



Russian Convoy Club of New Zealand

Newsletter
January/February 2021



Dear shipmates, families and friends

Divers discover lost Nazi coding machine under Baltic Sea

A team of scuba divers made an incredible discovery when they found a Nazi encryption device, an Enigma machine, at the bottom of the Baltic Sea.

The group, divers from the World Wildlife Fund searching for abandoned fishing nets to remove, thought they had found an old typewriter before realising they had found something much rarer.



“I’ve made many exciting and strange discoveries in the past 20 years. But I never dreamt that we would one day find one of the legendary Enigma machines,” underwater archaeologist Florian Huber (pictured below) told Reuters.

The Enigma machines were used by the Nazi military to send secret messages but the code was cracked by British cryptographers led by Alan Turing, helping turn the tides of World War II.



In May 1945, about 50 Nazi submarines, called U-boats, were intentionally scuttled near where the device was found in an effort to avoid handing the vessels over to the Allies after the Nazis surrendered.

“We suspect our Enigma went overboard in the course of this event,” said Huber.

The Nazis ended up sinking more than 200 of their own submarines in the Baltic and North Seas before the end of the war.

The divers said that even though Enigma machines can sell for tens of thousands of dollars at auction, theirs will be donated to the Archaeological Museum Schloss Gottorf in Schleswig, Germany.

Source: *New York Daily News*

The Arctic Convoys: ‘True Brotherhood in Arms’

Royal Navy and Russian military representatives have taken part in 75th anniversary commemorations of the end of a bitter four-year struggle to deliver vital aid to the Soviet Union and defeat Nazism.



The global pandemic scuppered plans for a major commemoration of the end of the convoys. Instead, a ‘virtual commemoration’ was held last month, when veterans joined senior political and diplomatic figures from Britain and Russia for an online discussion to underline the importance of the convoys – and to thank the dwindling number of men who endured what Churchill called ‘the worst journey in the world’.

That event sparked the idea of low-key physical commemorations at some of the key monuments to the convoys.

Commander James Buck, Harbour Master in Orkney, saluted the fallen commemorated by the monument on Hoy; adjacent Scapa Flow was home to many of the warships which escorted the convoys.

Liverpool was a key staging post for both Atlantic and Arctic Convoys. The Royal Navy’s Deputy Regional Commander Lieutenant Colonel Guy Balmer Royal Marines joined the Rector of Liverpool Canon Dr Crispin Pailing for a service at the Arctic Campaign memorial in Liverpool Parish Church of Our Lady and St Nicholas.

And on HMS Belfast on the Thames Rear Admiral Iain Lower, the Royal Navy’s Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Policy), and the Russian Defence Attaché to the UK, Colonel Maxim Elovik, met on the quarterdeck of Belfast in London for a 15-minute service of remembrance and thanksgiving.

RCCNZ Christmas at Otaki

Our pre-Christmas meeting was held on 26 November 2020 at the home of Rear Admiral David Ledson and Barbara, to whom we are extremely grateful. Guests included Igor Baiazov, Deputy Head of Mission at the Russian Embassy, and Captain Quentin Randall RNZN.

Apologies were received from Chris King, Pen Moore, Joyce Jones, Evelyn Thompson, Ruth Allen, Andy Fraser (Principal of Otaki College) and Chief of Navy Rear Admiral David Proctor.

Igor spoke of Russia’s continued interest in our part in taking supplies to the Northern ports to aid their fight against the Nazi invaders whilst Quentin spoke of his job as Chief Staff Officer Support - H/Q Joint Forces NZ.

Thanks to Igor we were able to offer a toast to H.M. the Queen and to the Russian people. As a token of our esteem a small presentation was made to David and Barbara for their continued support of our club.

A delicious lunch and afternoon tea were served to some 18 guests and our thanks go to Barbara for all her hard work in the preparation. Thanks also go to Chris King for providing the Christmas cake ably cut and served by his son Patrick.



A small supply of our club badge has been obtained and were given to those members present who had not received previously. In addition, a small brooch bearing the club logo was given to the ladies. These are available to lady members who are financial - please let me know if you would like one.

Thanks to all who attended and made the day an enjoyable event.

Navy divers end threat posed by wartime mine

Royal Navy bomb disposal experts detonated a wartime mine trawled up by fishermen in the Firth of Clyde.

The team from Northern Diving Group, based at Faslane, sprang into action after the wartime device – laid by a German submarine off the island of Ailsa Craig – was recovered in December 2020.

The trawler's seven crew were evacuated by Troon Lifeboat and Rothesay Coastguard Rescue Team while the vessel was sailed to Etrick Bay on the Isle of Bute to meet with divers.

They declared the mine, which still contained around 350kg of explosives, to be in pristine condition and decided a controlled detonation at sea was the best solution.



They coordinated the lowering of the ordnance to the seabed off Etrick Beach, before a controlled explosion sent it – and mud and water – high in the air.

“Considering it had been in the water for around 80 years, the mine’s condition was remarkable,” said Lieutenant Commander Mark Shaw, Commanding Officer of Northern Diving Group.



“From the initial pictures we were able to easily identify the mine type and, importantly, determine that the explosive fill was intact and therefore presented a significant hazard.

“Items of this size are relatively uncommon, however, the group are approaching 100 call-outs in 2020 supporting civil authorities with all types of Explosive Ordnance Disposal, ranging from mines and torpedoes to hand grenades and improvised devices.

“On average, across the UK, Royal Navy Clearance Divers are tasked once a day for EOD assistance. This highlights the remaining presence of historic ordnance. Even small items can be unstable and present a hazard; carrying-out a controlled explosion is the only safe way of dealing with them and neutralising the hazard.”



Inverasdale, Loch Ewe : Commemoration : 16 May 2021



Thursday 25 Mar 2021
RCCNZ meeting
Lower Hutt RSA

Sunday 25 Apr 2021
Pukeahu Memorial Park

Tuesday 9 May 2021
Wellington Waterfront

Thursday 26 Aug 2021
RCCNZ meeting
Lower Hutt RSA

Thursday 25 Nov 2021
Otaki

Further details will be
advised as they come to
hand



Up Spirits!



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Nulli Secundus In Oriente

High above the Hong Kong township of Sheung Shui a coat of arms is engraved into the hillside – the badge of the Royal Hong Kong Regiment (The Volunteers). It remains to this day, proudly displaying the motto “*Nulli Secundus In Oriente*” or “*Second to None in the Orient*”, despite the change in sovereignty over Hong Kong having occurred some 23 years ago.

The Royal Hong Kong Regiment (The Volunteers) [RHKR(V)] was formed in May 1854, as a local auxiliary militia force funded and administered by the colonial Government of Hong Kong.

During the era, home defence units were raised in various British colonies with the intention of allowing regular army units tied up on garrison duty to be deployed elsewhere. The first locally raised militia in Hong Kong was the Hong Kong Volunteers, a fore runner of what was to become the Royal Hong Kong Regiment (The Volunteers).



Second to None in the Orient : The motto, with its crown and dragons, to this day stands proudly above the township of Sheung Shui

Although the British government was responsible for the defence of the territories and colonies, the local forces were raised and funded by the local territories and as such the RHKR(V) was always a branch of the Hong Kong government. It was not a part of the reserve force of the British Army. The RHKR(V) did however form part of the order of battle of 48 Gurkha Infantry Brigade and were under command of the commander of the British forces in Hong Kong.

These locally raised defence units met British military standards with many of the officers and NCOs attending training in the United Kingdom. Although colonial/overseas British territories' auxiliary units could have no tasking under the British Ministry of Defence, and members could not be compelled to serve outside their territory, many served voluntarily on attachment to British Regular and Territorial Army units.



Above the township of Sheung Shui and the current Sai Wan barracks of the People's Liberation Army

The regiment should not be confused with the separate Hong Kong Regiment formed in 1892, which was a regular infantry regiment of the British Army, recruited in India.

In the beginning

The Hong Kong Volunteers was formed in 1854 when the Crimean War led to a reduction of the British military presence in Hong Kong. To help bolster the defences at a time when marauding pirates were still a hazard on the China coast a call for local volunteers was made.

A total of 99 Europeans were recruited, mostly British but with some Portuguese, Scandinavians and Germans also answering the call. However almost as soon as it was founded, it was disbanded when the threat of war in Europe receded, and Regular units of the British Army were once again able to resume responsibility for the security of Hong Kong.

In 1862, the Hong Kong Volunteers was re-established, and in 1864 they were called out to help subdue a serious outbreak of rioting between British and Indian soldiers. In 1866 it was disbanded again only to be reborn in 1878 as the Hong Kong Artillery and Rifle

Volunteer Corps. By 1917, it was renamed the Hong Kong Defence Corps and was actively engaged in guard and patrol duties during World War One when, due to the recall of the British forces, they were the only military unit left in Hong Kong.

In 1933, the Hong Kong Defence Corps acquired its first armoured car, equipped with an

armour-plated body and mountings for two machine-guns. Later, four others were bought by the colonial government. The bodywork was outfitted by the Hong Kong and Whampoa Dock Company and these armoured cars played an important role in the Battle of Hong Kong in December 1941.

World War Two

The Hong Kong Defence Corps, now renamed the "Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps" (HKVDC), met their severest test in the bitter fighting that took place in the crucial weeks before the fall of Hong Kong on Christmas Day 1941.

On 8 December 1941, the HKVDC, deployed a total fighting strength of 2,200 all ranks in seven infantry companies, five artillery batteries, five machine gun companies equipped with Vickers machine gun and an armoured car platoon.

While only seeing light action in the New Territories at the beginning of the Japanese attack, the Volunteers were heavily engaged on Hong Kong Island, especially during the key battles of Wong Nai Chung Gap and Stanley. Casualties among 3 Coy at the former, and 1 Battery at the latter, were extremely heavy. 1 and 2 (Scottish) companies also suffered heavy losses, as did 5 Battery.

Out of the mobilised strength of 2,200, some 289 were listed either as missing or killed, and many others became prisoners of war. Some, however, made their way into China where the British Army Aid Group was formed to assist the Chinese Government in the

struggle against the Japanese. A number of these men later joined the Hong Kong Volunteer Company in Burma, where they were attached to the Chindits under General Orde Wingate.

The services of the defence corps were later recognised by the award of 19 decorations and 18 mentioned in despatch for gallantry and good service. As a recognition of The Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps defence of Hong Kong during 1941, the Corps was awarded the battle honour "Hong Kong".



British built Wa Shan Military Road snakes across the hills above Sheung Shui with Shenzhen, China in the background

Post-World War Two

In 1949, The Hong Kong Regiment were reorganised and became part of the Hong Kong Defence Force, which also included separate air and naval units. In 1951 the new combined defence force was granted the title 'Royal', and replacement colours were entrusted to the care of the regiment as successor to the defunct Defence Corps.

In the early 1960s, the role of the Royal Hong Kong Defence Force changed from that of an infantry battalion to a reconnaissance regiment equipped with six British Ferret armoured cars (each armed with Browning .30-inch machine-gun) were acquired. The regiment was reorganised to form a headquarters, headquarters squadron, three reconnaissance squadrons, an infantry company and a home guard company. During the 1967 leftist riots, the Royal Hong Kong Defence Force were called out during the six-month disturbances in Hong Kong.

By 1970 the naval unit was phased out and in 1970 the Royal Hong Kong Defence Force was itself disbanded – the two remaining member units, the Hong Kong Regiment and the Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force, officially becoming separate entities. At the same time, both were granted the 'Royal' title by Queen Elizabeth II, and the words 'The Volunteers' were incorporated into the Hong Kong Regiment's title.

With its new title and colours, the RHKR(V) was reorganised as a light reconnaissance unit operating under the command of the British Forces Overseas Hong Kong.

In the late 1970s the Volunteers were deployed to assist the civil powers over the problem of illegal immigration and from 1980 till 1992 the Volunteers were deployed to man the defences of the China-Hong Kong border.

In the late 1980s to early 1990s the Volunteers were deployed to support the colonial government in controlling the flood of Vietnamese illegal migrants, commonly known as the "Boat People". This included guarding temporary detention camps for Vietnamese migrants.

The Sino-British Joint Declaration on the question of Hong Kong as a British colony was finalised and the joint declaration was signed in Beijing on 19 December 1984. On 27 May 1985, instruments of ratification were exchanged and the agreement entered into force. It was registered at the United Nations by the British and Chinese Governments on 12 June 1985.

In April 1992 the Security Branch of the Hong Kong Government formally announced that the Regiment would disband in September 1995.

The Royal Hong Kong Regiment (The Volunteers) Association

The Royal Hong Kong Regiment (The Volunteers) Association was created in 1995 as a charitable organisation to support former members in Hong Kong with a clubhouse located at the Hong Kong Jockey Club Happy Valley racecourse on Hong Kong Island.

Remembrance

Those who gave the ultimate sacrifice in the defence of Hong Kong are remembered at several war cemeteries, the main memorial being the Sai Wan War Cemetery on Hong Kong Island.



Sai Wan War Cemetery under the care of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission