

# **Small Steps from Empire to Independence: The Royal New Zealand Navy, 1910-2010**

**Michael Wynd**

*Cet article explique le lien intime entre la Marine royale britannique et la Marine royale néozélandaise dans l'histoire nationale et militaire de la Nouvelle-Zélande, une relation qui a commencé tôt dans l'histoire de la colonie avec l'inclusion de la Nouvelle-Zélande dans le cadre de l'Empire britannique. Jusqu'à dans le courant du vingtième siècle, la Nouvelle-Zélande a maintenu des liens étroits avec la Marine britannique et a embrassé avec enthousiasme son rôle de soutien de l'empire, comme peuvent en témoigner les contributions nationales aux deux guerres mondiales. Pour commencer, l'auteur passera en revue les contributions et le développement d'une marine très distinctement néozélandaise. La dernière partie de l'article examine le développement d'après-guerre de la Marine néozélandaise et les principaux changements qu'elle a subis pour devenir la force qu'elle est en 2010.*

The history of the Royal New Zealand Navy is a progression of small steps from Empire to independence. The navy in New Zealand has followed a very different path when compared to the experience of Australia and Canada. This paper will explore the influence of such factors as the nation's manpower and financial capacity to build a fleet, perception of New Zealand's place within the Empire, a growing self-awareness post-1945, domestic and party factional politics in the 1970s and 1980s, and finally a shift back to multilateralism and cooperation in the past two decades. Up until the early 1970s its steps towards independence were slow and sure but from then on became uncertain as external economic pressure and a generational change in politics forced sudden and unexpected changes of direction while political and personal antipathy decided defence and foreign policy. New Zealand national history suggests that its citizens were contented to be part of the British Empire, and a case could be made that New Zealand would have been happy to remain a dominion, yet this nation has moved to full independence.

## **Formation of a Navy, 1910-45**

In 1910, the loyal Dominion of New Zealand had no naval force. The spar-torpedo boats bought in the 1880s to scare off the Russian fleet had been scrapped. The

*The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* XXIV, Nos. 3 & 4 (Jul. & Oct. 2014), 104-123  
*Canadian Military History* 23, Nos. 3 & 4 (Summer & Autumn 2014), 104-123

former HMS *Sparrow*<sup>1</sup> was operating as a training ship for seamen boys. The dominion enthusiastically contributed to funding for the Royal Navy to remain in Australasian waters and the Calliope drydock located at Devonport was for the use of the Admiralty. In 1909 Prime Minister Sir Joseph Ward offered to purchase a battleship for the RN. At the same time he increased the annual contribution to naval defence of the dominion to £100,000. His public statement regarding the offer stressed:

...how important it is for the protection of the Empire that the Navy should be at the absolute disposal of the Admiralty... that the truest interest of the people of New Zealand will be best served by having a powerful Navy under the independent control of those responsible for directing it in time of peace or war... so that the most effective results for the defence of all portions of the Empire may be assured.<sup>2</sup>

The offer, to be funded by borrowing, was made without consultation of his cabinet colleagues or approval in parliament.<sup>3</sup> The naval crisis in 1909 was sufficient reason for Ward's offer as well as reaffirming New Zealand's place within the Empire as a proud dominion. His unilateral decision received wide public and political support when it was announced in the press. Construction began in 1910 on the battlecruiser that would be named HMS *New Zealand*.<sup>4</sup> Her commissioning into the RN's Grand Fleet raised hopes in New Zealand that a major Imperial fleet would now be based in the Pacific to counter the threat of Japan and protect the dominions in the South Pacific.<sup>5</sup>

In 1913 there was debate within the government over whether New Zealand ought to join with Australia and form a Commonwealth Navy in the belief that there was a strategic need for a significant naval force to be based in Australasian waters. Strategic and political events in Europe required that the gift battlecruiser remain with the Grand Fleet. This was something of a sore point in New Zealand and created tension with Britain over imperial defence policy for the Asia and Pacific regions. Ultimately it spurred New Zealand to press harder for its own navy.

The first step to a navy was legislative. After the 1913 Imperial Conference the government passed the *Naval Defence Act* in December which authorised the creation of a New Zealand naval force. The act established the intended structure, duties and obligations of the navy. This 'paper navy' awaited the reality of ships and men but this next step was delayed as the government chose to wait for the assistance from the Admiralty. On 15 July 1914 Captain P.H. Hall-Thompson RN was appointed Naval

---

<sup>1</sup> A composite screw gunboat completed in 1889, sold to the New Zealand government and renamed *Amokura*; served as a training ship from 1905 to 1922 when it was sold as a coal hulk.

<sup>2</sup> T.A Brassey (ed), *The Naval Annual 1909* (London: J. Griffin and Co, 1909), 12.

<sup>3</sup> It was the equivalent to £2 for every man, woman and child in New Zealand in 1909. The loan was only repaid in 1944.

<sup>4</sup> An Indefatigable-class battlecruiser commissioned in 1912, sold off in 1922 and broken up in 1923.

<sup>5</sup> Ian McGibbon, *The Path to Gallipoli: Defending New Zealand 1840-1915* (Wellington: GP Books, 1991), 179-180.

Advisor to the government for the purpose of establishing the new navy. He was also the commanding officer of the light cruiser HMS *Philomel* allocated by the Admiralty as a sea-going training ship for New Zealand.<sup>6</sup> Her sister ships *Pyramus* and *Psyche* would remain on station but under Admiralty control as the New Zealand Division. Within three weeks of Hall-Thompson's arrival war was declared and *Philomel* also reverted to Admiralty control. The escort sloop HMS *Torch* was offered to New Zealand from the imperial Australian station when it ceased to exist in October 1913. It was used as a depot ship in Wellington until *Philomel* returned.<sup>7</sup> With a war to fight, New Zealand's fledgling navy was placed on hold.

The three cruisers were deployed initially to escort troopships. On 15 August they escorted an expeditionary force from Wellington to seize German Samoa which was successfully occupied on 30 August. In October 1914, the three cruisers escorted the troopships with the main body of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force bound for Egypt. *Philomel* and *Pyramus* (both partly manned by New Zealanders) detached from the convoy and went to Singapore. *Philomel* escorted ships to Aden and served on active service in and around the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. During this time a New Zealand rating serving in *Philomel* was killed in action, the first New Zealander to die while in naval service. *Philomel* returned to New Zealand in 1917, worn down by three hard years of operations. Hall-Thompson resumed the task of setting up the stillborn navy.

The lack of naval vessels meant that New Zealand's naval contribution in the First World War were individuals who were able to get themselves overseas to join the RN.<sup>8</sup> The most famous of these was Lieutenant-Commander William Sanders RNR who won his Victoria Cross in 1917 commanding a Q-Ship. In addition to Sanders, some 200 New Zealanders were recruited in 1916 for service with the Coastal Forces serving on minesweepers and motor launches while others served in the RNAS. Ernest Rutherford, a New Zealand scientist, made his contribution to the war effort with his involvement in the development of ASDIC. By the Armistice, New Zealand was no nearer a fleet than it had been in 1914 despite the cost of proving its loyalty to Empire through the sacrifice on the Western Front and in the Middle East.

The inter-war period from 1919 was one of slow but sure steps in the development of naval forces in New Zealand but under constant budgetary restraint. Despite a lack of progress towards a naval force, New Zealand adopted a rather contrary position in joining the other Dominions in August 1918 and rejecting the British proposal for an Imperial Navy. The next step came when Viscount Jellicoe arrived in Wellington aboard HMS *New Zealand* in 1919 and presented to the government an audacious plan

---

<sup>6</sup> A Pelorous-class light cruiser in service with the RN since 1890, the hulk of *Philomel* was disposed of in 1946.

<sup>7</sup> R.J. McDougall, *New Zealand Naval Vessels* (Christchurch: GP Books, 1989), 13. In 1918 *Torch* was renamed HMS *Firebrand* and returned to the Australian government for use as a patrol vessel.

<sup>8</sup> New Zealand only recruited for the 1<sup>st</sup> NZ Expeditionary Force's NZ Division and Mounted Rifle Brigade and actively dissuaded men from naval service. The 200 volunteers were fortunate in that they were able to volunteer at all, as conscription came into effect in 1916.

for the rapid expansion of the naval forces in New Zealand. This plan was an altered version of one that had already been presented to the Australian government. Despite Jellicoe's enthusiasm, the government was not able to fund even a small portion of the plan. Unlike Australia, a New Zealand navy would have to be formed "from scratch"<sup>9</sup> using the depot ship HMS *Philomel*, Calliope drydock, some minor buildings, and a small number of trained men.

In 1920 the New Zealand Station was formally split from China Station. In the following year an Order-in-Council established the New Zealand Naval Board along with regulations that formed the New Zealand Division of the RN. To serve as the flagship for the Division, New Zealand was offered the cruiser HMS *Canterbury*. The offer was withdrawn because of a lack of fuel oil storage at Devonport. The light cruiser HMS *Chatham*,<sup>10</sup> which could be kept on station by the plentiful coal supply in Auckland, was offered instead and accepted. It had originally been decided that the ship would be primarily manned by the RN, with personnel on loan to New Zealand, but when it came to actually implementing this, the RN was unable to provide the necessary personnel.

The difficulty was overcome by the New Zealand government offering three-year short term engagements which appealed to currently serving RN ratings that were dissatisfied with their conditions of service but still had some years to serve. By this means 293 ratings were recruited, comprising the core ship's company for *Chatham* and also *Philomel*, the balance being made up by RN ratings on loan and New Zealand-trained recruits. HMS *Chatham* arrived in New Zealand in January 1921 and while serving with the Division the government would pay for her maintenance. A commitment was given to the Admiralty that a naval base would be developed at Devonport.<sup>11</sup> *Philomel* was made seaworthy and moved to Auckland as a training and depot ship. This was completed in April and these two ships formed the nucleus of the New Zealand Division. *Chatham's* arrival allowed time for the naval base to be further developed. By 1924 oil storage tanks were built at Devonport and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary oiler *Nucula* was assigned to the division to maintain a supply of fuel oil. *Chatham* left New Zealand in 1924 to be replaced by the cruisers HM Ships *Dunedin* and *Diomede*.<sup>12</sup> Sufficient New Zealanders had volunteered by 1924 to man two cruisers, but there remained a significant number of RN officers and ratings on both vessels. Alongside the cruisers, the sloops HM Ships *Labuenum*, *Leith*, *Veronica*, and *Wellington* were also stationed in New Zealand for various periods from 1924 to 1939.

In addition to the regular force, the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (New Zealand) was established in 1924 under auspices of the 1913 *Naval Act*. The driving force behind the formation of the volunteer reserves was Charles Palmer, one of the 200 men who had served with the RNR during the First World War. Recruiting began in

---

<sup>9</sup> Captain Augustus Agar, *Showing the Flag* (London: Evans Brothers, 1962), 37.

<sup>10</sup> A Chatham-class light cruiser completed in 1913, she served off Gallipoli as General Sir Ian Hamilton's headquarters and fought at the Battle of Jutland, left New Zealand service in 1924, and was sold for breaking up in 1926.

<sup>11</sup> Agar, *Showing the Flag*, 37.

<sup>12</sup> D-class cruisers, *Diomede* left New Zealand in 1935 and *Dunedin* in 1937.

Auckland and the first parade was held there in March 1925. In 1928 additional volunteer units were formed in Wellington, Lyttelton [Christchurch], and Port Chalmers [Dunedin] in 1928. To provide a vessel for training purposes the government purchased the Canadian-built minesweeper *TR-1* and renamed it HMS *Wakakura* in 1926. All who entered service with the RNVR (NZ) up to 1939 trained on this vessel.

Between 1924 and 1939 the New Zealand Division's role can best be described as showing the flag in the Pacific and building up a cadre of trained men for naval service releasing Royal Naval personnel to return to Britain. A regular routine of island cruises and exercises with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) was followed during this period. There was also service to the Empire when the cruisers *Dunedin* and *Diomedé* carried out operations in Samoa from 1928 to 1930 to suppress an anti-government Mau movement. In 1931 a disaster proved the value of a naval force in a nation that still had very limited transport infrastructure. The sloop HMS *Veronica* was in port at Napier on 3 February when a major earthquake struck the region. Through the resources of the navy including radio communications, the citizens of the devastated town received medical treatment, were fed, and given shelter.

To support the division further, negotiations with the Admiralty were conducted over the ownership and development of the dockyard facilities in Devonport.<sup>13</sup> The outcome of the successful negotiations was an urgent three-year programme of re-equipping the naval base including the necessary heavy machinery and additional fuel storage. Part of the driving force behind this programme was the arrival of the Leander-class cruisers HM Ships *Achilles* and *Leander*. From 1919 to 1939, through a series of small steps the navy in New Zealand came to consist of two modern cruisers, a minesweeper, a small cadre of reservists, a structure to absorb naval volunteers for service in case of war, and a base able to support naval forces in New Zealand.

In 1939, after the declaration of war, Prime Minister Michael Savage announced that where Britain goes New Zealand would go and play its part in the defence of the Commonwealth. Unlike the First World War, there would be New Zealand warships in action. As another step to independence from Britain it was felt that the navy was worthy of its own identity. Acting on the request of the prime minister, King George VI agreed to formalise this, and in September 1941 the *Royal New Zealand Navy Order 1941 No 1941/169* was duly enacted by order-in-council effective from 1 October 1941. While this has given rise to claims for that date as the birth of the Royal New Zealand Navy, that is incorrect (the 1913 *Naval Defence Act* should be used instead) and the practical effects were minimal until 1946, when the work of forming a peacetime navy was undertaken.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> This excluded the Calliope dry-dock as it remained in the ownership of the Auckland Harbour Board.

<sup>14</sup> One immediate and permanent impact was in the styling of naming ships in commission: all those in service prior 1 October 1941 are referred to as "HMS", after 1 October 1941 that changed to "HMNZS" (for "His / Her Majesty's New Zealand Ship"). As an example, *Achilles* served with the NZ Division of the RN as HMS *Achilles*, but as of 1 October 1941 she became HMNZS *Achilles*. The first warship to be commissioned into RNZN service as a

The initial contribution to the naval war was through the cruisers HM Ships *Achilles* and *Leander* that served in the South Atlantic, Pacific, Tasman Sea, Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean up until 1941. The part of *Achilles* in the Battle of the River Plate in December 1939 is the most significant event in New Zealand naval history of the Second World War. For the second time in the nation's history, the New Zealand flag was flown from a warship going into combat.<sup>15</sup> Both cruisers remained the major surface combat units until 1943 when *Leander* was paid off and returned to the RN and *Achilles* was sent to Britain for a refit. The RNZN remained without surface combat units until mid-1944 when *Achilles* returned to service along with the cruiser HMS *Gambia*<sup>16</sup> as a replacement for *Leander*. Both would serve with the British Pacific Fleet until the end of the war. It would be the Pacific that was the central theatre for the majority of New Zealand naval operations. From 1942 New Zealand minesweepers and Fairmile launches operated in the Solomon Islands. The three minesweepers HMNZ Ships *Kiwi*, *Moa* and *Tui*<sup>17</sup> accounted for two Japanese submarines in 1943 that provided intelligence on naval codes.<sup>18</sup> In the home waters, a fleet of minesweepers was created to protect the major ports. This was the first example of vessels being constructed in New Zealand for naval service.

Despite having a fleet of surface combat vessels, the main contribution of New Zealand to the war at sea would be trained men. Over half the men that passed through the training establishment HMNZS *Tamaki*<sup>19</sup> went to serve with the Royal Navy. In addition, under the Scheme 'F' recruitment programme a number of New Zealanders joined the Fleet Air Arm. By 1945 one-quarter of the aircrew serving with the British Pacific Fleet were New Zealanders, a significant involvement in terms of the total manpower committed to naval service. Women also entered naval service with the formation of the Women's Royal New Zealand Naval Service (WRNZNS) in 1942 to free men for sea service. It was disbanded at the end of the war.

Along with the creation of a surface fleet, the Second World War provided the impetus for further development of the naval base in Devonport. The base had taken over twenty years to slowly develop in a series of small steps, as the example of the naval hospital illustrates. With the arrival of HMS *Chatham* in 1921, plans were made to

---

HMNZS was the minesweeper *Kiwi*, on 20 October 1941.

15 The first occasion was when HMS *New Zealand* carried the New Zealand flag into the battle of Jutland.

16 A Fiji-class cruiser commissioned into RNZN service in 1943, to date this remains the largest warship to have served with the RNZN.

17 Bird-class minesweepers *Moa* was sunk at Tulagi harbour in April 1943, while *Kiwi* served from 1941 to 1956, and *Tui* to 1967 mainly as a research vessel after 1946.

18 S.D. Waters, *Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War: The Royal New Zealand Navy* (Wellington: War History Branch Department of Internal Affairs, 1956), 307-309. See also Philip Jacobsen, "Codebooks from the I-1 Revisited," in *Guadalcanal Echoes* (February-March 1960), 24.

19 This training establishment located on Motuihe Island in the Hauraki Gulf operated there from 1941 to 1963 when it was relocated to Devonport. In the 1990s all recruit training was absorbed into HMNZS *Philomel*.

construct a hospital along the lines of hospitals at naval bases in Britain. Despite the flood of letters, reports and requests flowing back and forth from the Naval Board to the government, no action had been taken by 1939. It took the arrival of the United States Navy in 1942 to stimulate construction of a Quarterdeck, barracks, the hospital, and storage for fuel oil and ammunition, which were completed by 1944. The base took the name HMNZS *Philomel* from the depot ship that had seen a generation of sailors entering into naval service. At war's end the RNZN was a large force that would now face the challenges of a post-war world.

### **Crisis and Change, 1945-2001**

At the end of hostilities in 1945, the composition of the RNZN was reviewed. It was a unique situation in that for the first time New Zealand had a peacetime navy to be "controlled and operated solely by the New Zealand Government."<sup>20</sup> It was decided to retain a core of two cruisers but *Achilles* was considered too old and *Gambia* too large. As replacements, the cruisers HM Ships *Bellona* and *Black Prince*<sup>21</sup> were acquired in 1946. These well-equipped anti-aircraft cruisers were seen as a potential complement to the aircraft carrier force then proposed for the RAN. In addition to the new cruisers, the corvettes *Arabis* and *Arbutus*<sup>22</sup> with the smaller minesweepers *Kiwi* and *Tui* were available for training duties, and in reserve were a flotilla of Fairmiles and HDMLs (harbour defence motor launches). As part of the review there was a rapid demobilisation of personnel that reduced RNZN strength to 1,500 from a wartime high of 12,000. The loss of so many trained officers and ratings immediately compromised the ability to keep ships on active deployment at sea. A further driving force for the rapid resizing was the post-war economic recession that New Zealand found itself in. Scales of pay for the armed forces were considered and changes made. The pay issue for the RNZN was so ineptly handled by the government that in April 1947 ratings at HMNZS *Philomel* and some ships mutinied. The result was that 200 ratings were dismissed from naval service but the pay matter was addressed. The need to keep ships at sea led to the re-establishment of the WRNZNS in 1949.

By 1948 events in Europe had shown the Cold War was a reality for New Zealand, in that the threat of modern Soviet submarines could not be ignored, even in the South Pacific. New Zealand consequently purchased six Loch-class anti-submarine frigates in 1948 from Britain, renamed as HMNZ Ships *Hawea*, *Kaniere*, *Pukaki*, *Rotoiti*, *Taupo*, and *Tutira*. *Arabis* and *Arbutus* were returned in part payment. With the new frigates came a commitment to provide at least one ship if required for the defence of Hong Kong. To assist the RNZN develop its overall standards, two frigates were sent on exchange to the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet in 1950, although the Korean War was

---

<sup>20</sup> Grant Howard, *The Navy in New Zealand: An Illustrated History* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1981), 86.

<sup>21</sup> Both Improved Dido-class cruisers, *Bellona* served with the RNZN 1946-1954 and *Black Prince* 1946-1960.

<sup>22</sup> Modified Flower-class corvettes that served with the RNZN 1944-1948, during the Second World War they were part of the British Pacific Fleet 1944-45.

to intrude on this arrangement.

On 27 July 1950, within 48 hours of the government making the decision to support United Nations operations in Korea, *Pukaki* and *Tutira* were enroute to join the United Nations fleet; others would follow in rotation. The frigates were based either at Sasebo or Kure, for what were generally twelve to fourteen month deployments. Facilities for recreation in these two ports were extremely limited, considerably reducing the benefit of the relatively few occasions that the ships were in harbour. For the first few months the main tasks of the New Zealand ships were convoy escort and general patrol work. *Pukaki* and *Tutira* also formed part of the naval force which covered the landings at Inchon, then also participated in the landings at Wonsan.

From mid-1951 the New Zealand frigates primarily operated close to the west coast of Korea in support of land operations, often well up the Han River providing gunfire support to units ashore. For example, during a fourteen-month deployment from August 1951 to October 1952, *Taupo* fired over 16,000 rounds from her 4-inch gun, wearing out the barrel in the process. Although hard worked and frequently operating close inshore, the ships were particularly fortunate in seldom coming under fire, although *Rotoiti* was engaged by enemy shore batteries when far up the Han River. The last RNZN sailor to be killed in action occurred during a raid in August 1951 operating from *Rotoiti*.

The Korean War from the perspective of the RNZN was a matter of ships and men enduring three hard years, often in extreme weather conditions, of hard and monotonous but essential work, denying the sea to the enemy with none of the headline brilliance of great naval battles, while enabling the UN naval forces to make full use of it. Subsequent to the truce of 1953, New Zealand maintained its naval commitment to the UN Command in South Korea until 1959, by the regular attachment of RNZN warships to the UN forces. From 1955 these attachments occurred in conjunction with deployments to the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve (CSR) (see further discussion below).

Participation in the Korean War changed New Zealand's strategic focus and marked another step towards independence. Where the country had faithfully followed Britain in 1914 and 1939, it now saw a different path. As a step away from Empire and traditional links, New Zealand signed the ANZUS pact in 1951, the first time that New Zealand had entered into a security pact without Britain as a party.<sup>23</sup> This was a practical gain of a "stronger defence shield" well beyond New Zealand's "limited financial and manpower resources."<sup>24</sup> Although a Japanese resurgence was feared, New Zealand saw more threat from the Communist Bloc, and the ANZUS pact was the price for New Zealand's signature on the peace treaty with Japan.<sup>25</sup> This threat was reinforced when New Zealand went through a long waterfront strike in 1951 that only increased the

<sup>23</sup> J.G. Starke, *The ANZUS Treaty Alliance* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1965), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ewan Jamieson, *Friend or Ally: New Zealand at Odds with its Past* (Sydney: Brassey's Australia, 1990), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Ian McGibbon, *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31.



paranoia against 'reds under the beds'. During the strike sailors became *de facto* waterfront labour and coal miners. An American assessment of New Zealand's defence in 1953 noted that New Zealand's main naval effort was directed to anti-submarine warfare and surface warfare to protect its trade routes. The report commented that the RNZN, as an organisation, was based on the tradition of the RN, and Britain was the source of all fighting vessels that were then in commission.<sup>26</sup>

Although New Zealand had taken a step toward independence, there remained a willingness to continue Commonwealth defence relationships centred in Southeast Asia. The first step was joining the ANZAM Pact in 1948 along with Australia and Britain for the defence of Malaya. After the Korean War, RNZN vessels operated with the RN and RAN as part of the naval element of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, in which the task for RNZN vessels was to provide convoy protection and an anti-submarine force. From 1953 a commitment was made to keep a warship on station based in Singapore, making the primary task of the RNZN from 1955 onwards the fitting out, working up and deployment of fully armed and equipped warships to the region as New Zealand's contribution to regional security and as a tangible part of collective defence. At first, ships deployed away from New Zealand for twelve to fourteen months, but from 1959 efforts were made to reduce the length of each deployment to six to eight months.

While this arrangement remained in place, it meant that two to three vessels in the surface fleet would be outside New Zealand to meet the commitment to the pact. When the 1971 Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) came into effect, there was no longer a requirement to maintain a continuous presence in the region, although deployments away from New Zealand continued on an annual basis. From the 1980s individual deployments were reduced to just less than six months. Since the disbandment of NZ Force South East Asia in 1989, the RNZN has annually deployed task groups of up to four ships to meet the nation's FPDA commitments. With the granting of independence to Malaya in 1957, New Zealand joined the Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement. During the Malayan Emergency RNZN vessels as part of the CSR carried out patrols and some shore bombardments off Malaya. Whatever the level of commitment to Commonwealth defence, New Zealand was acutely aware that the nation's defence policy was based on the realistic assessment of the dependence upon the United States rather than the Commonwealth to guarantee national security.

The RNZN carried out active operations during the Indonesian Confrontation of 1962-66. In this type of counter-insurgency campaign, the larger ships were somewhat unsuited for the type of inshore and narrow waters patrol work required, while the main role of the Commonwealth naval task force was sea control and deterrence across the wider area. Accordingly, the two Ton-class minesweepers HMNZ Ships *Hickleton* and *Santon* were commissioned into RNZN service at Singapore in 1965. Both ships operated from Singapore as part of the Royal Navy's 11<sup>th</sup> Minesweeping Squadron, conducting anti-infiltration patrols alongside Australian and British vessels. *Hickleton* remains to this day the last RNZN vessel to have used its guns in anger. On 28 June

---

<sup>26</sup> RNZN Museum [copy], American Defence Assessment of New Zealand's Military Capability – American Ambassador's report, issued 1953.

1966, a 'kumpit' (a local trading vessel) was found to be returning from an abortive attempt to land on the south-east coast of the Malay Peninsula. When the occupants produced a heavy machinegun it was fired upon. In another quirk of naval history, this was the final hostile naval action of the Confrontation. Both ships were paid off in Britain at the end of 1966, never having actually visited New Zealand.

Unlike the Malayan Emergency and the Confrontation, the government had an ambivalent attitude towards involvement in Vietnam. The frigates then in the fleet were not suitable for extended naval gunfire negating any active RNZN participation. Rather than ships, thirty-eight volunteer naval medical staff would serve with a New Zealand Joint Services Medical Team in South Vietnam between 1967 and 1972.<sup>27</sup> Alongside an involvement in South East Asia, the New Zealand navy was involved in the development of nuclear weapons in the Pacific.

The history of the RNZN involvement in nuclear testing has been one of a shift from participation to protest. During the Cold War, New Zealand remained a faithful part of the Western Alliance, demonstrated by participation in the British nuclear testing programme in the Pacific. Nevertheless, New Zealand was independently minded enough in 1955 to refuse the British request to test thermonuclear devices in the Kermadec Islands.<sup>28</sup> The RNZN did deploy two frigates that operated as weather ships during the Operation Grapple testing programme of 1957-58.

The shift from participation to protest came about due to a swing in political attitudes and public opposition that developed from 1958, which only increased when in 1962 the light produced by a United States high-atmospheric test was seen widely in New Zealand. A year later the government outlined its nuclear policy which stated that nuclear weapons would not be acquired or stored in New Zealand. When USN vessels visited in 1960 and 1964, the question of whether they were carrying nuclear weapons was not raised.<sup>29</sup> In 1968, New Zealand became a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, based on the principle of deterrence. From 1964 to 1976 nuclear-powered vessels did not visit New Zealand ports.<sup>30</sup> The visits resumed in 1976 with a change of government. The rationale for the resumption of the visits was that they were "an essential element in New Zealand's alliance relationship with the United States" and for the benefit of domestic politics.<sup>31</sup> Between 1976 and 1984 there were ten separate visits in the form of nuclear-powered warships. These visits and the corresponding protests were always an anxious time for the RNZN, as its ships attempted to escort warships in the Waitemata Harbour against a ramshackle protest fleet unaware of the risks they ran.

The next major step to independence came with the election of the Labour

<sup>27</sup> McGibbon, *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, 26.

<sup>28</sup> Prime Minister's Officer PM 121/5/2 International Affairs, Atomic Energy, Military Uses Experiments Archives NZ, Telegram from Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden to PM Sydney Holland (nd, but believed to be 16 May 1955).

<sup>29</sup> McGibbon, *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, 22-23.

<sup>30</sup> RNZN Museum research document published July 2009. See also Ian *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, 22-23.

<sup>31</sup> McGibbon, *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, 22.

government in 1972. During the election, the party manifesto promised that it would formally protest against French nuclear testing in the Pacific. In 1973, in accordance with the promise, two RNZN frigates (*Otago* and *Canterbury*) were despatched to Mururoa Atoll to monitor the French atmospheric tests. With the support of an RAN vessel, HMAS *Supply*, the frigates acted as messengers of protest during the two tests conducted in July while other nation's navies carried out surveillance operations. In 1995, with the resumption of testing at Mururoa, the New Zealand Government once again deployed an RNZN vessel to the atoll without RAN support, as the Australian and New Zealand governments responded differently to public clamour for action, reflecting a divergence of views in the use of a naval vessel as an instrument of protest.

The 1970s saw a sea-change in New Zealand politics and the economy. With Britain entering into the European Common Market, links to the major export customer were torn asunder. New Zealand now faced a volatile political and economic environment without the security blanket of trade with Britain. It was in this environment that the Labour party won the election on the back of a promised political and economic transformation. The first noticeable step was the move from participation to protest against nuclear testing described above. Allied to this was the formal work undertaken by New Zealand in the United Nations to abolish nuclear testing by all nations. This step to independence influenced a generation of politicians that came into political power in the 1980s, who had become radicalised on the back of protests against nuclear testing, nuclear ship visits, and the New Zealand participation in the Vietnam War. The repercussions of this generational change were to be felt acutely by the RNZN.

The election of the Labour Party in 1984 meant that the armed forces of New Zealand became the unwilling participants and victims of the most significant departure from traditional alliances. Prime Minister David Lange, some of his cabinet, and the party executive's outlook were infused with a virulent anti-Americanism and an anti-nuclear bias. In July 1984 the government declared its intent to American Secretary of State George Schultz to ban visits by nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered warships. Lange wanted the luxury of banning nuclear vessels while at the same time remaining within ANZUS.<sup>32</sup> His actions were devastating on two counts. The first was lack of awareness that this policy approach was mutually exclusive and a naive understanding of the American position and the *realpolitik* of military alliances, especially in the Cold War.<sup>33</sup> The second, and perhaps more fatally for the defence relationship, was that Lange left Schultz with the impression that New Zealand would turn a blind eye to visits by nuclear-powered vessels. Any such action would be in direct contravention of openly stated Labour policy and totally impossible to guarantee despite public support of Lange's personal position that favoured both retaining ANZUS whilst also remaining nuclear free.<sup>34</sup> The ban was not an action of high philosophical principles; rather it was directly tied to domestic political interests and the internal factional politics of the Labour Party. The ban was the price extracted from the right faction by the left faction to achieve

---

<sup>32</sup> Jamieson, *Friend or Ally*, viii, 2, 5.

<sup>33</sup> McGibbon, *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, 23.

<sup>34</sup> Jamieson, *Friend or Ally*, 3.

its policy goals of deregulation, a consumption tax and sell-offs of state-owned businesses.<sup>35</sup> This much-contested period of New Zealand political history has been subject to much revision and disingenuous actions on the part of participants including Lange himself.<sup>36</sup>

The breaking point for the pact and New Zealand-United States relations was over the visit of the destroyer USS *Buchanan* in 1985. It was described to the government by the Chief of Defence Staff Air Marshal Ewan Jamieson as an “old diesel rustbucket.”<sup>37</sup> In late January 1985 the Americans requested that she visit New Zealand in March following exercises off the Australian coast.<sup>38</sup> Lange had indicated that his government would approve the request despite his public commitment to an anti-nuclear position. It was understood that this warship was not equipped with nuclear weapons, which in 1985 would seem to have satisfied the policy goals of the government with respect to ANZUS. Incredibly, on 5 February the application was declined leaving the Americans angry at the duplicity of the New Zealand government based on the impression that Lange had given.

The fallout effect on RNZN operations is contrasted in the reports of proceedings of the Leander-class frigate HMNZS *Canterbury* for 1984 and 1985, the August and September 1984 reports detail visits to San Diego on the way home from exercises with the Canadian Navy. There is no mention of any tension or difficulties in relations with the USN. The January 1985 report shows the changing situation. The commanding officer made reference to the “unsettling NZ political climate” and speculated that this was affecting morale of the ship’s company.<sup>39</sup> In June 1985 *Canterbury* left New Zealand for the AUSCANAM deployment in company with the Rothesay-class frigate *Southland*. The commanding officer of *Canterbury* wrote in his July report that “it will be interesting to observe the effect on morale of visits to American ports.” In August *Canterbury* visited Pearl Harbor and then San Diego, but the report for that month records that there were no official calls made on USN commanders nor did any USN personnel visit the frigate while she was in port. The ship departed San Diego on 19 August for the Canadian naval base at Esquimalt. After exercising with the Canadian vessels, *Canterbury* was forced to detach from further participation due to the imposed ANZUS restrictions and returned to New Zealand by way of San Francisco and Pearl Harbor in September.<sup>40</sup> In the same month a Labour cabinet minister visited the United States to make an effort to reconcile New Zealand’s anti-nuclear stance with its obligations under ANZUS. His reception in Washington was described as “cold”.<sup>41</sup> At home, former New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) senior officers published a paper attacking the

---

<sup>35</sup> McGibbon, *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, 32.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Bassett, *Working with David: Inside the Lange Cabinet* (Auckland: Hodder Moe, 2008), 88-89.

<sup>37</sup> Bassett, *Working with David*, 119.

<sup>38</sup> Jamieson, *Friend or Ally*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> RNZN Museum Archives, HMNZS *Canterbury*, Report of Proceedings, January 1985.

<sup>40</sup> RNZN Museum Archives, HMNZS *Canterbury*, Reports of Proceedings, July-October 1985.

<sup>41</sup> Bassett, *Working with David*, 187.

government's anti-nuclear stance. Lange dismissed them as "geriatric generals."<sup>42</sup> In 1986, US Secretary of State George Schultz commented that in 1985 the time had come to part, and while the United States and New Zealand parted as friends, there was still a parting.<sup>43</sup> This ill-considered step to independence destroyed a treaty that had been in place for over thirty years, and cut off the RNZN from training and restricted access to intelligence which had an immediate and lasting effect.

Despite the wrench in its military relationships, New Zealand remained committed to playing its part in peacekeeping operations. RNZN officers and ratings were posted to UN Observer missions or specific UN tasks requiring naval skill sets. For example, RNZN officers were sent to Bosnia as part of UNPROFOR, while an officer served afloat as a UN Observer aboard the NATO task force in the Adriatic. As part of UNTAC in the lead up to democratic elections in Cambodia in 1993, two thirty-man contingents of officers and ratings were deployed to monitor political activities and support the elections using river craft, small boats and coastal patrol vessels. New Zealand sailors worked alongside Chilean, Philippine, Uruguayan and British marines and sailors. Apart from these UN operations, it would be the Persian Gulf and the Pacific where RNZN vessels and personnel took on the significant role of peacemakers and peacekeepers.

After Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the UN placed embargoes on Iraq and asked member states to enforce them. The Leander-class frigate HMNZS *Wellington* was available to deploy, but the government chose not to provide assistance. In a repetition of Vietnam, an RNZN medical officer commanded a Joint Service Medical Team that was sent by the NZDF of which over half were medical personnel from the RNZN. The tanker HMNZS *Endeavour* was made available to assist the work-up and deployment of the second RAN task group to the Gulf. She fuelled the ships during the long transit, provided a target for the combatants to screen, and acted as a merchant ship for boarding training. This task took *Endeavour* far into the Indian Ocean before the RAN task group departed for the Gulf. After the Gulf War, RNZN frigates were sent to serve with the Multi-National Interception Force between 1995 and 1999. As indicative of a thaw in the defence relationship, a specialist RNZN Boarding Team deployed to the northern Gulf and operated from USN ships, to conduct boarding and search operations in merchant ships trading with Iraq in 1998 and 1999.

After the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, RNZN personnel undertook civil aviation security duties as part of an NZDF commitment for the following three months. In addition, officers and ratings have served in a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan, and RNZN officers in the US Central Command HQ. In November 2002 the government agreed to contribute ships to Operation Enduring Freedom, and the Anzac-class frigate HMNZS *Te Kaha* was ordered to deploy on operations with the coalition Maritime Interception Force (MIF) in the Arabian Sea, where she worked under Canadian command.

---

<sup>42</sup> Bassett, *Working with David*, 187.

<sup>43</sup> Jamieson, *Friend or Ally*, 1.

While the RNZN served in the Gulf and Afghanistan, there was a need for RNZN participation in peacemaking closer to home. During the late 1980s, civil war had broken out on Bougainville, sparked over the giant Panguna copper mine, which provided much-needed foreign earnings for the Papua New Guinea government, but was destroying the land on Bougainville. The militant separatists sought independence from Papua New Guinea. During July 1990, in an effort to assist negotiations between the warring parties, the New Zealand government offered ships of the RNZN as a neutral venue for peace talks. An RNZN task group was diverted from Southeast Asia and steamed to Bougainville, where the Leander-class frigate HMNZS *Waikato* hosted the Bougainville rebels while *Wellington* hosted the Papua New Guinea government representatives, and the tanker *Endeavour* was the site of the actual talks. An agreement was reached, known as the Endeavour Accords, and the ships returned to Auckland after 44 days of continuous steaming. Unfortunately the accord was not adhered to, and conflict broke out again some months later. By 1996 after various attempts to negotiate peace, the New Zealand government hosted a series of talks by the warring parties, and in 1997 a truce was negotiated, with an unarmed New Zealand-led multinational Truce Monitoring Group (TMG) inserted onto the island. RNZN personnel were assigned to the TMG, and the frigates *Canterbury* and *Endeavour* and diving tender *Manawanui* were deployed to assist the insertion of the group. *Canterbury*'s ship's company provided much of the manpower needed to quickly set up the TMG, open roads and assist with initial civil administration. Subsequently the peacekeeping force was retitled the Peace Monitoring Group, and during 1998 and 1999 *Manawanui* undertook two more deployments to Bougainville. During 2001 the Papua New Guinea government achieved political agreement with the islanders, and in 2002 the NZDF contingent to the Peace Monitoring Group was reduced as the operation came to an end.

As the situation became stable in Bougainville, another conflict erupted nearby in East Timor. After the August 1999 referendum in favour of independence, Indonesian militia groups went on a rampage of killing and destruction. Under the auspices of the UN, an Australian-led international force (INTERFET) was inserted into East Timor on 20 September 1999 to bring order and stability to the territory. On 9 September, *Te Kaha* was diverted from an FPDA exercise to join the international naval task force, while *Endeavour* was assigned to bring fuel to the operation. *Canterbury* was also assigned, and she relieved *Te Kaha* at the end of September after the initial amphibious and air landing intervention. *Canterbury* covered the arrival and landing of the New Zealand infantry battalion at Suai. *Endeavour* made a second deployment to East Timor during January-February 2000. RNZN officers and ratings were attached to the UN Transition Authority, East Timor, which replaced INTERFET in March 2000. RNZN officers and ratings were also attached to the New Zealand Battalion Groups in East Timor throughout this period and joined specialist training teams to assist the new East Timor Defence Force. After East Timor became an independent state in May 2002 the frigate HMNZS *Te Mana* undertook New Zealand's first diplomatic ship visit to the new nation.

During June 2000 communal conflict on Guadalcanal Island led to a breakdown of law and order. While a combined Australian and New Zealand air and sea evacuation of nationals was arranged, *Te Mana* was diverted to the island to support the operation.

Her ship's company operated the airport during the airlift, while the ship provided radar control for the evacuation aircraft. Subsequently *Te Kaha* relieved *Te Mana* at Honiara, and in September *Te Kaha* returned to be the venue for initial peace talks. Ultimately the talks were completed in Townsville, Australia, which led in December 2000 to the insertion of a small International Peace Monitoring Team and RNZN personnel were assigned to this mission. The IPMT was supported by the RAN, and in October 2001 *Manawanui* deployed to the islands for an eighteen week attachment to the IPMT. During that time elections were held and *Manawanui* played an important role in transporting election monitors and assisting the newly-formed government. The RNZN was only able to take part in peacekeeping operations as its fleet was developed and it is to that development that we now turn.

### **Towards a New Fleet 1955-2010**

In the 1950s the RNZN began to develop and change the fleet and test its independence from the RN. In 1955 the Naval Board reviewed the composition of the fleet and wanted to replace some of its ageing ships by purchasing two modern frigates. During a visit to London by the prime minister that year, it was impressed upon him that Commonwealth interests would be better served purchasing the cruiser HMS *Royalist*<sup>44</sup> as support for the carrier HMAS *Sydney*. He was further assured that it was intended to upgrade other cruisers, so that *Royalist* would not be an orphan. The government's decision to acquire the cruiser was supported by the Naval Board and New Zealand paid for the cost of the upgrade. However, the government was not aware that the Chief of the New Zealand Naval Staff, Commodore Charles Madden, had been briefed before he left London that one of his primary goals was to convince the government to buy *Royalist*.

RNZN officer Captain Peter Phipps, then serving in London, believed that the purchase of the cruiser was an unmitigated disaster which would affect the navy for the next ten to fifteen years. With supreme irony, Captain Phipps was then appointed to commission *Royalist*. Regardless of plans and deadlines set by the Admiralty, Phipps was adamant that he would not accept the ship until it was fully ready. This included accommodation spaces for the ship's company. The postponing of commissioning caused some embarrassment to the Naval Board. Similarly, Captain Phipps was determined that he would not sign-off the modernisation of the ship until all work had been completed to his satisfaction. In July 1956 the Admiral Superintendent of the Dockyard inspected *Royalist*. After the inspection a meeting was held in the wardroom. Facing a roomful of RN officers, Phipps was expected to sign the modernisation refit completion form. Again, he declined as not yet satisfied with the work. Only when he was completely satisfied, Phipps commissioned *Royalist* and took her to the Mediterranean fleet for working up.

There were two significant steps for the RNZN in the 1960s. The first was acquisition of the two Type-12 frigates *Otago* and *Taranaki*. These frigates were the first

---

<sup>44</sup> An Improved Dido-class cruiser and sister ship to *Bellona* and *Black Prince*, she was commissioned in 1956 and paid off in 1966 after suffering a failure in her boilers in late 1965 on return from a deployment with the CSR, which required a tow to reach Auckland.

new major surface vessels to enter service in the history of the RNZN. It also was end of the fascination with cruisers and heralded the era of a fleet of ASW frigates. The second development was the change in the officer corps. In 1951 nearly half of officers serving with the RNZN came from the RN, yet in 1969 there was a lone RN officer serving in the RNZN. The New Zealand Naval Board did not have a New Zealander as a Second Naval Member until 1957, but ten years later, the Board was entirely comprised of New Zealand officers and remained so until its disbandment in 1971.<sup>45</sup> While there were still strong links to the RN, the RNZN became more of an independent navy as a training relationship was cultivated with the USN.

When *Royalist* was decommissioned in 1966 the composition of the combat fleet of the RNZN changed to four frigates. In 1966 the Leander-class frigate *Waikato* was delivered followed by her sister *Canterbury* in 1971. As an interim measure, the Rothesay-class frigate HMS *Blackpool* was lent by the RN from 1966 until *Canterbury* arrived. While the frigates were a significant change for the fleet, it did create the problem that the Type-12 would require replacing in the 1980s and the Leanders in the 1990s. By 1981 various studies had been carried out into suitable replacements for *Otago* and *Taranaki* whose hulls were then over 20 years old. In 1981 the British government offer of the RNZN two Leander-class frigates *Dido* and *Bacchante* was accepted as an interim measure and the ships were commissioned as HMNZ Ships *Southland* and *Wellington*.

While the all-Leander force had the advantages of commonality, *Waikato*, *Canterbury* and the loan vessels all would have to be replaced at some point in the 1990s. To alleviate this, a comprehensive modernization and life extension was carried out to *Wellington* by the Naval Dockyard at Devonport by 1987. A similar modernisation of *Canterbury* was completed in September 1990. *Southland* brought the Ikara anti-submarine weapon system into New Zealand service, but the biggest change for the RNZN was the ADAWS 5 operational computer system. The RNZN established a new branch of software engineers to manage ADAWS and the new NAUTIS command systems that were subsequently installed in *Wellington* and *Canterbury*. At the same time, the number of Wasp helicopters, first introduced to RNZN service in 1966 with the commissioning of *Waikato*, was increased to seven, allowing flights on all the frigates and, as well, Wasps to be available for the survey vessel HMNZS *Monowai* and tanker *Endeavour*. The tanker, built in Korea, was commissioned in 1987 as an answer to a long-recognised need for replenishment at sea to facilitate operations in the vast distances of the Pacific. The addition of *Endeavour* to the fleet enabled the RNZN to fulfil its peacekeeping and peacemaking operations in Bougainville, East Timor, and the Solomon Islands.

The breaking of the ANZUS pact lead to a cabinet discussion in 1987 about a policy of self-reliance on defence needs. At the time the Australian government was proposing a co-operative plan to build frigates for the RAN and RNZN.<sup>46</sup> The problem of

---

<sup>45</sup> Peter Corbett, draft manuscript history of the New Zealand Naval Board prepared for the Navy Museum.

<sup>46</sup> Bassett, *Working with David*, 400.



block obsolescence for the Leander-class ships was alleviated in part by the life extensions to *Wellington* and *Canterbury* but purchasing new surface combatants could not be avoided any longer. The cabinet approved the decision to link in with the Australian new combatant project, which became known as the Anzac Ship Project. In 1988 Prime Minister David Lange indicated to the Australians that New Zealand would only purchase two.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, in the face of vigorous Australian lobbying, the minister of defence indicated that he “wouldn’t personally mind if the frigates were shelved,” but thought that they were “the downside of our nuclear policy.”<sup>48</sup> Unbeknownst to his cabinet colleagues, Lange had given his government’s firm commitment to purchase two new frigates.<sup>49</sup> The project awarded the prime contract for eight new Australian ships to Tenix shipbuilders and two ships for the RNZN through a treaty signed in November 1989 with Australia.<sup>50</sup>

The project provided for significant New Zealand industry involvement, which had previously been denied for Australian defence contracts under the 1982 Closer Economic Relations agreement. As a result of the Anzac Frigate Treaty, New Zealand industry gained approximately NZ\$800 million worth of work, from a total project cost of NZ\$1,200 million (in 1989 dollars). More importantly New Zealand firms gained an important entrée to the Australian and international defence markets, with a number of manufacturing contracts flowing out of their Anzac frigate work.

Straitened financial circumstances in the early 1990s caused a major review of all government spending. The Anzac frigates became a *cause célèbre* in New Zealand politics. The effort to purchase an additional ship to return to a four-frigate fleet was defeated by a public outcry led by a grouping of those who had been active in breaking the ANZUS Pact in the 1980s. Preposterous claims were made that social welfare spending would be directly affected if three new warships were purchased. The existing contract for the two frigates, it was suggested, should be cancelled although quite how the RNZN would meet its obligations to monitor New Zealand’s exclusive economic zone, contribute to peacekeeping and fulfil its international maritime obligations without surface vessels was not discussed. The Anzac Ship Project allowed New Zealand the option of ordering two more ships, if a decision was made by November 1997, but the outcry over the project meant that the option was allowed to lapse. Additional unsuccessful efforts were made during 1998-99 to gain political support for a third Anzac-class frigate, possibly leased from the RAN. In early 2000 the newly-elected government announced it would not consider a third frigate. Fortunately for the RNZN the government held the line on the frigates already being constructed. The frigates, named *Te Kaha* and *Te Mana*, were delivered and commissioned in 1997 and 1999, replacing *Southland* and *Waikato* respectively. Despite the technical success of the Anzac frigate project for both the RNZN and RAN, there was limited understanding about the role of the RNZN in New Zealand’s defence policies.

---

<sup>47</sup> Bassett, *Working with David*, 407.

<sup>48</sup> Bassett, *Working with David*, 461.

<sup>49</sup> Bassett, *Working with David*, 461.

<sup>50</sup> Bassett, *Working with David*, 518.

The delivery of the Anzac frigates meant that the RNZN had to review its naval aviation arm. From 1966 with the arrival of the Wasp helicopters, naval aircraft in New Zealand service came under the Royal New Zealand Air Force but were crewed by naval pilots and aircrew. The Wasp helicopters were at the end of their effective lives, and a lack of sensors and tactical data links, and their limited endurance prevented their use for contemporary maritime operations. The last operational flight of a Wasp was from *Wellington* in 1997. Studies showed that the Kaman SH-2 Seasprite would best suit the new frigates of the RNZN, and could also operate from frigate *Canterbury* after the ship's flight deck was modified. In parallel the RAN also selected the Seasprite as its intermediate naval helicopter. The RNZN ordered four SH-2G aircraft, for delivery by 2001, but it was realised that the fleet needed an interim aircraft to keep small-ship flying skills alive. In February 1998 four SH-2F Seasprites were acquired as interim helicopters to replace the Wasps. Only three were brought into flying service, with the fourth airframe serving as a source of spares. During 1999 two SH-2Fs were deployed to East Timor and the Gulf on board *Te Kaha* and *Canterbury*. In 2001-02 four newly-built SH-2G Seasprites were delivered as the RNZN's long-term replacement helicopters, able to operate from the frigates *Te Kaha* and *Te Mana*, the offshore patrol vessels *Otago* and *Wellington*, and the new multi-role ship *Canterbury*.

The 1997 Defence White Paper set a policy of a three-ship combat force, so together with *Canterbury* the two new frigates would form the combat ships of the RNZN in the twenty-first century. The frigate *Wellington* had stopped running during 1999 and was paid off the following year. A change of government in 1999 returned to power MPs who had been in the Labour government of 1984-90. There was a lack of understanding about defence issues in general and the obligations and demands on the RNZN in particular. The impression given in this period by the ministers of defence is that there was a wholesale belief that the NZDF was nothing more than a glorified peacekeeping force. Ironically, ratification of the Law of the Sea and other international agreements give New Zealand direct responsibility for the policing and management of vaster areas of ocean than ever before.

In June 2000 the New Zealand government announced its Defence Policy Framework (DPF), for the future development of the NZDF. The DPF reaffirmed New Zealand's defence links with Australia and support of the FPDA. The priorities for the re-equipment of the armed forces were the Army's infantry battalions, the RNZN's military sealift and airlift capability, and the nation's maritime surveillance capabilities. The DPF underlined the government's goal of developing versatile, responsive and cost-effective armed forces. On 8 May 2001 the government announced its plan for a sustainable Defence Force. The plan called for a practical naval force keeping the Anzac frigates in service, the purchase of a suitable multi-role ship for sealift capability, a review of surface vessel requirements to meet coastal and mid-range off-shore patrol requirements, and future equipment and weapons for the Seasprite helicopters. The Chief of Navy at the time, Rear-Admiral P.M. McHaffie, said publicly he was delighted to have a firm direction for the RNZN and the development of a "practical" naval fleet structured to meet the government's requirements. The crises and operations of the previous two years had shown that the ships of the RNZN were indeed versatile, responsive and

effective, and that the requirement for the navy to play a full part in international peacekeeping missions and direct crisis response would continue. Additionally the defence policy affirmed New Zealand's commitment to regional security across what is a vast maritime region. To meet this naval commitment, Project Protector came into being.

Project Protector was a plan to re-equip the RNZN with new vessels to carry out EEZ patrols, sealift, and peacekeeping duties.<sup>51</sup> Further to the Defence Policy Framework reaffirmation of defence links with Australia and support of the Five Power Defence Arrangements, in January 2002 the government released a Maritime Forces Review which reassessed the navy's tasks and recommended a future force structure. Gaps in military sea and airlift capability and maritime surveillance were identified in the review. The government then developed the Long Term Development Plan and Defence Sustainability Initiative to fund identified shortcomings across the three services. To fill the gaps in naval capability, the NZ\$500 million contract would deliver a multi-role vessel, four inshore and two offshore patrol craft. This influx of new vessels would increase the fleet to its largest size for some time while still leaving the surface combat force restricted to two Anzac frigates. Initially, these Project Protector vessels were to be totally unarmed and it took some negotiation between the NZDF and the government for weapons to be fitted or small arms carried. As in any large hardware project there have been problems, which led the defence minister to characterise the project as being "bedevilled by delay and dispute."<sup>52</sup> The last of the Project Protector vessels, the offshore patrol vessel *Wellington*, was delivered in June 2010.

### **The RNZN in 2010**

In 1910 New Zealand had no naval force to speak of. One hundred years later the RNZN fleet consists of two Anzac-class frigates, four inshore and two offshore patrol vessels, one multi-role vessel, a diving tender, a survey vessel, and a tanker, plus one squadron of Seasprite helicopters. The RNZN faces two current and continuing challenges: one, recruiting and retaining high quality people; and two, building public understanding of the need for appropriate replacement ships and the place of the RNZN in New Zealand's defence interests. In other words, overcome the 'sea blindness' that affects politicians.

Defence relationships have improved with the United States but New Zealand has not returned to the pre-1984 level of contact.<sup>53</sup> In 2010, there are two signs of growing maturity and a definite change in attitude both within and outside of New Zealand. Firstly, *Te Kaha* and *Endeavour* are the first RNZN vessels to visit the west coast of the United States in twenty-five years. Although the vessels will not have access

---

<sup>51</sup> From a speech made by the then Minister of Defence Phil Goff, 18 November 2006, at the launching of HMNZS *Otago* at the Williamstown yard in Melbourne.

<sup>52</sup> Defence Minister Dr Wayne Mapp, quoted in the *Dominion Post*, 26 February 2010.

<sup>53</sup> McGibbon, *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, 22. See also Jamieson, *Friend or Ally*, 4-20.

to USN bases, it is a positive development.<sup>54</sup> Secondly, one of the Labour ministers who drafted the anti-nuclear legislation stated that a return to New Zealand waters by USN vessels is desirable. The argument was based on changes to American nuclear policy such as the agreement between Russia and the United States to reduce their stockpiles of weapons. The former minister stated that the summit and changes to nuclear weapons was vindication of New Zealand's stance.<sup>55</sup> To take his argument further, he stated that the objections to ship visits raised in 1984 no longer apply, so long as these visits must not breach the existing legislation and that the vessel is not nuclear-powered or carrying nuclear weapons. Alas, the USN, despite the improved defence relationship, will not be visiting Auckland harbour for the foreseeable future.

In conclusion, New Zealand's naval history in the past one hundred years has travelled a path taking small steps as the country slowly moved away from Empire, through interdependence, and reaching independence. Sometimes these steps have not been in the interests of the navy and have worked to the detriment of operational efficiency. That being said, the navy of the last century is still a rich and memorable part of New Zealand's military history. The record of the navy in the defence and development of the nation is a proud one. The men and women of the RNZN continue to serve the nation with courage, commitment, and comradeship.

---

<sup>54</sup> Bassett, *Working with David*, 400.

<sup>55</sup> <http://tvnz.co.nz/politics-news/palmer-let-us-nuclear-ships-come-nz3455968>, accessed 11 April 2010.