with [Admiral Hipper's](#) five ships, the New Zealand was fifth in the line of Beatty's six battle-cruisers. Barely twelve minutes after firing had begun, the Indefatigable, astern of the New Zealand, was hit several times in quick succession. Her magazines blew up and the ship vanished in an enormous cloud of flame and smoke, taking with her more than 1000 men. The only two survivors were picked up hours later by a German destroyer. Twenty minutes after the loss of the Indefatigable, a like disaster overwhelmed the [Queen Mary](#). Twelve hundred and fifty-eight men died in one tragic moment, which spared only seventeen of the entire ship's company.

Throughout the battle, Captain Green wore the Maori piu-piu and greenstone tiki given to the ship by an old chieftain at [Rotorua](#) in 1913, with the injunction that they were always to be worn by the captain of the New Zealand when she was fighting. Captain Halsey had worn them in action in the Heligoland Bight and at the Dogger Bank. With the gift went a prophecy that the ship would one day be in action and be hit in three places, but her casualties would not be heavy.

At Jutland the New Zealand was hit only on her after turret and there were no casualties. The old Maori chief had been emphatic that the same officers and men would be in the ship in action, and he was right. The outbreak of war had prevented the ship paying off on her due date and many of her original ship's company were still in her at Jutland and later.

Much faith in the Maori mascots was shown by the seamen. More than a year after Jutland, on the last occasion that HMS New Zealand sighted enemy ships and went to action stations, a seaman was seen to mount the ladder to the bridge and take a quick look round. 'It's all right. He's got them on,' he was heard to tell his mates on the deck below, thus assuring them that the new captain was wearing the piu-piu and the tiki.

HMS New Zealand served with the battle-cruiser force of the Grand Fleet throughout the war. In 1919 she was recommissioned and hoisted the Union flag of Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Jellicoe, who made a world cruise in her to report on the naval defences of the British Empire. The New Zealand was given a great welcome on her second visit to the Dominion, as was the great sailor who later became its Governor-General.

After her return to England, the New Zealand was paid off into reserve. Her fate and that of many another famous ship was sealed by the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922, which set a drastic limit to the capital ship strength of the Royal Navy. HMS New Zealand was little more than ten years' old when she was dismantled and sold to shipbreakers.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

APPENDIX VIII – RECORD OF HMNZS PHILOMEL

Appendix VIII

RECORD OF HMNZS PHILOMEL

HMNZS Philomel, the little old cruiser that for a quarter of century did duty at Devonport Naval Base, [Auckland](#), as training and depot ship, can fittingly be described as the cradle of the Royal New Zealand Navy. Since 1921, the year in which the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy came into being, the names of many thousands of officers and men have been borne on her books. The ship herself has gone and a modern barracks and naval depot now bear her name which has an honourable and enduring place in the traditions of the Royal New Zealand Navy.

The Philomel was the fifth ship of her name in the Royal Navy. The first was a sloop of 384 tons, 18 guns, built at Bridport in 1806. She saw service off the Spanish coast and in the [Mediterranean](#) during the Napoleonic Wars. In 1809 she assisted in the destruction of a French convoy under the hostile guns of Fort Rosas, and in October of that year took a leading part in the storming of the island of [Ithaca](#). She was sold out of the Navy in 1817.

Six years later the name was given to a sloop of 231 tons, 10 guns, built at Portsmouth. The second Philomel in 1827 took part in the battle of Navarino, against the Turks. She, in her turn, was sold in 1833.

The brig Philomel of 360 tons, 8 guns, was built at [Plymouth](#) in 1842. She took part in the operations on the Parana River and in the action of Obligado in 1845. Her boats assisted in the demonstration against the King of Lagos in 1851.

The fourth Philomel was a steam gunboat of 663 tons, built at Deptford in 1867. Seven years later, she took part in the capture and destruction of the fort of Masmaah, in the Gulf of Oman; and in 1875 was in the Perak expedition. She, too, was sold in 1885.

Designed as a third-class cruiser, the fifth Philomel was laid down at Devonport

Dockyard, England, in May 1889, and launched on 28 August 1890. She was a twin-screw vessel of 2575 tons displacement and mounted eight 4.7-inch guns. She cost £141,802 to build and equip. Captain Charles Campbell, RN, was her first commanding officer and her ship's company numbered 221 officers and men. She was commissioned on 10 November 1891 for service on the Cape of Good Hope Station.

In 1893 the *Philomel* took part in the Bohemie Creek expedition, and three years later, in company with HMS Sparrow (later the New Zealand training ship *Amokura*) and other ships, she bombarded the palace of the [Sultan](#) of Zanzibar which had been seized by a rebel chief. In 1897 the *Philomel* saw service in the Benin expedition on the west coast of [Africa](#).

After a refit in England, the *Philomel* returned to the Cape Station in 1899 and took an active part in the South African War. She contributed men to the Naval Brigade which saw service in the field, and two of her guns were landed and used in the bombardment of Boer positions at Colenso prior to the relief of Ladysmith.

The *Philomel* was paid off at [Devonport](#) on 22 March 1902, and laid up in the Firth of Forth for more than five years. After an extensive refit she was recommissioned on 1 February 1908 for service in the [Red Sea](#) division of the [Mediterranean Fleet](#). She was lying at [Malta](#) at the time of the disastrous earthquake at Messina. Within a few hours she had sailed with doctors and nurses for Reggio, where an emergency hospital was set up. She also took an active part in relief operations at Messina.

Soon afterwards the *Philomel* proceeded from [Malta](#) to [Aden](#), where she embarked the Royal West Surreys and other troops to suppress disorders in Somaliland. She supported the landings of troops at Berbera and Lashkori, as well as landing a naval armed party and blockading the coast to prevent gun-running. The *Philomel* served a second commission on the East Indies Station, operations against gun-runners in the Persian Gulf being one of her chief duties.

In 1913 the Admiralty agreed to make the *Philomel* available to the [New Zealand Government](#) as a seagoing training ship, to form the nucleus of the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy. On 15 July 1914 she was recommissioned at

[Wellington](#) by Captain P. H. Hall-Thompson, RN, who had been appointed Naval Adviser to the [New Zealand Government](#).

The *Philomel*, with her first entry of New Zealand naval recruits, was on a 'shake-down' cruise to the Marlborough Sounds when the outbreak of war in [Europe](#) recalled her to [Wellington](#). Her ship's company was augmented by naval reservists and she sailed on 8 August 1914 for [Auckland](#), where she joined company with HM ships *Psyche* and *Pyramus*. All three cruisers put to sea on 15 August escorting the [Union Company's](#) steamers *Moeraki* and *Monowai* which were carrying an expeditionary force for the occupation of German Samoa. The convoy proceeded to [Noumea](#), where it met HMA ships [Australia](#) and [Melbourne](#) and the French cruiser *Montcalm*. After a call at [Suva](#) the ships arrived at [Apia](#) on 30 August. The troops landed unopposed and took the German surrender that day.

The next duty of the *Philomel* was to assist in escorting the transports carrying the Main Body of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to Egypt. The convoy of ten troopships sailed from [Wellington](#) on 16 October 1914, escorted by H.M. ships *Minotaur*, *Philomel*, *Psyche*, and *Pyramus*, and the Japanese cruiser *Ibuki*. At Albany the *Philomel* and *Pyramus* parted company with the convoy and proceeded to [Singapore](#), whence the former escorted three French transports to [Aden](#). After a short patrol in the [Red Sea](#), the *Philomel* left [Suez](#) on Christmas Day escorting nine transports to [Malta](#), where she underwent a refit.

At the end of January 1915 she sailed for [Port Said](#), where she received orders to patrol the coast in the Gulf of [Alexandretta](#) and harass the Turkish communications. As well as shelling the railway and its rolling stock, frequent night landings were made. On 8 February a party of two officers and fifteen ratings encountered a strong force of Turkish troops and, in severe fighting, the *Philomel's* casualties were three killed and three wounded, one of the former being the first New Zealander to fall in action in the war.

In July 1915 the *Philomel* was ordered to [Aden](#), where the Turks had driven the British garrison into the town. An armed party was landed to stiffen the defences. In September, *Philomel's* men took part in an attack on the enemy's lines, capturing a village but being thrown out of it by a greatly superior force. The British casualties included three of *Philomel's* party killed. The Turks were driven off eventually and

the threat to [Aden](#) receded.

The *Philomel* then went to the Persian Gulf, where apart from two brief visits to [Bombay](#) for repairs, she remained on patrol duties from November 1915 until the beginning of 1917. When she was docked at [Bombay](#), it was found that she needed a long and costly refit to condition her for further sea service. She returned to [Wellington](#) in April 1917 and was paid off, recommissioning next day with a nucleus crew. The old cruiser was stripped of her guns, her last warlike activity being to act as depot ship for the minesweepers which swept the mines laid by the German raider *Wolf* off the Three Kings and Farewell Spit.

The New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy came into being in 1921 when HMS *Chatham* arrived from England. In company with that ship, the *Philomel* made her last sea passage under her own power from [Wellington](#) to [Auckland](#) where, moored at the Devonport Dockyard, she became the training establishment and depot to which she gave her name.

Two years later the *Philomel* received many relics from HMS *New Zealand*, which was scrapped in accordance with the terms of the Washington Naval Treaty. Besides an assortment of silver plate, mostly gifts to the battle-cruiser in 1913, the relics included the main steering wheel, the ship's bell, and a massive carved panel formerly mounted on the superstructure on the quarterdeck of the *New Zealand*. The panel was incorporated in the pulpit in the chapel of St. Christopher of HMNZS *Philomel*. The battle honours of HMS *New Zealand* in brass letters on oak panels, and relics of most ships of the Royal New Zealand Navy, are also housed in the chapel.

The old cruiser was little more than a shell when she ended her long career of fifty-six years on 16 January 1947. The occasion was commemorated in the following signal from the New Zealand Naval Board to HMNZS *Philomel*:

The Naval Board record their regret at the passing from the Service of the first of His Majesty's New Zealand Ships, a ship that has meant so much to all who served in her. She goes as many good ships have gone before her; but when HMNZS *Philomel*'s colours are hauled down for the last time at sunset this evening, the tradition which she has established during her long career

will live on in the depot to which she has given her name.

The Philomel's hulk was sold for £750 to the Strongman Shipping Company Ltd. It was towed to Coromandel harbour, where it was stripped of its teak decking and other material. Much of this was worked into a small twin-screw motor-vessel built by Mason Brothers for the Strongman Shipping Company for service between [Auckland](#) and Coromandel. This vessel, named Coromel, was launched on 4 October 1947. Many souvenirs made from teakwood and metal from the Philomel were presented to persons associated with her during her long career, one of the recipients being Mr H. S. Moreton, a brother of Able Seaman J. T. Moreton who was killed on active service in her in 1915. As it was not practicable to break it up, the hulk of the old ship was towed out to sea in August 1949 and sunk by explosive charges.

THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND NAVY

APPENDIX IX – NEW ZEALAND TRAINING SHIP AMOKURA

Appendix IX

NEW ZEALAND TRAINING SHIP AMOKURA

(By F. H. McCluskey)

For many years before the passing of the New Zealand Naval Defence Act of 1913, there had been a strong feeling that New Zealand should take a more active part in naval defence than the mere payment of an annual contribution to the cost of the Royal Navy. From time to time it was suggested that New Zealand should acquire a seagoing training ship for boys wishing to enter the Navy or the Mercantile Marine.

A select committee of the House of Representatives set up in 1899 reported that it was 'undoubtedly desirable to establish a training ship', but it was not until 1905 that the Prime Minister, Mr R. J. Seddon, was able to announce that negotiations were almost completed between the Admiralty and the Government for a small warship suitable for the purpose. This vessel was HMS Sparrow, an old gunboat which had been laid up at [Sydney](#) for some months.

On 28 February 1905 the Sparrow was formally handed over to Captain C. F. Post, acting on behalf of the [New Zealand Government](#). He took command of her for the passage to [Wellington](#), his chief officer being Mr Frank Worsley, of [Christchurch](#), who later was to serve as master of the Endurance in Sir Ernest Shackleton's ill-fated Antarctic expedition of 1914–16. With Shackleton and three others, Worsley made the memorable boat journey of 800 miles from Elephant Island to South Georgia to get assistance for the remainder of the crew of the Endurance, which had been destroyed in the ice. As a lieutenant of the Royal Naval Reserve, Worsley gained the DSO for distinguished service in the First World War.

After her arrival at [Wellington](#), the Sparrow lay at anchor for some months, Worsley being in charge of her for most of that time. Following lengthy negotiations, the Admiralty agreed to sell the vessel for £800 and on 10 July 1906 she became the property of the [New Zealand Government](#).

HMS Sparrow was one of nine gunboats of the Goldfinch class authorised in the Navy Estimates of 1887. She and the Thrush were built at Greenock by Scott's Shipbuilding and Engineering Company, which also supplied the engines and boilers for two others of the class. Founded in 1711, Scotts is now the oldest shipbuilding firm in [Britain](#). It has been building warships for more than 150 years, the first being HMS Prince of Wales, an 18-gun sloop launched in 1803.

The Sparrow was a vessel of 805 tons displacement, mounting six 4-inch guns, two 3-pounders, and three machine guns. She was composite-built of teak planking on steel frames. Sail was dying hard in the Royal Navy at that time and the Sparrow and her sisters were heavily rigged as three-masted barquentines. She was a single-screw vessel fitted with a horizontal triple-expansion engine of 1200 horsepower and two boilers working at 145 lb. to the square inch, giving her a speed of 13 knots. HMS Thrush will be remembered as having been commanded by HRH Prince George (afterwards King George V) on the [North America](#) and West Indies Station in 1891.

Fourth ship of her name in the Royal Navy, HMS Sparrow was launched on 26 September 1889, and commissioned by Lieutenant P. Hoskyns, RN, on 13 May 1890 for service on the Cape of Good Hope Station. On her passage out to Simonstown the vessel was under sail for most of the time.

In those palmy days of the Victorian era, the service of HM ships overseas was confined mainly to showing the flag and maintaining the Pax Britannica. On the African coast ships such as the Sparrow carried out constant patrols in suppression of the slave trade and gun-running and curbing the oppressive practices of native rulers and other wrong-doers. It was all part of the 'white man's burden'.

In March 1892 HM ships Sparrow, Alecto, and Racer carried out a punitive expedition against a native chief at Tambi, on the Scarcies River, who had been raiding villages under British protection. Five months later, the Sparrow, in company with the cruiser Blanche and the sloop Swallow, took part in a similar operation against the Sultan of Witu which involved a difficult march through tropical forest and some sharp fighting. The Sparrow was recommissioned in Simonstown in October 1893 with a relief crew from England and spent the next three years on the east coast of [Africa](#), mainly in the Mozambique Channel and about the islands off the coast of Zanzibar.

Following the sudden death of the [Sultan](#) of Zanzibar in August 1896, an insurgent force led by a pretender seized the palace and made other warlike moves. HM ships [Philomel](#) and [Thrush](#) landed parties to protect the British Residency and were joined by the [Sparrow](#). Then the Zanzibar warship [Glasgow](#), an old cruiser presented by the British Government to the late [Sultan](#), joined the insurgents. On the following day Rear-Admiral Rawson arrived in HMS [St. George](#), with the [Racoon](#) in company. When no reply was made to Admiral Rawson's ultimatum to the pretender, the squadron bombarded the palace. The shore batteries and the [Glasgow](#) and other craft returned the fire. The palace was wrecked, the [Glasgow](#) sunk, and more than 500 rebels killed. At the height of the bombardment the pretender fled and made his escape into German East Africa. The insurgents surrendered and order was restored.

After four more years' African service, HMS [Sparrow](#) returned to England and was paid off on 19 January 1900. Towards the end of that year she was recommissioned for duty on the Australian Station. She made her first visit to New Zealand on 24 May 1901, when she arrived at [Auckland](#). In company with HM ships [Royal Arthur](#), [Pylades](#), [Penguin](#), [Archer](#), and [Torch](#) of the Australian Squadron, she took part in [Auckland](#)'s welcome to the Duke and Duchess of [York](#) (later King [George V](#) and [Queen Mary](#)), then on a world tour. The Royal Yacht [Ophir](#) steamed into [Waitemata](#) harbour between the two lines of anchored warships which greeted her with the Royal Salute. During that commission, the [Sparrow](#) made several cruises to the South Sea Islands and became a familiar visitor to most New Zealand ports. She was finally paid off at [Sydney](#) on 31 March 1904 and laid up at Garden Island until she was taken over by the [New Zealand Government](#).

The greater part of her armament was removed at [Wellington](#) in the latter part of 1906 and she was given a thorough refit, the necessary alterations and additions being made to convert her into a training ship. A Bill authorising such an establishment was passed by Parliament, and a Gazette notice of 25 October 1906 announced that she had been renamed [Amokura](#), a Maori name meaning 'tropic bird'.

Captain G. S. Hooper was appointed in command of the [Amokura](#) on 7 January 1907, the vessel was transferred from the Defence Department to the [Marine](#)

[Department](#) in February, and the first entry of boys joined her in March. Boys were accepted between the ages of 13 ½ and 14 ½ years for a period of two years' training. On entry every boy was rated as 'second-class boy' and paid one penny a day. Each advance in rating to boy petty officer after fifteen months' service carried an addition of one penny a day and good conduct stripes earned another penny a day. The daily routine and standard of discipline were based on naval procedure. The boys were given a thorough grounding in seamanship and navigation and, by arrangement with the Education Department, a schoolmaster looked after their educational needs in a shore building at [Wellington](#) during the winter months and at other times when the Amokura was in harbour.

Seagoing training was carried out during the spring, summer and autumn months. Following a 'shake-down' cruise in Cook Strait for new entries, the Amokura usually proceeded to [South Island](#) ports and the West Coast Sounds, and thence to the outlying southern islands on which food and clothing depots for shipwrecked mariners were maintained. On her northern cruise the vessel called at way ports, Great Barrier Island, and the Kermadec Islands. In December 1917 the Amokura made a special visit to the latter group to reconstruct and provision the depot despoiled by the German raider, Captain von Luckner, and his men after their escape from Motuihi Island in [Hauraki Gulf](#). In 1908 the Amokura made a cruise to the [Chatham Islands](#) in an unsuccessful search for the missing barque Loch Lomond, and in the following year she visited those islands while searching for the lost steamer Duco.

Undoubtedly, the Amokura achieved success as a training ship. From 1907 to 1921, 527 lads passed through her. Some did not stay at sea, but the great majority carried on in the Mercantile Marine, in which many attained command of steamers or filled responsible shore appointments. In 1914 the Union Steam Ship Company agreed to accept a number of the most promising Amokura boys as cadets in its steamer Aparima. Seven of them were among the fifty-four members of that ship's company who lost their lives when that vessel was torpedoed and sunk by a U-boat in the [English Channel](#) on 19 November 1917.

Twenty-two boys from the Amokura entered the Royal Navy or the [Royal Australian Navy](#) and three joined the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy at its inception in 1921. Others who received their early training in the Amokura served in

the Royal Naval Reserve during both World Wars.

When Captain Hooper went to England in 1919 to select a larger vessel to replace the Amokura, he handed over his command to Captain J. W. Burgess. Though several vessels were offered by the Admiralty, none was deemed suitable.

After a survey the Amokura was found unfit for further sea service and from 1919 she remained at anchor in [Wellington](#) harbour. The Government then decided that the training of boys for the Mercantile Marine was a matter for the shipping companies. In any case, the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy was being provided with a training ship in HMNZS Philomel. Accordingly, the Amokura was finally paid off in December 1921 and not long afterwards the ship, shore buildings, and stores were sold for £1435 to Mr E. A. Jory. The ship was then dismantled and disposed of to the Westport Coal Company, which converted her into a coal hulk and in 1940 sold her to the Union Steam Ship Company.

In that humble capacity the old Amokura was a familiar sight on the [Wellington](#) waterfront for more than thirty years. Her traditions as a training ship were maintained by many who had served in her and, as members of the Amokura Old Boys' Association, were wont to visit their old ship whenever they foregathered in [Wellington](#).

In March 1953 the hulk was bought by Mr W. J. Orchard and towed to St. Omer, in the Kenepuru arm of Pelorus Sound, where she served as a combined store and jetty. Her end came two years later when she was broken up. It can truly be said that the Amokura, formerly HMS Sparrow, has her place in the maritime traditions of New Zealand.

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