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**From the Southern Cross to the Northern Lights: New
Zealanders in the Arctic Convoys, 1941-45**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
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ABSTRACT

The Arctic convoys, which ran between 1941 and 1945, were an important part of the Second World War. They cemented the commitment of the western Allies and the Soviets to the cause, delivered critical supplies to the Soviet Union, and helped enable the opening of a new front in Europe that was crucial to the war effort. They were also notoriously dangerous, battling the weather as much as the enemy, and the cost in lives and ships was high.

Many New Zealanders served in these convoys, primarily as part of the Royal Navy, Merchant Navy, or the Fleet Air Arm. Several earned awards for their service. Despite this, their contributions are relatively unknown in New Zealand, and they are largely missing from the country's existing historiography of the Second World War. Until recently, piecing together a picture of their individual and collective contributions to the convoys was difficult due to the scattered and incomplete nature of records, and their participation was not seen as a 'New Zealand' effort, where much of the historiography has been focussed.

This research sought to identify as many of these New Zealanders as possible, to understand the parts they played in the Arctic convoys and the impact this had on both the war effort, and their lives afterwards. Their contribution was considerable, and for many, it profoundly changed their lives. It is time that their efforts, long overlooked, were acknowledged.

PREFACE

This work is dedicated to all the New Zealanders who served in the Arctic convoys: both those who came from here and those who came and made this country their home.

This research would not have been possible without the many people who helped along the way. The list is long, and it is not possible to name everyone who contributed here. Please know that like the convoys, this was a collective effort, and you are much appreciated.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the members of the Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand, particularly Derek and Rita Whitwam, Arch Jelley, John Wyeth and Ian Carson. Special thanks to my fantastic supervisors, Glyn Harper and David Littlewood, for their patience, guidance, and sharing of their expertise.

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Approval for this research was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

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INTRODUCTION

Winston Churchill is said to have called the Arctic convoys the ‘worst journey in the world.’¹ Between August 1941 and May 1945, almost 80 convoys (not including the unescorted merchant ships who sailed as part of *Operation FB*) set sail on the Murmansk run.² Many lives and ships were lost on these perilous journeys, particularly in the Merchant Navy. The cost, as the Royal Navy staff recalled, was high, but ‘the goods were delivered.’³ The real and perceived importance of those goods has been the subject of much debate, but the danger those in the convoys faced was very real and ever-present. Many New Zealanders took part in the convoys; however, their contribution is still relatively unknown in New Zealand. Both the convoys themselves and the New Zealanders who participated are almost entirely absent from the existing historiography of the Second World War. This research, therefore, answered three key questions:

1. Who were the New Zealanders who took part in the Arctic convoys?
2. What roles did they perform on convoy duties and how important was it to the war effort?
3. How did this war service affect their lives after the war?

The answers to these questions reveal much about not only the New Zealanders themselves, but also life on the convoys, the vast range of duties they were called upon to perform, the dangers they faced, and the true breadth of this extraordinary endeavour. They also show how important the convoys were to the wider war effort, and the lasting impact on the lives of the participants. For many, this was profound.

¹ G. H. Bennett, “The Worst Journey in the World,” *BBC History*, Christmas 2013, 52.

² Michael G. Walling, *Forgotten Sacrifice: The Arctic Convoys of World War II* (Oxford: Osprey, 2012), 270.

³ Malcolm Llewellyn-Jones, ed., *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys: A Naval Staff History* (London: Routledge, 2006), 129.

Why then are the New Zealanders in the convoys missing from our histories? A review of the existing literature shows that New Zealand's military historiography has built up a nationalistic tradition over time, so much so that certain elements of it are embedded in the nation's idea of itself, from the great sacrifice and debacle of Gallipoli to the Vietnam War protests. Some view state-sponsored writing such as the official histories of the Second World War as being as much a nation building project as a history project. Rachael Bell wrote that 'much of the rationale behind the War History series was to provide a factual base on which to found a national tradition of the war so that it might be a source of cohesion and strength rather than division and discontent to the nation.'⁴

By the Second World War New Zealand was well on its way to establishing its own armed forces and identity. It is therefore unsurprising that this would become the focus of the New Zealand histories of the conflict, rather than those serving in 'foreign' services. There is also the simple matter of logistics. The New Zealanders who served in the convoys did so as individuals rather than as a cohesive group and were scattered throughout different services (primarily the Royal Navy, Merchant Navy, and the Fleet Air Arm). As such, their records were also scattered and not easily accessible or able to be incorporated into the New Zealand histories being written post-war. The digitisation of many archives has now made it possible to access many of these records, but this would have been a significantly more difficult task at the time.

S. D. Waters acknowledged these challenges when attempting to write about the New Zealanders in the Royal Navy for his *The Royal New Zealand Navy* volume of *The Official*

⁴ Rachael Elizabeth Bell, "Memory, History, Nation, War: The Official Histories of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-1945" (PhD thesis, Massey University, 2012), 253, <http://hdl.handle.net/10179/3967>.

History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945. Waters lamented that the available records were ‘scant’ and ‘incomplete’ and the response from the Royal Navy to his requests for records had been ‘somewhat meagre.’⁵ Additionally, the focus of the *Official History* was not the navy. Waters’ work was the only one devoted to it in the entire fifty book series. Some of those involved in the wider convoy support effort, such as pilots in Coastal Command, were mentioned in the three-part *New Zealanders with the Royal Air Force*, but that is where the *Official History* coverage stops.

Waters’ study of New Zealanders participating in the convoys may have amounted to only part of a chapter in a single volume, but it contains crucial details such as the names of several New Zealanders who served, the ships they served on and what they did, particularly those who were mentioned in despatches for their efforts. Some of these mentions are short and lacking in detail while others are more comprehensive, but all help establish that there were several New Zealanders who served in the convoys, that they performed a wide variety of roles, and that New Zealand’s contribution to the convoy effort was significant.

There is no doubt either that this service had a significant impact on the lives of those who took part, and the New Zealanders were no exception. The majority of the convoy historiography from New Zealand, other than Waters’ chapter in *The Official History*, is individual recollections such as those collected and shared by the Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand (formerly the Russian Convoy Club of New Zealand) or the Russian Arctic Convoy Museum Project in Scotland.⁶ Richard Campbell Begg and Peter Liddle’s *For Five*

⁵ S. D. Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy, The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945*, (Wellington: War History Branch, 1956), 467.

⁶ “Convoys Remembered,” Russian Arctic Convoy Museum, accessed 21 March 2021, <https://racmp.co.uk/history-learning/convoys-remembered/>; “My Story,” Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand, last modified January 2022, <http://arctic.org.nz/MyStory.html>. NOTE: The Russian Convoy Club of New

Shillings a Day: Personal Histories of World War II included additional accounts from New Zealanders in the convoys and Neill Atkinson's excellent *Hell or High Water: New Zealand Merchant Seafarers Remember the War* includes extracts from oral interviews with New Zealand merchant mariners who took part in the convoys, offering a rare Merchant Navy perspective that is often absent.⁷

Denis Glover's memoir *Hot Water Sailor* is both informative and entertaining.⁸ Donald Grant recalled his time in the convoys in his memoir *A Working Holiday: 1940-1945*, and Lieutenant Doug Hazard's convoy experience was recounted by his family in Gerry Wright's 2012 book *A Kiwi Sailor at War: The Story of Lieutenant Douglas R Hazard RNZNVR*.⁹ Additional personal recollections in various forms including oral histories and newspaper interviews are sprinkled throughout New Zealand's libraries, museums and newspaper archives. New Zealanders also feature in Peter Brown's 2014 collection *Voices from the Arctic Convoys* and there are other occasional mentions in passing elsewhere, but not many.¹⁰

These accounts are not only extremely valuable as primary sources. They are also some of the most compelling descriptions of what it was like to serve in the convoys and to come home and live with the after-effects of that service, which has also often been neglected. Many of these veterans speak openly and honestly about some of the difficulties they faced following the war, and for the merchant seafarers there was the added layer of a general lack of

Zealand changed its name to the Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand in 2022. Where information has been retrieved from their website, I have referred to the URL that was in use at that time.

⁷ Richard Campbell Begg and Peter Liddle, *For Five Shillings a Day: Personal Histories of World War II* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 89-118; Neill Atkinson, ed., *Hell or High Water: New Zealand Merchant Seafarers Remember the War* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2005), 165-77, 179-193.

⁸ Denis Glover, *Hot Water Sailor* (Wellington: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1962), 139-158.

⁹ Donald Grant, *A Working Holiday: 1940-1945* (Gisborne: Allen and Hodden, 1992); Gerry Wright, *A Kiwi Sailor at War: The Story of Lieutenant Douglas R Hazard RNZNVR* (Wellington: Printstop, 2012), 453-501.

¹⁰ Peter C. Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys* (United Kingdom: Fonthill Media, 2014); Glover, *Hot Water Sailor*, 139-158.

recognition for the Merchant Navy as a whole, not just in relation to the Arctic convoys.

In his excellent master's thesis, 'Remembering Seafarers: The (Missing) History of New Zealanders Employed in the Mercantile Marine during World War 1,' Phillip Lascelles demonstrated that the stories of the New Zealanders who had served in the Mercantile Marine during the First World War had gone untold because they too were seen as part of a foreign (British) effort, and service in the Mercantile Marine 'did not fit alongside the Anzac legend of the heroic soldier sacrificing all for King and Country.'¹¹ It seems that by the Second World War, some things had changed but others had not.

Whether Royal Navy or Merchant Navy, no attempt to bring these accounts together has previously been made, and they remain an untapped source of vital and fascinating insight into not just one of the most overlooked areas of New Zealand's military history, but also the real human impact of involvement in this conflict as well. Trying to pull together all the threads of their individual service into a collective understanding is like putting together a puzzle, and when identifying the key questions this research needed to answer, it was front of mind to ensure that the human element was not forgotten whilst trying to fit all the pieces together. As such, the focus of the key research questions was people.

Given these questions, and the lack of prior research in this area, the first challenge was to find a methodological approach that could cover both the traditional military history angle and the more personal focus, so that the individual experience and stories did not get lost amidst the bigger picture. Ultimately, a hybrid archival and oral/family history approach was

¹¹ Philip R. Lascelles, "Remembering Seafarers: The (Missing) History of New Zealanders Employed in the Mercantile Marine during World War 1" (master's thesis, Massey University, 2014), i. <http://hdl.handle.net/10179/5469>.

decided on, with the archival approach being the primary focus, supplemented by this oral/family history approach where possible, such as interviewing surviving veterans or their family members. However, with so few convoy veterans remaining, it was designed so that any opportunity to speak to surviving veterans or their families would add richness to the research, but it would not be reliant on it. This approach is made possible by the many existing first-hand accounts of convoy service that were uncovered; more are always welcome but there are enough to gain a good understanding of individuals and their experiences, both during and post the war, and to be able to tell some of their stories.

One of the first questions is always ‘Are there enough primary sources?’ and given the lack of literature on this topic, this was of particular concern. Fortunately, we now have access to significantly more records and primary sources than S. D. Waters did and many of these are now digital and freely accessible. These include the National Archives of the United Kingdom (including Royal Navy and Merchant Navy records), the Imperial War Museum, Archives New Zealand, the National Library of New Zealand, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, the Navy and Maritime museums of New Zealand, PapersPast (New Zealand’s digitised newspaper archive), and the *London Gazette*.

Resources such as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s online database and the Auckland War Memorial Museum’s online cenotaph are also invaluable, as are the more informal databases that have sprung up in recent years. Whilst unofficial, resources such as Convoy Web, Unit Histories, U-boat.net and others can also be a useful starting point for identifying possible convoy participants, which can then be cross-checked with official records.

Informal identification of confirmed or possible convoy participants became and remains a theme of this research. Many people had never heard of the Arctic convoys, but some had, and they often had a story about a parent, grandparent, or someone they had heard of who they knew was there or who might have been there. Suggested names came from everywhere, including co-workers and fellow researchers, and many via the first-hand accounts of fellow veterans who often spoke of their fellow kiwis who were on convoy duties with them. Often these were nicknames, and sometimes very little detail was provided, but all were added to an Arctic convoy participants database and attempts made to match them to official records. A particularly challenging aspect of identification was those in the Merchant Navy, for whom records are even more scarce and information difficult to confirm.

Not all those suggested were able to be confirmed as Arctic convoy participants, however that does not mean that they were not there. For some, the information provided is not enough to enable a match to be made to available records. In other cases, the records are incomplete or inaccessible. Despite these difficulties, it was still possible to identify a considerable number of New Zealand's convoy participants, and to find even more who were most likely there, but who cannot be confirmed. Because of these challenges, it is unlikely that there will ever be a fully complete list of the New Zealanders in the convoys, but this is not a reason to ignore all of them.

Another question that arose was the definition of a New Zealander. For the purposes of this research, a New Zealander is defined as a person whose parents were from New Zealand, or who was born in or had migrated to New Zealand and had been living here prior to the outbreak of the war. Because this research focussed on those who were New Zealanders prior to the war, it acknowledges, but does not delve in great depth into, the service of those who

became New Zealanders after the war. Were they to be included, the numbers of participants would be higher, as many veterans settled in New Zealand in the following years, and not all of them are known. The confirmed or likely convoy participants from New Zealand, and those who became New Zealanders following the war, are listed in Appendix A and B respectively. Challenges with identification aside, there are enough primary sources available to identify a significant number of convoy participants, confirm their roles, and paint a picture of their contribution to the convoys and the wider war effort.

Evaluating the importance of the convoys to the wider war effort involved reviewing a range of primary sources and the existing literature, including contemporary writing and recent re-evaluations of both their strategic and military impact. What this literature review illuminates is that there has long been a lack of consensus on the Arctic convoys, with views ranging from them being an unnecessary waste of resources and lives through to them being crucial to the war effort. Some of the key works in this area are Vice Admiral B. B. Schofield's *The Arctic Convoys*, the declassified *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys: A Naval Staff History*, as well as articles by James Levy and Mikhail Suprun, among others.

Schofield's *The Arctic Convoys*, published in 1977, provides both a detailed report of convoy operations and much useful insight into naval and political strategy and decision-making, such as noting how PQ 17 was considered a 'most unsound operation of war' but 'political considerations were paramount' and it went ahead anyway.¹² The resulting disaster, which caused the heaviest losses to any of the Arctic convoys, is where much of the convoy literature has been focussed. Schofield does not seek to advance or refute any particular argument about the convoys, nor does he attempt to analyse whether or not the gains were

¹² B. B. Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1977), 55.

worth the sacrifice. He writes in a matter-of-fact manner which may lack the emotional resonance of other works such as Paul Kemp's more vivid *Convoy! Drama in Arctic Waters* or Admiral Sir Ian Campbell and Captain Donald Macintyre's *The Kola Run*, which blended their experiences as commanders in the Arctic arena with perspectives from other officers and official records to create an efficient but personal account.¹³ Nevertheless, Schofield does not shy away from his opinions, making his commentary extremely valuable.

The 2006 publication of the declassified *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys: A Naval Staff History*, first compiled by the Admiralty in 1954 as a confidential study for use within the Royal Navy and published unrevised, also provides an important opportunity to analyse and understand what the powers-that-be were thinking in regard to the Arctic convoys at the time.¹⁴ This similarly dispassionate assessment of the convoys nonetheless concluded that ultimately the success of the convoys hinged on the human element.¹⁵ This is a theme that runs through all of the existing convoy literature – there may be disagreements over the military or political importance of the convoys to the war effort, but there is no doubt about the challenges or the courage of those who took part.

More recently, in 2003 James Levy took Schofield's comments on PQ 17 a step further and argued not only was the PQ 17 disaster avoidable, but also challenged the prevailing view that the Royal Navy leadership who opposed it were simply overruled. Levy posited instead that 'military reality should have trumped political necessity' and that the naval leadership (both British and American) should have either made it absolutely clear that what was being

¹³ Paul Kemp, *Convoy! Drama in Arctic Waters* (London: Brockhampton Press, 1993); Vice-Admiral Sir Ian Campbell and Captain Donald Macintyre, *The Kola Run* (London: Frederick Muller, 1958).

¹⁴ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, ix.

¹⁵ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 133.

asked was not possible within the means available or made sure they received those means.¹⁶ Levy made a compelling case for this argument, and also issued a warning about a failure to learn from it, stating that the ‘inability of political leaders to acknowledge military reality, and the failure of military leaders to explain what ends can be achieved with the means at hand, will in most cases inevitably create the conditions for a PQ 17-style disaster.’¹⁷

In 2019, Mikhail Suprun re-evaluated the Lend-Lease program and the Allied strategy, arguing that Lend-Lease operations, particularly the Arctic convoys, played a significant strategic role not just in the physical war, but in the war for influence as well.¹⁸ Suprun also contended that, contrary to the doubts expressed by some about the real value of the convoys to the Soviet Union, the non-military supplies delivered were of vital importance, especially given that the Soviets had lost so much of their industrial capacity by then.¹⁹ Likewise, the military supplies, whilst not able to ‘radically change the situation at the Eastern front,’ were also of high morale importance.²⁰ As has been demonstrated countless times in history, morale can make all the difference.

When assessing the overall importance of the convoys to the war effort, Suprun looks at it from a different angle to most and concludes that ‘the significance of the Lend-Lease supplies to the USSR was as valuable as the value of the victory of the Eastern Front was for the coalition’ and the convoys were a key part of that.²¹ These recent reassessments show that

¹⁶ James Levy, “The Needs of Political Policy versus the Reality of Military Operations: Royal Navy Opposition to the Arctic Convoys, 1942,” *Journal of Slavonic Studies* 26, no.1 (March 2003): 49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390308559307>.

¹⁷ Levy, “The Needs of Political Policy versus the Reality of Military Operations,” 50.

¹⁸ Mikhail N. Suprun, “Lend-Lease and the Northern Convoys in the Allied Strategy During the Second World War,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 32, no. 4 (October 2019), 575, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2019.1684009>.

¹⁹ Suprun, “Lend-Lease and the Northern Convoys,” 577.

²⁰ Suprun, “Lend-Lease and the Northern Convoys,” 577.

²¹ Suprun, “Lend-Lease and the Northern Convoys,” 580.

there is still much to be considered when it comes to the Arctic convoys and their importance to the war effort.

This thesis will first present the background to the Second World War convoy system, particularly in relation to the Arctic convoys. The following chapters will introduce the New Zealanders who participated in the convoys, discuss what they did, what this meant for the war effort, the impact this had on their lives post-war, and the key findings that were discovered along the way. Those findings reveal that the New Zealanders in the convoys were a diverse bunch who carried out many different roles that were key to the success of the convoys, and therefore the wider war effort that the convoys were sustaining. They also demonstrate how the war affected the lives of the participants long afterwards, in ways both expected and unusual.

Several New Zealanders who served in the convoys earned awards for their exceptional bravery during their service, be that on the sea or in the air. Yet despite this, they remain largely unknown in New Zealand, and neglected in the nation's historiography, particularly regarding the Second World War. Their effort deserves acknowledgement, and accounts of New Zealand's involvement in the Second World War are incomplete without their stories. It may be understandable that, given the challenges of finding or accessing reliable primary sources, a comprehensive study of them has not been undertaken until now, and some of those challenges remain.

However, with the primary sources now available, it is possible to start telling the story of these New Zealanders, their contributions to the convoys and the war effort, and some of the ways in which that service affected them. This is an incredible opportunity to close a glaring

gap in the historiography of New Zealand's participation in the Second World War, and to do so in a manner that not only acknowledges their collective contribution to the war effort, but also tells the human stories of these extraordinary New Zealanders who have been largely left out of the narrative for too long.

To understand the importance of the New Zealanders' service in the Arctic convoys, the significance of the convoys themselves must first be understood.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CONVOY SYSTEM

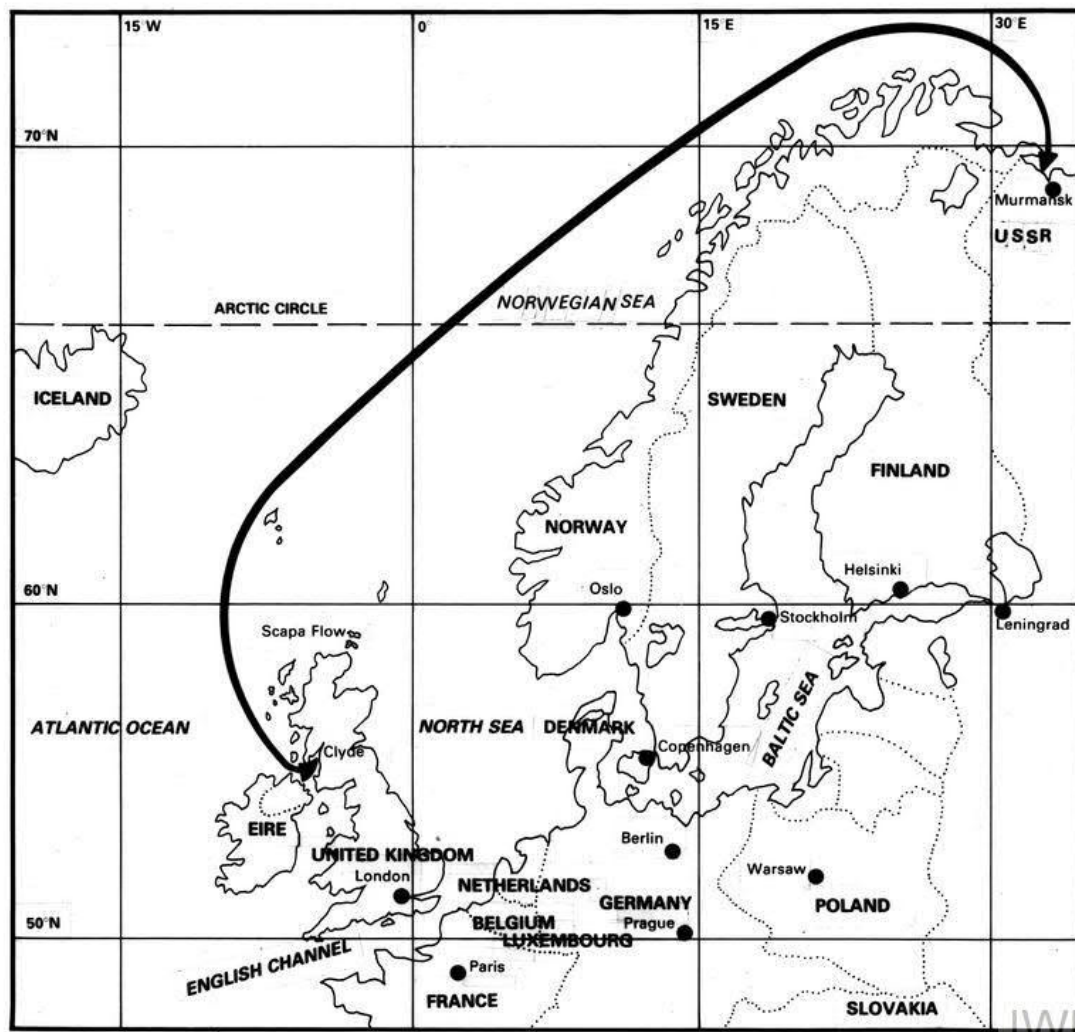


Figure 1 Arctic Convoy Route, 1941-45 © IWM MH 27855

By the time the first of the Arctic convoys, code-named *Dervish*, set sail for Archangel in northern Russia on 21 August 1941, the Second World War had already been raging for nearly two years and the sea war was well underway.²² The Battle of the Atlantic was already becoming one of the most crucial and hardest fought campaigns of the war, the Mediterranean was also fiercely engaged, and the Arctic was of increasing interest to the Germans, particularly Grand Admiral Raeder, the Commander-in-Chief of the German

²² Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 5.

Kriegsmarine.²³ Meanwhile *Operation Barbarossa* – the German invasion of the Soviet Union – had begun in June 1941, and was not going to Hitler’s plan, which was to have it completed by the end of the year.²⁴

The invasion came despite the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, in place since August 1939, which was supposed to guarantee non-aggression between the two superpowers. It marked yet another crucial turning point in the war as the Soviet Union and Britain suddenly became allies, signing their own Anglo-Soviet Agreement a month after the invasion began. As Stephen Roskill wrote, the opening of this campaign had far-reaching consequences for Britain’s maritime strategy, as it ‘gradually shifted the focus of the Home Fleet’s responsibilities from the passages between Scotland and Greenland to the north-east, and in particular to the waters between northern Norway and the varying limits imposed by the Arctic ice.’²⁵

This was not, however, the first time the need to work with the Soviet Union had been considered. The British had previously engaged Stalin and his representatives on several occasions, including in May 1939 when negotiations with the Soviets was discussed in the House of Commons. Winston Churchill later recalled that ‘Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Eden, and I all pressed upon the Government the vital need of an immediate arrangement with Russia of the most far-reaching character and on equal terms,’ before concluding that ‘there can be little doubt that this was now too late.’²⁶ The Americans had also been working on their options, should they find themselves allied with the Soviet Union at some point: ‘even before

²³ S.W. Roskill, *The War at Sea Volume 1: The Defensive* (Uckfield: The Naval and Military Press, 2004), 716-717; Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 11.

²⁴ Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 4-5.

²⁵ Roskill, *The Defensive*, 716.

²⁶ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War Volume 1: The Gathering Storm*, 5th ed. (London: Cassell and Co, 1955), 333, 337.

Barbarossa, discussions had begun within the Roosevelt administration on the most effective methods that might be employed if military necessity demanded close collaboration with the Russians.²⁷

By July 1941, the situation had changed drastically and both Britain and the United States found themselves needing to come to the aid of the Soviets and supply them on a massive scale, and it was 'plain that the responsibility for the safe passage of the supply ships would fall on Admiral Tovey's fleet.'²⁸ By the end of August, the first of what became the Arctic convoys was on its way. By the time the final convoy returned home in the final days of May 1945, Britain had delivered over £428,000,000 worth of material including more than 5,000 tanks, 7,000 aircraft, four submarines, 14 minesweepers and nine motor torpedo boats; 743 million projectiles thousands of anti-tank guns, rifles, machine guns, and sets of telephone, radar and radio equipment; as well as food, medical supplies, machinery and other raw materials to the value of £120,000,000 to the Soviet Union.²⁹

The cost was high. 7.2 percent of outbound and 4 percent of inbound vessels that took part in the convoys were sunk, as well as 18 ships and one submarine from the protecting forces. Additionally, an estimated 2,773 lives were lost.³⁰ Allan Burn summed it up well: "Ninety-seven percent of ships that sailed in the Atlantic convoys came unscathed through the whole battle, but in 63% of the Arctic convoys ships were either lost or turned back due to weather: only 37% of the convoys got through intact to their destinations.'³¹ However, without convoy

²⁷ George C. Herring Jr., *Aid to Russia 1941-1946: Strategy, Diplomacy, the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 26.

²⁸ Roskill, *The Defensive*, 717.

²⁹ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 129; Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 187.

³⁰ Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 187.

³¹ Allan Burn, *The Fighting Commodores: Convoy Commanders in the Second World War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 1999), 204.

system, these deliveries would not have been possible, and the cost would have been higher still.³²

The value of a convoy system was laid bare in the naval staff history *Defeat of the Enemy Attack on Shipping*, which detailed an initial failure to learn from the lessons of the First World War that later gave rise to an understanding of how crucial and effective a convoy system was, and how best to operate one. One of the key lessons was that convoys needed to run in coastal waters as well as the open ocean: ‘the immediate effect of ocean convoy was to reduce the losses in the Western Approaches. Next it led to intensive inshore U-boat operations against the unescorted coastal shipping. Slowly coast convoy was instituted and steadily sinkings decreased.’³³

By the start of the Second World War convoys were understood to be a key part of the picture, but still not fully appreciated until after the war was won:

Perhaps the outstanding example from the last war relates to the defeat of the enemy’s attack on our merchant shipping. Though it was not at once accepted there now seems no doubt at all that it was the defensive strategy of sailing ships in convoy and of providing the convoys with powerful surface and air escorts which did most to accomplish that decisive victory.³⁴

One of the most vital aspects of a convoy system was protecting merchant vessels. The losses suffered by the Merchant Navy in the Second World War, even when they sailed under protection, are staggering. Between 1939 and 1945 ‘almost 4800 Allied and neutral merchant vessels (over 21 million tons worth) were sunk and around 60,000 seafarers killed – more than half of them while sailing under the ‘red duster’ (red ensign) of the British Empire and

³² Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 187.

³³ Admiralty, *The Defeat of the Enemy Attack on Shipping, 1939-1945: A Study of Policy and Operations, Volume 1A*, Naval Staff History, Second World War (Admiralty Historical Section, 1957), 4-5.

³⁴ Roskill, *The Defensive*, 38-39.

its Dominions...Britain's Merchant Navy suffered proportionately higher casualties than any of that country's armed forces.'³⁵

Roskill emphasised the importance of the Merchant Navy, calling them the 'third element of maritime power' and noting that they 'must be adequate to feed our home population, to bring in the raw materials needed by our industries, to carry our exports overseas and to transport our armies and their multifarious supplies to the theatres where they are required to fight.'³⁶ Crucially, he also noted the Merchant Navy is not enough by itself, and must be supported by 'an adequate shipbuilding and ship-repairing industry to enable losses to be replaced and damaged ships to be returned rapidly to service.'³⁷

The convoy system kept merchant shipping alive, which in turn kept critical lifelines open and supplies flowing. In July 1940, the United Kingdom was 'under threat of invasion, the Battle of Britain was at its peak, and...Commander-in-Chief Portsmouth described the Channel convoys as being "vital to the life of the south of England."³⁸ This sentiment would be echoed numerous times over the following years. The importance of the convoy system in the Second World War cannot be overstated. Given this, it is no surprise that there were multiple convoy routes operating at different times during the war.

These included the East Coast Convoy Systems, the Ocean Convoy System and a South Coast and north-about Scotland Coast Convoy System which were introduced after the fall of France. The Coastal Convoy System was partially linked to the Ocean Convoy System, which in turn operated two routes: the first between the United Kingdom and North America,

³⁵ Atkinson, *Hell or High Water*, 23.

³⁶ Roskill, *The Defensive*, 33-34.

³⁷ Roskill, *The Defensive*, 34.

³⁸ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 468.

and the second between the United Kingdom, Gibraltar, and Freetown in Sierra Leone. When the Americans entered the war, they established a north-south Coastal Convoy system along their east coast that extended all the way to Brazil and linked up to the Ocean Convoy System. Additional convoy routes that operated at various times include those between the United States and Gibraltar, a Scandinavian Convoy System which ceased after the invasion of Norway, an extension of the United Kingdom to Gibraltar route to include the Mediterranean, Alexandria and Port Said, a West African Coastal Convoy System and even a limited Indian Ocean Convoy System.³⁹

By the time the Arctic convoys came into existence, the question was not whether they were needed but how exactly they would operate and what they were intended to achieve. The delivery of essential supplies to the Soviet Union was the practical aim, but even it was multi-layered. There were many different types of goods required that would feed the war effort in different ways and provide critical support to the Soviet people as well as their military. There were political considerations as well: Roosevelt and his advisors 'also felt that the provision of effective aid to the USSR was necessary to bind Stalin into a solid coalition against Hitler.'⁴⁰

President Roosevelt ran straight into Roskill's problem of supporting a Merchant Navy when he agreed to extend their 'Lend-Lease' agreement to include the Soviet Union. Lend-Lease was initially Roosevelt's way of providing support without officially entering the war. It was 'an ingenious measure that bypassed the Neutrality Act by conferring upon him special powers' that also 'unequivocally committed the United States to provide all possible

³⁹ Admiralty, *The Defeat of the Enemy Attack on Shipping*, 29-30.

⁴⁰ Herring, *Aid to Russia 1941-1946*, 32.

assistance to Britain.⁴¹ Lend-Lease gave the President the power to authorise provision of whatever the United Kingdom asked for, on terms set by the President himself.⁴² Whilst providing this support to an established ally was acceptable, extending it to include the Soviets was not a popular idea at first.⁴³

Communism was generally seen as a threat at this time, and there were many people in both the United States and the United Kingdom that were not enamoured with the idea of aiding or making an alliance with a communist power. Churchill understood this and dismissed the differences in ideologies between nations in his address of 21 June 1941, emphasising instead the danger to the entire world if Hitler were not stopped.⁴⁴ By the time Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union was approved in late 1941, public opinion had changed, but the practical and logistical challenges of supplying the immense amount of goods that had been promised, and the delivery of them, remained.

The United Kingdom's position was also challenging at the time. They were already committed across multiple different theatres of war, and that list was growing longer by the day. There were significant challenges at home too, as the scale of the conflict continued to increase, and with it the demands upon supply and economy. It was not an easy environment to be operating in, and the last thing they needed was another major issue to contend with. Churchill himself admitted the promise of aid to the Soviet Union involved 'much derangement of our military plans, already hampered by the tormenting shortage of munitions,' also lamenting that 'all fell upon us, because we not only gave our own

⁴¹ Herring, *Aid to Russia 1941-1946*, 3, 5.

⁴² Herring, *Aid to Russia 1941-1946*, 3-4.

⁴³ Herring, *Aid to Russia 1941-1946*, 7-8.

⁴⁴ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War Volume 3: The Grand Alliance* (New York: Rosetta Books, 2013) 305-306, Kindle.

production, but had to forgo most important munitions which the Americans would otherwise have sent to us.’⁴⁵

Nevertheless, planning for the Arctic convoys commenced. With the experience of other convoys, and two years of maritime warfare under their belts, the Admiralty were able to put together a plan that seemed workable. One of the key decisions was to take the Arctic route. The Persian corridor was likely safer, but the Arctic route was shorter and had the advantage of protecting the Soviet Union’s northern ports, particularly Murmansk, the only ice-free northern port which was also the gateway to the nickel-producing region of Polyarnoe and had a crucial rail line to the south. The Germans had already tried and failed to capture Murmansk, but how much longer the Soviets could hold out was not a question their new allies wanted to find out the answer to, so the Arctic route it was.⁴⁶ The outbound convoys became known as ‘PQ’ and the inbound convoys as ‘QP.’ This would change to ‘JW’ and ‘RA’ later in the war.

There was no truly safe route for a convoy, and the Arctic convoys were no exception. It has been said that convoy operations ‘produced some of the hardest fought battles of the Second World War, notably in the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans and in the Mediterranean Sea.’⁴⁷ The Arctic convoy route was roughly 1,400 miles long and the convoys were open to submarine attack for the entire duration. Added to this was the threat from German aircraft and surface attack from German vessels that had plenty of places to hide along the route, most notably the battleship *Tirpitz*, which would prove to be a persistent thorn in the convoys’ side.⁴⁸ Indeed,

⁴⁵ Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 381.

⁴⁶ Roskill, *The Defensive*, 716.

⁴⁷ Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 1.

⁴⁸ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 129-131; Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 10-11; Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 475.

in January 1942, Churchill considered the threat posed by the *Tirpitz* so great that he said ‘no other target was comparable’ to it, and that ‘the whole strategy of the war turns at this period on this ship.’⁴⁹ Its destruction was ‘of the highest urgency and importance’ and the ‘entire naval situation throughout the world would be altered’ by its removal from the equation.⁵⁰

In order to counter these threats, each convoy sailed initially with a relatively light escort: generally one cruiser and at least two destroyers, with additional support from trawlers and minesweepers at either end if required.⁵¹ This was sufficient for the first few convoys which made it through relatively unscathed compared to what came later. In the *Naval Staff History* of the Arctic convoys, it was commented that ‘the enemy held all the strategic cards.

Fortunately, he did not know how to use them.’⁵² The enemy, however, learned:

As the enemy came to realise the scale on which British and American ships were carrying aid to their hard-pressed ally through the Arctic ports, his reaction was to attack in a rising crescendo of fury with all the weapons in his armoury...an indication of what lay ahead was given when, in the last month of 1941, the Germans reinforced their destroyer strength in northern Norway and decided to keep more U-boats constantly at sea in the far north.⁵³

With the threat level escalated by both the rise in enemy attacks and the winter weather, the convoy escorts also needed to increase accordingly. This posed a challenge to convoy planning, as the convoys were originally intended to run on a forty-day cycle throughout the winter. However, due to the length of time it took for the escorts to make a round trip to the Russian north, and the constraints this placed on other operations, this was shortened to a ten-day cycle.⁵⁴ The arrival of the *Tirpitz* in the northern waters where the convoys were at their

⁴⁹ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War Volume 4: The Hinge of Fate* (New York: Rosetta Books, 2013), 126-127, Kindle.

⁵⁰ Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*, 126-127.

⁵¹ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 5; Roskill, *The Defensive*, 725.

⁵² Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 129.

⁵³ Roskill, *The Defensive*, 726.

⁵⁴ Roskill, *The Defensive*, 725.

most vulnerable caused a major issue for the Home Fleet, as they were now forced to deploy battleships badly needed elsewhere to protect the convoys from her.⁵⁵

Over time, as the enemy threat evolved, so did the organisation of the convoys and their escorts. The convoys may have been run by the Home Fleet, but they were a team effort involving the Royal Navy, Merchant Navy, other allied ships and crew, minesweepers, submarines, air support, and even the codebreakers at Bletchley Park. The codebreakers had, thanks to two successful operations in Norway in 1941, ‘enabled the Home Waters Enigma settings used by the German surface ships and U-boats in the Arctic to be broken daily for the rest of the war and brought invaluable intelligence to the battle of the Arctic convoys.’⁵⁶

In addition to battling the enemy, the Arctic convoys also had to survive the infamous Arctic weather, which was particularly horrendous during the winter months.

Many of the convoys sailed during winter when the perpetual darkness provided them with valuable cover. On the other hand, this limited their flexibility, as they were dictated to by the ice. S. D. Waters described the journey as ‘one of the most hazardous and arduous operations of the war at sea’ and the ‘grim ordeal’ of ‘shepherding a convoy of slow, heavily laden ships through bitter Arctic gales and snowstorms...Weather damage was often severe. Several escort aircraft-carriers buckled the fore-end of their flight deck 60 feet above the waterline and one recorded a heavy sea which rolled the whole length of the deck.’⁵⁷

Convoys often ran into trouble with the weather, and on more than one occasion this played into the hands of the enemy. PQ 13 was one such unfortunate example, meeting ‘a gale so

⁵⁵ P. K. Kemp, *Victory at Sea, 1939-1945* (London: Frederick Muller, 1957), 235.

⁵⁶ John Jackson, *Ultra's Arctic War* (Milton Keynes: The Military Press, 2003), 6.

⁵⁷ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 475.

severe that the merchant ships were scattered far and wide. In this defenceless state enemy destroyers, U-boats and aircraft reaped a rich reward, sinking five out of the twenty ships.’⁵⁸ It is impossible to find an account of the convoys that does not refer to the weather and this epic battle with Arctic conditions added a layer of complexity and danger to the Arctic convoys, which made them a challenge unlike any other.

The Arctic convoys were an immensely difficult undertaking. The danger was high, and ultimately so was the toll in lives and ships. The early easy days evaporated quickly, only to be replaced by a nightmare journey where the convoys and their escorts faced repeated attacks from enemy ships, U-boats, and aircraft. During the winter, they faced the awful Arctic weather: freezing seas, howling gales, and numerous storms. It is not surprising that when one thinks of the Arctic convoys, the image that comes to mind is ice. Summer voyages brought relief from the cold, but also the loss of the covering darkness. Enemy tactics evolved and when poor decisions were made, they resulted in disaster. To say the Arctic convoys were a challenge is an understatement. There were many New Zealanders who took up that challenge, and the following chapters will tell some of their stories.

⁵⁸ Kemp, *Victory at Sea, 1939-1945*, 237.

CHAPTER TWO: WHO WERE THEY?

War's a silly business. The sea
Alone is hard enough.
We tackled both sea and enemy,
Taking them rough or tough.
We won of course, eating salt horse,
Head-bobbing enemies sometimes
Befriending.
It is the sea that has no ending.

Denis Glover, "Frank Glass"⁵⁹

New Zealand was still a young country when the Second World War broke out and still very much a nation of migration. For the purposes of this project, it was decided to define 'New Zealander' as someone who was either born in New Zealand or who had migrated and was living here prior to the outbreak of the war, as a narrower definition would be unnecessarily exclusionary. There were also many convoy veterans who became New Zealanders following the war, and whilst the focus of this research is on those who were New Zealanders prior, it is important that the contribution of this other group also be acknowledged. So, who were the New Zealanders who took part in the Arctic convoys?

The New Zealand convoy contingent were a varied and interesting bunch and trying to paint a picture of them as a cohesive group is difficult as they served as individuals in different services, rather than an organised unit. They were in different branches, on different ships, in different convoys, at different times. The vast majority served as part of the Royal Navy, or on loan to them through the Royal New Zealand Navy or Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve, with some in the Merchant Navy, and others contributing to the greater

⁵⁹ Denis Glover, "Frank Glass" in Val Aldridge, "Remembrance Day for WWII's 'Worst Cock-Up,'" *The Dominion Post*, 4 July 2002, 9, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=azh&AN=DOM0207041031-FCONVOY-FE&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

convoy effort as, for example, pilots in the Fleet Air Arm or as a liaison officer and interpreter.⁶⁰ They came from all sorts of backgrounds, from all across the country, and took on all kinds roles in the convoys and afterwards. In the convoys, they were officers and ratings, cooks, signalmen, and commanders. In their civilian lives beforehand, they were accountants, clerks, scholars, miners in training, and bootmakers, to name a few.

Drawing their stories out is a challenge for several reasons. First, the scattered nature of their service. It is easier to find defined groups of people, such as a battalion, than it is to find individuals and to pull them together into a group. The challenges are such that it is unlikely that every single New Zealand convoy participant can be found. However, a good number of them can, and an understanding of their service, its impact on the war effort, and the impact of that service on their lives, can be gained. In the case of these New Zealanders, the first step was gathering names of possible convoy participants to check, and then gathering as much information on them as could be found, from a collection of different sources.

This included official New Zealand, Royal Navy and Merchant Navy records, as well as databases assembled by researchers around the globe, personal recollections, and family histories. Fortunately, over the years, many more records have become available in either original form in archives or digital form, as well as numerous family or military history interest groups which often hold additional information that might otherwise be difficult to obtain.

Some convoy veterans had told their stories already, some several times over, but those

⁶⁰ Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RANVR) Officers, 1939-1945," Unit Histories, accessed 18 December 2021, https://www.unithistories.com/officers/RANVR_officers.html.

recollections were as scattered as they were. An oral history project here, an interview there, newspaper articles, mentions in books, stories told to family and friends. Others kept their experiences closer to their chest. For some, a vast amount of information could be found. For others, less. Some remain only a nickname, unable to be traced, or a vivid description – such as the ‘freckle-faced New Zealand gunner, with uncanny shooting, [sic] became the pride of his ship’ – unable to be identified, whilst others are quite well known.⁶¹

Several prominent New Zealanders took part in the Arctic convoys, including playwright Bruce Mason CBE, writer and poet Denis Glover DSC, founder of the National Portrait Gallery Bill Williams, master mariner Te Waari ‘Ward’ Whitiri QSM, and legendary athletics coach Arch Jelley CNZM, OBE. Many others are unheard of, but their stories are no less valuable and deserving of being told. All these different sources provide valuable pieces of the puzzle and collectively make it possible to answer the question of ‘Who were they?’ for the first time.

An analysis of the available background information on these New Zealanders shows that they were indeed a diverse bunch, from all corners of New Zealand and a variety of different professions. There were very few with any sort of navy experience prior to the war, established officers were even rarer, and many had never even been to sea before. The 19 New Zealand convoy participants that S. D. Waters was able to identify when assembling his *Official History* chapter show both the diversity and the commonalities amongst those who took part. There was one ordinary seaman, one able seaman, one signalman, one petty officer, four sub-lieutenants, eight lieutenants, two lieutenant-commanders, and Commander

⁶¹ “Pride of Ship,” *Bay of Plenty Times*, 7 October 1943, 3, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/BOPT19431007.2.12>

Maxwell Richmond (later Rear-Admiral, DSO, OBE, Croix de Guerre, Order of the Red Banner) in the group.

Two were Royal Navy, two Royal New Zealand Navy, and the rest Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve. Three had been born outside of New Zealand (Australia, Scotland, and Northern Ireland), and the others came from Auckland, Wellington, Hamilton, Blenheim, Onehunga, Timaru, Oamaru, Kawhia, and Taupiri. Only Richmond was a career naval officer. The occupations of the rest were recorded as clerk (eight), Rhodes scholar, public servant, civil servant, salesman, company manager, oil company employee, telegraphist, tinsmith, bootmaker, and draughtsman (one each) respectively.⁶²

This is consistent among the convoy participants who have been identified since. Bruce Mason, from Wellington, was working as a law clerk before he joined the Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve. A young Denis Glover from Dunedin was working in publishing. Penwill (Pen) Moore was an accountant in Wellington, Norman Sim was working at the Pareora Freezing Works, Gordon Forrester was an apprentice bootmaker in Christchurch, and Maurice Newman (OBE DSC) was employed at his father's fish processing firm in Christchurch. William Edward Brown, from Auckland, was a 'commercial traveller' by profession and not yet 21 when he joined the Navy in September 1943.⁶³

Richard Campbell Begg was born in Wellington, but his family had moved to South Africa by the late 1930s and he joined the Royal Navy from there.⁶⁴

⁶² Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 475-480.

⁶³ National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Navy Office Record of Service: William Edward Brown; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record card: William Edward Brown.

⁶⁴ Begg and Liddle, *For Five Shillings a Day*, 616.

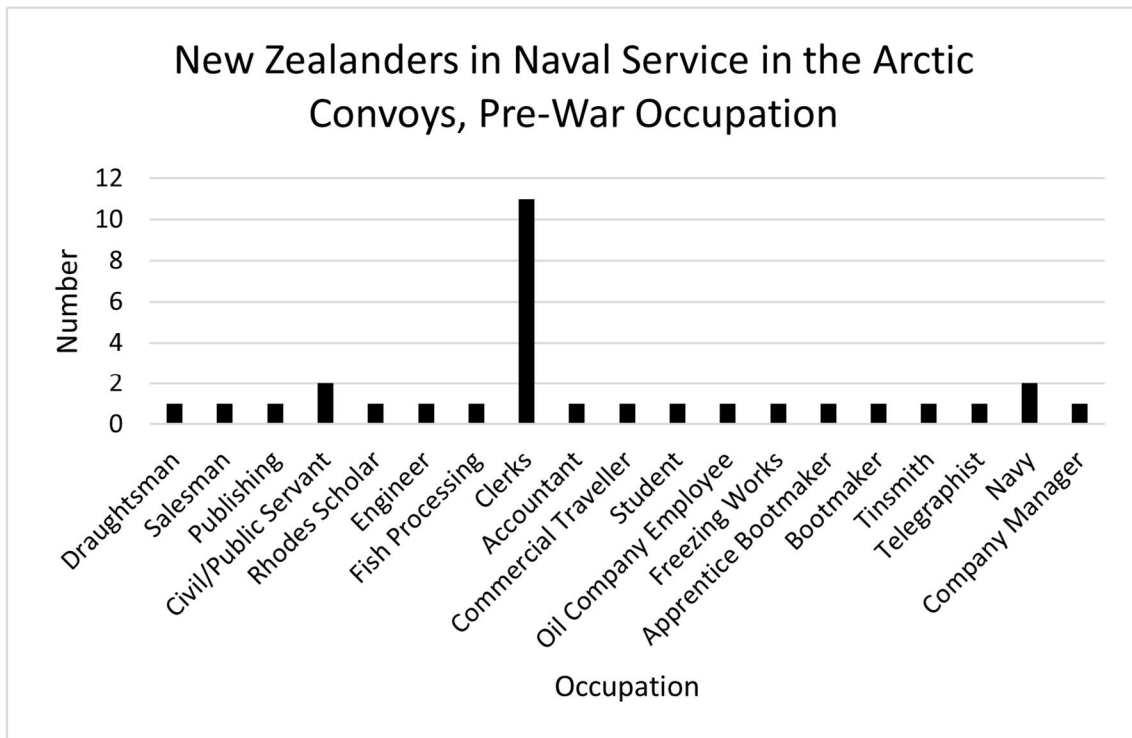


Figure 2 New Zealanders in naval service in the Arctic convoys: Pre-war occupation

A comparison of the pre-war occupations of 31 New Zealanders who served in the navy during the Arctic convoys with the 1936 New Zealand Census data on employment shows that this is generally consistent with the data regarding employment among working males at the time.⁶⁵ The biggest differences between the census data and the convoy participants data are that there are more people employed as various kinds of clerks, and less in primary production, however this is likely due to the location in which they were living, and the employment opportunities available at those locations, which are largely urban.

An analysis of 83 convoy participants whose place of birth is known is also consistent with the expected population spread based on the 1936 Census data, with larger numbers from the major cities and urban areas and a scattering of others from all across the country.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ New Zealand Census and Statistics Department, *1936 Census Data* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1937-45), <https://statsnz.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p20045coll21/id/51/>.

⁶⁶ New Zealand Census and Statistics Department, *1936 Census Data*.

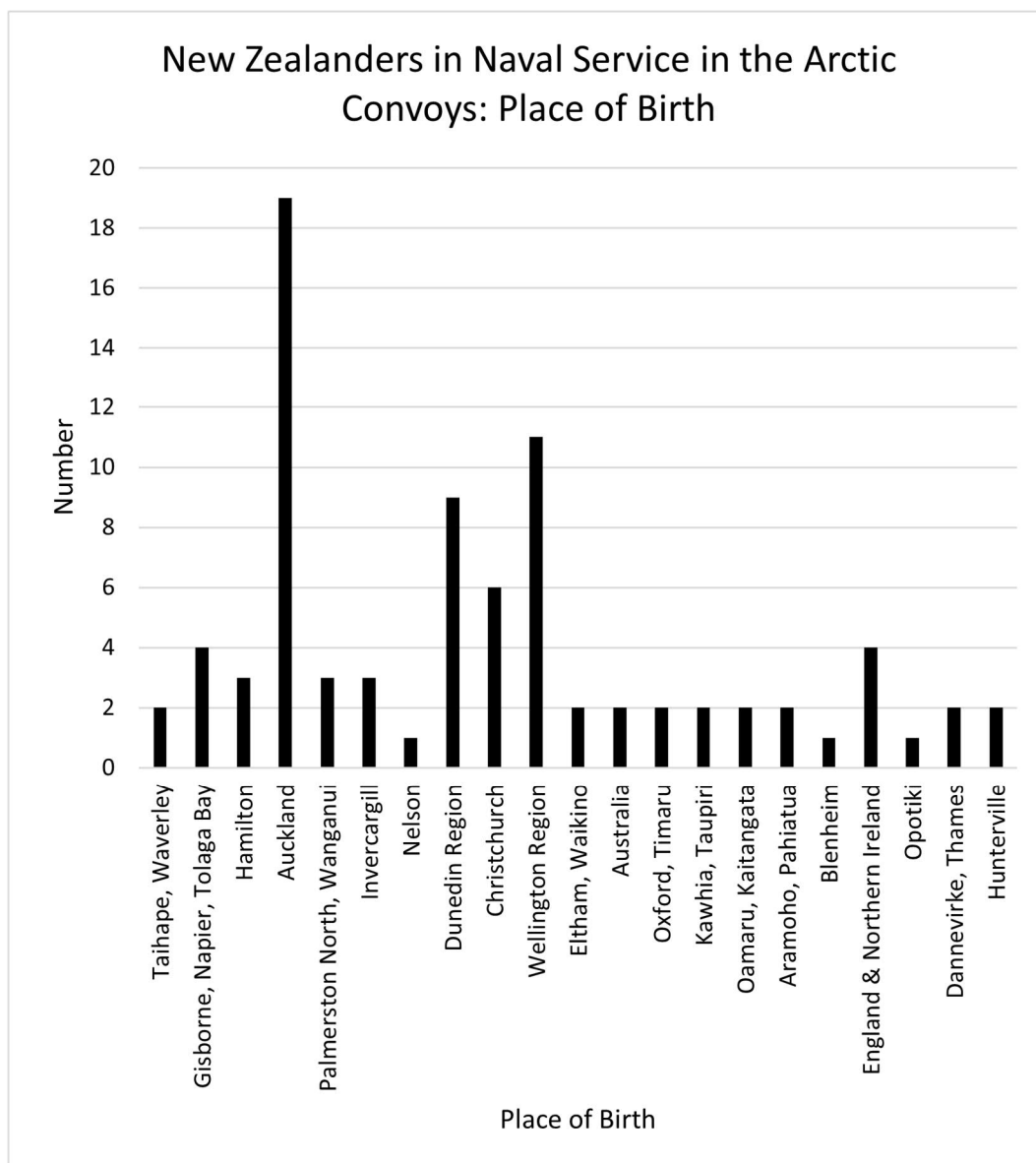


Figure 3 New Zealanders in naval service in the Arctic convoys: Place of birth

The average age upon joining the navy was young, although generally not as young as in the Merchant Navy. A breakdown (Figure 4) of the age of 86 New Zealand convoy participants when the war broke out shows that the majority (55) were less than 20 years old at the time, with 38 of the group being 18 to 19 years old.⁶⁷ An additional 15 were aged 20 to 22, and 13 aged 16-17. Although they all signed up for naval service at different times, their average age upon joining was very similar, according to the records available.

⁶⁷ 1 September 1939 has been used as the date of the outbreak of war for this calculation.

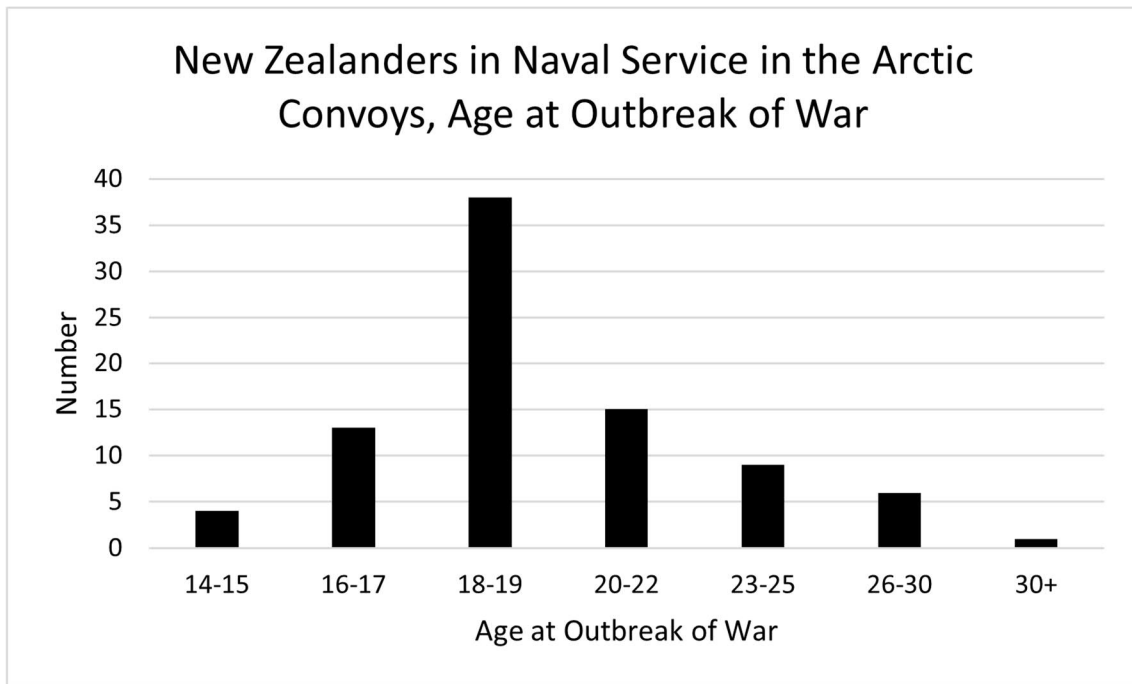


Figure 4 New Zealanders in naval service in the Arctic convoys: Age at outbreak of war (1 September 1939)

Most of the New Zealanders in the convoys were serving in or on loan to the Royal Navy at the time, either as ratings or officers. Many of them found their way into the convoys through what was known as ‘Scheme B’ that identified future potential officers and sent them to the United Kingdom to train and, if appropriate, eventually be commissioned as sub-lieutenants. William ‘Bill’ Carson (Figure 5, far right, back row) is a prime example of a typical Scheme B recruit.⁶⁸ Bill was from a mining family out of Kaitangata, in Clutha, and was born on 23 October 1919.

Carson excelled at both academia and sport and when the war broke out, he was at the University of Otago studying mining and preparing to follow in his family’s footsteps. Bill soon found himself abandoning his previous plans and volunteering to join the Navy. Like countless others, he had no prior experience on the sea, however he soon found himself a part

⁶⁸ Archives New Zealand, “Royal New Zealand Navy, Recruiting and Training Schemes – Scheme B – Candidates at entry, 13 and 28 August 1941”; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record card, William Matthew Frederick Carson.

of Scheme B, and on his way to HMS *Ganges*, along with many other new recruits, some of whom would also go on to serve in the convoys beside him or on different ships. There may be as many as a dozen fellow convoy participants in the photograph below of Bill Carson and the New Zealanders of the shore-based No 2 Mess, Blake Division, HMS *Ganges*, 1941, including Ordinary Seaman Andrew Cecil Dick, who died when HMS *Trinidad* torpedoed herself during convoy PQ 13 in 1942.⁶⁹



Figure 5 Bill Carson and the New Zealanders of the shore-based No 2 Mess, Blake Division, HMS *Ganges*, 1941

Another fellow Scheme B recruit is also in this picture.⁷⁰ Campbell ‘Cam’ Wyeth (fourth row, fourth from right). Wyeth was born in Invercargill in 1921, and, like Bill Carson, found himself volunteering for naval service when the war broke out. Wyeth and Carson made their way to HMS *Ganges* together, and then to HMS *Trinidad*. They both survived the sinking.

⁶⁹ National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record card: Andrew Cecil Dick.

⁷⁰ Archives New Zealand, “Royal New Zealand Navy, Recruiting and Training Schemes – Scheme B – Candidates at entry, 2 September 1941”; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record card, Campbell Wyeth.



Figure 6 Campbell Wyeth on the deck of HMS Trinidad in Murmansk on his 21st birthday

Another batch of Scheme B recruits contained Bill Smith (later Commander William ‘Kiwi’ Smith, DSO), Archibald ‘Arch’ Jelley from Dunedin and his lifelong friend Alan McLauchlan from Invercargill, who all ended up on convoy duty on HMS *Bermuda* together.⁷¹ Before he signed up for naval service, Arch Jelley (born 13 August 1922) was a clerical cadet in the Lands and Survey Department. He was also a champion boxer and athlete in his youth and went on to become a highly successful Olympic running coach later in life, being awarded an OBE, made a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit, and inducted into the New Zealand Coaches Hall of fame for his contribution to the sport.⁷²

⁷¹ Archives New Zealand, “Royal New Zealand Navy, Recruiting and Training Schemes – Scheme B – Candidates at entry, 20 July 1943”; Arch Jelley, email to author, 2 February 2022; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record cards: Arch Jelley, Alan McLauchlan.

⁷² New Year’s honours list 1982,” Supplement to the *New Zealand Gazette*, 18 January 1982, 105; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, “New Year Honours 2021 – Citations for Companions of the New Zealand Order of Merit,” last updated 31 December 2021, <https://dpmc.govt.nz/honours/lists/ny2021-cnzm>.

This combination of athleticism and academic skills is a common theme amongst those who were selected for Scheme B: Denis Glover also found himself amongst those promoted via the Scheme.⁷³ In his memoir, Glover described appearing before a panel in order to get into Scheme B, which asked him everything from whether he had been to school to if he had been in the first fifteen.⁷⁴ Both of these things were seemingly important, but neither of them were sufficient to prepare these young recruits, the vast majority of whom had never left New Zealand's shores, for what they were about to face. Another Scheme B New Zealander who found his way onto HMS *Bermuda* was Maurice Newman. Like many of the others, the young Newman excelled at sport, worked in his father's fish business by day, and studied part time at university at night. It was no surprise that he was chosen for the Scheme. He then went on to win the Distinguished Service Cross for his service with the *Bermuda*.⁷⁵

Penwill 'Pen' Moore, born and raised in Wellington, volunteered when he was 21 in 1941. Until then, he had been an accountant, an occupation he returned to following the war – one of the few who chose to pursue his pre-war profession.⁷⁶ Unlike many of the others, Moore came from a seafaring family, had been yachting all his life, and even built his own centre-boarder before the war broke out. There was no doubt which service Moore was going to join. In an interview in 1998, he said “when the war broke out if I was going to go anywhere, I was going to go in the Navy.”⁷⁷ He became part of Scheme B shortly after.⁷⁸

⁷³ Archives New Zealand, “Royal New Zealand Navy, Recruiting and Training Schemes – Scheme B – Candidates at entry, 1 July 1942”; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record card: Denis James Glover.

⁷⁴ Glover, *Hot Water Sailor*, 121-122.

⁷⁵ Archives New Zealand, List of Honours and Awards to personnel of the Royal New Zealand Navy including loan personnel: Maurice Leigh Newman; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record card: Maurice Leigh Newman.

⁷⁶ Penwill Moore, “My Story,” Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand, last updated January 2022, <http://arctic.org.nz/PenwillMoore.html>; Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 92-95.

⁷⁷ Penwill Moore, Interview with Commodore G. F. Hopkins, 23 November 1998, transcript.

⁷⁸ Archives New Zealand, “Royal New Zealand Navy, Recruiting and Training Schemes – Scheme B – Candidates at entry, 1 January 1942.”

Colin Christensen was only 17 when he joined the Royal New Zealand Navy in 1943. Born and raised in Palmerston North, Christensen had finished school and was working in his first job as a health department clerk.⁷⁹ As did countless others, Christensen volunteered for naval service and was looking forward to going overseas.⁸⁰ He too had no idea what awaited him, and the Arctic would prove to be a rude shock to a clerk from Palmerston North. Noel Smith was also only 17 when he signed up, and also had no experience with the sea before he joined the navy. He would eventually find himself on Arctic convoy duty on HMS *Trinidad*.⁸¹

Gordon Forrester ‘had a hankering to go to sea’ from an early age and ran away from home when he was 15 because he knew the Merchant Navy would accept people from age 14.⁸² He made the mistake of not going directly to Lyttleton to sign up and was working at his job as an apprentice bootmaker when he was found by the police, put on probation, and ordered home.⁸³ He later agreed with his mother that he would join the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve when he was 16, and ‘perhaps satisfy my seafaring urges.’⁸⁴

Norman Sim had left school in Timaru and started doing whatever work he could find, as the depression bit.⁸⁵ He saw an advertisement in a newspaper for stokers in the Royal New Zealand Navy and thought it looked more interesting than his job at the freezing works:

Well it looked pretty good in the advertisement in the paper, it said join the Navy and see the world. In those days there wasn't much chance of saving money to do any travelling, so I thought well I will do the travelling and get paid for it.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Steve Christensen, *Convoy to Murmansk: A New Zealander's Story* (Wellington, Opus Laboratories, 2007), 1; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record card: Colin Christensen.

⁸⁰ Christensen, *Convoy to Murmansk*, 1.

⁸¹ National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record card: Francis Noel Smith; “Biography of Francis Noel Smith,” accessed 18 December 2021, <https://heritage.christchurchcitylibraries.com/Archives/Newth/SmithF/>.

⁸² Gordon Forrester, Interview with Lieutenant T.K. de Castro RNZNVR (Rtd), 24 June 2002, transcript.

⁸³ Forrester, Interview.

⁸⁴ Forrester, Interview.

⁸⁵ Norman Sim, Interview by National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, 5 December 1990, transcript.

⁸⁶ Sim, Interview.

Similar stories of seeking out adventure are echoed throughout accounts from convoy veterans. Most of the young men who volunteered for naval service did so because they wanted to see the world, or experience something different from what they knew. The reality of what was involved in being in a war did not truly set in until they were in the thick of it. Some were lucky enough to have old friends beside them, others forged new friendships that lasted a lifetime. Many – ordinary ratings and officers alike – went on to distinguish themselves not only in the Arctic convoys but in other theatres of war, and when they returned home. Their sense of adventure and desire to see the world beyond New Zealand's borders was shared by their fellow convoy participants in the Merchant Navy.

Unlike the Royal Navy, there was no clear or consistent path into the Merchant Navy and from there into the war effort. However, many merchant seafarers share a similar story to those already told by their Royal Navy counterparts. They were looking to travel, for adventure, or just for steady employment. Although they varied greatly in age, many of them were quite young when they joined up. None of them were planning to be involved in a world war or could have anticipated how that would play out. New Zealand lost over 140 of its merchant seafarers in the Second World War, and it has been said that 'no other group of New Zealand civilians faced such risks during wartime.'⁸⁷

It has been estimated that nearly 60,000 merchant seafarers in total lost their lives throughout the course of the war, making the Merchant Navy one of the most perilous places to be.⁸⁸

Bernard Edwards described the lot of the merchant seaman well:

The merchant seamen were in an ambiguous position, being neither Armed Services nor true civilians. Even though they were at war, they were still regarded as being part of a commercial enterprise. They were expected to deliver the cargoes and maintain

⁸⁷ Neill Atkinson, "The Merchant Navy in the Second World War," Ministry for Culture and Heritage, last modified 16 Jan 2015, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/the-merchant-navy>.

⁸⁸ Atkinson, *Hell or High Water*, 23.

their ships as they had done in peacetime and yet they were required to man their guns, and die if necessary, to get their ship through. Inevitably, their casualty rate was far higher than that of any of the Services, yet they were accorded none of the privileges enjoyed by those who manned the escort ships and bases ashore. Their total allegiance was demanded at all times, yet their employment was terminated at the end of each voyage and, if their ship was sunk, their pay was stopped the minute they went over the side into a lifeboat or into the sea.⁸⁹

The Arctic convoys were no exception, and were, in many ways, some of the most dangerous work there was. Or, as the Admiralty themselves put it: ‘for sheer fortitude and courage, perhaps the palm should go to the merchant ships.’⁹⁰



Figure 7 Merchant seamen memorial, Wellington waterfront

Finding the New Zealanders who took part in the convoys as merchant seafarers was the most challenging part of this research. Whilst there are more records available now than ever before, and growing interest in and recognition of, the role of the Merchant Navy in our military history, it is still difficult to find and verify merchant seafarers and the details of their service. So far only a handful of New Zealand seafarers have been identified as having

⁸⁹ Bernard Edwards, *The Road to Russia: Arctic Convoys, 1942–45* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2002), 203-204, Kindle.

⁹⁰ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 134.

participated in the convoys (not counting those who became New Zealanders following the war). These New Zealanders included Ronald Bradshaw, Walter Caldwell, Fred Crafar, Dan Bashall, Dewi Browne, and Te Waari ‘Ward’ Whitiri. There are likely to be more.

The Maritime Museum of the United Kingdom has an archive of records of merchant seamen deaths between 1939 and 1953. This includes details of 90 New Zealanders who died whilst in the service between 1939 and 1945. While not all of them served in the convoys, an analysis of this data provides valuable insights about the New Zealand merchant mariners, who they were, and what they did. For example, the geographic spread of where they were born matches what we might expect given the population distribution in New Zealand. Some places of birth were recorded only as ‘New Zealand’ with no further detail, but the rest show higher numbers from cities, then small numbers spread across the country.⁹¹

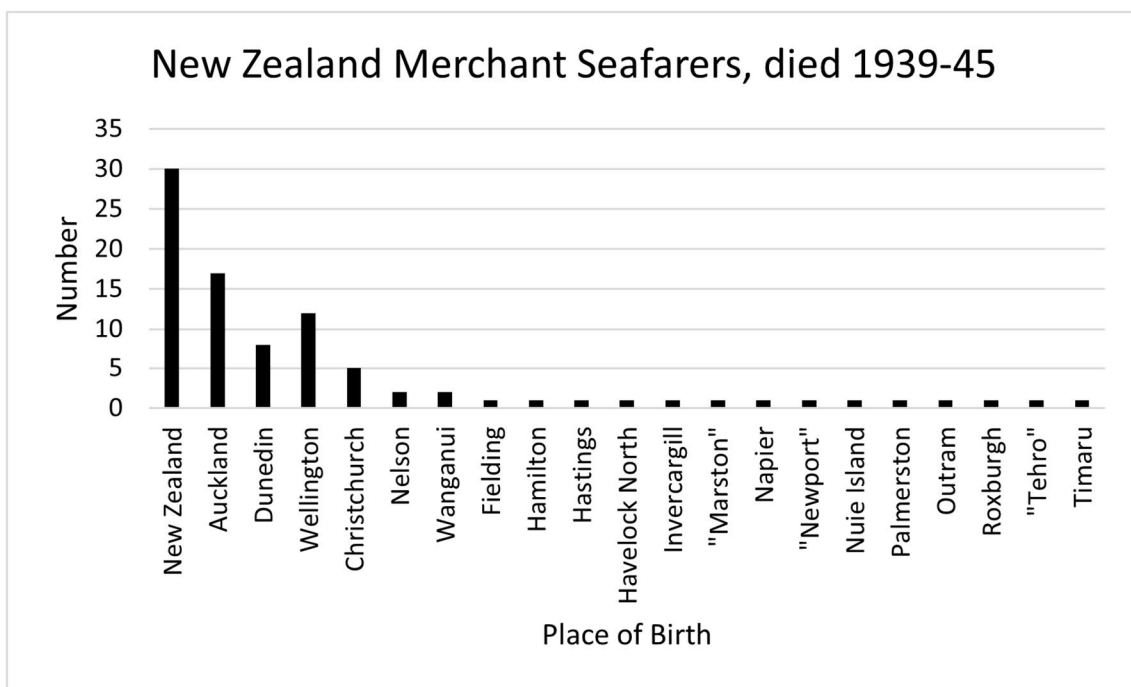


Figure 8 Place of birth of New Zealand merchant seafarers, died 1939-45

⁹¹ National Maritime Museum of the United Kingdom, “Merchant Seamen Deaths, 1939 -1953,” (database online), last updated 2016, accessed via <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61094/>.

Te Waari ‘Ward’ Whaitiri (Ngāti Mutunga, Ngāi Tahu) is an example of a typical merchant seafarer and a trailblazing one. Born on the Chatham Islands in 1912, Whaitiri became a seafarer when he was only 11 years old; lying about his age in order to be taken on as a deck boy.⁹² He then worked his way up through the ranks to become one of the first Māori master mariners. By the time the Second World War broke out, Whaitiri was in his late twenties, and he had already spent more than half of his life at sea by the time he joined the Murmansk run.

This is a familiar story for many seafarers. Walter Caldwell from Dunedin was only fourteen when he left school and stowed away on what he thought was a ship bound for Bluff; its destination turned out to be Sydney and a career in the Merchant Navy throughout the war.⁹³ Fred Crafar was also only 14 when he attempted to join the Navy but was rejected for being too young, so he joined the Merchant Navy instead, because he ‘just wanted to go to sea.’⁹⁴ Ronald Bradshaw was only 18 when the *Empire Howard* went down in 1942.⁹⁵

Dan Bashall, from Golden Bay, was also 18 when he decided to become a seafarer. He had been a farmhand until then, and preferred the sea to the army, describing his choice in an interview as: ‘I wanted to go away, and I did. I think it was the best thing I ever did.’⁹⁶ Dewi Browne from Wanganui was 19 and had been at sea for two years already when war broke

⁹² Reina Ann Whaitiri, “Whaitiri, Te Waari Kahukura,” Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, last modified February 2006, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5w21/whaitiri-te-waari-kahukura>.

⁹³ Mark Birch, “Stratford notable lived a full life,” *Taranaki Daily News*, 5 June 2000, 4, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=azh&AN=TNL0006050041-DEADMAN-ED&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁹⁴ Esther Taunton, “Merchant Seaman’s War Service Honoured,” *Taranaki Daily News*, 4 September 2010, 1, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=edsinz&AN=edsinz.996545333602837&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁹⁵ “Assistant Cook Ronald Bradshaw,” Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed 2 February 2022, <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2795769/>; “Ronald Bradshaw,” Auckland War Memorial Museum Cenotaph Online, accessed 2 February 2022, <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C20965>; “Roll of Honour, 1939-45,” Ministry for Culture and Heritage.

⁹⁶ Dan Bashall, Interview with Neill Atkinson, 6 November 2003, transcript, Alexander Turnbull Library.

out.⁹⁷ In a deviation from the norm, Noel Mudford from Foxton took a different route and spent time in the Merchant Navy before joining the Royal Navy and finding himself in the Arctic convoys. Whilst this might not be the typical path, going where there is work is very much the norm for merchant seafarers.

The New Zealanders in the convoys each have their individual stories, but for the first time we can start to understand them as a group. They came from all over New Zealand, and sometimes further afield, from all walks of life and occupations prior to their service. Most were young when they volunteered for naval service or become merchant seafarers. The Royal New Zealand Naval and Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve contributed greatly to the war effort, and it was through their links with the Royal Navy that most of these New Zealanders found themselves on Arctic convoy service. The differences between serving in the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy were at times acute, and at others irrelevant.

Whilst the focus of this research is on the core of the convoys themselves and therefore the naval personnel who took part, there were also others who contributed to the convoy effort through other branches of service such as the Fleet Air Arm, the Royal Air Force, and commanding submarines off the coast of Norway to try and keep that coast, and the convoys' path, clear. With over a hundred New Zealanders having taken part in the Arctic convoys, it is impossible to tell all their individual stories here, but it is possible to say that they were there, they did take part, and their contributions and sacrifices are known and appreciated.

In addition to those who were New Zealanders prior to the war, there are also those who became New Zealanders after the war, and they are not an insignificant group. Many of them

⁹⁷ Browne, Interview.

served right alongside the New Zealand contingent, and some established lifelong bonds. One of the things that brought convoy veterans together was the formation of the Russian Convoy Club of New Zealand (now the Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand). The Convoy Club was founded in 1989 by John Middleton, himself a veteran of the infamous PQ17, and is still active in 2022.⁹⁸

Over the years it has been in existence, the Club has not only facilitated connections between veterans and their families, but it has also contributed significantly to the awareness and recognition of the New Zealand contribution to the convoy effort. The Club maintains an informative website and a regular newsletter that are both publicly accessible, has worked closely with the Russian Embassy to enable the awarding of medals to convoy veterans, and played a pivotal role in getting a commemorative plaque established on the Wellington waterfront in 2005.



Figure 9: Memorial plaque on the Wellington waterfront

⁹⁸ “About Us,” Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand, last modified April 2022, <http://arctic.org.nz/AboutUs.html>.

The current (2022) President of the Convoy Club is Derek Whitwam, a veteran of HMS *Berwick*. Born in Yorkshire in 1925, Whitwam was just 17 when he found himself standing in a recruiting office in May 1943 with three others, ‘wondering what we’d all let ourselves in for.’⁹⁹ A typical example of a navy recruit at the time, Whitwam had left school at the age of 14 and worked various jobs before he signed up for service, and had no ambition to join the navy or any of the armed forces until that time. Like many of his fellow recruits, he also had little prior experience at sea, and the sixty-foot waves the *Berwick* faced on that first run to Iceland would come as a shock, but he got used to it.¹⁰⁰



Figure 10 Derek Whitwam, 1944

Whitwam, like several of his fellow convoy veterans, migrated to New Zealand following the end of the war and settled, married, and raised a family here. Others who made the same

⁹⁹ Derek Whitwam, “My Story,” Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand, last modified August 2018, <http://arctic.org.nz/MyStoryDerekWhitwam.html>; Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 171.

¹⁰⁰ Whitwam, “My Story”; Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 173.

journey are the prior Convoy Club President Chris King, Sydney Wells, Stanley Welch, Stan Douglas, and Denis Glover's mate Frank Glass (Royal Navy) and Frank Roe and Syd Simpson (Merchant Navy). As has been demonstrated, Syd Simpson's account of setting out to sea on a cargo ship at just 14 and being one of the first to become involved in the conflict is common among those who served in the Merchant Navy.¹⁰¹ Of the 92 Arctic convoy participants who became New Zealanders following the war who have been identified to date, 16 are Merchant Navy, one Royal Fleet Auxiliary, and the remainder are Royal Navy. This is consistent with their New Zealand counterparts. There are likely to be at least twice this number of convoy veterans who became New Zealanders following the war, but it is not possible to identify all of them at this time.¹⁰²

As we have seen, the New Zealanders who participated in the Arctic convoys were a diverse group from different places and occupations, but who still had many elements in common. Many of them were young, most had never been to sea, and most chose naval service or seafaring over other options such as the army. Some took a more direct path than others, but all of them eventually found themselves in the Arctic convoys. Once there, whether Royal Navy or Merchant Navy, ratings or officers, cooks, or commanders, they made the New Zealand presence felt. The country may not have committed them as a single cohesive group, but the sum of their collection contribution was significant, nonetheless. When you add that of those who chose to become New Zealanders following the war, it is even more so. It may not be possible to find all of them, but now that we do know who they are, we can ask: what did they do, and how important was it to the war effort?

¹⁰¹ Syd Simpson, "My Story," Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand, last modified January 2017, <http://arctic.org.nz/MyStorySydSimpson.html>; Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 124.

¹⁰² This assumption is based on discussions with the Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand, as well as relevant medal, award and unofficial lists and estimates. Only those who have been confirmed as convoy veterans throughout the course of this project have been included in Appendix B.

CHAPTER THREE: WHAT DID THEY DO AND HOW IMPORTANT WAS IT TO THE WAR EFFORT?

The importance of the Arctic convoys to the war effort has been the subject of much debate. The courage of those who participated in them has not. During the four long years that the convoys ran, the priority for the vast majority of those serving in them was not to meet any military or strategic goals. It was to get the job in front of them done, and to survive. Neither of these was an easy task, and at times, the challenges to both were immense. As previously noted, the Arctic convoys cost almost three thousand lives on the Allied side, including some New Zealanders. Some participants made a single convoy run and others endured the perilous journey on multiple occasions. Others still were involved in the wider convoy effort through the Royal Air Force, the Fleet Air Arm, and submarine and minesweeping patrols. Each had their part to play, and their efforts deserve to be acknowledged.

This is not necessarily as straightforward as it seems. As has been discussed, official records relating to the New Zealanders in the Arctic convoys are patchy and incomplete. In some cases, they do not match up with participant's own recollections and informal records that they kept, and in others official records cannot be found at all and a person's service is known only by references made to them by their fellow participants who remember them and their actions. Whilst official records remain key, without the richness of the informal records now available this task would be much harder, and many names would be missing. However, while gaps in our knowledge may remain, we can now understand much more about who was there, what they did, and what that meant for the war effort than ever before.

One very detailed, and yet frustrating, example of the sort of duties the New Zealanders in the

convoys performed was the aforementioned ‘freckle-faced New Zealand gunner’ whose exploits are only known through an article in the *Bay of Plenty Times* in 1943.¹⁰³ The article was originally published in the American newspaper *PM* and likely picked up by the *Times* due to its extremely vivid recollection of the actions of the kiwi gunner. The article recounts the story of a merchant seaman whose ship had been torpedoed, and who had been picked up, along with several other survivors, by a minesweeper attached to one of the Arctic convoys:

The gunner, a New Zealander, was the pride of the ship. He was a dead shot, they all boasted – had absolute and instantaneous co-ordination. He never missed. Next to their ship they loved this young gunner. I got a look at him. He was a freckle-faced lad of about 20 with narrow shoulders that slanted like a gable roof and certainly no physical model for a hero. I was a little sceptical of him until I got another sample of his gunnery later on.¹⁰⁴

Later, when the convoy was attacked during heavy fog and the minesweeper came under heavy fire from an enemy pilot in a Junkers 88, flying low to the water to avoid the ship’s anti-aircraft guns and launch a torpedo at them:

The Oerlikon in the hands of the New Zealand gunner began to explode. Cerise tracers tracks streaked into the waves under the Junkers. I wondered frantically why the Junkers didn’t raise his sights, and watched, expecting every instant to see the Junkers drop its tin fish. But instead a great gush of flames suddenly swept over the big bomber. She went over nose first and collapsed in a mass of wreckage, fire and smoke.¹⁰⁵

The New Zealand gunner had ‘skipped’ the shells under the bomber, and having witnessed this, the seafarer declared that ‘a man has to be good to skip the shells up just so, I should think. I was satisfied after the exhibition that the New Zealander rated all the admiration that he got.’¹⁰⁶ Attempts to identify the young New Zealander gunner (including one by someone identified only as ‘Trooper’ who wrote to the newspaper attempting to find him) have so far

¹⁰³ “Pride of Ship,” *Bay of Plenty Times*, 7 October 1943, 3.

¹⁰⁴ “Pride of Ship,” *Bay of Plenty Times*, 7 October 1943, 3.

¹⁰⁵ “Pride of Ship,” *Bay of Plenty Times*, 7 October 1943, 3.

¹⁰⁶ “Pride of Ship,” *Bay of Plenty Times*, 7 October 1943, 3.

been unsuccessful, but his contribution should not go unrecognised because of this.¹⁰⁷ His story is, as well as an outstanding individual effort, also a prime example of the difference that a single person can make. Without this young man's precision shooting, the fate of all of those aboard the minesweeper – both the ship's crew and the merchant seafarers who had taken refuge on it – may have been very different.

There are many other fine examples of New Zealanders in the convoys performing equally impressive feats under immense pressure. Several of them earned awards for their efforts at the time, while others had to wait until recently to receive recognition, particularly those in the Merchant Navy. For many, the first acknowledgement they were given for their service was from the Russian government, in the form of medals commemorating a succession of anniversaries of what is known there as the Great Patriotic War. The first of these were bestowed in 1988 following the fortieth anniversary of victory and the most recent, marking the seventy-fifth anniversary, in 2020. In 2012, surviving New Zealand veterans of the Arctic convoys were presented with the Medal of Ushakov, for bravery and courage in Arctic theatres, by the Ambassador of the Russian Federation in New Zealand. It was also in 2012, after a long campaign for recognition of Arctic convoy service by the United Kingdom, that the Arctic Star medal was announced.¹⁰⁸

The award criteria for the Arctic Star medal reveals much about the varied nature of service in the Arctic convoys and the types of roles that people performed. It includes both Royal Navy and Merchant Navy personnel who served directly in or in support of the convoys;

¹⁰⁷ "A Freckle-Faced Lad," *Auckland Star*, 27 December 1944, 7, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19441227.2.122>.

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of Defence, David Cameron, and Mark Francois, "Recognition for veterans of Arctic Convoys and Bomber Command," last modified 19 December 2012, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/recognition-for-veterans-of-arctic-convoys-and-bomber-command>.

Fleet Air Arm and Royal Air Force personnel who landed or served in the air over this area; non-aircrew of the same who were on operational service in the area, such as ground crew or those on Catapult Armed Merchant Ships (CAM Ships); Army personnel serving in navy or defensively equipped merchant ships or taking part in land operations north of the Arctic Circle; and civilian members of specific categories who would otherwise meet the criteria. Foreign nationals serving in British or Dominion forces such as the Royal New Zealand, Australian and Canadian navies are eligible if they have not already received a similar award from their own governments.¹⁰⁹

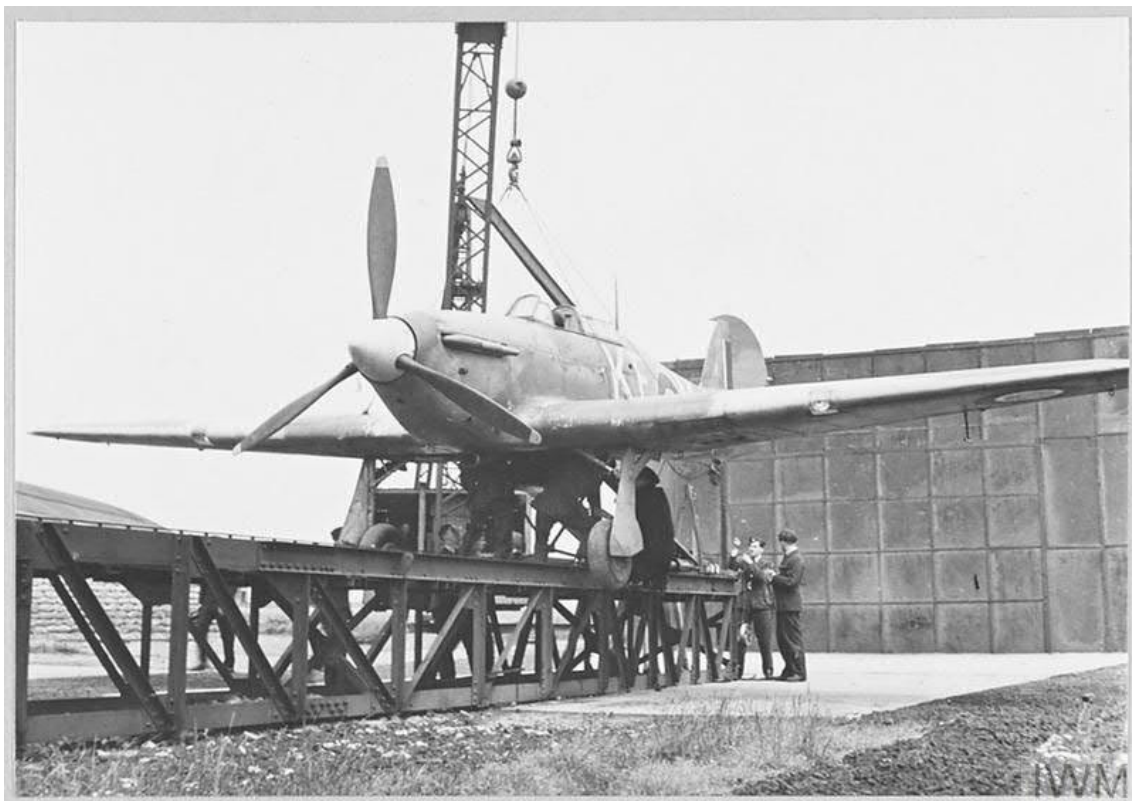


Figure 11 A typical catapult aircraft setup used to defend Merchant Navy Ships © IWM CH 6909

While the New Zealanders in the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy formed the bulk of the New Zealand contribution to the Arctic convoys, the convoys were very much a team effort

¹⁰⁹ UK Government, “Eligibility criteria: Arctic Star,” National Archives of the United Kingdom, accessed 19 May 2022, https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20140805134423/http://www.veterans-uk.info/arctic_star_index.htm.

and the ships would not have gotten through without the additional support from minesweepers, submarine patrols, civilian experts, and those in the air. When defining what constitutes ‘convoy service’ it is important to focus on the convoys themselves, but also to acknowledge the wider effort that made them possible. The broader criteria for the Arctic Star medal, which encompasses the many different parts that made up the convoy effort, are a good example of this.

AIR COVER FOR THE CONVOYS

The first of the Arctic convoys, codenamed *Dervish*, sailed on 12 August 1941. The convoy made it to Archangel untroubled by the enemy. As well as the main convoy, *Dervish* had two accompanying operations – *Operation Gauntlet*, to evacuate the Spitzbergen archipelago, and *Operation Strength*, to deliver No.151 Wing Royal Air Force and its two dozen Hurricanes, plus an additional 15 for the Soviets, to Murmansk, to initiate *Operation Benedict*. The goal of *Benedict* was to establish a protective force for Murmansk, Archangel and Polyarnoe.¹¹⁰ 151 Wing was led by a ‘sturdy, hard-bitten New Zealander,’ Wing Commander H. N. G Ramsbottom-Isherwood, from Petone.¹¹¹ Ramsbottom-Isherwood earned a Distinguished Flying Cross for his service in defence of Murmansk and later became one of only four non-Russians to receive the Order of Lenin medal, for the same.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Richard Woodman, *Arctic Convoys 1941-1945* (Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Maritime, 2018), 69-70, Kindle.

¹¹¹ Denis Richards and Hilary St. George Saunders, *Royal Air Force 1939-1945 Volume II: The Flight Avails* (London, Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954), 78.

¹¹² “Henry Neville Gynes Ramsbottom-Isherwood,” Auckland War Memorial Museum Cenotaph Online, accessed 2 February 2022, <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C129438>; “Royal Air Force: Distinguished Flying Cross,” Supplement to the London Gazette, 3 March 1942, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/35475/supplement/1011>; “Order of Lenin,” Supplement to the London Gazette, 31 March 1942, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/35507/supplement/1452/>.



Figure 12 No. 151 Wing Royal Air Force operations in Russia, Sep-Nov 1941. © IWM CR 38

Dervish was the beginning of a long story of close cooperation between the ships of the Arctic convoys and the airmen who provided additional support throughout their duration. The pilots of the Fleet Air Arm were a key part of the convoys' covering forces and there were many New Zealanders amongst this group. The job of a Fleet Air Arm pilot covering a convoy was not an easy one. Many were quite young, and there were numerous challenges in addition to the enemy. As Richard Woodman wrote:

Many of the extremely young Fleet Air Arm pilots suffered not only the effects of extreme cold, but also nervous problems which in some squadrons approached epidemic proportions. The ordeal of handling aircraft in such appalling conditions and the technical difficulties of operating from small and lively flight decks was bad enough, but to suffer persistent gunfire from one's own side must have been intolerable.¹¹³

¹¹³ Richard Woodman, *Arctic Convoys 1941-1945*, 575.

At least eight New Zealanders in the Fleet Air Arm earned honours for their work protecting the Arctic convoys. They are Sub-Lieutenant (A) Owen Keith Armitage, Lieutenant (A) Allen Russell Burgham, Sub-Lieutenant (A) J. McE. Gilbert, Lieutenant R. M. J O'Connor, Lieutenant (A) John William Robert O'Shea, Lieutenant (A) J. A. Quigg, Sub-Lieutenant (A) Patrick E. Temm and Lieutenant (A) D. R. Wallace.¹¹⁴

Wallace, Gilbert, and Temm were all Swordfish pilots from HMS *Activity*. Lieutenant Wallace earned a mention in despatches in April 1944 when he directed the fighters of *Activity* and HMS *Tracker* in combat against an attack on convoy JW 58, resulting in the sinking of two U-boats and the downing of five enemy aircraft.¹¹⁵ Sub-Lieutenants Gilbert and Temm also earned mentions in despatches for their actions in attacks by U-boats on the convoys.¹¹⁶ Lieutenant O'Shea (HMS *Campania*) earned a mention in despatches for his 'outstanding skill in his control of deck landings in difficult conditions' and 'good service with convoys' in December 1944, and Sub-Lieutenant Armitage, also of the *Campania*, earned a Distinguished Service Cross for successful attacks on torpedo aircraft whilst protecting convoys in 1945, alongside Quigg from HMS *Nairana*, who also earned the Distinguished Service Cross for the same.¹¹⁷

Lieutenant Quigg's shipmate, Lieutenant Burgham, was mentioned in despatches and also

¹¹⁴ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 479-480; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting Record Cards: O.K. Armitage, A. R. Burgham, J. McE. Gilbert, J. W. R. O'Shea, J. A. Quigg, P. Temm, D. R. Wallace.

¹¹⁵ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 479; Kemp, *Convoy! Drama in Arctic Waters*, 196-197; Archives New Zealand, List of Honours and Awards to personnel of the Royal New Zealand Navy including loan personnel: Donald Ramos Wallace.

¹¹⁶ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 479; Archives New Zealand, List of Honours and Awards to personnel of the Royal New Zealand Navy including loan personnel: John McEwen Gilbert and Patrick Eamon Temm.

¹¹⁷ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 480; Archives New Zealand, List of Honours and Awards to personnel of the Royal New Zealand Navy including loan personnel: John William R. O'Shea, Owen Keith Armitage, and John Alphonsus Quigg.

earned a Distinguished Service Cross for his convoy service, which included the first operational night landing on an aircraft carrier when he successfully landed on the ‘wildly heaving’ deck of HMS *Nairana* in total darkness, having taken off a similarly heaving, snow-covered deck in order to drive off enemy aircraft attacking the convoy.¹¹⁸ Lieutenant O’Connor earned his Distinguished Service Cross for ‘good service and outstanding devotion to duty’ across five different Arctic convoys on HMS *Whitehall*.¹¹⁹

One New Zealander in the Fleet Air Arm who was not a pilot was Sub-Lieutenant Louis David Fenton. Fenton joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve in July 1941, applied to join the Fleet Air Arm, and became an observer.¹²⁰ This was a specialist role that formed part of the Fleet Air Arm aircraft crew, alongside the pilot and telegraphist air gunner. Their primary responsibility was to observe the fall of shot and communicate any necessary corrections, and they were also trained in navigation and morse code. The aircrew also collectively looked after the operational needs of their aircraft:

Fuel, ammunition bombs or depth charges, settings of fuses, although the refuelling and arming would have been completed by the appropriate ground crews of the squadron, also checked were all instrument gauges, compasses, magnetic and gyro, radar set, radio, guns etc. The observer’s chart, usually prepared in the ops room had details of the ships planned course, signals for the day - position of targets if known, courses, weather and wind, complement of smoke bombs, flame flares carried in the cockpit.¹²¹

Sub-Lieutenant Fenton would eventually find himself on HMS *Formidable* and HMS *Victorious*, which had covered the first *Dervish* convoy, and returned to cover or distant cover convoys PQ 12, QP 8, PQ 13, QP 9, PQ 14, QP 10, PQ 15, QP 11, PQ 16, QP 12, PQ

¹¹⁸ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 480; “Night Landing on Carrier,” *Otago Daily Times*, 19 February 1945, 6, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19450219.2.94>; Archives New Zealand, List of Honours and Awards to personnel of the Royal New Zealand Navy including loan personnel: Allan Russell Burgham.

¹¹⁹ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 480; Archives New Zealand, List of Honours and Awards to personnel of the Royal New Zealand Navy including loan personnel: Reginald M. J. O’Connor.

¹²⁰ Louis David Fenton, Interview by National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, 6 May 1994, transcript.

¹²¹ Fenton, Interview.

17, QP 13, JW 58, as well as several attacks on the *Tirpitz*, including *Operation Tungsten* in 1944, which failed to sink the battleship.¹²² Fenton described the long hours waiting to launch an attack in an interview with the Royal New Zealand Navy Museum in 1994:

When their fears were at their greatest, we waited in the crew room not permitted to leave for four days. The aircraft on the deck were warmed up every hour otherwise they would never be able to take off, such was the cold. There was at the time a convoy going to Russia and it was usually felt that a convoy was a real bait for *Tirpitz*.¹²³

In addition to those in the Fleet Air Arm and the Royal Air Force, there were also pilots providing air support to convoys from Merchant Aircraft Carriers (MAC ships), and more in Coastal Command.¹²⁴ One example of this is Squadron Leader T. O. Marshall of Coastal Command, who flew Catalinas on patrols in support of the convoys.¹²⁵ Marshall earned a Distinguished Flying Cross for his war service, which also included a 27-hour pursuit of the *Bismarck*, and the evacuations of Greece and Crete.¹²⁶ There were New Zealanders among the pilots and aircrew in Coastal Command, the Royal Air Force, and the Fleet Air Arm all involved in the immediate and the wider convoy effort.

There were also New Zealanders on the Merchant Navy ships the convoys were designed to protect, and their protecting and escorting forces, including the MAC ships. Lieutenant-Commander Connell Thode, the RNZNVR's first and only submarine commander during the Second World War, did two war patrols off the coast of Norway covering the Arctic convoys and there may have been others.¹²⁷ New Zealand born Ian Grey, having moved to Australia in

¹²² Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 9, 21, 28, 34, 49, 128; Woodman, *Arctic Convoys 1941-1945*, 459.

¹²³ Fenton, interview.

¹²⁴ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 511; "N.Z. Airmen's Experiences," *Nelson Evening Mail*, 20 July 1943, 5, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NEM19430720.2.81>.

¹²⁵ "N.Z. Airmen's Experiences," *Nelson Evening Mail*, 20 July 1943, 5.

¹²⁶ "N.Z. Airmen's Experiences," *Nelson Evening Mail*, 20 July 1943, 5.

¹²⁷ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 503-504.

his youth, even served on the convoy ships as an interpreter and liaison officer as part of the Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve.¹²⁸



Figure 13 A protecting Supermarine Spitfire seen from the destroyer HMS Ashanti, Arctic, March 1942. © IWM A 8208

CONVOY SHIPS AND ESCORTS

The convoy effort was much wider than just the ships that sailed in them. However, most of the New Zealanders who participated in the Arctic convoys did so on the navy ships that protected the merchantmen at their core. Over a hundred New Zealanders are known to have been involved, and that is without counting those who became New Zealanders after the war ended. It is not possible to tell all their stories within the confines of a thesis, but it is possible to understand the sorts of roles they performed on convoy duty and how important that was to the war effort.

¹²⁸ “Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RANVR) Officers, 1939-1945,” Unit Histories; National Archives of Australia, Royal Australian Naval Reserve posting record card: Ian Grey, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=5216411&S=1>.

Records show, and veterans confirm, that many of the New Zealanders in the Royal Navy or the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) found their way there through the Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNZVNR) and subsequent loan or recruitment arrangements such as Scheme B.¹²⁹ Of the New Zealanders in the Royal Navy, there was a mix of ratings and officers alike, and they performed a range of roles encompassing everything from meteorologist, stoker, leading stoker, gunner, signaller, telegraphist, navigator, navigator's yeoman, aircraft recognition officer, aircraft liaison officer, seaman, able, ordinary and leading seaman, petty officer, sub-lieutenant, lieutenant, and commander. Some endured only a single Arctic convoy run, some did several, and one, Commander A.V. (Viv) Kempthorne did an astonishing 24.¹³⁰

In an interview with the Royal New Zealand Navy Museum in 1990, Kempthorne recalled how he came to be in so many of the convoys:

I was then given [following his time on HMS *Hussar*] the opportunity of choosing what I would like to do next. As I had been on warships all that period of the war, I said I would like to go to a battleship or an aircraft carrier and I finished up in HMS *Anson* (13 November 42 - 31 July 44).

For the rest of the period up to D-Day I served in *Anson* mainly carrying out covering force duties with the Russian convoys. All told counting the time I was in *Anson* I was involved in 24 plus Russian convoys (15 in HMS *Hussar* and 9 plus in HMS *Anson* in the Covering Force).¹³¹

Viv Kempthorne was a leading seaman when his time in the convoys began and was a sub-lieutenant by the time that his convoy service was complete. The first half of his convoy service was on the minesweeper HMS *Hussar*. The ship had not been designed for Arctic

¹²⁹ Archives New Zealand, "Royal New Zealand Navy, Recruiting and Training Schemes – Scheme B."

¹³⁰ Commander A. V. Kempthorne, Interview by National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy researcher, 6 September 1990, transcript; "Alfred Vivian Kempthorne," Auckland War Memorial Museum Cenotaph Online, accessed 4 May 2022, <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C133390?n=Kempthorne>.

¹³¹ Kempthorne, Interview.

conditions and the winter weather kept them as busy as the enemy did: ‘our main problem was the weather particularly the ice, because we had to spend all our time chipping the ice off the focsle in case we capsized.’¹³² The *Hussar* was then based in Murmansk for several months, where they swept the entrance to Kola inlet to keep it clear for the convoys coming through, as well as escorting the convoys leaving Murmansk, and were regularly bombed by German aircraft.¹³³ Kempthorne described how close they were to their adversaries when covering the entrance of Kola Inlet as ‘like sweeping in the Hauraki Gulf with the enemy on the Coromandel Peninsular [sic]. We were virtually within sight if they could see us during the daylight hours or when the weather was suitable.’¹³⁴

Kempthorne’s time with the convoys on HMS *Hussar* coincided with some of the most eventful convoys for New Zealanders: PQ 13, QP 11, and PQ 14. PQ 13 would soon become famous for the incident in which HMS *Trinidad* accidentally torpedoed itself, but that was hardly the only issue that convoy encountered. On 23 March 1942, PQ 13 ran into the notorious Arctic weather. By 25 March, the convoy was facing the full fury of an Arctic storm, and by 27 March, they convoy was scattered far apart.¹³⁵ There were 17 New Zealanders on board HMS *Trinidad* at the time, among them Bill Carson, Cam Wyeth, Noel Smith, Jimmy Keenan, Lieutenant E. H. G. Lassen, A. C. Dick, K. E. Lipanovic and B. S. Heal.¹³⁶

By the morning of 28 March, the weather had improved but the situation had not: the

¹³² Kempthorne, Interview.

¹³³ Kempthorne, Interview.

¹³⁴ Kempthorne, Interview.

¹³⁵ Woodman, *Arctic Convoys 1941-1945*, 123-124.

¹³⁶ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 476; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy Posting record cards: William Carson, Campbell Wyeth, Francis Noel Smith, Edward Henry Godfrey Lassen, Andrew Cecil Dick.

Luftwaffe had found them and the convoy, such as it was, came under sustained attack. Then, at 09:24 on 29 March, a ‘disaster as unique as it was unpredictable’ unfolded and the *Trinidad* torpedoed herself.¹³⁷ The reason for the accident was given as a failure of the gyro-controlled direction system or as the result of a salvo of *Trinidad*’s own shells landing short just ahead of the torpedo’s track toppling the gyro and causing the torpedo’s course to reverse, but either way the damage was done.¹³⁸ That damage was extensive, and although the ship managed to limp its way to Murmansk, Ordinary Seaman Andrew Cecil Dick became the first New Zealander known to have died on Arctic convoy service.¹³⁹



Figure 14 HMS *Trinidad* under repair at Kola Inlet in Murmansk, 1942. © IWM HU 43945.

PQ 13 was followed by PQ 14 and return convoy QP 11, and more trouble for the newly repaired *Trinidad* and the survivors of HMS *Edinburgh*, which also had several New

¹³⁷ Richard Woodman, *Arctic Convoys 1941-1945*, 133.

¹³⁸ Richard Woodman, *Arctic Convoys 1941-1945*, 133; Frank Pearce, *The Ship that Torpedoed Herself* (Plymouth: Baron Jay, 1975), 77.

¹³⁹ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 476; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy Posting record card: Andrew Cecil Dick.

Zealanders on board, including ordinary seamen Stanley Braithwaite, William Walbran, Jack Gaelic, Terence Southee, and Bryan Philpott.¹⁴⁰ *Edinburgh* had survived the chaos of PQ 13, made the return journey of QP 4, then returned to the Arctic again for PQ 14. Another New Zealander, assistant cook Ronald Bradshaw, of the merchant ship *Empire Howard*, was killed when she was torpedoed by *U-403* after PQ 14 was again scattered or had to turn back, this time due mostly to ice.¹⁴¹ Now it seemed that *Trinidad* and *Edinburgh*'s luck had run out.

When HMS *Trinidad* headed for home on 13 May, she was carrying the survivors from HMS *Edinburgh*, which had been lost during return convoy QP 11.¹⁴² That QP 11 was not a bigger disaster is largely due to the actions of New Zealander Commander Maxwell Richmond of HMS *Bulldog*, who earned a Distinguished Service Order and the Soviet Order of the Red Banner for his defence of the convoy.¹⁴³ During repeated attacks that started on 1 May, Commander Richmond and the *Bulldog* screened and protected the ships in the convoy, repeatedly putting themselves between them and the enemy, and taking the offensive and driving the attackers back. At 16:00 the enemy attacked again, and Richmond and his destroyers once again drove them off. By now the convoy had entered the ice and would have been easy pickings if it were not for the destroyers.

A final attack was made some time later and after defeating them once again, Commander Richmond 'pugnaciously pursued them until the hindmost German destroyer vanished in the smoke bank and they made off eastwards.'¹⁴⁴ Meanwhile, HMS *Edinburgh* was floundering.

¹⁴⁰ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 476; "Torpedoed in Arctic," *Nelson Evening Mail*, 15 June 1942, 4, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NEM19420615.2.78>; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy Posting record cards: Stanley Norman Braithwaite, William Henry Walbran, Jack Leopold Gaelic, Terence Francis Southee, and Bryan Passmore Philpott.

¹⁴¹ Assistant Cook Ronald Bradshaw," Commonwealth War Graves Commission; "Empire Howard," U-boat.net, accessed 2 February 2022, <https://uboat.net/allies/merchants/ship/1544.html>.

¹⁴² Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 36-38.

¹⁴³ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 476; Richard Woodman, *Arctic Convoys 1941-1945*, 169-172.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Woodman, *Arctic Convoys 1941-1945*, 171.

She had been hit by two torpedoes from U-boats and although they tried to save her, would ultimately not survive. Ordinary Seaman Braithwaite described the chaos that reigned after *Edinburgh* was hit:

When the *Edinburgh* was torpedoed, I was at action station alongside an ack-ack gun, and had been there 10 minutes, relieving a man who went to mess, in which he and many others were killed when a torpedo struck. I would have been killed, too, if I had not been at the action station.... Southee had a lucky escape; he suddenly found himself swimming in a mess of oil and water, but fortunately he saw a torch shining down the hatch, and swam to it. He was covered with oil and was unrecognisable when I saw him a quarter of an hour later.¹⁴⁵

Somehow, despite the damage, the *Edinburgh* did not sink until a further attack two days later:

We had a hell of a time for two days, having no proper food and also having to sleep on the decks, though the weather was very bitter. We were expecting dive-bombers and submarines at any time, for there is no darkness during the summer period. Eventually three German destroyers attacked and fired three torpedoes from a range of five miles.

One hit amidships, and there was a terrific explosion, and the ship heeled over, but still kept firing, damaging one German and hitting another amidships and causing it to blow up. We donned our lifebelts and prepared the Carley floats but realised there was little chance of surviving more than five minutes if we took to the water in that latitude; but suddenly warships arrived and took us aboard. A destroyer torpedoed her, after which she sank gracefully.¹⁴⁶

The survivors of the *Edinburgh* were later transferred to HMS *Trinidad* for the return journey to Britain. Unfortunately for them, the *Trinidad* was attacked again on 13 May by multiple Ju 88 dive bombers and was struck again. This time there was no escape. Dozens of the *Trinidad* crew were killed, along with several survivors from the *Edinburgh*. New Zealanders Bill Carson and Cam Wyeth were among the *Trinidad* crew who survived the ordeal.

¹⁴⁵ "Torpedoed in Arctic," *Nelson Evening Mail*, 15 June 1942, 4.

¹⁴⁶ "Torpedoed in Arctic," *Nelson Evening Mail*, 15 June 1942, 4.

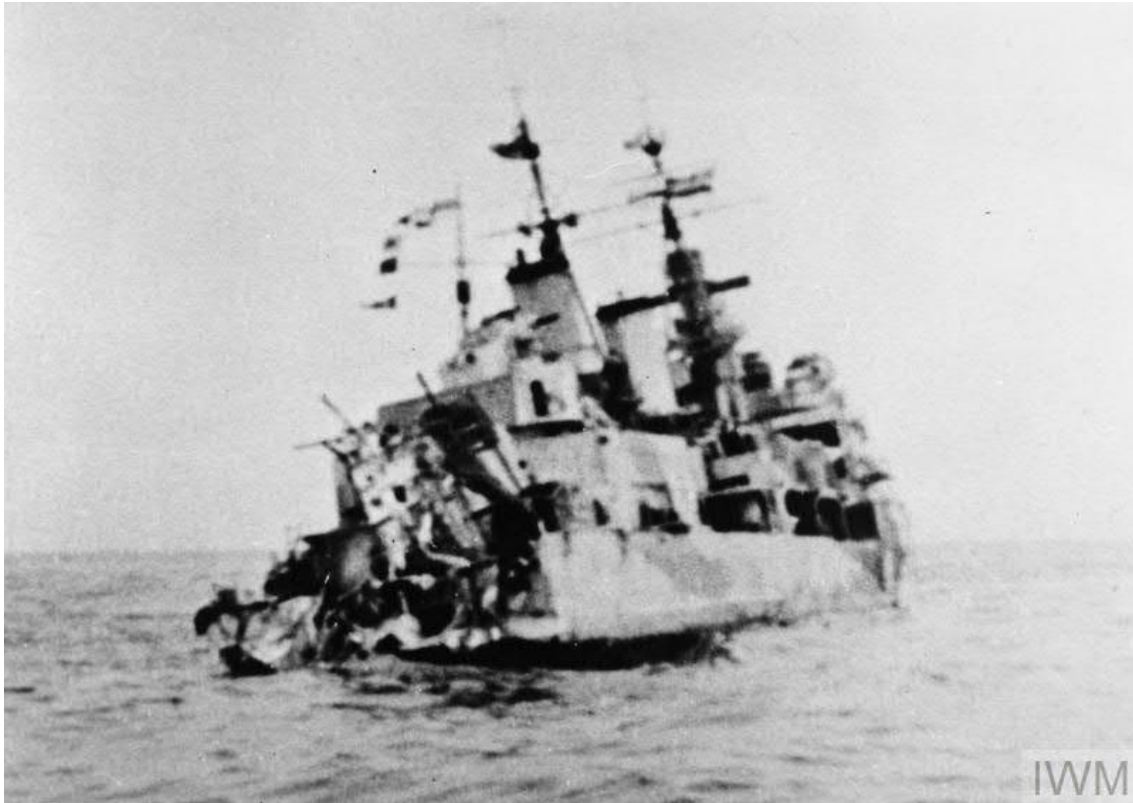


Figure 15 The sinking of HMS Edinburgh, May 1942. © IWM MH 23866.

Unfortunately, more loss was to come for the New Zealanders. Lieutenant Stirtevant Frederic Piggin was killed when his destroyer, HMS *Punjabi*, and the Home Fleet's flagship *King George V* collided in dense fog off Iceland on 1 May 1942, whilst on escort duty covering convoy PQ 15.¹⁴⁷ Sub-Lieutenant J. A. Foster of the corvette HMS *Honeysuckle* then earned a mention in despatches for the defence on convoy PQ 16.¹⁴⁸ The *Honeysuckle* was involved in several of the convoys, but PQ 16 was the biggest to date and the last that sailed before the disaster that became PQ 17.

Setting out from Iceland on 21 May, unlike the many convoys that had to battle the Arctic winter, PQ 16 had to deal with the summer sun, which had its own unique set of difficulties.

¹⁴⁷ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 476; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy Posting record card: Stirtevant Frederic Piggin.

¹⁴⁸ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 477; Archives New Zealand, List of Honours and Awards to personnel of the Royal New Zealand Navy including loan personnel: John Alexander Foster.

The ships of PQ 16 came under sustained heavy attack over several days by aircraft and U-boats alike and made it clear that there was an ‘obvious and urgent need for an aircraft carrier to accompany the Arctic convoys so that the shadowing aircraft could be destroyed.’¹⁴⁹ Sadly what followed PQ 16 was PQ 17, the single bloodiest episode of the Arctic convoys.

PQ 17 has been called the ‘Convoy to Hell’ and with good reason.¹⁵⁰ B. B. Schofield described it as a ‘most unsound operation of war’ but that ‘political considerations were paramount.’¹⁵¹ In the *Royal Naval Staff History*, the Admiralty called it a ‘major disaster’ of ‘unrelieved gloom.’¹⁵² Winston Churchill himself called it ‘one of the most melancholy naval episodes in the whole of the war.’¹⁵³ It is the most infamous of all the Arctic convoys, for all the wrong reasons. Some lessons had been learned from the convoys that had come before, but not enough. There are many elements of the Arctic convoys that have been, and remain, widely debated, but that the destruction of PQ 17 could have been avoided had the decision-making been different is not among them.

Admiral Tovey wanted to postpone PQ 17 until more escorts were available, but this was rejected, as was his suggestion of running more frequent, smaller, less vulnerable convoys.¹⁵⁴ Instead, despite all the misgivings and knowing full well that it was not a good idea, PQ 17 went ahead, and the ships sailed out of Iceland on 27 June 1942. The Admiralty instructed that the ‘safety of the convoy against surface attack to the westward of Bear Island must be met by our surface forces, and to the eastward of that meridian must be met by submarines; and that the cruiser covering force was not intended to go east of Bear Island, unless the

¹⁴⁹ Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 66.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Lund and Harry Ludlum, *I Was There on PQ 17, the Convoy to Hell* (Berkshire, Foulsham, 2010).

¹⁵¹ Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 55.

¹⁵² Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 53.

¹⁵³ Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*, 292; Captain Jack Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter* (London: Futura, 1974), 15.

¹⁵⁴ Kemp, *Convoy! Drama in Arctic Waters*, 65.

convoy was threatened by the presence of a surface force which the cruisers could fight, or in any case to go beyond 25°E.’¹⁵⁵

This was just one in a long line of mistakes and the disaster did not unfold immediately. The biggest mistake came when the Admiralty wrongly believed the battleship *Tirpitz* to be at sea and ordered the escorts to withdraw and the convoy to scatter. This was the worst possible move they could have made, and it ended in disaster for the ships of PQ 17, which suffered the worst losses of any of the Arctic convoys during their entire run.

There were several New Zealanders involved in this awful tragedy, and others rumoured to have been but presently unconfirmed. Those who we know were present for the horror that unfolded were Denis Glover, Tommy Turnbull, A. R. (Reg) Thomas, J. B. (Bill) Tinney, and John Scott on HMS *Onslaught*, as well as John Phillips and Able Seaman Hugh Hutcheson, all of whom survived.¹⁵⁶ Midshipman Richard Campbell Begg was also present on the *Norfolk*.¹⁵⁷ Convoy Club founder John Middleton, of the merchant vessel *Ocean Freedom*, called the three signals that ended with the infamous ‘Convoy is to scatter’ the ‘blackest naval history.’¹⁵⁸

Hugh Hutcheson described some of the horror of PQ 17 in a letter to his mother that was published in the *Auckland Star*:

¹⁵⁵ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 55.

¹⁵⁶ Glover, *Hot Water Sailor*, 140; “The Russian Convoy,” *Ashburton Guardian*, 3 October 1942, 4, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AG19421003.2.42.2>; “New Zealanders in the Northern Convoys,” The Northern Convoys International Centre Foundation, accessed 8 November 2021, https://north-convoys.com/en/history_of_the_northern_convoys/the_heroes_of_the_northern_convoys/uchastniki_severnyh_konvoev_iz_novoj_zelandii.html; “Arctic Escapes,” *Auckland Star*, 11 December 1942, 2, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19421211.2.15>.

¹⁵⁷ Begg and Liddle, *For Five Shillings a Day*, 104.

¹⁵⁸ John Middleton, *Personal account of Convoy PQ17*, Russian Convoy Club of New Zealand, 1992 (from the Royal Navy Museum of New Zealand archives).

We took shelter for a day, and then when the signal came through that the coast was clear we set out for the White Sea. When we left our haven we ran into heavy fog, which we thought was a Godsend. However, it nearly proved our downfall. Before we knew where we were, we had run into pack ice and were nearly rammed two or three times by U.S. Liberty boats. As we were the first to hit the ice, we had no option but to carry on, for the merchant ships had piled up behind us and we could not turn or go astern.

We were 16 hours before we got clear of the ice, and what a relief it was. On the horizon appeared a corvette from Archangel looking for the convoy, which was not to be seen. We patrolled around for 12 hours waiting for the ships, but not one appeared, so we went on ahead. We had on board 56 survivors from a tanker hit by a bomb. We were all at action stations going into the White Sea, for the entrance is within reach of the divebombers.

Four ships of our flotilla were sweeping the entrance and they informed us they had just sunk an enemy submarine waiting in the entrance for the convoy. We went on into Archangel, where we put our survivors ashore. What a glorious sleep we had that night. We were nearly dropping with fatigue, and with no sleep our nerves were just on breaking point.¹⁵⁹

The terrible disaster of PQ 17 was followed by PQ 18, in which Leading Seaman Huia Frederick Charles Hudson, RNZNVR, earned a mention in despatches for his role in defending PQ 18 from the relentless attacks by the Luftwaffe. Despite being ‘officially on the sick list with a sprained ankle, he insisted on manning his gun whenever attack was due and was an inspiration to his gun's crew’ and successfully shot down two attacking bombers with the multiple pom-pom on HMS *Wheatland*.¹⁶⁰

Richard Campbell Begg and the crew of the *Norfolk* were also in PQ 18.¹⁶¹ As was Norman Sim, who was also on the return convoy QP 14 as a petty officer on the destroyer HMS *Meteor*. Sim made five convoy journeys on the *Meteor* and described the temperature in the boiler rooms as below freezing point with icicles hanging and freezing cold water pouring in

¹⁵⁹ “Arctic Escapes,” *Auckland Star*, 11 December 1942, 2.

¹⁶⁰ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 477; Archives New Zealand, List of Honours and Awards to personnel of the Royal New Zealand Navy including loan personnel: Huia Frederick C. Hudson; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record card: Huia Frederick Charles Hudson.

¹⁶¹ Begg and Liddle, *For Five Shillings a Day*, 110.

through the fan intakes and soaking him as ‘when I started going grey, I think.’¹⁶² He recalled his first journey on the *Meteor* in an interview with the Royal New Zealand Navy Museum in 1990, and it was an eventful one:

When I first went to it, we went to sea to go to the rescue of a submarine that was in trouble off the Norwegian Coast, the *Stubborn*, there was us and another destroyer the *Scorpion*. Then we went back to Scapa Flow after a tug had come out and picked it up and towed it into Wick. The next stop after leaving Scapa Flow, was the Faeroe Isles, Faeroe Islands, [sic] we used to top up with oil and then pick up a convoy, up off North Iceland, then arrive up in Kola Inlet near Murmansk.¹⁶³

Hudson and Sim were not the only New Zealanders who took part in PQ 18. Navigator’s Yeoman Pen Moore was on HMS *Malcom* with David Dodson, Norman Ettlinger, Viv Hall and Ces Jackson. Denis Glover, Tommy Turnbull, and Ordinary Seamen Thomas, Tinney and Scott were on the *Onslaught*. Petty Officer Radio Mechanic L. M. Hadley was on HMS *Scylla* with John Phillips, and although they have not all been identified, S.D. Waters also noted there were New Zealanders on the crew of the destroyer HMS *Scorpion* and several other ships in the escort.¹⁶⁴

There were several New Zealanders in the escorts and covering ships of convoy JW51B, including two who earned awards for their roles in protecting the convoy from attack. They were Lieutenant Lewis King (RNZNVR) of HMS *Onslow*, who earned a Distinguished Service Cross for his courage and leadership in fighting the fires that broke out on the *Onslow* after she was torpedoed three times by the *Admiral Hipper*, and Instructor Lieutenant George Lawrence Hogben of HMS *Sheffield*, whose skilful use of radar allowed Rear-Admiral

¹⁶² Norman Sim, interview by National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, 5 December 1990, transcript; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record card: Norman George Sim.

¹⁶³ Sim, Interview.

¹⁶⁴ Penwill Moore, Interview; “Service in the Navy,” *Evening Star*, 30 October 1942, 2, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ESD19421030.2.28>; “The Russian Convoy,” *Ashburton Guardian*, 3 October 1942, 4; Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 479; “New Zealanders in the Northern Convoys,” The Northern Convoys International Centre Foundation.

Burnett's cruisers to track enemy ships, approach them undetected, and hit them almost immediately.¹⁶⁵ Captain Sherbrooke of the *Onslow*, himself wounded in the attack, wrote of Lieutenant King:

Although Lieutenant King, a young Reserve Officer, had been first lieutenant in the leader for one month only, he exercised complete control when the ship was seriously damaged by three 8-in. shells. A fire raged as a result of two hits forward; the forward fire and repair party had been wiped out; the ship had to remain at action stations and had suffered a 20 per cent loss in personnel through casualties. Despite these severe handicaps, by personal demonstration he showed his untrained assistants exactly what he required and the serious fires were under control in remarkably short time.

Nearly the whole forepart of the ship was on fire at one time or another; nevertheless, after four hours he was able to report to the bridge that all fires were extinguished and a collision mat in place over the hole in the ship's side. He continued unceasingly to attend to the safety of the ship and the welfare of the ship's company. Her safe arrival in harbour 24 hours later is testimony to his sound judgment and untiring efforts. In courage and leadership he set a fine example to his men and that their morale remained as high as ever is a tribute to their first lieutenant.¹⁶⁶

The commanding officer of HMS *Sheffield* had similarly high praise for Lieutenant Hogben:

Hogben 'displayed great coolness and the highest ability. His duty as officer-in-charge of the plotting office was, in the conditions of visibility, of vital importance, the success of the tactics employed by the force being greatly dependent upon the accuracy and precision of the plot. All this was provided by him in full measure.'¹⁶⁷

Arch Jelley, Alan Mclauchlan, Bill Smith, Bruce Mason and Maurice Newman were also on convoy duty on HMS *Bermuda* during JW 51B.¹⁶⁸ Maurice Newman's role on *Bermuda*, which acted as distant cover for several of the Arctic convoys including JW 51B, JW 52, RA 52, JW 54A, JW 5WB, RA 54B and JW 56A, was fighter direction officer, aircraft recognition officer, air liaison officer and quarter-deck divisional officer.¹⁶⁹ He stood watch,

¹⁶⁵ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 477-479; Archives New Zealand, List of Honours and Awards to personnel of the Royal New Zealand Navy including loan personnel: Lewis King and George Lawrence Hogben; "Lewis King," Auckland War Memorial Museum Cenotaph Online, accessed 6 May 2022, <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/193402?n=Lewis+King>; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record card: George Lawrence Hogben.

¹⁶⁶ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 477-479.

¹⁶⁷ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 477-479.

¹⁶⁸ Arch Jelley, email to author, 2 February 2022; Maurice Newman, "My Story," Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand, last modified January 2017, <http://arctic.org.nz/MyStoryMauriceNewman.html>; Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 106.

¹⁶⁹ Newman, "My Story"; Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 103.

did rounds of the ship, formed part of the air plot crew, directed aircraft from the ship, assessed the air situation, and kept the captain informed of the situation.¹⁷⁰ Arch Jelley described his role on the *Bermuda* as:

On the Bermuda my Attack or Battle station was in the control room of the high angle guns. In the computer-less age my task was to do my best to keep this contrivance exactly level by means of manipulating a type of spirit level which, apparently helped to control the high angle guns. The control room was down in the depths of the ship access to which was by vertical steel ladders leading to steel trapdoors. If the ship was torpedoed no one would have much of a chance of escaping to the deck and even if they did, they would have little chance of surviving for more than a few minutes if they finished up in the sea.¹⁷¹

Another New Zealander, gunnery rating Colin Christensen from the destroyer HMS *Zealous*, joined the convoy effort for JW 64. The weather was atrocious, and the convoy got little peace as they were harried by enemy aircraft all the way to Murmansk, but they made it. Once there, they were immediately diverted along with three other destroyers, to *Operation Open Door*, to evacuate 500 Norwegian civilians from Soroy Island.¹⁷² They successfully retrieved the civilians and divided them up amongst the merchant ships making the return convoy run, RA 64. One of the final convoys, RA 64 would somewhat unluckily encounter what would come to be considered the ‘worst storm ever recorded on the Barents Sea during WW2.’¹⁷³ In addition to this, they were ‘in almost continual contact with the enemy’ and the waters of Kola Inlet at the time were infested with U-boats.¹⁷⁴ The convoy was attacked the moment they left Murmansk and lost a minesweeper, a merchant ship and HMS *Bluebell* within a matter of hours.¹⁷⁵ The rest of the journey was equally rough. Despite all of this, Christensen survived.

¹⁷⁰ Maurice Newman, “My Story”; Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 103-104.

¹⁷¹ Arch Jelley, email to author, 4 January 2022.

¹⁷² Christensen, *Convoy to Murmansk*, 7.

¹⁷³ Christensen, *Convoy to Murmansk*, 7.

¹⁷⁴ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 119, 122.

¹⁷⁵ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 123.



Figure 16 A merchant ship in convoy RA 64. © IWM A 27565

There are numerous other New Zealanders who served in the convoys at different times. Not all of them survived. Telegraphist Richard George Castle served on convoys JW 60 and RA 60 on board HMS *Rodney*, alongside Able Seaman Pat Hughes and Able Seaman George Grant.¹⁷⁶ Leo de Abaitua was an able seaman on HMS *Mounsey* for convoys RA 61 and RA 62.¹⁷⁷ Two New Zealanders were lost on HMS *Lapwing* escorting convoy JW 65 when they were attacked by U-boats off Kola Inlet on 20 March 1945 and torpedoed by *U-968*. They were Leading Stoker Philip Norman Kinnear, and Signaller William Charles Cragg.¹⁷⁸ Sub-

¹⁷⁶ “Richard George Castle,” Auckland War Memorial Museum Cenotaph Online, accessed 6 May 2022, <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C33484?n=Richard+George+Castle>; RNZN Communicators Association Roll of Honour, <https://rnzncomms.org/elementor-21439/>; Helen Harvey, “A Man, his Models, and Memoirs,” *Taranaki Daily News*, 23 April 2011, 15, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cookie,url,uid&db=anh&AN=TNL1104230015135792433-CF&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹⁷⁷ Mark Birch, “Former Seaman had Action Filled Career,” *Taranaki Daily News*, 13 April 1999, 4, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=azh&AN=TNL9904130041-DECEASE-ED&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹⁷⁸ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 480; “Leading Stoker Philip Norman Kinnear,” Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed 8 April 2022, <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2482767/philip-norman-kinnear/>; “William Charles Cragg,” Auckland War Memorial Cenotaph Online, accessed 8 April 2022, <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C22579?n=William+Charles+Cragg>.

Lieutenant Graham Neil Horspool (RNZNVR) of the frigate HMS *Goodall*, was killed on escort duty for convoy RA 66 when the ship was torpedoed by *U-286* at the entrance of Kola Inlet on 29 April 1945.¹⁷⁹ It was the last sinking of an Arctic convoy ship by a U-boat.¹⁸⁰

Horspool was not the only New Zealander in convoy RA 66. Lieutenant Douglas L. Hazard of the frigate HMS *Loch Shin*, part of the 19th Escort Group, received a mention in despatches for 'good service as a group navigator' in 1945 for his service in the convoy.¹⁸¹ Lieutenant Hazard's role was to 'provide navigation and operational advice' to the *Loch Shin's* Commander, and to 'be aware of where all merchant, naval and air units were and their intentions. He had to be prepared for any incident or action with a plan 'A', and plan 'B'. Sleep was not a high priority on his agenda.'¹⁸² As group navigation officer, he was also responsible for recording the ship's position at all times, in often challenging conditions, and advising the Commander on tactics and command and control.¹⁸³

Gordon Forrester took part in several convoys as a Gunner on HMS *Offa*, alongside fellow New Zealander Bill Thurston, and had a rude introduction to convoy life almost immediately, recalling his first night at sea in an interview in 2002 as an 'introduction of fire' that 'every gun on the ship was firing including mine' and you got over being scared by doing your job.¹⁸⁴ He described his action station on the ship in vivid detail:

Was on the 4-inch ack-ack gun, which never got used very much. We were virtually in an ack-ack role, because by the time you had your gun trained on an aircraft the thing

¹⁷⁹ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 476; Richard Woodman, *Arctic Convoys 1941-1945*, 512; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record card: Graham Neil Horspool; Archives New Zealand War Graves, Second World War, Lost at Sea: Graham Neil Horspool.

¹⁸⁰ Richard Woodman, *Arctic Convoys 1941-1945*, 512.

¹⁸¹ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 480; Archives New Zealand, List of Honours and Awards to personnel of the Royal New Zealand Navy including loan personnel: Douglas Lenard Hazard.

¹⁸² Wright, *A Kiwi Sailor at War*, 423.

¹⁸³ Wright, *A Kiwi Sailor at War*, 431.

¹⁸⁴ Forrester, Interview; National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, Posting record cards: William Edward Thurston and Gordon Cameron Forrester.

had gone, it was so slow in traversing, particularly up around the ice, it used to freeze up, even with our shoulders to the mount pushing it around.

Imagine you get a bearing on, say the port side aircraft and you are on the starboard side and you have got to get to the port side, by the time you got there the plane had gone and sprayed us with bullets and dropped its torpedo and so on. It was a hopeless, useless thing it was. I never fired it much at all.¹⁸⁵

Like his fellow convoy participants, one of the things Gordon remembered most keenly was the cold that was so bitter that it was hard to stay awake, even at action stations.¹⁸⁶ One of the *Offa*'s duties as part of the convoy was as 'Duty Crash Boat' to an aircraft carrier when aircraft were taking off and landing, so that they could attempt to rescue anyone who went into the water before the cold got them.¹⁸⁷ There wasn't a single task on the Arctic convoys that was easy, and this is not an exhaustive list of all those who took part or everything that they did. What it does show, however, is that there was a great variety of roles performed by the New Zealanders in the Arctic convoys, and this is before covering those in the Merchant Navy.

¹⁸⁵ Forrester, Interview.

¹⁸⁶ Forrester, Interview.

¹⁸⁷ Forrester, Interview.

THE MERCHANT NAVY



Figure 17 Special gunnery course for Merchant Navy officers and men: Shooting down enemy aeroplanes © IWM A 5250.

All the work of the escorts was to protect the ships of the Merchant Navy, and there were several New Zealand seafarers involved in this crucial part of the war effort. They may be difficult to track down, but their service should not go unrecognised because of this. The tremendous amount of aid delivered to the Soviet Union by the Arctic convoys was carried by Merchant Navy ships. The cost of keeping the Soviets in the war was high – 7.2 percent of outbound and 4 percent of inbound vessels sunk, and nearly 2,800 lives lost– but would have been much higher had it not been for the convoy system.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 187.

The British Ministry of Information described a typical ship's cargo in a convoy as: 'tanks and aircraft almost as a matter of course, but also motor-cycles, [sic] ammunition, butter, canned meat, camouflage nets, dried eggs, ether, flour, lard (a lot of lard has been carried), machinery of various sorts, torpedoes, Red Cross stores, rope, X-Ray units and R. A. F. Lighthouses. Seventy to eighty major items are normally carried in a convoy.'¹⁸⁹ None of these goods would have been delivered without the Merchant Navy.

There are currently 165 names on the New Zealand Merchant Navy Roll of Honour of those who died in the Second World War and a further 140 are known to have become prisoners of war.¹⁹⁰ Given the mobility of seafarers and the incomplete nature of some records, the total number who lost their lives may never be known but is likely higher. Counting the number who took part in the war is difficult for the same reasons. The Ministry of Information acknowledged the considerable number of seafarers in the Merchant Navy that came from elsewhere in their *Official Story of the Merchant Navy*, noting that in 1944 'of Allied and neutral seamen serving with us, mostly under their own flags and laws, there are nearly 50,000.'¹⁹¹

Of the 157 seafarers on the Roll of Honour whose age at the time of death is known, the average age was 33.¹⁹² There were 17 who were less than 20 years old, and the two youngest – deck boys Thomas Burke and Edward Walls of the *Port Hunter* – were only 15 and probably the youngest New Zealanders to lose their lives in the Second World War.¹⁹³ That

¹⁸⁹ Ministry of Information, *Merchantmen at War: The Official Story of the Merchant Navy: 1939-1944* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1944), 106.

¹⁹⁰ Neill Atkinson, "No Grave but the Sea," Ministry for Culture and Heritage, last modified 17 May 2017, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/the-merchant-navy/no-grave-but-the-sea>.

¹⁹¹ Ministry of Information, *Merchantmen at War*, 16.

¹⁹² Neill Atkinson, "Roll of Honour, 1939-45," Ministry for Culture and Heritage, last modified 2 November 2021, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/the-merchant-navy/roll-of-honour>.

¹⁹³ Atkinson, "No Grave but the Sea"; Atkinson, "Roll of Honour, 1939-45"; National Maritime Museum of the United Kingdom, Record of death of Merchant Seaman: Thomas Burke and Edward Hugh Walls.

so many of the Merchant Navy casualties were younger is unsurprising given the many accounts of younger people seeking to become seafarers. Nor is it surprising that some were quite a bit older, as many carved out long careers in the merchant service: ‘thousands of men are serving in ships for the first time. Quite often they are shipmates with men who have grown old in the sea’s service.’¹⁹⁴ Te Waari Ward Whitiri lied about his age to become a seafarer when he was just 11 as a deck boy, was in his late twenties when war broke out, was torpedoed four times whilst on Arctic convoy duties, continued to climb the ranks until he became a master mariner and only left the service when he lost his job in 1975.¹⁹⁵

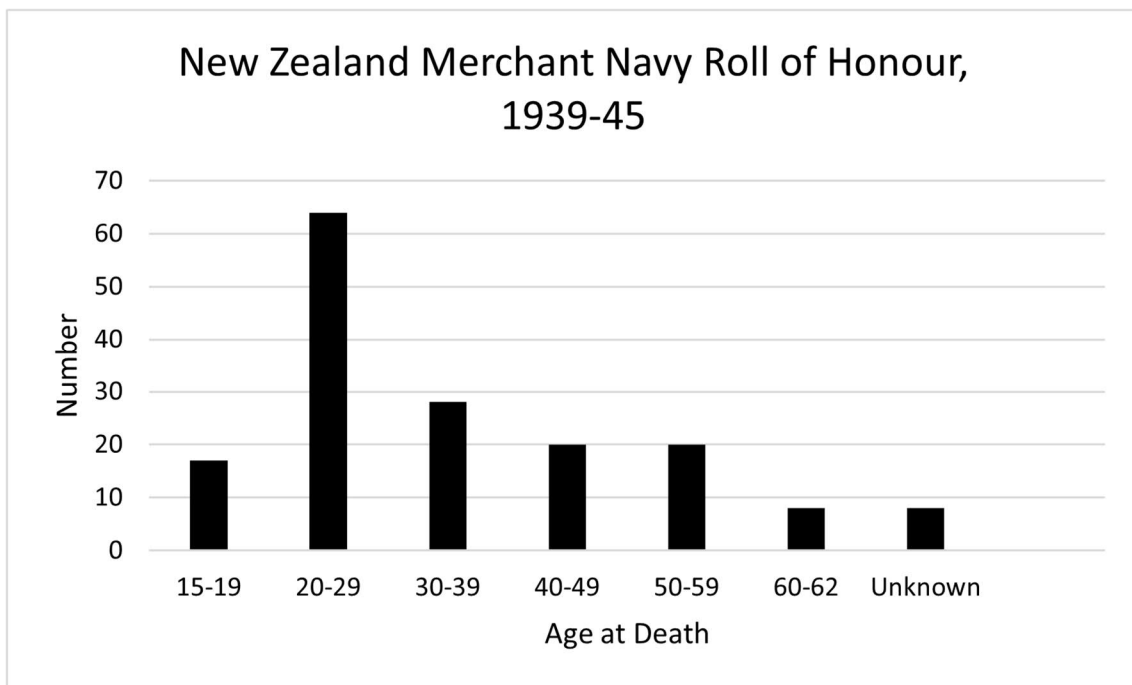


Figure 18 New Zealand Merchant Navy Roll of Honour, 1939-45, Age at Death

Like Whitiri, Fred Crafar started his seafaring career as a deck boy, and worked his way up the ranks. Whilst in the Arctic convoys, he ended up with a gun in his hands, and this was a common occurrence on merchant ships. Everybody was essential, and defence of the ships had to be done by whoever was able and was at hand. Fred was at the wheel when he saw a

¹⁹⁴ Ministry of Information, *Merchantmen at War*, 16.

¹⁹⁵ Whitiri, “Whaitiri, Te Waari Kahukura.”

ship torpedoed for the first time: ‘the captain told me to have a look out the back, because she was red hot...I saw plenty of ships go down - that was just life on the sea.’¹⁹⁶

On another occasion, Fred became a gunner, being put in charge first of a six-inch gun before being moved to an Oerlikon 20mm gun after a mishap he tried to hide: ‘I only weighed about eight and a half or nine stone; these projectiles were rather heavy pieces of metal. I actually dropped one on my foot, but I was too embarrassed to say so. I had a very sore foot for a very long time.’¹⁹⁷ Seaman Dewi Browne described taking similar action when his merchant ship was attacked just off the coast of Liverpool in 1945:

It was tea time, and the next thing, ‘Action Stations’. The ship ahead of us, a Yankee Liberty ship, she’d been torpedoed.... I did what I was trained to do, we all did. I happened to be the first one to get to our gun, an Oerlikon. You throw the cover off and you pull a pin out, you elevate the gun, then you train it, and you strap yourself in. That’s what we were trained to do. The other chaps arrived as quick as that.¹⁹⁸

By this time, Dewi had already experienced landing a small boat at Normandy during D-Day and spending two months ferrying the wounded back to Britain¹⁹⁹. This is another example of why many Merchant Navy veterans were particularly hurt by their exclusion from official recognition for so many years, on the grounds that they were merely civilians – not only were they in the thick of some of the fiercest fighting, they were also actively participating in it.

As well as contending with the enemy, which they did not just leave to their naval escort, the Merchant Navy crews also had to contend with the weather. The midnight sun could be almost as dangerous as the infamous Arctic ice. Able Seaman C. R. Charles described his convoy experience on a merchant ship as ‘twenty-four [sic] hours of daylight and 24 hours

¹⁹⁶ Taunton, “Merchant Seaman’s War Service Honoured,” *Taranaki Daily News*, 4 September 2010, 1.

¹⁹⁷ Helen Harvey, “Seascrapes,” *Taranaki Daily News*, 8 September 2007, 13, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=azh&AN=TNL070908001312894971-CP&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹⁹⁸ Browne, Interview.

¹⁹⁹ Browne, Interview.

for bombing,' adding that 'it is not so bad until you see a ship blown up in flames. Then you begin to think.'²⁰⁰ Able Seaman Charles also recalled that on his Arctic convoy, they 'had a good trip and only lost one-eighth of the convoy while destroying more than two-thirds of the attacking German aircraft. With the midnight sun we had to be prepared at all hours.

The Germans seemed to prefer to attack during the short dusk before midnight.'²⁰¹ During winter, the ice was so difficult to navigate around that 'a captain who returned from Archangel in the winter of 1941 said it took him 16 days to move 70 miles, and that every night his men were able to leave the ship and walk across the ice to neighbouring ships.'²⁰²

An unidentified New Zealand seafarer described the conditions on his Merchant Navy ship to his wife in a letter that was partially published in the *New Zealand Herald* in June 1944:

We have been busy breaking the ice off the ship this week, after a week at sea. She is just like the pictures you see sometimes, with one foot of ice on the deck and all the deckhouses and the bridge sheathed in ice. The ropes and stays are like trees of ice. We had a few days of appalling weather, with everything wet and the decks awash.

It was a good job we had tinned food, as the cooks had a rough time. My cabin is over a large water tank and every time the ship rolls the water seeps up and I have to bail it out. It is good to be in harbour again and on even terms with my cup and saucer at the mess table.²⁰³

The only New Zealander on the Merchant Navy Roll of Honour known to have died on Arctic convoy service is Ronald Bradshaw of Whanganui. Bradshaw was 18 years old, and an assistant cook on the British steam cruiser *Empire Howard* at the time. The *Empire Howard* was part of convoy PQ 14 bound for Murmansk and loaded with 2,000 tons of military equipment when they were torpedoed by *U-403* on 16 April 1942 and sank with the loss of

²⁰⁰ "Voyage with Convoy to Russia," *The Press*, 19 June 1942, 3, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19420619.2.23>.

²⁰¹ "Voyage with Convoy to Russia," *The Press* 19 June 1942, 3,

²⁰² Ministry of Information, *Merchantmen at War*, 104.

²⁰³ "Arctic Convoy Work: Merchant Seaman's Life," *New Zealand Herald*, 6 June 1944, 6, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19440606.2.31>.

most of her crew, including Assistant Cook Bradshaw.²⁰⁴

PQ 14 was a typical Arctic convoy consisting of 24 merchant ships and accompanied by two minesweepers and four trawlers for the first part of their journey, until they joined their full escort on 11 April. However, they ran into difficulties with the ice and were scattered. By 15 April only eight of the original merchant ships remained; the others, and most of their escort, had either lost contact with the convoy or been forced to turn back due to damage from the ice. The *Empire Howard* was attacked and sank on the 16 April, and the remainder of the convoy made it to Murmansk unscathed by the U-boat attacks, however the American merchant ship *Yaka* was torpedoed by *U-624* whilst in the harbour.

That more were not lost was in part due to the same weather which had caused the allied ships to turn back; the German raiders had encountered the same issues. As Adam Claasen wrote, the German anti-convoy activity was ‘only marginally more successful in preventing Allied ships reaching their destinations than bad weather, which alone forced 16 of PQ 14’s ships to abandon their voyage.’²⁰⁵ The situation would soon change, as improving weather and greater cooperation between the Luftwaffe and the German Navy started to tip the scales in their favour.²⁰⁶

Because of the extensive issues encountered by PQ 14 and QP 10, which sailed in the other direction on 10 April, it was suggested afterwards that the next pair of convoys should be reduced in size if they could not be postponed, however the Admiralty decided to add an anti-

²⁰⁴ “Assistant Cook Ronald Bradshaw,” Commonwealth War Graves Commission; Frank Pearce, *Heroes of the Fourth Service* (London: Robert Hale, 1996), 56-57.

²⁰⁵ Adam Claasen, *Hitler’s Northern War: The Luftwaffe’s Ill-Fated Campaign, 1940-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 201.

²⁰⁶ Claasen, *Hitler’s Northern War*, 202.

aircraft ship to the escort and have them accompanied part way by the submarine *Sturgeon* instead.²⁰⁷

The following year, Dan Bashall encountered the infamous Arctic weather during Christmas 1943. Dan was a trimmer and fireman in the Merchant Navy. His job was to keep feeding the coal required for the ship's engines to run. He became part of the Arctic convoys when his ship, the *Ocean Gypsy*, joined convoy JW 55B in December 1943. Only a few days later their naval escort became involved in the Battle of North Cape during which the *Scharnhorst*, a thorn in the Admiralty's side for so long, was finally sunk. The sinking of the *Scharnhorst* removed one of the key surface threats to the convoys. Bashall recalled the start of the voyage in an interview years later:

We went from Loch Ewe to Murmansk. It was Christmas time; I think we had Christmas dinner on the ship. We didn't even know anything about the battle, because it's dark so early at that time of year.... They must have been going hammer and tongs. They reckoned afterwards that if it hadn't been for the navy they'd have sunk all of us, just one at a time, no trouble at all.²⁰⁸

As the war began to draw to a close, Dewi Browne joined the crew of the tanker *British Promise* and the last of the Arctic convoys, JW 67. The war had finished by the time they set sail towards the midnight sun, so their convoy experience was quite different to those who had been in the thickest of it. They delivered their goods as promised and upon their return to Britain, Browne, like many of his fellow seafarers, looked for his next ship.²⁰⁹

The stories of these New Zealanders are typical of Merchant Navy service at the time. The occupations of those New Zealanders known to have served in the Arctic convoys in the Merchant Navy include those who began as deck boys and became officers, as well as

²⁰⁷ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 34-35.

²⁰⁸ Bashall, Interview.

²⁰⁹ Browne, Interview.

fireman and trimmer, engineer, assistant cook, seaman, and able seaman. This is consistent with the range of occupations recorded on the New Zealand Merchant Navy Roll of Honour and the United Kingdom list of merchant seamen deaths.²¹⁰ None of these people did ‘just’ their job, and all of them were needed to ensure their crucial work was done.



Figure 19 New Zealand Merchant Navy Roll of Honour, 1939-45, Occupation

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the Merchant Navy to the war effort. The Arctic convoys were just one of the many missions that they undertook; the Merchant Navy’s efforts in the Second World War were on a global scale, with different theatres of operation becoming more or less a focus as the war progressed. The Arctic convoys not only kept crucial military and essential supplies running to the Soviet Union, they also solidified the commitment of the western Allies and the Soviets alike to the common cause. Britain had made a pledge to keep their new ally in the war and they honoured it, but this was just one piece of the complex puzzle at the time.

²¹⁰ Neill Atkinson, “Roll of Honour, 1939-45”; National Maritime Museum of the United Kingdom, “Merchant Seamen Deaths, 1939 -1953.”

In many ways Britain was already over-committed and attempting to balance the needs of campaigns in North Africa, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the growing threat of Japanese aggression in the Pacific. Keeping their own supply lines open was only the first challenge, for all nations, and control of shipping was crucial in keeping both essential goods and military supplies moving. Without the efforts of the world's seafarers delivering those goods across the oceans, this would have been an impossible task, and the convoy system was the best way of protecting them.

The British Admiralty acknowledged as much in the naval staff's history of the *Defeat of the Enemy Attack on Shipping*, where they noted that 60 percent of ships sunk by U-boats were sailing independently and the loss rate of independent ships was 'at least twice of those ships in convoy, and at various critical periods was greatly in excess of this.'²¹¹ They also concluded that the convoy system not only protected shipping, it also did crucial damage to the enemy:

Up to May 1943, when the U-boat was defeated at sea, 64.9 per cent of all operational U-boats destroyed by all means in the Atlantic, Arctic, Home and American waters had been destroyed by convoy air and surface escorts....An analysis of the available operational data relating to the employment of carrier aircraft in the anti-U-boat war reveals unequivocally that so long as the U-boats were attacking convoys, the most economical and efficient employment for A/S carriers was as convoy escorts or support groups.²¹²

When evaluating how important the Arctic convoys were to the war effort, it is therefore important to remember the larger context that they were operating in. Shipping was key to the war effort as a whole, and the war at sea was brutal, as demonstrated by the estimated 60,000 merchant seafarers who lost their lives during its course.²¹³

²¹¹ Admiralty, *The Defeat of the Enemy Attack on Shipping*, 228.

²¹² Admiralty, *The Defeat of the Enemy Attack on Shipping*, 228-229.

²¹³ Atkinson, *Hell or High Water*, 23.

This huge loss of life is a terrible price to pay, however that price would have been even higher if it were not for the convoy system:

The records of the First World War and of earlier wars demonstrate that notwithstanding the changed conditions of sea warfare with different types of craft employing different weapons, convoy was the surest method of bringing to action and defeating enemy raiders, surface and submarine, sent out to attack our merchant ships.

The records of the Second World War even more decisively point to the same conclusion. Only when we adopted other measures to the detriment of our convoy system did our countermeasures fail to achieve their object – the destruction of the enemy in decisive numbers and the prevention of attacks upon our shipping.²¹⁴

The Merchant Navy formed the core of the convoys, but they could not have made it through without the support of the escorts and those who cleared the way, such as the submarine patrols, minesweepers, and pilots of the Fleet Air Arm and the Royal Air Force. The Arctic convoys were a collective effort, and there were New Zealanders involved in almost every facet of convoy duty. Many of those New Zealanders earned awards for their exceptional service, but all of them performed a role that was important to the situation they were in at the time. It is difficult to state how important a single person's role was in the context of a World War, but by breaking the grander scale down into smaller moments we can see how each person's actions made a difference in that moment, and the cumulative impact of all those individual actions over time.

Whether they were a stoker in an engine room, a cook, a seaman, a commander, a navigator, a meteorologist, a pilot or fulfilling one of the many other roles on convoy duty, all those individual actions add up. From there, we can start to understand the difference they made to the war effort, and that difference was significant. The cooperation between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union was crucial to ensuring buy-in on both sides. Not only did it solidify the commitment of the Soviet Union to the Allied cause, it also made a material

²¹⁴ Admiralty, *The Defeat of the Enemy Attack on Shipping*, 231.

difference to the Soviet people and enabled them to stay in the war and open a crucial new front in Europe.

Additionally, the losses inflicted on the enemy by the air and sea escorts accompanying the convoys allowed them to further protect merchant shipping and keep their own critical supply lines open. The cost for the difference they made was high, and for those that paid the ultimate price, the convoys became the final chapter in their story. For those who survived, it became one of many. But how did that chapter fit into the rest of their lives? As important as it is to understand how their service impacted the war effort, an equally good question is how their war service affected their lives afterwards.

CHAPTER FOUR: HOW DID THEIR SERVICE AFFECT THEIR LIVES AFTER THE WAR?

There is no doubt that the New Zealanders who served in the Arctic convoys had a significant impact on the war effort. That service also had a lasting impact on their lives. Not everyone who went came back, and those who did were not necessarily the same when they finally made it home. Serving in a war is many things, but something that most people can easily shrug off afterwards is not one of them. How it affected people was different for each and every person who served, but none returned untouched by it.

Little was understood about just how much war service could affect people's lives in the 1940s, when the veterans of the Second World War started to return home. The term 'shell-shock' had been coined for those suffering psychological trauma following the First World War, however true understanding of concepts such as post-traumatic stress injuries was a long way off.²¹⁵ The first recognition in psychiatric circles that service in a war could cause psychiatric injury did not start to emerge until the late twentieth century.²¹⁶ The term PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) did not enter the popular lexicon until it was used to describe the experiences of those returning from the Vietnam War decades later.

Many Second World War veterans have spoken about how they were expected to just get on with things, as if they could just pick up where they left off, and of the limited support and understanding that they were given by those other than their own. In 2007, Alison Parr noted that post-traumatic stress injuries in Second World War veterans have been underdiagnosed,

²¹⁵ Allan V. Horwitz, *PTSD: A Short History*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 53-54; Note: Whilst post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD is commonly used terminology, many veterans prefer the phrase post-traumatic stress injury.

²¹⁶ Horwitz, *PTSD: A Short History*, 19.

and one of the reasons for this is the ‘silent coping strategies of this generation of soldiers; men who are culturally less likely to than later generations to discuss the emotional effects of combat.’²¹⁷ Even today, when concepts such as post-traumatic stress are widely accepted and understood, that does not necessarily mean the right supports are available to those who need them.

For the veterans of the Second World War in New Zealand, most of the assistance provided was designed to get them working and the economy booming, rather than to treat any issues that may have arisen from their service. The government devised schemes to get them into stable employment in trades that would be useful to the economy, as well as land settlement and financial assistance for disabled veterans.²¹⁸ This approach may have allowed many to enter new careers or at least to survive, but it did little to address what these veterans had been through and how that had affected them, or to give them the tools to deal with it.

The experience of war is complex. People are asked to bear witness to, and participate in, highly traumatic events, often on a seemingly never-ending basis. For many, their war service was not merely another chapter in their lives, but the defining chapter. Many of their lives were profoundly changed by what they experienced. As the stories shared in this research have shown, the vast majority New Zealanders who served in the Arctic convoys did not know what they were signing up for. How could they?

Very few of those who served in the Second World War were veterans of the first, and the nature of the two wars were very different. For those young men – many of whom had never

²¹⁷ Alison Parr, “Breaking the Silence: Traumatized War Veterans and Oral History,” *Oral History* 35, no.1 (Spring, 2007): 62, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40179923>.

²¹⁸ Veronica Hopner, “Home from War” (PhD thesis, Massey University, 2014), <http://hdl.handle.net/10179/6235>, 72-76.

set foot on a boat before – leaving their families, friends and lives in New Zealand behind, journeying to the other side of the world on a troop ship was a shock to the system in itself. This was before they even arrived at the conflict zone.

For several of the New Zealanders, the Arctic convoys were their first experience of the war, and sadly for some, their last. Even for those who had prior navy or merchant service, suddenly finding themselves in the midst of the convoys was unlike anything else they had been through before. The attrition rate in both lives and ships demonstrates clearly how dangerous and unpleasant the convoys were. The common threads that run through the recollections of convoy veterans are the enemy and the appalling weather.

Frank Glass said of PQ 17 ‘I was 18 when it started and 19 when it finished. And I was an old man.’²¹⁹ The son of one Arctic convoy veteran recalled his father saying that he was on several Arctic convoys and there was at least one suicide on each.²²⁰ Whilst there has not been time to search the available records for confirmation of this, it appears from all accounts that Winston Churchill had good reason to call the convoys the ‘worst journey in the world.’²²¹

Despite this, another thread that runs through recollections of the convoys is that of friendship and camaraderie. Some of those bonds were forged on the ships, and some years afterwards through networks or organisations such as the Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand. Norman Sim said there was a comradeship in the Navy that you would never find in

²¹⁹ Aldridge, “Remembrance Day for WWII’s ‘Worst Cock-Up,’” *The Dominion Post*, 4 July 2002, 9.

²²⁰ Arthur Bennett, “Is your Magazine Full and your Powder Dry?” accessed 5 June 2022, from: <https://hastingsbridge.org.nz/TinyFileManager/resources/files/103///modferwarfare.pdf>

²²¹ Bennett, “The Worst Journey in the World,” 52.

civilian life.²²² There were moments of light amidst all the darkness, even with the enemy – in his memoir, Denis Glover recalled talking rugby and drawing scrum formations with a German prisoner his ship had picked up.²²³

Maurice Newman remembered the northern lights:

One of the enduring memories of these voyages is that of the ‘Northern Lights’, the Aurora Borealis, which we saw on numerous occasions in the high latitudes if the weather was clear. Imagine yourself on the bridge peering ahead into a dark void and gradually the high sky lightens a fraction, followed by the appearance of dim yellow-green shapes like big cigars which start moving and changing colour to include mauves and reds forming into waving shapes like giant curtains across the sky, and you are seeing the Aurora. It is hard to realise that it is about 600 miles above the earth, but it has a fascinating beauty as, after a period it dims gradually back into the darkness of the night sky.²²⁴

There is also the cumulative effect of war service to consider. For some the convoys were their first taste of the war, for others they were the end, and for many they were one of several different experiences they survived. A number of the New Zealanders – be they Royal Air Force, Fleet Air Arm, Navy or Merchant Navy – would go on to serve in other crucial actions such as the D-Day invasion of Normandy in France, including Campbell Wyeth, Denis Glover and George Hogben, who provided crucial weather forecasts for the Allied landings.²²⁵

For many, the convoys became a piece of their own puzzle that they, once the war was over, had to figure out. Figuring things out was not necessarily easy. A few, like Sir Maxwell Richmond and Viv Kempthorne, would remain in the Navy and achieve the ranks of Rear Admiral and Commander respectively. Most, however, left the ranks of the military and attempted to return to civilian life. This was easier for some than for others.

²²² Sim, Interview.

²²³ Glover, *Hot Water Sailor*, 155.

²²⁴ Maurice Newman, “My Story”; Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 111.

²²⁵ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 479; “George Lawrence Hogben,” Auckland War Memorial Museum Online Cenotaph, accessed 1 June 2022, <https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/record/C141775?lang=mi-nz>.

One of the New Zealand returnees was Doug Hazard. Hazard's story is that of a family man who loved the sea. During his time in the RNZNVR he had earned two mentions in despatches, survived the convoys, met a girl and started a family. For the duration of his naval service, he did what he had to do. When peace was declared, a different kind of uncertainty appeared:

The general topic of conversation was what each would do on their discharge from the Navy. It was clear that there would be massive unemployment so for most the future was looking bleak. Many servicemen had been promised by their pre-war employer that their position would be kept open for them. For some this was an empty promise. For others, juniors, who did not join the Services, were now holding senior positions. Peace was not to come easily. For Doug, his task was completed. He now turned his thoughts to returning home to his wife and baby.²²⁶

When Hazard was finally informed that he was going home at long last, his wife and their baby were unable to travel with him as servicemen were prioritised over war brides and their children.²²⁷ His family eventually followed on the liner *Rangitane*, which became known as a 'Stork ship' due to how frequently it transported New Zealand servicemen's families.²²⁸ It was a long, crowded voyage to the other side of the world, and a country the new Mrs Hazard had never known.²²⁹ She was just one of many women who would make this same journey and make lives for themselves in New Zealand following the end of the war.

Doug Hazard was fortunate in that he had the family accountancy business in Hamilton to return to once he finished his commerce degree.²³⁰ He lived with his young family in Auckland and received five pounds a week from the government whilst studying and worked on a farm as well in order to improve their finances.²³¹ The family later moved into 'transit housing' (repurposed barracks) in Hamilton, where Doug continued to grow the family

²²⁶ Wright, *A Kiwi Sailor at War*, 507.

²²⁷ Wright, *A Kiwi Sailor at War*, 515

²²⁸ Wright, *A Kiwi Sailor at War*, 521.

²²⁹ Wright, *A Kiwi Sailor at War*, 520.

²³⁰ Wright, *A Kiwi Sailor at War*, 527.

²³¹ Wright, *A Kiwi Sailor at War*, 530.

business and also joined the RNZNVR Supplementary Reserve.²³² They later relocated back to Auckland, where he continued to sail, work, and raise a family. Doug Hazard died in 1999 and was described as a ‘quiet religious man not afraid of death.’²³³ Had he not gone to war, he would not have experienced the horrors of it. He also would not have met his wife, and his life may have been quite different.

Donald Grant’s (HMS *Onslow*) story is similar – he met his wife Helen in the United Kingdom, returned to New Zealand following the war, then she and their young child followed him several months later.²³⁴ Grant was lucky enough to get his old job at the Post Office in Christchurch back, and recalled how there were many returned servicemen and their ‘war brides’ there at the time and they looked out for each other.²³⁵ They built a life and raised a family together on the West Coast: ‘I was becoming more civilized too. I had exchanged my rifle for a fishing rod.... When I look back on those days I realize I must have got as close to Heaven as it was ever possible for an ex-sailor to get.’²³⁶

Grant also wrote passionately about the wilderness and how he felt about it and his fellow servicemen in his memoir, *A Working Holiday*:

A two thousand, three hundred meter peak in the Snowy Peak Range is named Mount Onslow, and that is not just a coincidence. Immediately across the Havelock River lie four more peaks. Their names are Achilles, Leander, Ajax and Graf Spree. Everyone who has been in the Southern Alps carries within him the memories of spectacular scenery, and the quiet peace of the mountain valleys. He, or she, could not be human not to, and I like to think that in a way the untouched scenery of that remote valley serves as a memorial. Not only to those who died in the actions in which those ships fought, but to all those sailors who loved the mountains, anywhere, and lost their lives to the sea.²³⁷

²³² Wright, *A Kiwi Sailor at War*, 533.

²³³ Wright, *A Kiwi Sailor at War*, 534.

²³⁴ Grant, *A Working Holiday*, 226.

²³⁵ Grant, *A Working Holiday*, 230.

²³⁶ Grant, *A Working Holiday*, 243.

²³⁷ Grant, *A Working Holiday*, 246.

Bill Carson (HMS *Trinidad*) was another who found refuge in nature. His son Ian described him as ‘at a loose end’ when he returned to New Zealand following the war, suffering from a post-traumatic stress injury, and being met by ‘an unsympathetic family thought he should “harden up” and simply get on with life.’²³⁸ He was ‘as lost as any of them were’ and lacking family support, wandered the country for two years before he found a doctor who referred him to a facility in Hamner Springs for mental recuperation.²³⁹ It was there that he met Mae, a nurse, who he later married and have several children with.²⁴⁰ After working in forestry in gold dredging, Carson eventually took up gardening and established a thriving market garden in Ōtaki.

Ian Carson described his father as was hard-working, loyal, intelligent, had a great sense of humour and a strong sense of justice, and also struggled. His trauma stayed with him, and he suffered from nightmares and outbreaks of anger and depression from his convoy days.²⁴¹ He had a temper and would lash out, but Mae would calm him down. She often found Bill in his glasshouses, crying. He had several breakdowns and was hospitalised and treated with electroconvulsive therapy in the early 1970s.²⁴² Despite this, he made a good life for himself and his family, even if it was not the life that he originally had planned: ‘with a college dux, university education and sporting prowess, who knows what he might have done if not for the war that scarred a generation of families around the world.’²⁴³

Ian also recalled his father being not very demonstrative and withdrawn most of the time.

²³⁸ Ian Carson, “Bill Carson,” Russian Arctic Convoy Museum, accessed 1 June 2022, <https://racmp.co.uk/veterans/bill-carson/>; Bill Carson, “My Story,” Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand, accessed 1 June 2022, <http://arctic.org.nz/MyStoryBillCarson.html>.

²³⁹ Ian Carson, discussion with author, 22 July 2022.

²⁴⁰ Ian Carson, “Bill Carson.”

²⁴¹ Ian Carson, “Bill Carson.”

²⁴² Ian Carson, discussion with author.

²⁴³ Ian Carson, “Bill Carson.”

However, he was also heavily medicated, and when that changed for the few months before his death, he became ‘very bubbly.’²⁴⁴ When they were young, the children were not interested in the war, but it was not something that Bill Carson was willing to talk about anyway. Ian Carson described the war as the ‘elephant in the room’ that the family had an unwritten rule not to talk about, and he only found out much about his father’s service after he died.²⁴⁵

The effect of the war on Bill Carson’s life was profound, and that is an experience that was shared by many. Some were able to return to their previous positions or to the family business, but many had to carve out entirely new paths. Some, having been so young when they joined, had little other experience. Carson was not alone in his struggle to readapt to normal life, or the lack of understanding that he faced when he arrived home. As Ian Carson wrote of his father’s welcome, the people of New Zealand had not experienced the war the way people in Europe had, and ‘had no idea what a war could do to the psyche of a serviceman. It is no wonder these men clammed up and never wanted to talk about the war. Nobody wanted to know then.’²⁴⁶ Not talking about the war or their experiences in it is a common thread among many veterans.

Campbell Wyeth, fellow survivor of HMS *Trinidad*, also did not talk about the war. He experienced one of the worst disasters of the convoys when the *Trinidad* was lost, and then added the D-Day landings onto that. When another fellow *Trinidad* survivor, Frank Pearce, published his vivid and bloody account of the *Trinidad* disaster, *The Ship that Torpedoed herself*, Campbell confirmed it was accurate and advised that anyone wanting to know what

²⁴⁴ Ian Carson, discussion with author.

²⁴⁵ Ian Carson, discussion with author.

²⁴⁶ Ian Carson, “Bill Carson.”

happened could read the book. It is grim reading at times, and no wonder that many of the survivors were scarred from it. Campbell told his son, John, that he ended up in the water once.²⁴⁷ Whether this was part of the *Trinidad* disaster we do not know, but the Arctic was not a place people lasted long, so he was lucky to be alive regardless.

Wyeth's journey home from the war was different to Bill Carson's. When the war ended, he was actually in New Zealand, having been sent back for leave some time after D-Day, and was expecting to return to duty when he was able. Unfortunately, he had picked up tuberculosis, resulting in a months-long stay in hospital. This did however mean that he was already home when peace was declared. During his hospital stay, Wyeth had only his officer's uniform to wear when he went out, and later described the surreal experience of walking around the streets of Invercargill and receiving an extremely warm and respectful welcome, that surprised him.²⁴⁸ Was it the officer's uniform that commanded the respect he received? Wyeth also observed that there was a class system in operation in and regarding the Navy – officers were treated significantly better than ratings, and the Merchant Navy were another class again.²⁴⁹

Despite the trauma of the *Trinidad* experience and the misfortune of having acquired tuberculosis just as the war was ending, Wyeth went on to live a good life and raise a happy family. Could the bright-eyed young man, standing on the deck of HMS *Trinidad* on his 21st birthday, have had any idea what was coming? What would his life have looked like had he not joined the Navy? It is true that for many of the convoy veterans, they did not actually return to the lives they had before the war. Instead, they forged new ones, bringing with them

²⁴⁷ John Wyeth, discussion with author, 19 June 2022.

²⁴⁸ John Wyeth, discussion with author, 19 June 2022.

²⁴⁹ John Wyeth, discussion with author, 19 June 2022.

all their experiences – both good and bad – many of them taking completely different paths to those that had planned before the war.

Penwill Moore was one of the few who returned to his prior profession as an accountant and his previous employer after he returned home. In 1946, an ex-serviceman's scholarship from the New Zealand Society of Accountants allowed him to return to the United Kingdom to work for two years, before he returned home once again to continue a long and rewarding career in his chosen field.²⁵⁰ He remained on the Reserve of Admiralty Compass Officers until the 1950s and married, had three children, and continued to work well past when he could have retired.²⁵¹

Louis Fenton, like Campbell Wyeth, was in hospital when the war ended and had received a letter advising him he could return home on leave. He never returned to the war, instead returning to work and finishing his training as an accountant. He was proud of having been part of the Fleet Air Arm and felt privileged to have had opportunities that others did not.

When asked if he would do it all again, he did not hesitate:

I most certainly would. It was a tremendous experience. It was an experience that so few people, men in New Zealand have of being part of the Navy and being part of a flying force. I don't think anybody ever considered they would die. There were a few, I had people who asked me if I would go and see their parents, or their girlfriend if they did die and they did. We didn't really think about that, you don't at 20 or 22.²⁵²

Norman Sim, having been a stoker, came back to New Zealand and found related work onshore, first in the boiler room at the hospital in Timaru, then in the engine room of the Smithfield Freezing Works.²⁵³ He too had met and married whilst in the United Kingdom and endured a long separation from his wife, who did not arrive in New Zealand until after they

²⁵⁰ Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 95.

²⁵¹ Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 95.

²⁵² Fenton, Interview.

²⁵³ Sim, Interview.

had already been married for eight years and had children.²⁵⁴ Regarding his time in the navy, Sim said if he had to live his life again, he would probably do the same thing, and the best part of it was the people that he met.²⁵⁵ He, like his fellow returnees, kept in touch with old friends and made new friends through groups and associations for returned servicemen.²⁵⁶ These organisations gave not only the veterans, but also their families, opportunities to socialise and connect with those who understood what they had survived when the ordinary New Zealander on the street could not.²⁵⁷

Viv Kempthorne had a different post-war experience to many. He was in the Navy for almost three decades.²⁵⁸ When the Korean War broke out, he was Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence but soon found himself on a ship and back in the thick of things again.²⁵⁹ When his naval career finally ended, he was able to find another job that paid similarly and thanks to a small inheritance his family, while not rich, did not have to worry as much about money.²⁶⁰

Like Norman Sim, Kempthorne also said he would do the same thing again if he had the chance and that he enjoyed his career, despite the difficulties it presented at times – not just the reality of war, but the long separations from family.²⁶¹ He too married a woman he had met whilst in the United Kingdom – who herself had been one of the ‘Wrens’ working on code-breaking during the war – and brought her back to New Zealand with him.²⁶² He spoke frankly of the difficulties of balancing Navy life and family life, describing the isolation his

²⁵⁴ Sim, Interview.

²⁵⁵ Sim, Interview.

²⁵⁶ Sim, Interview.

²⁵⁷ Christensen, *Convoy to Murmansk*, 16.

²⁵⁸ Kempthorne, Interview.

²⁵⁹ Kempthorne, Interview.

²⁶⁰ Kempthorne, Interview.

²⁶¹ Kempthorne, Interview.

²⁶² Kempthorne, Interview.

wife felt, and the lack of support she received, when he was away for long periods of time, and missing out on long patches of his children's early lives.²⁶³

Gordon Forrester also ended up in the military for much longer than intended, though he took a somewhat circular route to getting there. He also met his wife whilst in the United Kingdom, at the New Zealand Forces Club in Charing Cross, London.²⁶⁴ She was an armourer, they married in a registry office in London in 1945, and then he worried that she had left him when he did not hear from her during his long voyage home. It turned out that his mail had been going to the wrong place, and Gordon had nothing to worry about.²⁶⁵ They were finally due to be reunited in New Zealand in May 1946, when Gordon was advised he had been drafted onto HMS *Achilles*, leaving New Zealand in May. Forrester, formerly of the Naval Reserve, had joined the regular Navy and now found himself faced with choosing between them and not seeing his wife for an even longer time.

Forrester applied for a discharge, it was granted, and he was there to greet his wife when her ship finally came into Wellington harbour.²⁶⁶ Despite his disappointment about how his Navy career ended, Forrester had no regrets. He learnt a trade (painter and paper hanger) and got a job in the rubber works of the Firestone Tyre Factory when it first opened.²⁶⁷ When he grew tired of this work, he tossed a coin. Heads was Army, tails Air Force:

I didn't want to go back into the Navy because at that stage you were doing a year at sea and a year ashore. I didn't want to loose [sic] my family, because by then I had three boys. Down came heads and I joined the Army and to cut a long story short I spent 22 years in the Army and never regretted it. Joined as a Private Recruit and I in turn became a gunner and left the Army as a Warrant Officer 1st Class in the Royal New Zealand Artillery. So in the long run perhaps the decision to take my discharge from the Navy took me into my true career that was being a soldier and an instructor.

²⁶³ Kempthorne, Interview.

²⁶⁴ Forrester, Interview.

²⁶⁵ Forrester, Interview.

²⁶⁶ Forrester, Interview.

²⁶⁷ Forrester, Interview.

I thoroughly enjoyed both services and I grew up in the Navy, because you have got to remember that I was 17 when I was called up. I had to get Mum's approval or her signature for me to go to the war. The Army has matured me because I joined the Army when I was 28. So on the whole I have no regrets and in particular with the Navy, growing up in the Navy and me being a full time sailor was one of my lifetime ambitions as I lived to the fullest. My service with the Army Regular Force was rewarded by receiving the Meritorious Service Medal.²⁶⁸

Arch Jelley CNZM OBE, 99 years old at the time of writing, also took a different path and is still sought out for his running advice, a situation he may well have not been in had he not gone to war. He still has his prayer book and his (illegal) camera that he took with him. Jelley is a member of the New Zealand Athletic Coaches Hall of Fame and was appointed an Officer of the British Empire for services to athletics in 1982, and a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for coaching and administration in athletics and bridge in 2021.²⁶⁹ Jelley's long and extraordinary coaching career, which included coaching John Walker to the world mile record in 1975 and the Olympic gold medal for the 1500 metre race a year later, was detailed in the citation for his CNZM in 2021:

Mr Jelley served as a New Zealand Cross Country selector from 1975 until 1993 and has served in a multitude of administrative and coaching roles within the sport. Between 1976 and 1993 he was appointed as coach or manager to twelve New Zealand or Oceania teams, including three Olympic Games teams. He retired from coaching in 2000 but returned in 2005 to coach runner Hamish Carson who has since won the national 1,500 metre title six times. Twenty of the athletes he has coached have represented New Zealand, with twelve competing either in the Olympics or World Championships.²⁷⁰

Jelley also had a long and distinguished teaching career alongside this, and he credited his war service with giving him the confidence to pursue the things he loved when he returned to New Zealand after the war had ended:

I think joining the navy, training as a seaman, being an ordinary seaman on a Russian convoy and subsequently becoming a torpedo or navigating officer on a coastal submarine was probably a turning point in my life. When I eventually returned to NZ, in Jan 1946 I was determined not to return to my previous job as a clerical cadet in the Lands and Survey department.

²⁶⁸ Forrester, Interview.

²⁶⁹ "New Year's honours list 1982," Supplement to the *New Zealand Gazette*, 18 January 1982; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, "New Year Honours 2021."

²⁷⁰ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, "New Year Honours 2021."

Within a fortnight I had enrolled at the Teachers' College and a few weeks later had also started my degree at university; these were things I would not have contemplated previously. I think my experiences overseas gave me the confidence to pursue a different path leading to a very rewarding life as a school principal and athletic coach. (I don't mean financially).²⁷¹

Arch Jelley's story of how his war service affected his life in a positive way is extraordinary but not unheard of. It is easy to focus on the losses, the horror, and the trauma that came with that, but many of the Arctic convoy veterans have said there were things they valued – be they experiences, friendships, opportunities they would not otherwise have had – that came from their war service. Arch Jelley is not the only iconic New Zealander to have served in the convoys either.

Early signs of Bruce Mason's illustrious career as a playwright started to show when he was told off by Maurice Newman whilst on convoy duty on HMS *Bermuda* for breaking the censorship rules in his letters home – revealing details about both his duties and whereabouts.²⁷² He would go on to become one of the nation's most famous playwrights, whose works such as *The End of the Golden Weather* and *The Pōhutukawa Tree* became an important part of New Zealand's artistic heritage.²⁷³ Bill Williams, in addition to becoming head of naval intelligence, contributed, edited and reviewed books, before going on to co-found the New Zealand Portrait Gallery Te Pūkenga Whakaata with his wife Jill.²⁷⁴

Denis Glover DSC needs no introduction. He is one of New Zealand's most famous poets and was not shy about writing about his experiences. He retained a lifelong love for the sea, and

²⁷¹ Arch Jelley, email to Author, 4 January 2022.

²⁷² Newman, "My Story": Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 106.

²⁷³ David Dowling, "Mason, Bruce Edward George," Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara – the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, accessed 3 June 2022, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5m37/mason-bruce-edward-george>.

²⁷⁴ P. Kitchens, "From Arctic Convoys to NZ's first computers," *Dominion Post*, 27 November 2008, <https://www.pressreader.com/new-zealand/the-dominion-post/20081127/282376920429461>.

even returned to the Soviet Union in the 1970s as the behest of the Soviet Writers Union.²⁷⁵ Another veteran of both the Arctic convoys and D-Day, Glover both thrived and struggled throughout his lifetime. He developed a drinking problem that would stay with him until the end, but so did his talent and creative output.²⁷⁶ He was also witty, subversive, sensitive, adventurous, impatient with ‘anything mean-minded’ full of ‘warm humanity’ and when he passed, this was what those who knew him remembered for.²⁷⁷

The war was a different experience for the merchant seafarers. In one way, it was just another job that they had to get done. On the other, it was unlike anything else, and as the records and recollections of their service has shown, they were just as much in the thick of it as their counterparts in the Navy, often performed duties above and beyond their peacetime activities, and many of them never made it home. Those who did counted themselves lucky. Dan Bashall described joining the Merchant Navy as the ‘best thing I ever did’ and himself as ‘one of the luckiest blokes going.’²⁷⁸ He was offered the opportunity to stay in the UK at the end of the war, but just wanted to go home.²⁷⁹

Even so, he remained as restless as ever, re-training as a carpenter before volunteering for the New Zealand Army in the Korean War, before returning to New Zealand once again to work out his days as a carpenter.²⁸⁰ Despite everything that he experienced, he continued to describe himself as lucky, telling Neill Atkinson in 2003 that ‘I was lucky, I never had to get in the water. Some of us were lucky, weren’t we? We all went through the other bit, there

²⁷⁵Gordon Ogilvie, *Denis Glover: His Life* (Auckland: Godwit, 1999), 431.

²⁷⁶ Gordon Ogilvie, “Glover, Denis James Matthews,” Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara – the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, last modified September 2014, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4g11/glover-denis-james-matthews>.

²⁷⁷ Ogilvie, “Glover, Denis James Matthews.”

²⁷⁸ Bashall, Interview.

²⁷⁹ Bashall, Interview.

²⁸⁰ Bashall, Interview.

were always alarms and things.... You know, there's only steel between you and the water. There was nothing you could do about it, was there?'²⁸¹

Fellow merchantman Dewi Browne also described himself as lucky: 'My whole life at sea was a lucky one, shall we say. I had ships next to me hit, two ships away hit, a straggler hit, but I survived.'²⁸² Like Bashall, he also worked his way back to New Zealand on various ships and then completed 'rehabilitation' training, in his case as a painter.²⁸³ Te Waari 'Ward' Whaitiri became a Master Mariner and had a long career as such until he was made redundant in 1975.²⁸⁴ He went to work for the Department of Māori Affairs and began a long second career as an advocate, taking up a number of paid and volunteer roles in the court system, youth clubs, the SPCA, senior citizen, pensioners' and beneficiaries' associations. He also never left his maritime roots behind, becoming Vice-President of the Ex-Royal Navy Men's Association and Warden and Life Member of the New Zealand Company of Master Mariners.²⁸⁵

In addition to all of this, he was also an accomplished performer, appearing in several television films and an even an opera.²⁸⁶ Whaitiri also regained his fluency in Te Reo, and received the New Zealand Māori Leadership Award in 1981 and the Queen's Service Medal for Community Service in 1990.²⁸⁷ An extraordinary life and career, that began when he ran away to join the Merchant Navy aged only 11.

²⁸¹ Bashall, Interview.

²⁸² Browne, Interview.

²⁸³ Browne, Interview.

²⁸⁴ Whaitiri, "Whaitiri, Te Waari Kahukura."

²⁸⁵ Whaitiri, "Whaitiri, Te Waari Kahukura."

²⁸⁶ Whaitiri, "Whaitiri, Te Waari Kahukura."

²⁸⁷ Whaitiri, "Whaitiri, Te Waari Kahukura"; "The Queen's Service Medal for Community Service," Supplement to the London Gazette, 30 December 1989, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/51982/supplement/31>.

A long-standing issue for many Merchant Navy veterans is the lack of recognition that they received for their role in the war. Without them, there would have been no convoys, the goods would not have been delivered, and events may have taken a very different turn. They faced some of the most hazardous conditions of the entire war and lost both ships and seafarers in numbers higher than any of the other services. Yet despite their service and sacrifice, they remained missing from many of the memorials, honours and even mentions that their Navy counterparts received. It is only in recent times that this oversight has finally been rectified, and the Merchant Navy veterans given their fair due.

For those such as former Convoy Club President Chris King, current President Derek Whitwam, and many of the other members of the Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand, one of the effects of their war service was that they moved to the other side of the world and started new lives there. Dorset-born King had worked in law offices prior to the war, and post war did the same, until he moved to New Zealand and settled in Canterbury with his wife and sons.²⁸⁸ Unlike many of his fellow convoy veterans, King was comfortable on the water already, and became a Coder on HMS *Bluebell*.²⁸⁹ He described the crew of *Bluebell* as ‘a closely knit bunch whose lives were in each other’s hands with everyone playing some part in getting the ship to whatever destination their Lordships at the Admiralty might decide to send us, and back again.’²⁹⁰

King also acknowledged the horrors: ‘The most unpleasant part of the convoys was that you were not supposed to stop to pick up people; there were designated rescue ships that would

²⁸⁸ Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 66.

²⁸⁹ Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 66.

²⁹⁰ Chris King, “My Story,” Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand, last updated August 2018, <http://arctic.org.nz/MyStoryChrisKing.html>; Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 67.

try go and pick up any men in the sea.²⁹¹ A piece of luck saved him from being on board *Bluebell* when she was sunk with only one survivor in February 1945, and he also participated in the D-Day landings and work in the Admiralty in London.²⁹² King described the difficulties he faced trying to resume civilian life after the war:

I don't think that I adjusted back to civilian life very quickly. I was with a law firm in England, and like me, a lot of them had been away in the same way, and it was such a different atmosphere. Most of us had become heavy smokers as well, probably because in the Navy we used to get duty free cigarettes, and a lot of people didn't know what we had experienced, and we didn't want to say too much about it.

It was hard to get along with people again and make some friendships, and it was usually the men we found we could associate with, having lived with men of the same age as ourselves for the last five years.²⁹³

He also echoed the sentiments of many of his fellow convoy veterans: not wishing his experience on anyone, whilst appreciating what he learned and the people he met whilst on the Arctic convoys:

It has been quite difficult trying to express in words what those sea-going years were really like. I regarded them as 'unnatural' because I think no-one, however bad or for whatever reason, deserves to go through the conditions experienced, for such continuous periods, and I'm thinking of the gales and the seas.

The various actions, the attacks, came and went, but the sea, the storms and gales, could be so relentless, tossing a little ship like the *Bluebell* around without mercy, like, as a former skipper had said, 'a cork' bobbing on the water. But the five years were a mind broadening experience for which I must be grateful. And I shall never ever forget those men, lost at sea, who I served with during my *Bluebell* years.²⁹⁴

In her 2014 PhD thesis 'Home from War,' Veronica Hopner identified three key themes in helping veterans cope with the effects of war service on their lives: Personal growth and development, social regard and status, and dealing with the war.²⁹⁵ Personal growth and development was defined as the psychological and emotional growth which occurred from

²⁹¹ Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 68.

²⁹² King, "My Story"; Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 73.

²⁹³ Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 73-74.

²⁹⁴ Brown, *Voices from the Arctic Convoys*, 73-74.

²⁹⁵ Hopner, "Home from War," 122.

military service.²⁹⁶ Social regard and status, such as genuine acknowledgement of, and support for, their service at both the social and political levels, as well as demonstrated care, respect and compassion, facilitates the social connections necessary for psychological recovery from the trauma of war.²⁹⁷

Dealing with the war requires making sense of it, which required incorporating it into their stories through ‘identity practices, moral validation and processes of normalisation’ or suppressing it.²⁹⁸ Hopner concluded that experiences of war are ‘highly complex, with co-existing negative and positive outcomes,’ that personal growth often came hand in hand with trauma, and even those with physical or psychological damage often found some benefit from their service, that became part of their life and coping strategies post-war.²⁹⁹

These observations are very much reflected in the experiences of the Arctic convoy veterans, their accounts of how their war service affected their lives, and in some cases, by their silence. Their service affected them all differently, but there are still common threads that run through so many of their stories. There is the shared trauma, but also the bonds that can only come from shared experience. The friendships formed before and after, and the networks and links, such as the Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand, that helped them regain and maintain those precious connections, not just for themselves, but for their families too. The relationships, journeys and hardships faced by those families, many of whom were ‘war brides’ and their children, moving to the other side of the world.

Retaining relationships through long periods of separation and uncertainty is no easy task.

²⁹⁶ Hopner, “Home from War,” iii.

²⁹⁷ Hopner, “Home from War,” iii.

²⁹⁸ Hopner, “Home from War,” iii-iv.

²⁹⁹ Hopner, “Home from War,” 226.

Time spent apart from children in their early formative years cannot be regained. Lives that were planned or dreamed before the war often had to be reimagined, and for some this meant adapting to a new country, as well as a new career. Adapting to civilian life after active military service can be difficult for both the returnee and the people they are returning to, let alone adapting to an entirely new life. It is not just the lives of the veterans themselves that were affected; far from it.

The horrors of war could not be shrugged off easily and often the only real support provided was the networks they built themselves. Understanding of just how much war service could affect people psychologically took a long time to be understood even by those suffering from what would likely be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress today. In the case of the Merchant Navy, many keenly felt the lack of acknowledgement of the part that they played and that hurt lingered a long time, denying them some of the social regard and status that is a key element in overcoming the trauma that can be caused by war. Despite all of this, and the difficulties some of them faced, many of the Arctic convoy veterans lived long and happy lives. Some of them are still doing so today.

CONCLUSION

Politicians often exaggerate, especially when making speeches or speaking to the media. However, when Winston Churchill allegedly called the Arctic convoys the ‘worst journey in the world’ this was not too far from the truth.³⁰⁰ As Allan Burn said, the Arctic convoys ‘were different from all other twentieth century ocean convoys, and indeed all the convoys in the long history of the Royal Navy.’³⁰¹ The convoys were a tough, perilous journey for those on the sea and a dangerous challenge for those in the air. The cost in ships and lives was significant: 7.2 percent of outbound and 4 percent of inbound convoy vessels, plus 18 ships and one submarine from the covering forces were lost, as well as almost 2,800 lives.³⁰² This was just in the convoys themselves; when air losses are included, the number was higher still. The goods, as they said, were delivered, but many have questioned if it was worth it.³⁰³

The New Zealanders who served in the Arctic convoys have been largely overlooked in the country’s rich historiography of the Second World War. The focus of the official histories that were written post-war was primarily the ‘New Zealand’ effort: that of the New Zealand Army, Navy, and Air Force units that served in New Zealand’s name. Those who served in ‘foreign’ forces – such as the Royal Navy – were given less attention because of this. There were also logistical challenges, such as the limited availability and scattered nature of records, which made a study of this group difficult to put together.³⁰⁴

In the case of the New Zealanders in the Arctic convoys, the only real acknowledgement they

³⁰⁰ Bennett, “The Worst Journey in the World,” 52.

³⁰¹ Burn, *The Fighting Commodores*, 201.

³⁰² Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 187.

³⁰³ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 129.

³⁰⁴ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 467.

received in the historiography to date was in a single chapter on New Zealanders in the Royal Navy in Waters' volume of the *Official History of the Second World War*. The New Zealanders in the Merchant Navy barely got a mention. There were scattered references elsewhere in official or academic works, but mostly in memoirs (such as Denis Glover's *Hot Water Sailor*) or collections of stories from convoy participants, such as those shared by the Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand and Neill Atkinson's Merchant Navy compilation *Hell or High Water*. Therefore, the key goal of this research was to identify as many of them as possible, understand their individual and collective contribution to the convoys, and to understand the impact their service had on the war effort, and that this service had on their lives. This was articulated as the following three questions:

1. Who were the New Zealanders who took part in the Arctic convoys?
2. What roles did they perform on convoy duties and how important was it to the war effort?
3. How did this war service affect their lives after the war?

Finding answers to these questions was not easy. Some of the limitations faced by Waters still remain. Personnel and service records are still scattered, not always accessible, and sometimes incomplete. However, significantly more of these and other primary and secondary sources are available than have been previously. The release of documents such as the *Naval Staff History* and the digitisation of records have made undertaking such research possible. The patchy nature of such records – some cannot be found, are incomplete, or do not match the recollections of the veterans – means that any list compiled from them is likely to be incomplete, particularly in relation to the Merchant Navy. However, the addition of many informal sources such as interviews and personal recollections by veterans and their families has added a richness to these records that was not present before.

It is important to acknowledge these limitations and where uncertainty remains, this has been noted. However, despite these, it has been possible to identify a great number of the New Zealanders who served in the convoys, and to gain an understanding of approximately how many there were, the sorts of roles they performed on convoy duties, how that service affected the war effort, and how it affected their lives afterwards. Whilst the focus of this research has been on those who were New Zealanders prior to the war, it is also important to acknowledge those who became New Zealanders following. Many of these veterans have now spent decades in New Zealand and become a key part of the social connectedness for veterans and their families, as well as contributing greatly to our knowledge through efforts such as those by the Arctic Convoy Club of New Zealand.

Who were the New Zealanders who took part in the Arctic convoys? An analysis of the available records and recollections from veterans themselves reveals many commonalities. Most of them were serving at sea, either in the Royal Navy itself, on loan from the Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve, or on merchant ships from across the Commonwealth and beyond. Many of them were young, with the majority of those in the Navy aged 22 or younger when the first convoys sailed in August 1941. Those in the Merchant Navy were usually even younger when they signed up, often in their early teens, and many were still young when the war broke out. A common theme among the merchant seafarers was having been rejected by the Navy for their age, however some had gone directly to the merchant life. Another common theme was a desire not to go to war, but if they must, to choose which branch they served in; or to do something different and see the world, like Fred Crafar and Colin Christensen.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁵ Christensen, *Convoy to Murmansk*, 1; Taunton, "Merchant Seaman's War Service Honoured," *Taranaki Daily News*, 4 September 2010, 1.

They came from all across New Zealand, country and city alike. Some had been born overseas but their families had settled in New Zealand prior to the war. Their pre-war occupations also reflected this diversity: there were as many clerks and civil servants as there were those in manual work. Perhaps surprisingly, for both merchant and 'regular' navy alike, many had never set foot on a boat before they signed on. There were a few sailors amongst them, such as Penwill Moore and Denis Glover, but they were rare.³⁰⁶ Maxwell Richmond was the only known career naval officer prior to the war, and a young Viv Kempthorne had always wanted to join the navy but had been 'diverted' by his family into the Naval Reserve in 1937.³⁰⁷ Among those who became officers through Scheme B, excellence at sport, academia, or both was also extremely common, as was the case with Bill Carson, Denis Glover and Arch Jelley.

A typical naval rating was likely to be between 18 and 22 years old and to have come from a New Zealand city or town where they either lived with their family or had moved out on their own. Some were still students, but most had started towards a profession or were at least in full-time employment. They were either single or did not mention having a significant relationship at the time that they departed New Zealand for the war. Louis Fenton was an exception to this; he later married his pre-war girlfriend who he came back to.³⁰⁸ They often chose the Navy, despite having never been on a boat before, because they preferred it to the Army, or something about going to sea appealed to them more than anything else. Others, like Louis Fenton, joined the Fleet Air Arm or Royal Air Force because they wanted to fly.³⁰⁹

They were young, strong, and smart, and those who had excelled in their education or

³⁰⁶ Glover, *Hot Water Sailor*, 121; Moore, Interview.

³⁰⁷ Kempthorne, Interview.

³⁰⁸ Fenton, Interview.

³⁰⁹ Fenton, Interview.

demonstrated sporting prowess were considered for Scheme B. Denis Glover recalled being asked in his Scheme B interview about whether he had finished school or made the first fifteen for rugby and this experience appears to have been typical.³¹⁰

Joining the Merchant Navy was a different experience, particularly as many of those recruits were significantly younger. A typical seafarer signing up for the first time was likely between 14 and 17 years old, like Walter Caldwell, Fred Crafar and Dewi Browne.³¹¹ They too may have come from the city or the country – perhaps a farm outside of Dunedin – but either way, they were looking for adventure, or just to go to sea. They may have been young, but they were also strong and smart, hard-working, and often quite pragmatic: many joined the Merchant Navy after being rejected for the ‘regular’ Navy due to their age.

This was because their drive was to go to sea, and how they got there was not as important. For many the Navy was simply the obvious first port of call, and once they signed on for the Merchant Navy, they were fully committed. None of the merchant seafarers signed up to fight a war. They were stokers, cooks, fireman and officers. Yet many, like Fred Crafar and Dewi Browne, ended up fighting fiercely throughout the convoys.³¹²

Convoy service was often a grim, thankless task, particularly for those in the Merchant Navy who received little acknowledgement for their service for a long time afterwards.³¹³ For the New Zealanders who served in the convoys, the answer to ‘What did they do?’ varies greatly. Those in the Merchant Navy had the dual roles of whatever their actual role was and the

³¹⁰ Glover, *Hot Water Sailor*, 121-122.

³¹¹ Browne, Interview; Mark Birch, “Stratford notable lived a full life,” *Taranaki Daily News*, 5 June 2000, 4; Taunton, “Merchant Seaman’s War Service Honoured,” *Taranaki Daily News*, 4 September 2010, 1.

³¹² Browne, Interview; Harvey, “Seascrapes,” *Taranaki Daily News*, 8 September 2007, 13.

³¹³ Atkinson, *Hell or High Water*, 23-24.

additional duties they were required to perform to protect their ships. Ronald Bradshaw was an assistant cook and had the misfortune of being on the *Empire Howard* when she went down.³¹⁴ Cooks, Stewards and Radio Operators were common professions for the New Zealanders in the Merchant Navy, and New Zealanders were also well-represented as Engineers, Fireman, Trimmers, Seamen and Officers. Most of them started as Deck Boy and worked their way up the ranks from there, like Fred Crafar, who also found himself an impromptu gunner on occasion.³¹⁵ Seaman Dewi Browne not only manned the Oerlikon when required to protect his ship in the convoys, he also landed small boats at Normandy during the D-Day invasion and ferried the wounded to safety.³¹⁶ Browne was lucky enough to avoid the winter cold. Many others were not.

Able Seaman C. R. Charles and others who did the convoy run during the winter months also had the added work of keeping their ships afloat in the appalling winter weather, which meant a lot of ice breaking. Dan Bashall, trimmer and fireman on the *Ocean Gypsy*, had the job of feeding the coal required to keep the *Gypsy's* engines running – another task made more difficult by the extreme cold. With the weather and the enemy to contend with, nobody had just one job on a merchant ship during a convoy run, and the supplies that the merchant ships carried were crucial.

The task of protecting those ships fell to those in the Navy ships and in the air, although the wider convoy effort also included those such as the RNZVNR's Lieutenant-Commander Connell Thode and his submarine patrols off the coast of Norway to protect the convoy route,

³¹⁴ "Assistant Cook Ronald Bradshaw," Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

³¹⁵ Taunton, "Merchant Seaman's War Service Honoured," *Taranaki Daily News*, 4 September 2010, 1.

³¹⁶ Browne, Interview.

and interpreter and liaison officer Ian Grey.³¹⁷ Wing Commander H. N. G Ramsbottom-Isherwood and the pilots of No. 151 Wing Royal Air Force were delivered to Murmansk by the first convoy, and established the essential protective force for the region, including the convoys.³¹⁸

Many New Zealanders also served in the Fleet Air Arm, including at least eight pilots who earned honours for their service protecting the convoys, downing enemy aircraft and sinking U-boats.³¹⁹ In addition to the Fleet Air Arm pilots, there were also New Zealanders among the pilots of the MAC ships who provided air support to the convoys, and the protective patrols of Coastal Command, such as Catalina pilot and Squadron Leader T. O. Marshall, DSC.³²⁰ There were also New Zealanders among the air crew, such as Louis Fenton, who served as a Fleet Air Arm Observer.

Without this wider convoy support in place, the Navy would have found their job of escorting and protecting the merchant ships magnitudes more difficult. The New Zealanders on the Navy ships were ratings and officers alike, and their list of occupations covers an impressive range. It includes meteorologist, stoker, leading stoker, gunner, signalman, telegraphist, navigator, navigator's yeoman, aircraft recognition officer, aircraft liaison officer, seaman, able, ordinary and leading seaman, petty officer, sub-lieutenant, lieutenant, and commander. Many of them also earned awards for their service, which included some of the most harrowing incidents of the Arctic convoys, including the loss of the *Edinburgh* and the *Trinidad*, and the terrible tragedy of PQ 17.

³¹⁷ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 503-504; "Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RANVR) Officers, 1939-1945," Unit Histories; National Archives of Australia, Royal Australian Naval Reserve posting record card: Ian Grey.

³¹⁸ Richards and St. George Saunders, *Royal Air Force 1939-1945 Volume II*, 78.

³¹⁹ Waters, *The Royal New Zealand Navy*, 479-480.

³²⁰ "N.Z. Airmen's Experiences," *Nelson Evening Mail*, 20 July 1943, 5.

The question of how important their service was to the war effort is two-fold. There is no doubt that many New Zealanders played critical roles in their particular convoys, be that keeping the ship moving, protected, or fed. The question of how important this was to the war effort is trickier, as this depends on the understanding of the importance of the convoys themselves to the war effort.

That the cost of the convoys was high is indisputable. However, the Arctic convoys did deliver many things – not just goods – of great importance to the war effort. First, there are the goods themselves. These comprised over £428,000,000 worth of material including more than 5,000 tanks and 7,000 aircraft, 4 submarines, 14 minesweepers, 9 motor torpedo boats, 743 million projectiles, thousands of anti-tank guns, rifles, machine guns, and sets of telephone, radar and radio equipment; as well as food, medical supplies, machinery and other raw materials.³²¹ This would not have been possible without the convoy system and the combined efforts of all of those who took part.

How important were these goods to the Soviet Union? They desperately needed the supplies, as much as the Allies needed their support. It is unlikely the Soviet Union could have opened a new front in Europe without this intervention. It could have been achieved a different way, a less dangerous route taken, or many individual decisions along the way could have been made differently. However, without receiving this support, it is unlikely the Soviet Union could have participated in the way that they did and without them, the outcome may have been quite different.

In addition to the material boost, there was also the morale boost. The Arctic convoys were a

³²¹ Llewellyn-Jones, *The Royal Navy and the Arctic Convoys*, 129; Schofield, *The Arctic Convoys*, 187.

symbol of commitment of both the western Allies and the Soviet Union to the cause. It may seem like a particularly grand gesture to make, especially when Britain was already over-committed elsewhere, and it was. However, it was an important one to make at the time. The losses inflicted on the enemy by the air and sea escorts accompanying the convoys also allowed them to further protect merchant shipping and keep their own critical supply lines open. The war was a complex puzzle, and without these pieces in place, it may have turned out differently.

The cost for all of this was indeed high. Many who served in the convoys paid the ultimate price for those ships to get through. For those that survived, their war service had an effect on their lives. Exactly what this was and how it revealed itself across their lifetime was different for each one. Many of the convoy veterans went on to serve elsewhere in the war effort. None of them were unaffected by it. For most, the life they returned home to following the war was not the one they left. Some had jobs to return to, but many carved out entirely new careers either out of choice or necessity. For some, this meant a move to New Zealand and adapting to life in a new country. This included both convoy veterans who decided to settle here and the wives and children of the New Zealand servicemen who they had met during wartime.

The difficulties faced by returning servicepeople are now well-documented. War is not a happy thing and some of the New Zealanders in the convoys experienced extremely traumatic events that stayed with them throughout their lives. They dealt with this as best they could given the circumstances, which included little understanding of the trauma service in a war could cause. The concept of 'shell shock' had emerged from the First World War but society was nowhere near describing, let alone providing solid support for, the concept of post-traumatic stress. Most veterans were left to figure it out on their own, and some found this

easier than others.

It is hardly surprising that many of them did not want to talk to those who had not been through what they had, or that they found their best support came from their fellow veterans, and the networks and supports that they built for themselves and for each other. Despite the difficulties that they faced during their war service, many of them also spoke of the value they received from it. In many cases, this came in the form of friendships formed at the time or afterwards, that have endured for decades since. It is easy to concentrate on the negative ways in which war service can and has affected people's lives. However, many convoy veterans did also find that personal growth did come alongside their trauma, and that they benefitted from what they had learned during said service. Many of the Arctic convoy veterans went on to live long and successful lives and some are still doing so today.

The New Zealanders who participated in the Arctic convoys may have been scattered across different services at the time, but the record of their individual and collective effort speaks for itself. They performed a huge variety of roles in the Royal Navy, Merchant Navy, the Fleet Air Arm and the wider convoy effort and made a significant contribution to a key part of the war effort. Without them, and those who fought alongside them, there might have been a different story. Despite this, those efforts remain largely unheard of in New Zealand. This study is an opportunity to recognise their service, and to start to fill this glaring gap in our military history.

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APPENDIX 1 – NEW ZEALANDERS IN THE ARCTIC CONVOYS

Royal Navy, Royal New Zealand Navy, Royal New Zealand Volunteer Naval Reserve	
Kenneth Bayes	Meliss Stuart Latter
Richard Campbell Begg	William Stanley Lowe
Roy Berwick	Robert Sinclair MacDonald
Stanley Norman Braithwaite	Bruce Mason
William Edward Brown	Don Mathison
Gilbert Lang Brunton	Louis McCleary
William (Bill) Carson	Paul McGee
Colin Christensen	Dugald McKenzie
James Clegg	Alan McLauchlan
David Collingwood	Thomas McNeice
David Cooke	Douglas Haig Meiklejohn
Valentine Henry George Cowper	Robert Metcalfe
William Charles Cragg	Penwill Moore
James Day	Noel Mudford
Dennis Davies	Arthur Napper
Leo de Abiatua	Maurice Newman
Andrew Cecil Dick	Ken Newton
David Dodson	John Phillips
John Ellworthy	Bryan Philpott
Norman Ettlinger	Stirtevant Frederic Piggin

Royal Navy, Royal New Zealand Navy, Royal New Zealand Volunteer Naval Reserve	
Louis David Fenton	Robert Powell
R D Forester	Sir Maxwell Richmond
Gordon Forrester	John Scott
John Alexander Foster	Raymond Martin Shaw
Jack Gaelic	Norman Sim
John Gilbert	Francis Noel Smith
Denis Glover	William (Bill) Smith
George Grant	David Spiers
L. M. Hadley	Terence Southee
Viv Hall	Jim Stewart
Doug Hazard	Reg Thomas
George Hogben	William (Bill) Thurston
Charles Selwyn Hood	Bill Tinney
Graham Neil Horspool	Bob Todd
Huia Hudson	Christopher Turnbull
Pat Hughes	Tommy Turnbull
Trevor Husband	Bruce Veale
Hugh Hutcheson	William Henry Walbran
Ces Jackson	Sydney George Wallace
Arch Jelley	Richard Washbourn
Stanley Godfrey Jervis	Alexander David Richmond Webber
Jimmy Keenan	Trevor Wickham
Alfred Vivian Kempthorne	Bill Williams

Royal Navy, Royal New Zealand Navy, Royal New Zealand Volunteer Naval Reserve	
Murray Kerr	Fred Nelson Williams
Lewis King	Owen Woodhouse
Philip Norman Kinnear	Tony Worth
Edward Lassen	Campbell Wyeth
Merchant Navy	
Dan Bashall	Walter Bowie Caldwell
Ronald Bradshaw	Fred Crafar
Dewi Browne	Te Waari (Ward) Whaitiri
Fleet Air Arm and Royal Air Force Pilots	
Owen Keith Armitage	Donald Gordon Payne
Allen Russell Burgham	John Alphonsus Quigg
John McEwen Gilbert	Patrick Temm
Reginald M. J. O'Connor	Donald Ramos Wallace
John William Robert O'Shea	Henry Ramsbottom-Isherwood, RAF
Other Services	
Ian Grey, Liaison and Interpreter, Royal Australian Volunteer Naval Reserve	Connell Thode, Submarine Commander, Norway

APPENDIX 2 – CONVOY VETERANS WHO BECAME NEW ZEALANDERS POST-WAR

Royal Navy	
Bill Abbey	Peter W Holt
Bill Bailey	G B W (Brian) Johnson
Fred Bamford	Kenneth Johnson
Joe Bartlett	Frank B Jones
Arthur Bassett-Burr	Chris King
Norman Batterham	Wilfred Kirby
George Billing	W Leitch
David C Boyes	Sydney A Linscott
Bill Brokenshaw	Derek McDonald
Len Burton	C G (Mac) McKinley
Henry (Harry) P. Carter	John McLaughlin
William (Bill) Chapman	David A. McNab
W E (Bill) Chipp	T. W. (Bill) Megennis
David Christison	Jack Moon
Matt Clapham	Tom A Moss
Ron Colman	George Musson
Robert A. Cotcher	Denis O'Donoghue
Douglas Dawson	David O'Rourke
Arthur Denby	Lieutenant C.H. Owen
Peter A Densem	David Owen
Stan Douglas	George Purdon

Royal Navy	
Les Edwards	Richard Ray
Chris Fletcher	Ken Redout
Stewart Fleming	John Renowden
Douglas (Jock) Forbes	Arnold Riches
Jim Gallie	Peter Sayer
W E (Bill) Gallie	Alf Scaddan
Ken Gerrell	Walt Siddall
Frank Glass	David Stevenson
Doug Gooday	Bill Thompson
Wilf Goodier	Bernard Tucker
Allan Gore	Christopher Turnbull
George G. Gosling	Stanley Welch
Thomas Grainger	Syd Wells
Ray Hastings	Des Whelan
R N G (Ron) Hancock	Dennis Whitehead
Alf Hargreaves	Derek Whitwam
W. Herbert	

Merchant Navy	
Michael Biegel	James W Lester
John Calkin	William McCallum
Jim Campbell	Patrick Meadlarkin
Rholda Draffin	John Middleton

Merchant Navy	
Henry Erlandsen	Frank Roe
John Foster	Syd Simpson
Hugh Gibson	A S (Toby) Tobin
Charlie Gray	Reg Urwin
Royal Fleet Auxiliary	
Ron Sanderson	