



Russian Convoy Club of New Zealand

Newsletter
February/March 2017

Dear shipmates, families and friends

2016 wrapped up with Christmas cheer



Our annual pre-Christmas meeting was, as usual, hosted by Barbara Devery and Rear Admiral David Ledson at their home in Otaki. We are indebted to them for their continued interest in our club. Sixteen members and guests joined the event, however some friends were unable to make it and apologies were received from Alison Sexton (President, Lower Hutt Memorial RSA), John Forsythe (President, Wellington Merchant Navy Association and his wife) and member Elizabeth Fisher. We were pleased to welcome guests H.E. Valery Tereshchenko (Russian Ambassador), Thomas Lord (2nd Secretary at the UK High Commission) and Lt. Cmd. Ian Marshall RNZN (PSO for the Deputy Chief of Navy) representing Chief of Navy Rear Admiral John Martin. And all the way from Taupo, daughter and son-in-law of our late respected member Ron Hancock, Gail and Warren, attended.

Sadly we had to announce the passing of two of our Christchurch members Bob Cotcher (HMS Vindex) and Noel Smith (HMS Trinidad). RIP Bob and Noel.

Small presentations were made to our hosts and, as the Ambassador (right) is nearing the end of his tenure in New Zealand the club presented him with a book of New Zealand scenery suitably inscribed with an insert thanking him and his wife, Alexandra, for their friendliness and hospitality during their term of office. The Ambassador suitably replied.



A wonderful lunch, prepared by Barbara and supplemented with typical Russian items, brought by the Ambassador, was enjoyed on the verandah. Later the excellent Christmas cake provided by Chris King was cut by Barbara and Gail (top). All in all, a wonderful day.

New member

We welcome as an Associate Member Michael Kerr of Invercargill. His father, Murray Renwick Kerr, was a Leading Telegraphist aboard HMS Black Prince after initial training at HMNZS Philomel.



The Rum Ration

A sailor's ration of alcohol was originally beer with a daily ration of one gallon. This official allowance continued till after the Napoleonic Wars. When beer was not available, as it would often spoil easily, it could be substituted by a pint of wine or half a pint of spirits depending on what was locally available.

In later years, the political influence of the West Indian planters led to rum being given the preference over arrack and other spirits. The half pint of spirits was originally issued neat; it is said that sailors would prove its strength by checking that gunpowder doused with rum would still burn (thus verifying that rum was at least 57% ABV).



The practice of compulsorily diluting rum in the proportion of half a pint to one quart of water (1:4) was first introduced in the 1740s by Admiral Edward Vernon (known as Old Grog, because of his habitual program cloak). The ration was split into two servings, one between 1000 and 1200 and the other between 1600 and 1800. In 1756 Navy regulations required adding small quantities of lemon or lime juice to the ration to prevent scurvy. The rum itself was often procured from distillers in Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago and the British Virgin Islands. Rations were cut in half in 1823 and again in half, to the traditional amount, in 1850.

The abolition of the rum ration had been discussed in Parliament in 1850 and again in 1881, but without action. In 1970, Admiral Peter Hill-Norton abolished the rum ration as he felt it could have led to sailors failing a breathalyser test and being less capable to manage complex machinery. Ratings were instead allowed to purchase beer, and the amount allowed was determined, according to the MP David Owen, by the amount of space available for stowing the extra beer in ships.

The last rum ration was on 31 July 1970 and became known as Black Tot Day as sailors were unhappy about the loss of the rum ration. In place of the rum ration, sailors were allowed to buy three half-pint cans of beer a day. While the rum ration was abolished, the order to "splice the mainbrace", awarding sailors an extra tot of rum for good service, remained as the command for it

could only be given by the Monarch and is still used to recognise good service. Rum rations are also given on special occasions.

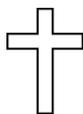
Other navies in the world have also removed the rum ration. The United States Navy was the first to abolish the rum ration in 1862. While the Royal Australian Navy never issued the rum ration, their sailors were entitled to the rum ration when they were on Royal Navy ships until 1921. The Royal Canadian Navy abolished the rum ration in 1972. The last navy to issue the rum ration regularly, the Royal New Zealand Navy, abolished the practice on 28 February 1990.

Club meetings

Please mark your diaries for the following club meeting dates:

23 March 2017 at 11:00am at Lower Hutt Memorial RSA
24 August 2017 at 11:00am at Lower Hutt Memorial RSA
23 November 2017 with time and venue to be advised

Crossing the bar

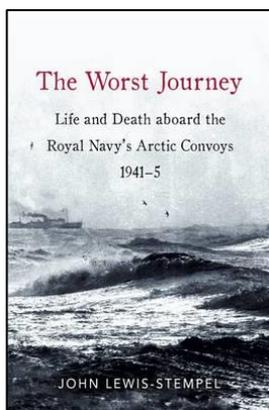


We are sad to report the recent passing of our members:

Bob Cotcher (HMS Vindex)
Noel Smith (HMS Trinidad)
Toby Tobin (SS Empire Garrick)

Book review : The Worst Journey by John Lewis-Stempel

Publisher: Little, Brown Book Group ISBN: 9781472137937



During the terrible voyage, from the extreme north-west of Scotland to Russia's Arctic coast, the sailors faced 50- and even 100-foot waves, icebergs and hurricane-force winds. Such winds could peel the steel shields from the ships' guns and regularly blew men overboard.

In summer, Oerlikon gunners would be at their guns for twenty hours a day; in the winter they often froze to death. Even when the convoys reached Murmansk or Archangel there was no respite. Murmansk

was about 25 miles from the front, which meant that there were enemy raids all day and food was short.

Despite all this the Royal Navy stuck to the convoys for four years, supplying Russia with planes, oil and other vital material, but, more importantly, by reassuring Stalin of Britain's commitment, the men of the Arctic convoys succeeded in keeping Russia in the war. This is a book about the men of the convoys, about life aboard ship, drawing extensively on letters, diaries and reports, many from previously unpublished archives, as well as new interviews with the last surviving veterans.

The Worst Journey shadows the experience of the sailors on the seventy-eight Arctic convoys: from enlistment, through training, joining a ship, shore leave, action and death - or survival - at sea. It follows the fortunes of twenty-five sailors drawn from the bottom, middle and top of the navy's ranks.

The book can be pre-ordered prior to publication this year from:
<https://www.waterstones.com/book/the-worst-journey/john-lewis-stempel/9781472137937>

China's aircraft carrier on open sea trials



China's recently built aircraft carrier has ventured out into deeper water. The aircraft carrier is the most capable offshore warship ever built and is considered a symbol of national and naval strength. Thus it's an indispensable part of China's ambition of building itself into a maritime power.

This made the first open-sea training exercise of China's sole aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, quite significant. China's second aircraft carrier now under construction in the northern port of Dalian is believed to be named "Shandong". Under construction for nearly three years it is reported that it will be based at Hainan Island in the South China Sea.

Pic of the month



HMNZS Canterbury amphibious sealift ship embarked earthquake refugees from Kaikoura, November 2016.

A New Zealand Defence Force's disaster relief operation swung into action following November's earthquake near Kaikoura and included HMNZS Canterbury and offshore patrol vessel HMNZS Wellington. They were joined by Australian, Canadian and United States warships with their support helicopters.

And remember ...

You can drive a horse to water but a pencil's got to be lead!

Up Spirits!



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