

HMNZS NGAPONA ASSOCIATION INC

LONGCAST

28 – 30 May 21 – Otago and All Ships Reunion (Contact Noel Davies
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11 June 21 - Navy Club Lunch – Remuera Club

18 June 21 - Ngapona Assn Lunch at Howick RSA

9 July 21 - Navy Club Lunch – Remuera Club

16 July 21 - Ngapona Assn Lunch at New Lynn RSA

24 July 21 – Ngapona Assn formal Dinner at Birkenhead RSA

Hi Folks

NGAPONA ASSN – MONTHLY LUNCH

Enjoyable lunch last week at the Pt Chev RSA.

Next lunch is at the Howick RSA on 18 June. See you there.

NGAPONA ASSN FORMAL DINNER – 24 JULY 2021

An invitation to attend the function is extended to all NGA Association members, this includes Associate Members, and all past and present members of HMNZS Ngapona and their partners/spouses.

The Ngapona Association is holding a formal dinner on Saturday 24 July 2021 at the Birkenhead RSA, Recreation Drive, Birkenhead, Auckland. The guest speaker will be RNZN's Chief of Navy, Rear Admiral David Proctor.

Tickets will be allocated on a first come first served basis. The cost of this function is \$50.00 per head. A cash bar will operate. There will be a buffet type meal of three courses. A highlight of the evening will be a performance by Able Musician Rebecca Nelson. It is also expected that a rum issue will be held.

As this is a formal occasion, appropriate dress with miniatures is expected.

For planning purposes, please advise Expressions of Interest by **replying to this email** giving the names of attendees and a contact phone number.

TWO KEY FIGURES STEP DOWN

Ports of Auckland's (POAL) CEO Tony Gibson has announced that he will step down at the end of June 2021 after 10 years in the role. "Over the last few months there have been persistent and sometimes personal attacks on me as CEO," he said. "I feel that this focus on me is damaging to the company and to the great people that I work with. It is taking our focus off what is really important – delivering change. I can't let that continue, so for the sake of our people and the good work that they do, I have decided to step down." POAL has been dogged by a debate over its future existence alongside three fatalities in recent years.

And Auckland International Airport chief executive Adrian Littlewood is stepping down after nine years in the job.

LT DONOVAN – DETAILS

From our super sleuth, Bob McKillop. (Thanks Bob)

His m.i.d. was covered widely in the press and noted his wife was resident in Dunedin He was fined ten shillings and costs ten shilling for a parking offence in Dunedin 5 August 1948 He passed the Public Service Entrance Examinations in Dunedin in January

1931

There is a report of a court Case in Dunedin in 1950 where Leslie Keith Donovan was a witness in a case for obtaining £45 by false pretences and Donovan was noted as the Manager of a Furniture Store.

So I think that all ties up with the grave details and the reference elsewhere that he was a store Manager.

From Births Deaths Marriages I found he was born in 1914 to Hannah Rathie Donovan and John Clydesdale Donovan and he married to Frances Mary (Molly) Rowe in 1941 Kind regards Bob McKillop.

And Terry Creagh reports that his father had dealings with him when he had a marine surveying business in Little Queen St in Auckland.

BATTLE FOR CRETE

It began just after dawn on 20 May 1941. Many of the 7700 New Zealand soldiers stationed on Crete were finishing breakfast when hundreds of German transport aircraft – some towing gliders – rumbled in over the Mediterranean island. The air above was suddenly filled with parachutes as thousands of elite German paratroops began to descend from the sky.

This was the start of what is known as the Battle for Crete. For 12 dramatic days New Zealanders, British, Australian and Greek troops, assisted by Cretan civilians, tried to repel a huge airborne assault by the Germans. They almost succeeded. Many New Zealanders made it off Crete, but thousands were left behind: more than 2000 were taken prisoner; 671 died. Among those evacuated were Charles Upham and Alfred Hulme, both of whom won the Victoria Cross (VC) for their actions on Crete. A few New Zealanders took to the hills, sheltered by the Cretans who, to this day, remember New Zealand's role in the battle.

The following article has been supplied by Cdr Charles Blackie, past CO of HMNZS *Ngapona*.

It recounts the experience of his father, John Stuart Blackie ex Lt. RNVR in the Battle for Crete.

This is the first of three parts.

“CRETE- A TRAGEDY - A BITTER LESSON

By John Stuart Blackie ex Lt. RNVR.

It was very nostalgic for me, as an ex Royal Navy sailor and a veteran of the battle of Crete, to read Wynn Denney's article about the Misfired Gun, (RSA Review August 2000). I would like to share some of my own recollections of those momentous days.

The Navy, in spite of inappropriate ships, landed 58,000 Imperial troops in Greece, with their equipment, mostly through the port of Pireus, despite the harbour

installations having been flattened by two ammunition ships exploding in the inner harbour. Within weeks, after the German invasion and the fall of Greece, the Navy was again called upon to pull the Allied forces out and 50,672 personnel were evacuated, over open beaches and from small fishing ports, mostly undercover of darkness.

When visiting these memorable places years later with old soldiers of the New Zealand Crete Veterans Association, I was kept vastly amused by stories of overloaded ships boats being towed out to the ships, many of the men semi-naked. Some of the yarns required a vivid imagination!

Some of the Army went back to Egypt. The less fortunate were sent to reinforce the small garrison on Crete. The New Zealand contingent was sent to the west of the island, where one of their tasks was to defend the airfield at Meleme. It was here that the German airborne troops chose to land and one of the fiercest and most important battles of the war was fought. The German invasion of Crete on May 20th 1941 involved 500 troop carrying planes and gliders, with 716 front line planes, both bombers and fighters. In addition, 25 Caiques were despatched by sea.

The battle was memorable because of the great numbers of German airborne troops killed in the air by the New Zealanders. Their skill at shooting moving targets was attributed by some wags to the popularity of the great New Zealand duck shooting season! The greatest result of this slaughter of some of Germany's best troops was an edict from Hitler to his Generals that no more airborne assaults were to be launched in future.

Meanwhile, the fleet was offshore doing it's best to protect the island and on the 22nd of May, was subjected to constant and unrelenting air attack from dawn onwards by a vast armada of 716 aircraft, consisting of 228 bombers, 205 dive bombers, 114 twin engined and 119 single engined fighters, all able to refuel and re-arm within minutes from their bases gained in Greece and Crete.

My ship, the destroyer Kashmir and other ships of the 5th Destroyer Flotilla, joined the Fleet to the west of Crete during a determined air attack. I had been at sea for a month or so and had experienced some savage air attacks on Malta, but I was, however, staggered at the intensity of the barrage put up by the several hundred guns of the fleet. By the end of the action, some of the ships had expended all ack ack ammunition and resorted to using practice rounds! How some of the bombers got through the barrage truly amazed me. During the battle and subsequent evacuation, the fleet was patrolling in great numbers and suffered horrific losses. It became apparent that the Allies would not be able to hold Crete. Supplying the island in face of enormous air superiority with bases close by on enemy occupied mainland would have caused considerable strain and undoubtedly heavy losses on our ships. The evacuation of troops from the island was to require all available shipping, so the fleet, being very short of ammunition and depleted by heavy losses, started an orderly withdrawal to Alexandria.

The ships of the 5th Flotilla were ordered to patrol, that night, to the North of the island to intercept any invasion craft and to give fire support to the troops ashore. We were to be well clear and on our way back to Egypt by daylight. We intercepted some caiques after dark, loaded with enemy troops, which we sank. In addition, the flotilla pumped a few broadsides into a part of Meleme airfield where the grounded gliders were supposed to be. These short actions did in fact result in us NOT being clear of Crete by daylight. Soon after sunrise, we were spotted by 24 Stuka dive bombers. One after another the Stukas peeled off from their formation and dived, some almost vertically, upon the Kelly (Captain Lord Louis Mountbatten) and Kashmir. In spite of weaving at full speed, both ships were hit. The Kelly, heeling on a full speed turn, rolled over, exposing her underside and trapping a high proportion

of her ships company. Kashmir was hit abreast the funnel and was blown in half, sinking in a few minutes.”

To be continued

AUSTTRALIAN BUILT PATROL CRAFT

Austal Australia has delivered two Cape-class Patrol Boats to the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard (TTCG).

The two 58 metre patrol boats, TTS *Port of Spain* (CG41) and TTS *Scarborough* (CG42), were accepted by Lieutenant Commander Francise Paulette Cazoe of the TTCG, at a delivery ceremony held at Austal Australia's Henderson shipyard. The Cape-class is Austal Australia's signature patrol boat design, with twelve vessels now delivered and a further six under construction at the dedicated defence shipbuilding facility in Henderson. These two patrol boats for the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard are the first Capes to be delivered for an export market.

LIGHT HOUSE OF THE WEEK – CUVIER ISLAND

Position: 36.26.5S 175.47.2E

Characteristics: Fl W 15s

Range: 19NM

Structure: White metal tower

Cuvier Island, also known as Repanga, is a volcanic outcrop lying east of the Coromandel Peninsula and between Great Barrier Island (Aotea Island) and the Mercury Islands (Iles d'Haussez). Twenty-five kilometres off the mainland, the Cuvier Island lighthouse was guardian to the broad Colville Channel between Great Barrier Island and the Coromandel Peninsula.

Its brilliant beam once warned and guided mariners, from atop one of the most exposed and isolated lighthouses in the country.

The island has had a lighthouse since 1889; it is the most distant of New Zealand's offshore lighthouses. The light was automated in 1982, and now runs on solar power.

Cuvier Island Lighthouse was the first cast iron tower to be built in New Zealand. The materials had to be hauled nearly 100 metres up the steep hill as soon as they were taken from the boats. There was no beach near the site. The light was originally powered by oil illumination and converted to diesel-generated electricity in 1939. The lighthouse was automated in 1982 and the final keeper was withdrawn then. In the 1990s the original 1000 watt light and associated equipment were removed and a 100 watt rotating beacon was installed. The beacon is now powered from battery banks charged by solar panels. The light is monitored remotely from Maritime New Zealand's Wellington office. Cuvier Island is the most distant of New Zealand's offshore lighthouses. The sense of isolation is intensified by the heavy fog that often surrounds it. Three keepers and their families lived on the rugged and exposed light station. They lived in houses sited in a small sheltered valley at sea level, near the landing place. To tend the light the keepers had to climb the slope using a nearly vertical zigzag track. On a stormy night this track could be treacherous.

The principal keeper wrote in 1892:

“I have to inform you that the cause of illness of keepers at this station is through the hill walk at night. Climbing the slope, the keeper gets into a state of perspiration and coming into a light room where there is such a draught, causes him to get a chill which makes him not fit for his work.”

The isolation was also a cause of irritation for most keepers. Although this was a feature of all lighthouses, on the island stations this was taken to the extreme. Mail and supplies were brought by boat every 3 months. In the early years the station had a high turnover of keepers because of the isolation.

In 1901 the principal keeper wrote:

“This is the worst station I was ever at. There is no convenience.”

Trained carrier pigeons were used to carry communications to Auckland between 1899 until 1911, although with little success. The pigeons were later replaced with radio communications.

The wreck of the old HMNZS *Philomel* was scuttled near the island on 6 August 1949 after decommissioning and being stripped of useful equipment.





Life can be a real bitch at times. I have just had to have my pet cat of 12 years put down.

Regards

Jerry Payne

Editor

HMNZS Ngapona Assn

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