



The Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand

Newsletter
July/August 2024

Dear shipmates, families and friends

Norman Cook posthumously awarded Arctic Star

Able Seaman Norman Cook, A/1578, RNVR, RNZN joined the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy on 26 March 1934 and initially served three years.

He re-enlisted in the Royal New Zealand Navy on 1 April 1940 as a QR gunner and was sent to the United Kingdom on loan to the Royal Navy. He was drafted to *HMS Nigeria*. It was known that he served on board *Nigeria* when it took part in the Commando raid on the Lofoten Islands in Norway thereby crossing the Arctic Circle. See article at right.

He was later drafted to *HMS Neptune* together with 170 other New Zealand naval personnel.

Tragedy befell *Neptune* on 19 December 1941 when, off the coast of Libya and together with *HMS Kandahar*, she ran into an uncharted minefield detonating four mines and sinking with the loss of 764 crew - including 150 New Zealanders. There was only one survivor who was picked up by an Italian ship after five days in the water.

In recent times, the family of Norman have been trying to obtain the Arctic Star in recognition of his service in the Arctic. This has proved to be a challenge, as they were advised by both the Royal Navy and Royal New Zealand Navy that the relevant records linking Norman with *Nigeria* were not available.



The family contacted the Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand to see if we were able to help.

We suggested they contact the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence to obtain Norman's Pay and Victualing records.

These records arrived promptly within 10 days showing that Norman was indeed on *HMS Nigeria* inside the Arctic Circle and proved that he was entitled to be awarded the Arctic Star. The award was recently received by the family along with a letter from New Zealand's Minister of Defence.

Raid on Lofoten Islands captured Enigma cypher machine

Operation Claymore was a joint British/Norwegian commando raid on the Lofoten Islands of northern Norway during the Second World War. The Lofoten Islands were an important centre for fish oil and glycerine production, used in the German war economy.

The landings were carried out on 4 March 1941, by 500 men of No. 3 Commando, No. 4 Commando, and a Royal Engineers section, and 52 men from Norwegian Independent Company 1. They were supported by the 6th Destroyer Flotilla and two troop transports of the Royal Navy, the force landed almost unopposed.

The original plan was to avoid contact with German forces and inflict the maximum of damage to German-controlled industry.

They achieved their objective of destroying fish oil factories and some 3,600 tons of oil and glycerine. The force returned with some 228 German prisoners, 314 Norwegian recruits, and a number of Quisling regime collaborators.



Through naval gunfire and demolition parties, 18,000 tons of shipping were sunk.

Perhaps the most significant result of the raid was the capture of a set of rotor wheels for an Enigma cypher machine, and its code books. These were rescued from the sinking *Krebs*, although her commander, Lieutenant Hans Kupfinger, threw his machine (one of three known to be on the island) overboard minutes before he was killed.

Captured documents showed the Kriegsmarine Home Waters key for February and assisted in solving the April traffic which was sent between 1 March and 10 May.

The capture enabled Bletchley Park to read all German naval codes for some time and provided the intelligence needed to allow Allied convoys to avoid U-boat concentrations.

After the raid, the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill issued a memo "to all concerned ... my congratulations on the very satisfactory operation".

Claymore was the first of 12 commando raids directed against the Germans in Norway during the Second World War.

The Germans eventually increased the number of troops in Norway and by 1944, the German garrison was 370,000 men strong (a standard British infantry division in 1944 had around 18,000 men).

No. 3 and No. 4 Commandos became part of the 1st Special Service Brigade and took part in the Normandy landings in June 1944.

Our next ACCNZ Events:

- Thursday 29 August 2024 at 1100 hrs
Anzac Lounge, Petone Workingmen's Club, Udy St, Petone
- Pre Christmas meeting to be advised

HMS Neptune remembered in New Zealand

HMS Neptune was a Leander-class light cruiser which served with the Royal Navy during World War II with the pennant number 20.

Neptune operated with a crew drawn predominantly from the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy. The ship also carried a large contingent of seconded South African personnel.



In December 1939, several months after war was declared, *Neptune* was patrolling in the South Atlantic in pursuit of German surface raider heavy cruiser *Admiral Graf Spee*. *Neptune*, with other patrolling Royal Navy heavy units, was sent to Uruguay in the aftermath of the Battle of the River Plate.

Neptune was the first British ship to spot the Italian Fleet in the battle of Calabria, on 9 July 1940, marking also the first time since the Napoleonic Wars that the Mediterranean Fleet received the signal "enemy battle fleet in sight". During the subsequent engagement, she was hit by the Italian light cruiser *Giuseppe Garibaldi*. The 6-inch shell splinters struck the aircraft catapult and damaged her floatplane beyond repair, its wreckage being thrown into the sea. Minutes later, *Neptune's* main guns scored three hits on the heavy cruiser *Bolzano*, inflicting some damage on her torpedo room, below the waterline and the "B" turret. During 1941, she led Force K, a raiding squadron of cruisers.



On the night of 19–20 December, *Neptune*, leading the line, struck two mines, part of an Italian minefield laid by an Italian cruiser force. The first struck the anti-mine screen, causing no damage. The second struck the bow hull. While reversing out of the minefield, *Neptune* struck a third mine, which took off her propellers and left her dead in the water.

The destroyers *Kandahar* and *Lively* were sent into the minefield to attempt a tow. The former struck a mine and began drifting. *Neptune* then signalled for *Lively* to keep clear. *Kandahar* was later evacuated and scuttled with a torpedo by the destroyer *Jaguar*.

Neptune hit a fourth mine and quickly capsized, killing 737 crew members. Initially some 30 crew survived the sinking, but they also

died of wounds and exposure in the subsequent days. Only one was still alive when their carley float was picked up five days later by the Italian torpedo boat *Generale Achille Papa*. The sole survivor, Norman Walton, spent 15 months in an Italian prisoner of war camp.

In 1991, Walton travelled to Nelson to unveil a memorial to *Neptune*. Of the 764 that perished, 150 were New Zealand sailors, including four from Nelson.

The memorial (right) to four Nelson men, killed in the New Zealand Navy's worst incident involving loss of life commemorates Don Corbin, Bill Gibbs, Trevor McComish and Lawrie Nalder who were aboard *HMS Neptune*.



Norman Walton seldom talked about the war and the sinking of the *Neptune* until he came to New Zealand in 1991 to unveil the memorial in Nelson. During that trip he spoke to New Zealand relatives of the crew and began to unburden himself of the grief he had felt for more than 50 years.

A memorial to those who perished in *HMS Neptune* was erected on the Dunedin waterfront and unveiled on 12 December 2008 (pictured below left). The memorial commemorates the lives of 30 local men involved in the *Neptune* tragedy.

The memorial incorporates two bronze plaques. The first with an account of the engagement and featuring the *HMS Neptune* Crest cast by Manor Foundry in England. The other bears the names of the local sailors who perished, beneath which is the epitaph ...

*There are no flowers on a sailors grave
No lilies on an ocean wave
The only tribute is the seagulls sweep
And the teardrop on a loved one cheek.*



Up Spirits!



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