



NGAPONA EX MEMBERS ASSN – LONGCAST

24 September 17 – NZ National Armed Forces Day

6 October 17 – RNZN Communicators 50th Anniversary, Navy Museum

20 October 17 – Trafalgar Day Lunch at Te Atatu RSA

20 October 17 - Old Salts Lunch at New Lynn RSA

10-12 November 17 - Armistice weekend at Cambridge

17 November 17 - Old Salts Lunch at Titirangi RSA

19 November 17 – Northland Xmas Function.

8 December 17 – Maritime Societies' Annual Dinner, Northern Club, Auckland

15 December 17 - Old Salts Lunch at Orakei RSA

Hi Folks

MONTHLY LUNCH

Our monthly lunch at Birkenhead last Friday was well attended with 22 dining. Special welcome to PO Chris Weissenborn, good to see another visitor in uniform.

CNS #13

Rear Admiral EC Thorne, CB, CBE, RNZN
Chief of Naval Staff: July 1972 – December 1975

Edward Courtney Thorne was born 29 October 1923 in Seatoun Wellington where his father, who had been invalided from the Royal Flying Corps, had emigrated. He was taught to sail in Wellington harbour by a Mr Grendall who crewed for Lord Jellicoe, then the governor general of New Zealand. and educated at Rongotai College and Nelson College. His career reflected the close ties between the Britain and New Zealand.

Thorne was inspired to join the Navy when in 1940 he saw the New Zealand-manned cruiser HMS *Achilles* fresh from her victory over the German pocket battleship *Graf von Spee* in Wellington harbour and there in 1941 he applied to join the newly created Royal New Zealand Navy. He was inspired by an old boy of Nelson College, Lieutenant Dick Washbourn (sic), *Achilles'* gunnery officer at the battle, and he was interviewed by her captain, Commodore W E Parry.

He entered the RNZN on 22 November 1941, one of only the second group of young men to enter as regular officers selected for a career in the RNZN. The selectors had chosen well. Commodore Tony Lewis says that Ted was "a fine leader of men. He knew where he was going and it was full steam ahead. It carried him to the top of his naval profession." Thorne and his classmates took passage for England in 'a dirty little tramp', the SS *Gorgiston*, where he stood watches on the bridge: a highlight of his first seagoing experience was a 'run ashore' for the teenagers in Balboa, Panama, under the watchful of the *Gorgiston's* mate. At Kingston, Jamaica he was shocked by his first experience of a colour bar – at Nelson College his best friend had been Fijians and Maoris.

Entering Dartmouth on 15 January 1942 he found himself a special entry in the Benbow term, with a class of cadets from Britain, Australia, India, and South Africa as well as from France Belgium, the Netherlands, and Norway. For the first parades he wore blazer and flannels, but the rudimentary uniform of serge trousers, seaman's jersey and long johns which he had received in New Zealand, was quickly supplemented by Gieves [the naval tailors]. Completing his initial training in August 1942 he then began his sea training as a Midshipman in HMS *Devonshire* (a heavy cruiser) which was deployed with the Eastern Fleet, based in East Africa and operating in the Indian Ocean. Though Thorne was under training through most the war, he witnessed some of its direst events. After Dartmouth he took passage via the Blue Funnel liner SS *Nestor* and the battleship *Warspite* to join the heavy cruiser *Devonshire* at Kilindini. Thorne recalled that

his action station was in one of the gun directors where he commanded a 'Glaswegian petty officer, and Newcastle leading hand, a Devon able seaman, and two marines, one of whom I think came from Liverpool. I spoke New Zealand English. I hardly understood a word they said, and I don't think they understood me. We got on quite famously.'

Devonshire convoyed troops from Australia to the Middle East, and one convoy consisted of several of the world's greatest liners, *Queen Mary*, *Ile de France*, *Aquitania*, *Queen of Bermuda* and *Mauritania*.

He transferred to HMS *Hawkins*, another heavy cruiser where on February 12, 1944 off the Maldives, he saw 'a sheet of flames and grey smoke' rise from one of the ships of the convoy, the *Khedive Ismail*. She sank in two minutes and of the 1511 crew and passengers, including nineteen Wrens, 54 nurses and nine members of the First Air Nursing Yeomanry, only 208 men and six women survived. The sinking was the worst loss of female service personnel in the war. The Japanese submarine *I-27* was depth-charged while the survivors were still struggling in the water. He also briefly served in the destroyer HMS *Redoubt*.

He returned to *Hawkins* until 7 May 1944, by which time *Hawkins* had departed the Eastern Fleet and returned via the Mediterranean in March 1944 to join the Home Fleet for the invasion of Normandy). Thorne returned to England for further courses to finish his training. By day he attended classes in Portsmouth and by night he commanded a boat which carried despatched around the invasion fleet at Spithead. He remembered going out one night and all the ships had disappeared: it was the eve of D-Day. He was promoted A/Sub Lieutenant on 1 May 1944, during his last week aboard *Hawkins*. He undertook 'Subs courses' in the shore training establishment HMS *Excellent* for the next five months, before being sent to Naples to join the Mediterranean-based destroyer HMS *Lamerton*.

Thorne spent his 21st birthday in Naples waiting to join the destroyer *Lamerton*. Ted served in *Lamerton* as the navigator from 4 Nov 1944–15 May 1945. *Lamerton* operated largely in the Adriatic Sea, in support of the 8th Army as it advanced up the Italian east coast, and in support of partisans in Yugoslavia on the other side of the Adriatic Sea carrying supplies and Special Forces to Yugoslav partisans and bombarded enemy positions on the coast. A favourite target were trains, trying to knock out both ends of tunnel while the train was inside. In March 1945 *Lamerton* returned to Britain to join the Harwich force to defend East Coast coastal convoys against last-ditch attacks by Schnorkel-fitted U-boats and fighting German E-boats off the Dutch coast. Ted Thorne thus earned the 1939-45 Star, the Burma Star and the Italy Star as his three Second World War campaign medals. He was promoted to Lieutenant in February 1945, but his seniority was backed-dated to 1 Nov 1944 reflecting the good results he obtained on his courses. He was in London on VE Day which he recalled laconically as 'quite an experience and a wonderful occasion'.

After the War, Ted returned to NZ and was posted to the cruiser HMNZS *Gambia*, which was about to return to Britain after paying off from the RNZN. When Thorne reached to New Zealand in 1945 he had been away for four years: his service over the next 30 years was to epitomise the close links between the RN and the RNZN. He returned to Britain in the New Zealand cruiser *Gambia* and took part in the victory parade He was one of the commissioning crew of the Improved-Dido class light cruiser, HMNZS *Bellona*, which they were to deliver to New Zealand. He was still serving in *Bellona* at

the time of the 1947 mutinies, although with some good management *Bellona* was not too extensively involved in the 'strike'. Thorne returned to Britain for the Communications course at the shore training establishment HMS *Mercury* in 1949, which was followed by a year in the minesweeper HMS *Fierce*, part of the 2nd Minesweeping Squadron in the Mediterranean which was committed to the huge problem of post-war minesweeping in Greek waters.

On his return to New Zealand Ted served variously in HMNZ Ships *Taupo*, *Bellona*, *Kaniere* and *Bellona* again, as the Squadron Communications Officer. In that time Ted was involved with the Navy's response to the 1951 Waterfront Strike. Thorne and his sailors loaded coal at Westport into waiting colliers, with the help of a commandeered locomotive manned by stokers and flying the White Ensign on a short staff from its 'stern'.

In 1952 Ted had a short spell in command of HMNZS *Inverell*, bringing the minesweeper across the Tasman to enter the RNZN. The ship had seen arduous war service in the RAN and in the rough Tasman seas they noticed that the entire bridge structure was cracked and working loose from the main deck! As a communications specialist, Ted was appointed to command HMNZS *Irirangi*, the naval radio station at Waiouru. He was in command on Christmas Eve 1953 when the railway bridge at Tangiwai was washed away, causing the night express to crash, killing some 150 people. *Irirangi* personnel under Ted's leadership played a key part in the recovery of the bodies, while they also restored communications in time for the Queen's Christmas message to be broadcast through *Irirangi's* transmitters.

As a Lieutenant Commander, his first major sea command was HMNZS *Pukaki* in 1955-56 before he returned to Britain for a period of exchange service with the RN. On promotion to Commander in 1957 he was appointed as Fleet Communications Officer on the staff of the Commander-in-Chief Far East Fleet. This was a key posting, as both New Zealand and Australia had major commitments to the Commonwealth fleet based in Singapore. It was a time when tensions in the region were high as Malaysia and Singapore approached independence, while Indonesia opposed the prospect of the British colonies becoming a federation. The Fleet had widespread responsibilities and was perhaps Britain's largest fleet at the time. Ted and his family returned to Wellington, where he had a four year stint as Director of Plans [DOP] on Naval Staff. In that role he was crucial to the ordering of HMNZS *Waikato* (F55) the third modern frigate for the RNZN and our first Leander-class frigate.

John Tobin recalls: "Ted was not difficult to work for and, with Rob Ellison, gave me a great deal of assistance in learning my job. I found him a very pleasant personality. The DOP was the main policy assistant to the CNS, preparing the papers and accompanying him to Chiefs of Staff meetings. Our main task at that time was to achieve the ordering of *Waikato*, which took a number of submissions to Cabinet. These had first to be cleared by the Chiefs and the Secretary of Defence so it was a busy time." Ted was posted back to sea, in command of HMNZS *Otago* (F111) in 1963 and during his time in command he was promoted to Captain and as Captain F11 (in command of the 11th Frigate squadron). While in command he oversaw the first trials of the newly installed Seacat missile system.

But the memorable moment was in Pearl Harbor, as Tony Lewis recalls.

April 1964, while we were breakfasting before the ship proceeded to sea for the final training assessment of our work-up, I glanced out the scuttle and remarked that a dockyard crane was going past rather fast. Then 'Emergency Stations' was piped, 'Close all [watertight] openings!' Moments later *Otago* was firmly wedged between the sterns of two American frigates." Someone had opened the main steam valves and applied full power to the ship's turbines; *Otago* broke her berthing lines and leapt ahead to collide with the American ships berthed in front. "Whilst highly aggravating and unpleasant for Captain Ted and certain individuals in the Engineering Department, the majority of the ship's company were happy to spend four more weeks in Hawaii! The incident did not affect Ted's career in the longer run. Back ashore he served in Wellington again, before moving to Britain for the Imperial Defence College (today, RCDS) course in London. The course went well, but in its final week he was given a pier-head jump' to join the *Waikato* which had not long been commissioned in Belfast and was undergoing its sea trials. Ted brought *Waikato* through her trials, workup and delivery voyage to New Zealand, and remained in command until early 1968. John Tobin was his Ops officer in *Waikato*: "Under his command we achieved a good report on our Portland work-up where as Operation officer I was trusted to get on with things. He was a good CO as far as the Officer of the Watch was concerned, was always pleasant and was a good ship handler." Before long he and his family were heading back to the UK, where Ted became the Head of the NZ Defence Liaison Staff in London as a Commodore. From that role he returned to NZ and, at age 48, was appointed Chief of Naval Staff in July 1972.

Ted served for 3½ years as CNS and in that time was involved with the Labour Government's decision to protest the French atmospheric nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific by sending a frigate to Mururoa [two, as it turned out—*Otago*, followed by *Canterbury*]. One consequence of that mission was that Fraser Coleman, the Minister who sailed in *Otago*, became a firm supporter of the Navy's desire for a logistic support ship. [The logistic ship became be-devilled by inter-service politics and it was not until 1988 that our replenishment tanker *Endeavour III* joined the fleet.] For Ted his time as CNS was marred by intensive inter-service rivalry; the defence budget was tight, the new unified Ministry of Defence structure was still bedding in, and the naval staff perceived that the CDS of the time was decidedly anti-navy. Looking back, some of his staff said that Ted tried to keep too much in his own hands, and perhaps picked fights within the Ministry that he couldn't win.

One success he did have was the decision about a new survey ship. Although the Naval Staff thought they had secured permission to build a Hecla-class survey ship (then entering service in the RN). The Muldoon administration insisted that we take over the island trader *Moana Roa*. Ted soon saw the way the political winds were blowing, accepted the change and brought the naval staff along in support, in order to ensure the ship would be fully refitted with the latest in survey systems. As HMNZS *Monowai*, the ship served us well until 1998. Ted had been awarded a CBE in January 1972; in the 1975 Queen's Birthday Honours he was elevated to Companion of the Bath (CB). He retired from the RNZN in December 1975, after arranging for his contemporary, John MacKenzie, to 'hold the fort' as CNS, until Neil Anderson was ready for the post. This, Ted saw, was the Navy's best chance of having a naval officer as a future CDS, which in fact played out that way. Still relatively young, Ted was appointed as the first

Commissioner of the (newly unified) Fire Service. He was successful and widely respected, remaining in that role for 10 years.

The frequent service in the UK with the RN had an indelible effect on Ted, who acquired what would today be seen as 'imperiousness'. One officer recalled that as CNS, Ted seemed perfectly friendly, but in those days a mid-ranked staff officer simply wouldn't have a drink and a chat with the Admiral, there was too much of a gulf. In fact Ted subsequently told, against himself, that as the new CNS he was aware that with all his time away, few in the RNZN knew who he was. Walking through the dockyard one day a young Lieutenant offered to help this apparent stranger. "I fixed him with my Admiral's stare...and informed him who the hell I was."

Within the RNZN, Rear Admiral Ted Thorne is remembered as a dynamic and positive leader. As Tony Lewis says, "In command he was an imposing figure. He exuded authority, positivity and confidence. He was never lacking in enthusiasm and vigour." Rear Admiral Ted Thorne died October 23, 2013.

Take care

Jerry Payne

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President

HMNZS Ngapona Ex Members Assn Inc

"There are good ships, and there are wood ships, the ships that sail the sea."

"But the best ships are friendships, and may they always be."

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