



Prawle Point

No: 50

'eyes along the coast'

Spring 2015

COASTGUARD HAWKE'S BAY SAR NEW ZEALAND STYLE

With a financial membership base of almost 700 and 25 active volunteers, the coastguard service at Hawke's Bay operates purely on a volunteer basis, apart from one salaried administrator.

The station building, at Meeanee Quay, Napier, is a state of the art marine search and rescue centre housing an operations room, crew meeting room, training areas and a room where lifejackets, wet weather attire and other safety gear is held for those going out on the rescue vessel. At the rear of the building is an extensive hard alongside which the rescue vessel *Celia Knowles* is permanently moored. She is 11.7 metres long, powered by twin 480-horsepower Cummins diesel engines with Hamilton jet units for ease of manoeuvrability, her top speed is 36 knots and she is capable of staying at sea for more than 10 hours, all necessary considering the rescue area, from Table Cape in the north to Aramoana in the south, is one of the largest covered by any Coastguard unit in New Zealand. Technically she is limited to 12 nm offshore but, with dispensation, has been 40 miles off to assist people in distress. Crew on board normally total five.

In New Zealand, the coastguard service began as a number of independent units (some dating from the late 19th century) often set up after, and in response to, a local boating tragedy where passionate locals determined their community would never again suffer in a similar way. It is interesting to remember that the volunteer National Coastwatch Institution began at Bass Point in Cornwall where fishermen were lost within sight of a station recently closed by HM Government.

The first official lifeboat station in New Zealand was set up at Timaru in 1864 and served the Canterbury marine community for 20 years. Another unit was established in Sumner in 1898 and imported a lifeboat from England to aid rescues on the hazardous bar, Auckland formed a volunteer coastguard service in 1937 and by 1976 there were 8 such organisations within the two islands. Coordination seemed the best way forward. Hence a meeting in Taupo was held to discuss development of a common approach to search and rescue, a concerted funding effort and a title to encompass all the diverse units. The



Hawkes Bay Coastguard personnel and the Celia Knowles

name "New Zealand Coastguard Federation" was chosen, later being granted a Royal title in 1990. More and more Units joined the national body and so it became necessary to devise a more devolved structure which lead to the set up of regions, Northern, Southern, Eastern and Central. Today the national body known as "The Royal New Zealand Coastguard Inc." comprises 69 units- 10 air patrol units, 58 wet (seagoing) units and 1 communications unit.

Hawke's Bay Volunteer Coastguard became incorporated in

1986 after an interesting succession of developments beginning in the 1940s when the Napier Sailing Club dedicated their rescue craft *Watchman* to a local community group. The next stage involved Hawke's Bay Harbour Board assuming rescue responsibilities until the New Zealand Police took over. General dissatisfaction led to clubs and individuals forming the Hawke's Bay Close to Shore Search and Rescue Organisation, all the while actual rescues were carried out by faithful *Watchman* and other vessels of opportunity crewed by local sailors and fishermen. In 1997, after 3 years of fundraising, the first dedicated rescue vessel was launched - an 8.5 meter rib built by Niaid. In 1998 a local air patrol was established with local pilots and other aviation enthusiasts, using club aircraft, to support searches on the water. In 2000 an ex RNLI Waveney Class lifeboat was acquired which complimented the Niaid very well. The latter was a high speed, quick response vessel while the Waveney, although slower, could face rougher seas and tow larger vessels. *Celia Knowles* combines both attributes. The Waveney was sold in 2005 for use as a dive support boat in the Bay of Islands.

The President, Henry van Tuel is a senior wet crew member, radio operator and on the Eastern Region and National Boards. He emphasises that the station sees itself very much as part of the community with volunteers from the locality and most of the funding being raised locally. They are in Hawke's Bay to serve local and visiting boat owners and work closely with several local organisations and individuals. Boat owners can make radio contact to log intended voyages, estimated times of arrival and number of persons on board and if they get into difficulties the Unit will provide breakdown

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and emergency services. Boat owners who are financial members receive the emergency service free of charge, non members are sent a bill for the hours spent, NZ\$280 per hour which makes the current membership of NZ\$45 a good deal. Local fishing clubs are given free safety checks and support during competitions while the annual powerboat race teams also receive safety cover with on board doctor and advanced paramedic in attendance. Information on registering EPIRBs, valuable handbooks covering voyage preparation, basic boat operation, safety on the water, responsibilities, distress and emergency situations, yachtmaster and other courses, as well as check-list stickers are all available for the asking.

Hawke's Bay attracts water and jetski enthusiasts, shore anglers and divers exploring reefs around Cape Kidnappers with its notorious currents. It is an area noted for seafood supplied by commercial fishing vessels and the delights of Napier, with its well documented history of earthquake and consequent re-building in Art Deco style, attract many a cruise ship from October to March. The busy commercial port has a constant turn-round of timber and container vessels. Such maritime activity has given rise to the supportive role of Hawke's Bay Volunteer Coastguard "The charity saving lives at sea". *Celia Knowles* even serves as back-up pilot vessel for the port.

The station monitors channel 16 emergency and distress calls, the Coastguard channel 82 for assistance and trip reports, and weather forecasts on channel 21. Every active crew member carries a pager to alert them to emergencies and 3 are registered skippers. Training sessions are held every Wednesday evening, all crew are radio literate and one member monitors a radio from home. Shifts in the Operations Room are of 2 hours duration every weekend when all radio operations are logged as mentioned above. When the Operations Room radio is not covered, local radio broadcasts are transmitted over the internet to radiorooms in Tauranga and Auckland. This enables a 24 hour 7 day a week radio service without overloading local volunteers.

Annual advertisements for new recruits may attract up to 20 volunteers for vigorous induction training; from these only 2 or 3 qualify each year for permanent duty.

When an emergency arises a page alerts the crew and operations people. For simple tows only Coastguard personnel are involved, both on *Celia Knowles* and in the radioroom. For larger emergencies, where the Police are involved, in addition to Coastguard people they will also have Police and other emergency services working out of their Operations room. In New Zealand there are three levels of marine emergency response. Coastguard operations are straight forward tows etc, the Police are the lead agency when there is a search for missing people close to shore, Rescue Co-Ordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ) covers the area further out to sea. Both Police and RCCNZ use the Coastguard to deliver actual "on water" service.

Not surprisingly, funding is an ever present challenge. The Port Company contributes annually, charitable trusts offer grants, 2 lottery days are held each year and money gradually filters in from the generosity of the public. Just occasionally a windfall lands in their favour; *Celia Knowles* left her whole estate thus enabling the completion of the new rescue boat, *Celia Knowles* and the ongoing purchase of safety equipment. Napier Sailing Club donated the necessary floating pontoon to which was added a sloping aluminium ramp wide enough to unload a stretcher.

Activities last year include:-

- 6 police emergency call outs = 221 hours
- 19 call outs for vessels needing assistance = 317 hours
- 100 training exercises = 2945 hours
- Radio crew logged over 2050 trip reports = 750 hours
- Public education locally = 625 hours.

DFS ASSESSMENT - from the watch keepers' viewpoint

During winter months, Sunday mornings are frequently chosen for Salcombe Lifeboat crew exercises at sea. On March 8th both lifeboats were instrumental in cooperating with NCI Prawle Point during the annual Declared Facility Status (DFS) review, for which the station is most grateful.

Watchkeepers, Peter Cubbon and Kim Tucker had the morning watch well set up in readiness for the arrival of Assessor, Eddie Stephenson from Teignmouth NCI, while Don Bell and Jean Lyon, assigned to radio communications, cast an eye towards Salcombe Bar for sight of both lifeboats and awaited initial radio contact followed later by confirmation of launching at the predicted time of 09.30. Falmouth Coastguard were notified of the intention to work with NCI Prawle Point on the NCI dedicated Ch 65 and on channel 0 for communication between the lifeboats. There were eight persons on board including the Prawle Training Officer, Graham Richardson.

The first exercise was initiated by Salcombe ILB dropping a dan buoy 'casualty' which was soon established as being half a mile from the lookout (PQ) on a bearing of 230°. Due to poor visibility of less than one mile in misty conditions, the NCI radio operator had serious doubts as to whether the dan was still visible but an apparent sighting was resumed, updates of its bearing gradually altering with an eastward tidal drift, until the ILB was informed it was just 1 cable from the casualty. The



Watchkeepers after the exercise

crew however reported this target to be a fishing dan so further attempts were made by watchkeepers to find the original without success; eventually the ILB completed retrieval.

With conditions deteriorating, a second run began with Salcombe Lifeboat (ALB) dropping a white buoy with flag half a mile from the lookout on a bearing of 187°. It took just six minutes and five radio communications to 'con' the lifeboat on

to the target. A third run, this time with the ILB, proved equally successful during which PQ was asked for, and supplied, transit positioning. The exercise, however, was no less demanding than previously. Fine mist on the windows made keeping the target visual, without binoculars, impossible thus rescue boat and target could not be viewed together nor could the pelorus be used as a backup aid.

At 10.40 it was time for the final run. Not only was the sea quite rough by now but the whole scenario notched up a more demanding requirement of dual search as the ALB dropped two separate targets for simultaneous conning of both boats from Prawle Point. Bearing and distance of the first casualty was soon ascertained along with requested transit positioning for the ILB, however, before this mission was accomplished, the ALB commenced her search for the other casualty and, although visual on this was momentarily lost, re-sighting soon allowed further successful directions including a request to slow down within the final cable length. The lifeboats were thanked for their valuable participation and the Assessor's comment of "Well done, not easy in these conditions", were welcome words to both radio operators, who had remained remarkably calm throughout despite weather forecast interruptions and the potentially distracting radio reception of a Mayday alert in Plymouth Sound.

Eddie Stephenson then continued his assessment by interviewing all four watchkeepers- an experience they deemed to be enjoyable, observing the handover of duty to the afternoon watchkeepers, Patricia Beauchamp and David Murphy who were also individually assessed, inspecting station manuals, visiting the Visitor Centre and interviewing the Station Manager, Andy Thomson and Training Officer,

Graham Richardson, hot foot from sea; Eddie even undertook the latest online training Quiz.

The final recommendation was for NCI Prawle Point to retain its Declared Facility Status as the station was judged to be a professional working environment with robust and effective management, maintaining good quality watchkeeping and general attitude, a clear, well planned training regime, well constructed, readily accessible documentation and fully operational AIS and radar capability. Performance in communications and spotting during the live exercises during difficult conditions was pronounced as excellent. The assessor claimed to be "impressed by all aspects of the Prawle Point operation".

Acting Coxswain, Adam Lilley, who came to give a debriefing session at a well attended monthly meeting two days later, made several points of interest. He sympathised with the visibility problems encountered, yet pointed out this only underlines how difficult it can be to see a person in the water. The crew were not prepared to risk using their full-size dummy as it is too valuable to lose. There was one slight error in estimation of distance but watchkeepers compensated and recovered from a deliberate offset by the ILB on the third run and competently managed a high workload demanded by the final run. Communications could be more 'snappy', he said, and bearings need only be given to the nearest five degrees with magnetic and true deemed unnecessary since there's only a two degree difference these days.

So there are lessons to be learned before another DFS assessment next year but the conning technique proved to be workable and robust.

Tour of Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth on 24th March 2015

Early on in this visit to Britannia Royal Naval College the distinctive nature of its architecture was explained: it was designed by Sir Aston Webb architect of the main façade of the V&A Museum, Buckingham Palace, Admiralty Arch and many significant buildings across the UK.

The tour, organised and led by Watchkeeper Mike Pearce, introduced 25 Watchkeepers to the varied history of the College stretching back to its earliest days when based on retired ships of the line. Along the way we learnt that the Royal Navy traced its history not to Henry VIII but across 1,000 years to King Alfred the Great as he established a navy to repel Danish invaders.

We were treated to a fascinating tale of the rediscovery in 1964, by a Captain of the College, of William Lionel Wyllie's painting The Battle of Trafalgar at 2.30, 21 October 1805, in an antiques shop under years of fireplace soot. It's considered to be one of the most accurate paintings of the battle. For art lovers a tour of the College is a must for an opportunity to see the collection of significant and varied paintings and sculptures dating through to the present era. These represent the largest public collection of portraits by Oswald Hornby Joseph Birley and include paintings of King George VI and 18 Admirals. Not art, but fascinating, we learnt that the curve in the wrought iron railing on the Poop Deck gallery (above the Quarterdeck) was added to the design in order that ladies in hoop skirts could lean down for the view without providing a 'view' for those standing below.

In the small but well-designed museum Mike showed us cases of exquisitely detailed model ships, complete with rigging, made by French Prisoners of War during the Napoleonic era. Clad in minute planks which appeared to be ivory or whale bone they were carved from the mutton bones in the prisoners' rations — the rigging was woven strands of human hair.

Toward the end of our three hour visit we sat under the gold and silver gilt bosses of The Royal Coat of Arms for the United Kingdom which decorate the soaring barrel vault of the



Senior Gunroom Mess. Apparently Prince Charles, as a student, very definitely noted the absence of a reference to Wales in all the lavish decoration. He later donated a solid silver statue of Britannia with the Prince of Wales plumes on her helmet; it sits in the entry hall outside the Mess.

Mike had a story for every stone and cornice and it's impossible to recount it all here; we came away reeling with information and delighted to have spent an afternoon being introduced to the intimate detail of a building which has so significant a place in the history of this nation. I recommend the tour to anyone who has the slightest interest in history and/or art. Thank you to Mike for creating this opportunity and for providing the Watchkeepers with such a memorable afternoon.

Information about tours can be found at: www.britanniaassociation.org.uk/tours/ Further information about the art held in the college can be found at: www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/galleries/collections/britannia-royal-naval-college-173/foreword.

Nancy Sinclair

Joint DFS exercise by RNLI Salcombe and NCI Prawle Point on Sunday 8th March 2015.

With admiration of the RNLI volunteers for their commitment and skill.

This was the latest joint exercise involving both Salcombe Lifeboats and the Prawle Point Lookout. The purpose was to demonstrate the ability of these search-and-rescue assets to work together in recovering a casualty from the water. I felt very lucky to have been offered a seat onboard to help co-ordinate the exercise.

The Lifeboat crew were great. All local folk, several from the marine industry, extremely tough and resilient, and totally devoted to saving lives at sea. We assembled in the upstairs crew-room at Salcombe. Adam, the coxswain went through a quick briefing on what the exercise was designed to achieve. The initial casualty recoveries were intended to be easy but we had a few tricks up our sleeves for the later ones!

Then everyone got kitted-up and out we went to the boats, seven to the orange all-weather boat and three to the inshore RIB, (which is actually faster under the right conditions). Once onboard, we strapped in and donned headsets. The engines rumbled into life. Screens came alive. (The cabin is stuffed with technology). Andy the mechanic logged in with Falmouth Coastguard on VHF Channel 0. Two of the guys slipped the mooring and we were off, past the expensive but un-occupied holiday homes.

Visibility in Salcombe Harbour was moderate at best. While bouncing across the Bar, it became clear this would be an interesting trip, to say the least! I don't really suffer from sea-sickness but had taken a tablet nonetheless. Further out, although the sea state was forecast as 'moderate' we were soon in waves of height around two metres. Wind was Force 5 and the atmosphere turned to something between driving mist and drizzle. In the circumstances, the crew decided they couldn't risk using 'Dead Fred' (their dummy casualty) as he was too valuable to lose. So we tied a large



Salcombe all-weather and inshore lifeboats at sea

fender to the danbuoy that David, one of our trainers, had lent us.

We dropped this off about half a mile SW of Prawle Point and it was the task of the inshore boat to recover it, receiving directions from watch-keepers at the Lookout on VHF Channel 65. The target was hard to spot in the waves and murk but they managed the recovery without too much difficulty.

Then it was our turn, on the

larger boat. Again, the 'casualty' was recovered. The third run though, was a 'curve ball'. The inshore lifeboat crew had been briefed to introduce a deliberate 30-degree error in their heading. But the watch-keepers up at the Lookout quickly compensated and directed the boat back on track. The final run involved two targets and both boats at once. Although the workload was high, both were ultimately recovered.

So that was the end of a successful exercise lasting about an hour and a half. Just as well, because the swell was getting very uncomfortable, especially for the inshore boat. Then it was simply a case of 'point and squirt' back to Salcombe at about 25 knots! The all-weather boat was moored-up, the inshore one hauled up the ramp and both were given a good wash to remove salt. Back in the crew-room afterwards over a welcome cup of tea, everyone agreed the exercise had been a success and a valuable contribution to the joint RNLI/NCI search and rescue capability locally. As a rather sobering thought, we all agreed that it would have been very difficult to spot a real person in the water under the conditions of the day.

But... what if we did manage to save a life between us? What would that person then go on to achieve, that they would not otherwise have done? How many other lives would we have touched among their family and friends? Those are the thoughts that get you out of bed at 0630 on a miserable Sunday morning!

Graham Richardson, NCI Training Officer

NCI PRAWLE POINT: INCIDENTS TO DATE



12.12.14 Yacht *Proteus* was heard calling Salcombe Harbour Office on Ch 16. The sea was rough and there was a moderate swell with a NW wind Force 5. We telephoned the Harbour Office to relay the message. Falmouth Coastguard were calling *Proteus* but without answer. The vessel had been motoring up and down between Sharpitor and Bar Lodge waiting for calmer conditions to cross the Bar into the outer harbour. The Coastguard requested we monitored the vessel's progress and she eventually crossed the Bar safely at 14:30.

15.12.14 We sighted Commercial Vessel *China Pride* heading west seven miles off Prawle Point. The vessel was only showing a large radar blip, no AIS ID although her name was clearly visible. We telephoned the Falmouth Coastguard who thanked us for our report.

16.12.14 Six dolphins were sighted on a heading of 240°T, details were reported to Brixham Sea Watch.



*Please help us to maintain this valuable service by making a donation
and becoming a supporter of NCI Prawle Point or becoming a watchkeeper.*

Please contact: The Secretary, PO Box 58, Kingsbridge TQ7 2QZ

Station tel. no. 01548 511259 www.nci-prawlepoint.org Cheques to NCI Prawle Point