

NEW ZEALAND NAVAL FORCES
REPORT OF THE COMMODORE COMMANDING THE NEW ZEALAND STATION,
FOR THE PERIOD 1st APRIL 1926 TO 31st MARCH 1927

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency the Governor-General

REPORT

The Hon. the Minister of Defence, Wellington.

H.M.S. "Diomede", at Auckland, N.Z., 11th June, 1927

SIR –

I have the honour to address to you the following report on the Naval Forces of the Dominion and the proceedings on the New Zealand Station during the year 1st April, 1926, to 31st March, 1927. Until the 9th August, 1926, the station was under the command of my predecessor, Commodore (now Rear-Admiral) Alister F. Beal, C.B., C.M.G., and this period is covered by extracts from his report on supersession. For purposes of reference this report has been divided into seven parts, under the following general headings: I, State; II, Personnel; III, The Naval Base; IV, Reserves; V, Proceedings; VI, Visits of Warships to the Dominion; VII, Drills and Exercises.

I. STATE.

The following is the present composition of the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy: H.M.S. "Diomede" (broad pendant of Commodore Commanding New Zealand Station), H.M.S. "Dunedin," H.M.S. "Philomel" (non-seagoing depot-ship and training establishment at Devonport, Auckland), H.M. trawler "Wakakura," oiler "Nucula."

H.M. ships "Laburnum" and "Veronica" are also employed on the station under the Commodore Commanding, but at the expense of the Imperial Government.

2. "Dunedin" has been sent to England for refit and to recommission. She is expected to rejoin the squadron at the end of July, after an absence of less than six months from the station.

II. PERSONNEL.

There are at present 299 active-service ratings who have been recruited in New Zealand serving in the New Zealand Division.

2. Recruiting for the New Zealand Division has continued to be satisfactory. During the year forty-nine seamen boys, twenty-two stokers, and one writer have been entered in New Zealand. So far as seamen boys and stokers are concerned there is no shortage of applicants and it is possible to select the best. The number of artisan and artificer candidates is, however, not so satisfactory, and there is inclined to be an insufficiency of competent and experienced workmen. This is doubtless due to the opportunities which are open to skilled men on shore. The following table shows the districts from which the new entries were recruited :—

Regimental District	Seamen	Stokers.	Artisans, &.	Total.
Auckland	10	7	..	17
Paeroa	5	..	..	5
Whangarei	2	..	..	2
Hamilton	2	1	..	3

Wellington	6	7	1	14
Palmerston North	5	4	..	9
Napier	8	1	..	9
Hawera	..	..	..	..
Nelson	..	..	..	..
Christchurch	5	1	..	6
Dunedin	1	..	..	1
Invercargill	5	1	..	6
Totals	49	22	1	72

3. The following table shows the numbers discharged or dismissed after final entry during the period of this report :—

Cause.	Seamen	Stokers.	Others.	Total.
Services no longer required, dismissed as a punishment, unsuitable	2	2	1	5
By desertion.	12	7	4	23
Invalided	3	1	1	5
By purchase	1	2	1	4
Totals	18	12	7	37

4. During the year seventeen ratings of various classes have been sent to England for specialist courses in the Imperial training establishments, to be followed in most cases by a period of seagoing training in battleships of the Fleet. During the refit of cruisers at home every effort is made to release as many of the New Zealand men as possible from ship duties in order to enable them to go through short courses of instruction at the naval technical schools, as this instruction cannot be given on the station. The importance of these courses cannot be appraised too highly, and the results are extremely satisfactory.

5. The health and discipline of the ships' companies have been excellent.

III. THE NAVAL BASE.

During the past few years it has been found necessary to expand the facilities of the base in order to compete with the growing demands of the squadron. The limited space available for expansion, and the age of the depot and training establishment (H.M.S. "Philomel" and the wooden huts), together with the necessity for being able to berth more ships alongside the wharves, have made it essential that sooner or later steps must be taken to obtain a larger area of land and to build a shore establishment to replace H.M.S. "Philomel." This matter is now under consideration.

2. A naval magazine is under construction at Takapuna in which to store the reserves of ammunition for the squadron. This arrangement will be far more satisfactory than the present system.

3. The stocks maintained at Devonport make it possible for H.M. ships to replenish with fuel, stores, and ammunition at very short notice:

4. Periodical dockings of all seagoing ships have been undertaken in the Calliope Dock, and small refits and running repairs carried out at the Naval Base. It has, however, been decided that cruisers shall return home periodically to undergo alterations and additions and repairs of a nature which cannot be undertaken without the resources of a fully-equipped dockyard. H.M.S. "Dunedin" is undergoing a refit of this nature in England at the present time.

IV. RESERVES.

The following is the state of the New Zealand Royal Naval Reserve:—

Officers, R.N.R.	..	8
Officers, R.N.V.R.	.. ..	21
Men, R.N.R.—		
Class A. (Active)—Men who have served in the Royal Navy or any Dominion Navy and who come up for periodical training		84
Class A. (Inactive)—Men discharged from the seagoing forces in New Zealand, other than those joining Class A (Active). These men are liable to be called up for naval service in the event of war within ten years of discharge from the seagoing forces, if not then over forty years of age		134
Class B—Men who follow the sea as a profession in the mercantile marine or steam fishing vessels		16
Class C—Men ineligible for Classes A and B		79
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		313
Class D—As for Class C, but only eligible to join when a company is formed in any district where they may be living		157

2. The total number of men in Classes A, B, and C has risen from forty-three on the 31st March, 1926, to 313 at the present time, which is very satisfactory; the number of Reservists in Classes B and C are not yet, however, up to requirements, but I hope that more candidates will apply when the conditions of service are more widely known.

3. A most satisfactory feature of the Reserve is the Class D at Auckland, which has during the last year been increased from two to three companies. The officers and men are keen, and this is reflected in their state of efficiency. They carry out their seagoing training in one of the cruisers, but with the arrival of H.M. trawler "Wakakura" on the station it is now possible to carry out more intensive training, and periodical cruises are made in her, the Reserve men actually working the ship themselves with a nucleus of active-service ratings. This enables them to have first-hand experience in seamanship, gunnery, and mine-sweeping. I feel that the extension of Class D of the Reserve to other parts of the Dominion will be equally successful, and I strongly recommend it.

4. A large number of men of this class of the Reserve, under their own officers, took part in the reception at Auckland of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York, assisting the active service personnel of the New Zealand Squadron in lining the route. They presented a very smart appearance.

V. PROCEEDINGS.

A. H.M.S. "Dunedin."

H.M.S. "Dunedin," under the command and wearing the broad pendant of Commodore Alister F. Beal, C.B., C.M.G., visited Lyttelton, Dunedin, Wellington, and Napier during April, 1926, returning to Auckland in May for docking and annual refit. A cruise in the South Pacific islands was commenced on the 25th May and lasted until the return to Wellington at the beginning of August. It was arranged to be at Suva to coincide with the visit of His Excellency the Governor-General of New Zealand. The following were also visited : Lautoka, Nukualofa.

2. I hoisted my broad pendant in succession to Commodore Beal on the 10th August, 1926, and took over command of the station and H.M.S. "Dunedin." On the 13th August I was honoured with a visit by His Excellency the Governor-General, who inspected the ship's company.

3. On the 1st September "Dunedin" proceeded to Auckland, and from there to the Hauraki Gulf for exercises. During October the following places were visited : Tauranga, Opotiki, White Island, Tokomaru Bay, Gisborne, Wellington, and Picton. The annual musketry course was held at Trentham in October—November. I am much obliged to the Wellington Harbour Board for their courtesy in providing berths at the wharves for both "Dunedin" and "Diomedé" whilst this course was being carried out at Trentham, and I trust that it may be possible to berth ships alongside during this course in succeeding years. In the latter part of November and early December various tactical exercises and drills were carried out with H.M.S. "Diomedé," and while making her way to Auckland to give Christmas leave calls were made by "Dunedin" at Pelorus Sound and Napier.

4. On the 24th January, 1927, after I had turned over the command to Captain J. S. M. Ritchie, Royal Navy, and transferred my broad pendant to H.M.S. "Diomedé," "Dunedin" sailed for England for refit and recommissioning, proceeding via Suva, Honolulu, San Diego (California), Panama, Port of Spain, Trinidad, and thence to Sheerness, arriving on the 24th March, 1927. All Imperial ratings on loan agreements to New Zealand terminating prior to the 31st March, 1928, were sent home in the ship to be relieved, and as many New Zealand ratings as possible were drafted to the ship to enable them to visit England and undergo short courses.

B. H.M.S. "Diomedé."

H.M.S. "Diomedé," under the command of Captain J. S. M. Ritchie, R.N., visited Russell, Lyttelton, Dunedin, and Wellington in company with H.M.S. "Dunedin," and Nelson independently, during March and April, returning to Auckland on the 1st May, 1926: The islands cruise was commenced on the 10th May, and visits were made to Niue, Apia, Pago Pago, Suva, Lautoka, Levuka, Bora Bora, Papeete, Rarotonga, Vavau, and Nukualofa, ending at Auckland on the 20th August, 1926. The ship was then docked in the Calliope Dock, and local refit taken in hand. Combined exercises with H.M.S. "Dunedin" were carried out in the Hauraki Gulf at the end of September, and the ship arrived at Wellington on the 20th October for the annual musketry course at Trentham. After leaving Wellington further exercises were carried out with H.M.S. "Dunedin," and *en route* to Auckland visits were made to Queen Charlotte Sound, Picton, Napier, and Gisborne.

2. Captain J. S. M. Ritchie handed over the command, and on the 24th January, 1927, "Diomedé," wearing the broad pendant of the Commodore Commanding the New Zealand Station, sailed for the Hauraki Gulf and the Bay of Islands for exercises; afterwards returning to Auckland.

3. On the 21st February "Diomedé" proceeded to sea to meet H.M.S. "Renown" with the Duke and Duchess of York on board, and escorted her to Auckland on the 22nd February.

4. Front Auckland "Diomedé" proceeded to Wellington for the Royal visit to that city, and sailed for the Chatham Islands, Timaru, and Bluff on the 11th March. While at the Chatham Islands the opportunity was taken to practise landing parties and storming tactics.

5. It was intended that "Diomedé" should have the honour of conveying H.R.H. the Duke of York from Bluff to rejoin H.M.S. "Renown," but, to my great disappointment, the very bad weather made it necessary for me to make other arrangements; to have attempted the operation would have submitted His Royal Highness to very great risk, and rendered possible serious damage to "Diomedé."

6. The ship returned to Auckland from Bluff, and, having completed with fuel and stores, sailed on the 31st March for Suva to embark His Excellency the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific and the New Hebrides Commission.

C. H.M. Trawler "Wakakura."

H.M.T. "Wakakura" was commissioned at Sheerness on the 8th April, 1926, under the command of Lieutenant R. A. McDonald, Royal Navy. A visit was paid to Portsmouth in June, and trials of mine-sweeping gear were carried out. Following exercises with the mine-sweeping flotilla at Portland, "Wakakura" sailed for New Zealand on the 14th June. St. Vincent, Cape Verde Islands, was reached on the 26th June, and after coaling and making minor repairs departure was made

for Port of Spain, Trinidad, arriving on the 17th July. Here a thorough examination of the machinery was made, as a great many defects existed. These were repaired, and the trawler sailed for Colon on the 26th August and arrived on the 2nd September. Passage through the Canal was made on the 7th September, and the next port of call, Mazatlan, was reached on the 19th September, after experiencing very bad weather. Thence passage was made to San Diego, arriving on the 29th September, where, unfortunately, the First Lieutenant, Lieutenant A.H. B. Atkinson, R.N., had to be discharged to hospital and a relief from England awaited.

2. The voyage from San Diego to Honolulu, which was commenced on the 11th November, was eventful. Very heavy weather was encountered, and machinery defects were developed. Fortunately, U.S.S. "Pittsburg" was in the vicinity and offered help. This was gladly accepted, and "Wakakura" was towed to Honolulu, arriving on the 25th November. Extensive repairs to the machinery were taken in hand with the assistance of the United States naval authorities, who were most generous in their help and in their kindness to the ship's company. "Wakakura" sailed for Pago Pago on the 9th December, and thence on the 30th December for Auckland, which was reached on the 17th January, 1927, after a voyage lasting seven months. She was then taken in hand to complete the arrangements for using her as a training-ship for officers and men of the New Zealand Royal Naval Reserve.

D. H.M.S. "Philomel."

The training of recruits and the depot-ship's work carried out in H.M.S. "Philomel" has continued very satisfactorily under the command and direction of Commander F. C. Bradley, R.N.

E. R.F.A. "Nucula."

During the year "Nucula" has been employed bringing oil fuel from San Pedro, California, to Auckland for the naval oil-fuel tanks and for H.M. ships. When the cruisers have been on extended cruises to places where there is no oil fuel "Nucula" has joined company and thus made these cruises possible. Her strategic value has been proved.

F. H.M. Sloops.

H.M. sloops "Laburnum" and "Veronica" left Auckland in April and May, 1926, respectively, and between then and October carried out very extended cruises in the South Pacific islands.

2. The Administrator of Western Samoa (Major-General Sir George Richardson, K.B.E.) and the Secretary for Native Affairs were embarked in H.M.S. "Laburnum" on the 5th July and visited the Tokelau Islands, returning to Apia on the 10th July. His Excellency the Governor of Fiji was embarked on the 24th August and in "Laburnum" visited Savu Savu, Mbutha Bay, Labasa, Naduri, and Levuka, returning to Suva on the 3rd September.

3. In November both sloops were docked in Calliope Dock, and since then have visited many of the main ports of New Zealand.

4. Commander C. E. Brooke, Royal Navy, remains in command of H.M.S. "Laburnum," but Commander P. Hordern, Royal Navy, was succeeded in command of H.M.S. "Veronica" by Commander R. H. F. De Salis, D.S.C., Royal Navy, in December, 1926.

5. Both ships were recommissioned in January, 1927.

VI. VISITS OF WARSHIPS TO THE DOMINION.

The only visits to New Zealand waters during the year have been by the French sloop "Cassiopee" from the 15th December, 1926, to the 3rd January, 1927, and H.M.S. "Renown," conveying Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York, from the 22nd February, 1927, to the 22nd March, 1927.

VII. DRILLS AND EXERCISES.

Every opportunity has been taken of carrying out gunnery, torpedo, and tactical exercises. A large target is being built at Auckland, which will greatly add to the efficiency of the cruisers.

2. The annual musketry course at Trentham proves of great value, and the temporary change from ship life is much appreciated by officers and men. At the conclusion of the course in November the range parties of "Dunedin" and "Diomedé" were reviewed by the Hon. the Minister of Defence.

I have, &c.,

G. T. C. P. SWABEY,
1st Naval Member and Commodore Commanding
New Zealand Station.