

PORT CHATTER

MARINE RESCUE NSW
PORT STEPHENS UNIT

JUNE 2016



COMMEMORATIVE EDITION



UNIT COMMANDER WELCOME



Welcome to this special edition of our newsletter Port Chatter, which we have produced to mark the occasion of the launch and commissioning of our new rescue vessel *Port Stephens 31 John Thompson*.

I hope you will find this publication interesting and informative and that you will keep it as a memento of this important milestone in the history of Marine Rescue Port Stephens.



We have also included some pictorial content to showcase the beautiful location we are privileged to occupy at Nelson Head.

If you have not already visited us, I hope these photographs in particular will entice you to do so. You will be most welcome.

You can come and see what we do in the radio room; you can visit our cottage museum and our gift shop; and you can enjoy a coffee and light refreshments at the



Within these pages you will find information about –

- our new vessel and rest of our fleet;
- our radio room and boat training programs;
- the Marine Rescue NSW Fleet Modernisation Program, of which *Port Stephens 31* is a part;
- the Late John Thompson ESM, after whom the vessel is named;
- how to join our Unit, both radio and boats streams;
- the Marine Rescue NSW Radio Club service; and
- our history at Port Stephens, initially as a RVCP Division and now as a Marine Rescue NSW Unit.

Inner Light Tea Rooms, with one of the best views in Port Stephens. You can even hold your wedding ceremony or other special event in our beautiful grounds.

We are very proud of what we do and the unique location we are privileged to occupy at Nelson Head.

We are also proud of our history as part of the Port Stephens community and the 24/7 service we provide to our boating community to help ensure their safe return whenever they go out on the water.

Thank you for your support.

Colin Cahill

MESSAGE FROM OUR PATRONS

THE HON. BOB BALDWIN



I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Marine Rescue Port Stephens on the acquisition of their new rescue vessel *Port Stephens 31 - John Thompson*.

In naming the vessel after John Thompson, it recognises the

outstanding contribution made by just one of the many dedicated people who willingly volunteer their time and at times risk their own lives, to keeping the waters of Port Stephens safe for the boating community.

Marine Rescue Port Stephens has built an enviable reputation over many years as a leading Unit in the Marine Rescue NSW organisation. In addition their volunteers provide an outstanding service to our community through their radio room operations, Gift Shop and maintaining the magnificent jewel of Port Stephens, the Inner Light Cottage and Museum.

The new vessel will allow their brave boat crews to continue their commitment to safety of life at sea.

My sincere congratulations to Unit Commander Colin Cahill and his team of very dedicated volunteers for their efforts and may your new rescue vessel enjoy a long and distinguished career.

The Hon. Bob Baldwin

THE HON. KATE WASHINGTON



It was terrific to welcome Marine Rescue Port Stephens' new rescue boat, PS-31 'John Thompson', as it arrived at its home port at Nelson Bay. As the frequency and severity of severe weather events increases it's vital to ensure that Marine Rescue volunteers have the resources that they need to carry out their life-saving activities. This new vessel will deliver our hardworking and dedicated marine rescue

volunteers the enhanced rescue capability they need. As we welcome the new vessel, I also acknowledge, and pay my respects to, the many years of service given by the outgoing life boat, *Port Stephens 40 Danial Thain*.

The past 18 months has seen an unprecedented level of activity for our Marine Rescue volunteers who have displayed their courage and bravery in the face of extreme conditions on numerous occasions. I thank all past and current Marine Rescue volunteers for their commitment to saving lives on our waterways. I am honoured to be the Patron of this important organisation and I look forward to doing all that I can to support the activities of Marine Rescue Port Stephens in the years to come.

The Hon. Kate Washington



FLEET MODERNISATION

MARINE RESCUE NSW \$15M FLEET INVESTMENT BOOSTS VOLUNTEER SAFETY

Over the past seven years, Marine Rescue NSW has invested more than \$15 million in a dedicated program to provide our volunteers with safe, modern and professional rescue vessels for their vital work to save lives on the water.

The comprehensive Fleet Modernisation Program has delivered an impressive 66 new and fully refurbished state-of-the-art vessels to MRNSW units throughout the State to help ensure the safety of their volunteer crews and the members of the boating community whom they assist.

Port Stephens 31 John Thompson, an \$840,000 Steber 38 fitted with a flybridge, is the newest vessel delivered

under the program, with new boats also to be delivered to the Marine Rescue Port Macquarie, Terrigal, Batemans Bay and Jervis Bay units in coming weeks.

Commissioner Stacey Tannos said the organisation's dominant investment in the modernisation program had delivered major safety benefits for the organisation's members.

"It was clear from the earliest days of the new organisation that the most pressing need faced by our units was for new vessels. Many were operating on ageing boats that were no longer suitable for rescue duties," he said.

"We made the Fleet Modernisation Program our highest investment priority to provide our crews with purpose-designed and built rescue vessels that would provide them with safe, stable operating platforms.

"The safety of our members must always come first, which is why we have concentrated our efforts on ensuring our volunteers are professionally equipped and trained to meet the challenges of working in an environment that can be challenging, changeable and sometimes dangerous.

"Our volunteers are committed to their mission to save lives, often putting their own personal safety at risk to rescue people they don't know who have found themselves in peril in rough seas and sometimes appalling weather".



"In the seven years since the establishment of MRNSW on July 1, 2009, the dramatic upgrading of the fleet has been the most visible sign of our progress and growth as a modern, professionally equipped rescue service.

"These flexible, highly manoeuvrable vessels have bolstered rescue capability on some of the State's busiest waterways and strengthened our strategic safety net of rescue vessels covering the coastline and inland on the Alpine Lakes and the Murray River."

(Continued on page 5)

FLEET MODERNISATION ...

(Continued from page 4)

Commissioner Tannos thanked the State Government and boating community for their ongoing support for the work of Marine Rescue NSW.

"This fleet modernisation would not have been possible without the support of the Government, which provides us with an annual grant, and the members of the boating community, who contribute to our operations through a



levy on their recreational boat registrations and licences," he said.

Marine Rescue NSW vessels are fitted with a comprehensive array of the latest navigation, search and rescue and communications technology such as radar, thermal imaging cameras and chart plotters, along with first aid equipment, including automated electronic defibrillators and oxygen kits.

The preferred Marine Rescue NSW marine electronics supplier is Raymarine, ensuring members are working with up-to-the-minute equipment to help guide their search operations.

The 66 vessels delivered to date include nine Rescue Water Craft (jet skis), which provide a rapid, flexible response resource ideally suited for work on coastal bars and upstream in shallower waters that cannot be accessed by rescue vessels.

The Rescue Water Craft are a great addition to units' capability, ensuring a first responder can be quickly on the scene of an emergency to begin providing urgent assistance. Rescue Water Craft operators are kitted out with specialised Personal Protective Equipment.

The modernisation program also has provided for increased standardisation of the fleet, allowing greater

transportability of volunteer skills, training and operations.

Crew members are able to more easily move between units, working on vessels that have standard design features, layout and equipment.

The organisation's major boat builders are Steber International, based at Taree, Yamba Welding and Engineering, which builds Naiads and Ocean Cylinders, and Sailfish Catamarans, based at Alstonville.

Commissioner Tannos said Marine Rescue NSW was committed to supporting the NSW boat building industry.

"We enjoy working with our boat builders, who are all based in regional NSW, giving us easier access during the construction phase and sea trials and for follow-up maintenance programs," he said.

"Just as importantly, this approach means we are helping provide welcome jobs in small regional centres such as Taree, Yamba and Alstonville".

"We are very proud of our record of supporting a skilled workforce in our State's regional boat building industry, as well as in the associated



service industries that support the boat builders."

Commissioner Tannos said *Port Stephens 31* would provide local and visiting boaters with a valuable rescue asset for years to come.

"The members of Marine Rescue Port Stephens are dedicated to serving their community and this new vessel will ensure that they can continue to assist and protect their boating community safely and effectively," he said.

"I know the unit has been looking forward to the delivery of this modern new vessel and I am sure it will serve the members and the boaters enjoying the region's spectacular waterways well."

Information provided by Marine Rescue NSW.

THE BUILDING OF PORT STEPHENS 31 THE *JOHN THOMPSON*

From This



design.

Members from Marine Rescue Port Macquarie, who are having the same class of rescue craft built by Steber attended the first meeting to accept the Design Build List. A subsequent visit was made to confirm the variations that each unit had made.

Two crews were formed to bring the *John Thompson* down to Port Stephens under the watchful eye of Alan Steber. After receiving training from Marine Rescue Foster-Tuncurry on their 'Steber 38' (without flybridge) the first crew brought the craft from Taree to Foster and the second crew brought her quietly into the Soldiers Point

To This



Marina on Friday ahead of the weekend storm. The sail-past then took place on Saturday 4 June.

Ken Johnson

It is quite some time since Marine Rescue Port Stephens put together an initial steering committee, including the likes of Malcolm Miliken and Mike Pierpoint. Their job was to look at a replacement for our rescue vessel Danial Thain and now, after many changes of the team and in consultation with Marine Rescue NSW Headquarters, we have **Port Stephens 31 JOHN THOMPSON**.

On our first visit to the Steber factory in Taree the hull lay-up had commenced. Alan Steber explained the 'Build' process and showed the team the various areas of the factory where the components would be assembled before being incorporated into the hull of 'Boat No 38 -312' as it was known on the factory floor.

Various members of the team made numerous visits to Steber to watch the progress of *Port Stephens 31* and to propose a few changes to the original



THE BUILDING OF PORT STEPHENS 31 THE *JOHN THOMPSON*....



Alan Steber & Jody Hollows official handover



The steering committee for PORT STEPHENS 31 John Thompson



MARINE RESCUE PORT STEPHENS FIRST FEMALE COXSWAIN

BOAT GIRL



Sue Freeman aboard Port Stephens 31

This year marks ten years since I first joined the boat crew. When I joined the organisation, I thought that just getting my head around the radio room was challenge enough! But watching the boat go out on jobs, I began to think, "Could I do that?" I did hesitate as I had no prior boating experience, despite spending most of my life near the water. Two of my classmates from the early days were on the



With Unit Commander Colin Cahill and Deputy Unit Commander Lee Uebergang

boat, so I knew that I would know someone. I thought about it and then on the day of the opening of the Command Centre, I asked some of the crew if I could join. They said that I would be welcome, so the following Saturday, down to the boat I went.

I was made welcome, and as I was radio qualified, I did feel useful, because at the beginning I was rubbish at everything else. I kept getting my port and starboard mixed up, was hopeless at throwing a heaving line, and steering the boat by compass did my head in, that was until I finally realised the compass stayed steady and the boat moved!

Attending on a regular basis helped, so did Noel Corcoran picking me up every Saturday. But it took a good six months to get to know all the procedures needed to be a 'deckie'. For anyone looking to be crew, this is the longest process, as there is so much to learn and it is vital to get to know the rest of the crew, as teamwork is so important.

The day after the Pasha Bulker ran aground at Newcastle, we went down to the boat, not sure if we would be training. For me it was important to see if I could

handle these types of conditions. If I couldn't I would not be much use. With Rod Reeson on the bridge, we all took turns at taking DT out through the heads and back again. We had to be careful, and when coming back in the message was "keep her straight". We survived and from that day, I was committed.



Aboard Codi K with Noel Corcoran

In the early days having the OPSO and duty skipper

down the road, did mean that there could be a knock at the door in the middle of the night. "Are you coming?" often then stopping down the road to pick up Noel, my offsider.

Trips to Sydney for Australia Day and the start of the Sydney to Hobart in Danial Thain were highlights. The trip in the Codi K, for the Pope's visit, not so much!

I have learnt so much from the skippers and crew during my time, and this has given me the confidence to continue with my training. Skipper 1 training in the "T-boat" with Thommo getting upset if we hit the side of the jetty. Skipper 2 training on Codi K and Codi K II, and finally Skipper of the Danial Thain - something I aspired to but was not sure that I would get there.

It has been an honour to work with members of the crew, through all sorts of weather carrying out the wide variety of jobs that we do. Someone did ask me what I liked about being crew and I replied, "Well I do not if we are going out today, and if we do, I don't know where we are going, what boat it will be, and I don't know who with".

Sue Freeman

A SHORT HISTORY

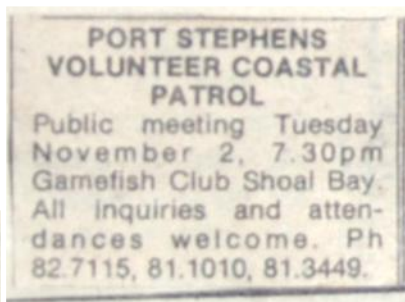
MARINE RESCUE PORT STEPHENS

The Port Stephens unit of Marine Rescue is the progeny of the Port Stephens Division of the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol (RVCP), a division that owes its existence to the efforts of John Thompson, who in 1982 was a member of the RVCP's Broken Bay division and had moved to Port Stephens. John himself was an active member of the surf lifesaving movement and had joined the RVCP after the Broken Bay rescue vessel came to his aid following a boating accident. He had been rescued after spending some terrifying moments in the water clinging to an upturned boat while supporting his young son.



John Thompson ESM.

In October 1982 after a BBQ with some other Broken Bay members, including Peter Dawson and Cec Lachlan, who had also moved to Port Stephens, a small advertisement was placed in the local newspaper asking other interested parties to meet at the Gamefish Club on 2 November. Prior to the meeting Kevin Clark, who was a well-known and respected identity amongst the



Mr Thompson (standing) and Mr Clark check over details for the new patrol.

local boating community, was asked to be the division's first unit commander. Kevin at first declined but after talking to Shirley Clark, John simply ignored Kevin's protestations. Shirley told Kevin he had been out voted and at the

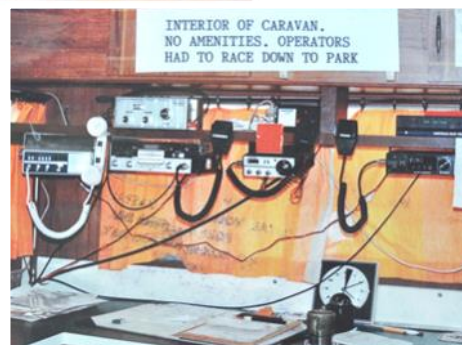
meeting John proclaimed Kevin the division's new Commander. It was a job that Kevin then took on with enthusiasm.

The first task was to find a place from which to operate. Tomaree headland and Little Beach were both considered but rejected. Kevin then approached Jerry Jones, the local Maritime Services officer operating from the old lighthouse cottage at Nelson Head. Without seeking official approval, Jerry agreed to the placing of a RVCP caravan in the cottage car park. Electricity was supplied



by an extension lead from the cottage. In a caravan borrowed from Medowie Engineering, radios supplied by Broken Bay and some funding

contributed by members of the inaugural committee, a radio base was set up. At the same time a radio course was run for the then twenty or so members. As a tribute to John and Kevin's efforts, the division commenced operating on 21 November 1982 only three weeks after the initial meeting. The radio base was opened by Arthur Wade MLA for Newcastle and the first official radio call was a congratulatory message from the Coast Guard at Lemon Tree Passage.



Initial coverage was weekends only, but eventually a radio was installed at Ray and Mary Penny's home and a 24hr service was provided. Operations were strengthened further when other members such as John Weir also installed radios in their homes. The initial rescues were undertaken in private boats with each boat registered for its individual capability. By February 1983 the division had thirty registered members and had six boats on call.

Raising funds was always an issue but thanks to the efforts and hard work of a few dedicated ladies the division survived those first few years. Market stalls, cake bake-offs and fashion parades were the order of the day as was selling raffle tickets both door to door and at shopping centres. A major fundraiser was raffling bottles of champagne to holidaymakers at caravan parks in the area. A bottle would be raffled, on the spot, every 20 tickets and sometimes the 20 tickets would be sold to a single caravan.

The division quickly outgrew the caravan, which didn't even have toilet facilities. It was apparent that a more permanent facility was required. If nature called, a radio operator would have to sign off, hand over to the Coast Guard, lock up and then use the facilities down the hill at Little Beach. After scouting around, a derelict army bunker in front of the cottage was seen as an ideal location for a more permanent base. At the time the bunker was damp and overgrown. There were a couple

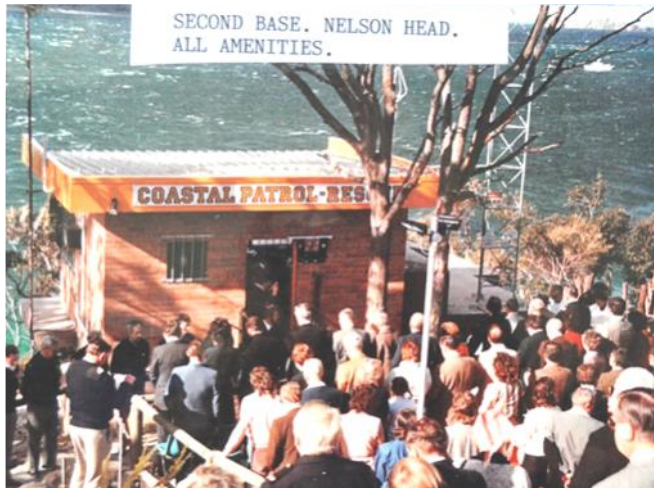
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A SHORT HISTORY

(Continued from page 9)

of white-anted sheds where the John Thompson Garden is now located.

Local Parliamentarian Arthur Wade was again extremely cooperative and helped navigate the patrol procedure through the local council and the state bureaucracy. Approval was obtained and with a team of members and local volunteers, the area was cleared, the unsafe



structures removed and the bunker was "repaired" (some might say totally rebuilt). The radio base was moved to the bunker in July 1984 and in August 1984 our founding Divisional Commander stood down in favour of Peter Dawson. At the time the Division still relied upon privately owned members' vessels to undertake rescues and it was not until 1985 that an 18ft aluminium runabout was obtained from the Sydney Division. This boat, named the *Scout*, was used often in conjunction with Peter Dawson's sea-going tug the *Koala*.

By this time Maritime had stopped using the cottage as an office, the building was derelict and run-down but was utilised by the Coastal

Patrol for training and meetings. Peter Dawson and Alan Hudson then began negotiations to have the trusteeship of Nelson Head awarded to the Coastal Patrol as its permanent home. This was quite a controversial issue which was vigorously opposed by the Port Stephens Council and a number of community organizations. Nonetheless in November 1985 the Division was given the custody of the area and a Trust was set up to manage and maintain the property. Only Coastal Patrol had representatives on this first trust.

Fund raising jazz concerts were held on a specially constructed platform that is now used for weddings and

the first Nelson Bay Carols by Candlelight was organised in December 1985. These took place on the lawn under an illuminated cross, attached to the main flagpole. The event became so popular that it had to be moved to Fly Point and until recent times remained a RVCP fund raising event.

In 1988 a Newcastle pilot boat the *Girralong* became surplus to government requirements and the Division was able to obtain possession, giving us our first dedicated ocean going rescue vessel. The *Girralong* was a fine



boat and is still regarded with nostalgia by many of the old hands. Peter Dawson retired in 1988 leaving the reins to Alan Hudson. Alan implemented a full 24 hr seven day service from the radio base as against the less formal operations from private homes. He also commenced negotiations for the construction of the larger radio base at the bunker complex. With the appointment of a new Divisional Commander, Reg Osborn, the idea of enlarging the bunker was abandoned and construction commenced on the new base in its current location. At the same time an initial grant was received for the restoration of the cottage. The new base commenced



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A SHORT HISTORY....

(Continued from page 10)



operations in 1993 Restoration of the cottage continued until 1999.

With thanks to a very generous donor, the RNLI rescue vessel *Spirit of Tayside* was purchased in 1999 and brought out as deck cargo on a P & O vessel. This boat, renamed *Danial Thain*, in honour of our benefactor's grandson, has been responsible for thousands of rescues and undoubtedly saved numerous lives. Time has now



daily maintenance and operation of our facilities. It is to everyone's credit that such a lovely setting can house a major search and rescue station and that we can continue in our main purpose of saving lives at sea.

Dr Paul Farnill

moved on. The *Danial Thain* has served us well, but just as with the passing of the *Girralong* and other vessels, many members now view the forthcoming retirement of the *Danial Thain* with both nostalgia and regret.

The Trusteeship of the Inner-light complex now rests with Marine Rescue NSW and the area with its radio base, tea rooms and cottage museum, has become a major tourist attraction. The comments of our visitors bestow enormous thanks to the legacy of our early members, as well as all of those volunteers who continue to contribute to the



RESCUE VESSEL CREW

MY LIFE AS RESCUE VESSEL CREW

When the editor of the illustrious Port Chatter asked me to write an article for this special edition focussed on my experiences as a crewman on board the Port Stephens Unit's rescue vessels, I was a little bemused. Sure enough, I've had some interesting experiences and met some interesting characters, but it's not the stuff of a Pulitzer Prize winning novel. A few days later however, as I was driving to work, surrounded in my metallic cocoon by a miscellany of people doing likewise, I came to a rather



startling realisation; so startling in fact that it could reasonably be considered an epiphany. You see, it suddenly dawned on me that my 'normal' wasn't, well, normal. I'd just spent the previous evening being tossed about inside a 32 tonne rescue vessel as we'd battled big seas and thunderstorms to reach a large cruising yacht – the Crystal Jane – haplessly adrift some nine miles southeast of Fingal Island with four souls on board. That job was a tough one; we got hammered on the way out by storms, and broke a towline on the way back in. I still remember the smile on the skipper's face when we shook hands having placed him on a mooring in Shoal Bay. He thanked me heartily and then told me he'd never seen worse seas in more than 15 years of sailing the world's oceans. To me it had been a bit rough, for sure; I had to brace my foot against the normally vertical pillar in the wheelhouse on several occasions to keep myself from falling out of the navigator's chair. But that bad? I'd heard stories of worse from some of the older crew, and I wasn't convinced I'd seen the worst Mother Nature could conjure. Was that it, I wondered? Is that why I did this? To witness first-hand the ferocity and splendour of a truly momentous sea? To test the limits of my fear?

I'd always been fascinated by the sea, by tales of shipwreck and heroic sea rescues. I'd gone out of my way to visit and photograph lighthouses – those lonely sentinels of the sea – wherever I'd been, and my bookshelf was full of the science and romance of the sea. Did I somehow hope to become part of all this by volunteering?

Was it the excitement, the camaraderie, the opportunity to get out on the water? I suppose it's a bit of all of these. Let me tell you my story and maybe you can decipher the

answer for yourself.

I first became active rescue vessel crew in 1999 when I joined the Port Stephens Division of the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol. I was 31 years old, the youngest crewman by nearly two decades. I'd visited the Coastal Patrol stand at a local fete, and scored myself an invite to check out the Division's recently acquired Arun-class rescue vessel, the 52-ft Danial Thain. I visited the vessel and that was it. This boat was special; a purpose-built, self-righting lifeboat designed to handle the very worst the North Sea could throw at her. She looked like a lifeboat should – purposeful, solid, unsinkable. She had served with the Royal National Lifeboat Institute at Broughty Ferry and would now ply some of the roughest waters the east coast has to offer. I decided then that I wanted to serve on her. So I joined.

Marine radio and boat licenses quickly followed. I did six months in the radio room before I took my next step onto the boat. I served on the Danial Thain for 18 months under the tutelage of men like Rod Reeson, Lloyd Cropper, and the late John Thompson, before my Air Force career intervened and took me to the UK in July 2001. During this 18 months, I'd done a few jobs on the Danial Thain, including one to Broughton Island in a rather large following sea. I'd had my taste of rescue vessel service and I was hooked.

I served on exchange with the Royal Air Force for two years as a NATO Master Controller coordinating the intercept and shadowing of Soviet long-range aircraft flying through the North Sea. I was based in Norwich, about an hour's drive from Cromer, home to that legendary lifeboat coxswain Sir Henry Blogg. I visited that lifeboat station of course, and a few others. I also spent some time sailing with a few mates in a 36-ft yacht around the south coast of England, and it didn't take them long to realise I had a fascination with rescue vessels as I cajoled them to sail past every rescue vessel in every port we visited!

I paid the penance for my overseas sojourn upon returning to Australia in mid-2003 with a posting to Canberra. I would spend five of the next six years in Canberra, before finally returning to Port Stephens in mid-2009 via a somewhat circuitous route which saw me dodging rockets in Afghanistan for five months.

Upon landing back in Port Stephens, my wife and I were faced with the momentous decision of where to buy a house. Her requirements were rational and normal, based as they were around our two young daughters' educational needs, her employment, and of course lifestyle. My requirements were somewhat simpler, even singular you might say; I just needed to live within 15 minutes of the Nelson Bay marina so I could rejoin the rescue vessel crew! Alas, I carried the day, helped in no small way by a pristine afternoon spent sitting on Shoal Bay Beach discussing our options over a glass of chilled wine whilst watching the last remnants of sunlight flicker on the Port's

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RESCUE VESSEL CREW....

(Continued from page 12)



iconic headlands.

It was only a matter of weeks then before I was back on the *Danial Thain*. I knew quite a few of the crew from my earlier service, but there were a bunch of new faces as well. Somehow I even managed to retain my original crew number, much to the consternation of a few of the more recent arrivals who couldn't quite get a handle on this new bloke. One bloke I didn't know but who subsequently had a profound impact on me was the Boat Training Officer at this time, Barry Schulz. Barry ran a tight training program and didn't suffer fools. He was brutally efficient, and I credit him with producing a generation of crew at Port Stephens who can tie a bowline single-handed behind their back whilst drinking a cup of tea in a four meter sea. He imbued a culture of professionalism, attention to detail, teamwork and safety among the boat crew which has served the unit so well ever since.

Over the course of the next five years, I trained hard and earned my stripes as a Navigator on the rescue vessel (thanks Ron!), racking up many hours of training and a long list of rescues and assists. I've spent five hours or so of almost every Saturday for the past seven years training on the boats – more than 1500 hours in total, or the equivalent of 42 weeks of full-time work!

And what do I have to show for all this? Some incredible memories, ranging from the euphoric to the terrifying, and everything in between. Let me give you a sampling.

The most terrifying moment is also quite recent; the very early hours of 7 January 2016, at precisely 39 minutes past midnight to be exact. *Danial Thain*, with a crew of seven, has been chasing the sleek racing yacht *M3 Mulberry Racing* up the coast for over four hours in horrendous seas of 10 meters or more. This is the culmination of a day of drama and tragedy, which claimed the life of one man and could so easily have claimed the lives of 12 more. *Danial* had finally closed to within half a mile of the *M3* as she drifted perilously close to the beach just south of Seal Rocks. The *Danial's* crew were all on deck making final

preparations for setting the tow and manning the searchlights which now painted a desperate picture of *M3* as she drifted inexorably towards the massive breakers pounding the beach. I was standing in the flybridge next to Ron, the skipper, and heard the noise first. A dull roar rising above the sound of the howling wind. I look to

starboard and see a wall of white water some 40 feet high literally meters from the boat and about to smash into us beam on. I choose the one word I have time to yell very carefully, thinking it may be my last. Ron sees the wave as it strikes the boat and then we're both under water as the boat rolls to about 130 degrees. That was the terrifying moment. The surreal moment came soon after, as I found myself calmly contemplating my options underwater. Should I separate from the boat and make for the beach, hoping to avoid the 32 tonne lifeboat



sharing the wave with me or do I wait to see if *Danial* really is self-righting? I'm still contemplating when the old girl comes back up.

A lighter moment then. Another night job in big seas. I'm manning the aft searchlight at the top of the stairs. Andrew's further forward, near the bridge. I look at him and he's waving hysterically in a backhanded sweeping motion, a motion I now know means 'Get out of the bloody way!' At the time however, I couldn't work out what his frantic gesticulations were trying to convey, so I dutifully turned around and continued to train the searchlight. Alas, seconds later I was enveloped in a shower of partially digested carrots, corn and whatever else Andrew had, until very recently, held in his stomach. He still hasn't stopped apologising. I, on the other hand, can't help but laugh when I recall his efforts to warn me off and my failure to heed said warnings.

A moment of great relief. Thursday, 24 January 2014. 'Otama', a large steel ketch is on the beach at Broughton Island, with four souls on board. She's in a difficult spot,

(Continued on page 14)

RESCUE VESSEL CREW....

(Continued from page 13)

tucked in on North Beach behind the reef. She's hard over on her starboard side, and the sand's got a good hold on her keel. We can't approach her bow due to the rocks and reef, so we opt for a nose tow from her stern. The Danial noses in and we try desperately to get a line to her stern. As this is happening, Danial gets turned by the action of wind and waves and suddenly heels over markedly to starboard as she hits the bottom. With consummate skill, Ron cajoles her off the sand and into deeper water where engineering checks show no obvious damage. Moment of relief number one. We go in for another attempt and get a nose tow set. We need the power of a forward tow however to break the beach's hold on the keel, and so we convert the nose tow to a stern tow. The tow line hisses and creaks under the strain as the power comes on and the deckies wisely make themselves scarce. It's not looking promising when, all of a sudden the sand relinquishes its grip and 'Otama' rises gracefully to her full height. Then she topples over onto her port side like a falling tree, her masts kissing the water. The crew on Danial watch in disbelief and wonder if she's going to come back up.

After what seems like an eternity, she does indeed come back up, and stays up. Moment of relief number two.

Finally, a moment of bemusement. It's a foul night in April 2015. A large catamaran – Reef Dragon – is seeking shelter from the rampaging winds of a vicious East Coast Low in the normally serene Fame Cove but is driven mooring and all onto rocks by 15 foot waves and cyclonic winds in excess of 78 knots. The two men on board declare a MAYDAY and the Danial Thain with a crew of eight is soon headed their way. It takes the Danial an hour to reach the scene of carnage; she can make barely five knots in the very short, steep 3-4 metre swell, and it is dark as she rounds the rocky corner into the cove. Her searchlights quickly illuminate the scene of Reef Dragon's cruel demise. She is coming apart under a relentless onslaught of wind and waves, and the two men abandon ship and find themselves on a rocky finger of land. The rescue vessel crew have swung into action and launched the small inflatable Y-boat which Danial carries behind the flybridge on the upper deck. Laurie and Barney do an amazing job in atrocious conditions to manoeuvre the Y-boat up a small creek and recover two very wet but relieved survivors. The trip back to the rescue vessel is just as sporting as the outward leg, but they soon arrive back



alongside. Throughout this whole iteration, I have remained at the nav station, monitoring our position and calling for subtle and sometimes not so subtle course adjustments to keep the DT off those same rocks that have claimed the cat. The crew are all immersed in recovering the Y-boat and I'm the only one in the main cabin, at the nav station. I hear a faint voice over the howling wind and look up to see two bedraggled sailors standing in the rain at the rear door. One of them looks at me with a pained look on his face and says something again, but I still can't make it out. I leave the nav station and approach them. It's only when I get within two feet that I finally hear what it is he's been asking: 'Please, may we come inside?' I look at them incredulously, thinking to myself 'there's a time and place for such perfect manners', before realising that they're still waiting for an answer. I usher them in and race to get them warm blankets, smiling in bemusement as I wonder at what had just transpired.

That's just a sample of my experiences on the rescue vessel. Admittedly, they're some of the more extreme examples. I have plenty of memories of heading out in calm seas on beautiful summer days to effect much less dramatic rescues for sure, but they're just not, well, that dramatic. Unless of course it's you who's being rescued. And therein lies the answer as to why I do this rescue vessel thing. The conditions vary on every job – dark, cold and stormy, not a puff of wind through to hurricane force, barely a ripple to waves four stories high, but the really tough jobs are thankfully quite rare. The one constant throughout every job is however the gratitude; not a polite, spoken gratitude but the sort of gratitude you see in someone's eyes or feel in their handshake. It's the heartfelt gratitude I experienced recently from Sarah, Michael and Dennis, three sailors from three different yachts who know firsthand the conditions we confronted in January of this year. I had the pleasure of meeting two of them at a special luncheon put on by the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia and the Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club in Sydney recently. They had their own stories of terror and tragedy from the 6 and 7 of January, but their gratitude, expressed in tears and heartfelt words, was a poignant reminder to me of why it is I leave the warmth of my bed at 2am on a moonless and stormy night to head out in five metre seas in search of some hapless soul in distress....

because I am a volunteer rescue vessel crew member
Richard Pizzuto

COMMODORE JOHN THOMPSON ESM

COMMODORE JOHN THOMPSON ESM

There has been a lot written about our late founding member John Thompson with the work and dedication that

he put into the Unit of Port Stephens over many years. I would therefore like to share a little more of this remarkable man's life and his Maritime history with you all.

John Thompson, (whom I will now refer to as JT) joined the *Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol* Sydney in

1968 and was stationed at the Spit in Mosman. He also served at Broken Bay. Because of his boating background he rose through the ranks and became Divisional Commander of Broken Bay and from here he soon climbed the rank structure and became Captain North Officer Commanding, then First Officer Commanding and Deputy Chairman of the Patrol Council.

JT had a very good background in the Maritime Industry before joining the Coastal Patrol. He was a qualified Marine Engineer and had built many aluminium and steel boats. In his spare time, if there was ever any, he would be found down at the water's edge assisting some unfortunate boating friend to repair their vessel.

JT had been involved in the Surf Life Saving Movement for many years, so it was no real surprise that he was selected by Judge Sir Adrian Curlewis (Surf Life Saving Administrator for Australia) to travel to the UK to train Her Majesty's Coastguard in the use of Jet Boats.

One of John's colleagues and a boating friend asked if he would go back to the UK and assist in ferrying a 100ft trawler out to Australia. JT jumped at the chance. However I believe that work commitments would not allow him to do the full sea voyage, so JT had to be content with being the Navigator/Coxswain on the last 400 miles of the journey.

JT was an excellent Skipper and Navigator, he held a



Commodore John Thompson ESM



Sir Adrian Curlewis



MV Krait

Commercial Master 4 Ticket and was also a qualified Twin Engine Instrument Rating, Light Aircraft Private Pilot. He was one of the very few Coastal Patrol members who was a qualified Master and he was Carer for the well known World War II vessel *MV Krait*, when she was in the care of the Coastal Patrol. He was also a part time lecturer at TAFE Colleges in Sydney, teaching Maritime Studies as well as at other RVCP units. John went on to become Training Officer, Rescue Boat Master, Lecturer and you name it - JT was involved. He was also a NSW Vessel Inspector for the Coastal Patrol and Examiner of Skippers for Rescue crews. He was always on call in his administration role in Sydney and he continued to serve on committees while being operational at Port Stephens.

JT's time with the RVCP, and later Marine Rescue NSW, was his whole life - training members in seamanship, navigation and engineering. He was also promoting safe boating to all, not just his students. He would involve the boating public in safe boating, at every chance he could.

Many deep sea/off shore rescues were done with John as Duty Master and me as his Engineer. We were recommended a few times (that I can remember) for Citation awards for rescues performed in dangerous off shore conditions. I must say that we were all very pleased to have had such an experienced skipper as John Thompson, who brought us back to Port, often a bit bruised



The Giralong

(Continued on page 16)

COMMODORE JOHN THOMPSON ESM

(Continued from page 15)

and sore, but all still operational.

In 1999, it was quite obvious that our 66ft ocean going vessel *Girralong* was in need of replacement. At this time the RNLI in the UK had advised HQ IN Sydney that they were updating their fleet and asked would we be interested in purchasing an Arun Class Lifeboat? A very generous local supporter of the Port Stephens Unit offered to fund a round trip for two members to go the UK to inspect and train on the vessel. JT was the obvious choice and he was



PS 40 Danial Thain

joined by Rod Reeson. With his engineering ability, as well as his boat building expertise and maritime experience, the decision to purchase the vessel was up to him and Rod. Needless to say, off to Dundee in Scotland, went two very excited volunteers - visiting the Broughty Ferry Life Boat, *Spirit of Tayside*, in the North Sea.

Some very extensive training and familiarisation was done by JT and Rod.

The vessel was renamed the *Danial Thain* and became John's life when she arrived in Australia. Extensive training programs were set up by JT to bring all crew up to speed with the operational and functional abilities of this fine vessel.

Away from Coastal Patrol/Marine Rescue duties, you would at times find JT enjoying one of his hobbies, but he was always at the ready to pilot/ferry a friend's big game fishing cruiser up to the Great Barrier Reef. On one trip, I went with him. It was anything but an enjoyable coastal transfer cruise though - *he turned the whole trip into an educational training exercise!!*

What else could one expect from the person who had devoted over four decades of his life to training in Maritime disciplines and going to the aid of people in distress in all types of seas and conditions.

JT was awarded the **Silver Albatross** for courage by the RVCP and he was also a recipient of the

Emergency Services Medal for his many years of dedicated service to the Maritime Rescue Services. He was also a recipient of the **Centenary Medal** along with the **National Medal with three Clasps**. In 1994, he was made a **Life Member of the RVCP**.

John Thompson was very respected by the NSW Water Police, MSB and other Volunteer organisations along the coast. He mixed with all Captains of Industry and Governments. However his most memorable meeting was with HRH Prince Charles when he visited Sydney on January 26 1995. Prince Charles was ferried around Sydney Harbour on the Port Stephen's Rescue Vessel *Girralong*, with JT never leaving his side.

Knowing John Thompson and serving with him for 30 years I could go on and on - and still only touch the surface in describing a remarkable, dedicated and caring Officer and Gentleman. I am sure this description would be recognised by members past and present as well as by many in the boating public

John Thompson ESM - 1932 - 2012

Harold Gibson



SO YOU WANT TO JOIN MARINE RESCUE PORT STEPHENS

Marine Rescue Port Stephens is your local volunteer marine safety organisation made up of over 200 dedicated people from all walks of life.



As our primary role is safety of life at sea, both inside the port and out in open waters, Marine Rescue Port Stephens provides our volunteers with full training including First Aid, boat licence courses, Marine Radio (LROCP) courses, Navigation and many other interesting and informative courses.

If you are interested in joining our organisation, you can make an initial enquiry on (02) 4981 3585, you can leave a completed Expression of Interest form at Nelson Head Radio Base or you can e-mail to

membership.portstephens@marinerescuensw.com.au

You will be invited to an information session with our membership team who will brief you on our organisation and our expectations for membership.

Our Unit has a number of opportunities for you to become involved in Marine Rescue. You can:

- Train to become a marine radio operator in our radio room
- Join our fundraising group working in our Gift Shop
- Become a Cottage Guide and learn more about our local history by volunteering in the historic Inner Light cottage and museum
- Train as crew for our rescue vessels.

Like all volunteer organisation, we also need people to help in support roles doing administration work and carrying out grounds and building maintenance. We have many opportunities for you to become involved.

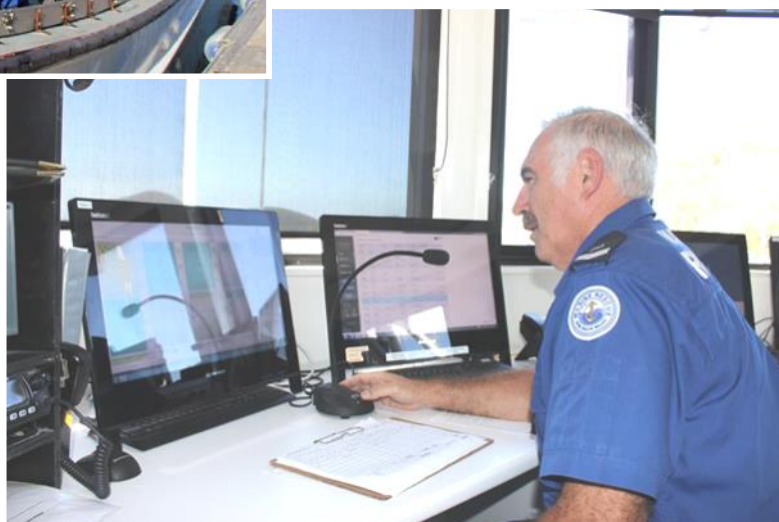
After meeting with our Membership Team, we will ask you to complete some membership forms - including a Police

security check. You will then be accepted as a probationary member for a minimum of six months. During this time, you will be able to commence training and attend courses. And remember, there is no cost to join Marine Rescue Port Stephens.

On successful completion of your probationary period, you will be accepted into Marine Rescue NSW as a member of the Port Stephens Unit and will be issued with a Marine Rescue uniform.

You can reasonably expect to become a productive team member very quickly and generally speaking reach Marine Radio Operator or Marine Rescue Crew level in six to nine months.

During your training period, you can self-roster and volunteer as often as you wish. Later on, you will be formally rostered for



Radio Room Shifts based on your preference for which days suit you and how many Radio Room shifts you wish to complete per month

Rescue Boat Crew training happens every Saturday morning with no formal rostering system. In the event of an incident requiring our rescue vessel to attend, you may be called out. Because of this requirement, Rescue Boat crew must be able to reach the Marine Rescue dock within 20 minutes.

Marine Rescue is not all work. We have an active social committee organising social activities such as car rallies, trivia nights and dinner nights. Just a few of the events.

So again, if you are interested in joining our organisation, you can make an initial enquiry on (02) 4981 3585, by leaving a completed Expression of Interest form at Nelson Head Radio Base or by e-mail to:

membership.portstephens@marinerescuensw.com.au

Membership Team

MARINE RADIO SERVICE (MRS)

The Marine Radio Service (MRS) is a service provided by Marine Rescue NSW. This service at Port Stephens allows the boating public to become a member for a small annual fee of \$25 for one year or \$60 for three years. Information provided by the member is stored on the Marine Rescue New South Wales (MRNSW) database.

The member is provided with their own MRS number which they quote when logging on. This allows for a quick and easy log on process when going boating. As an added benefit the member can log on with other units throughout NSW. Only five simple questions are asked at log on:

- Where did you launch from
- Where are you going,
- How many on board,
- When will you be back,
- And confirm the mobile on board.

Marine Rescue NSW volunteers monitor vessels that are logged on to the Seahawk system. If the skipper of a

vessel has not called by the agreed time then contact is initiated by the radio operator to ensure that all is well and to ask if the member would like to extend their log off time.

For example if a member decides to stay overnight somewhere like Broughton Island then they have the confidence that the operators in the Communications Centre know where they are and their intentions.

While joining MRS is voluntary the public have the added confidence that should something go wrong then there is the trained personnel who can deal with the situation quickly.

If you would like to join the MRS service contact Marine Rescue Port Stephens on: 4981 3585 or visit our website for an application form.

www.marinerescueportstephens.com.au/join-radio-club

Graeme Abberton



MARINE RESCUE NSW PORT STEPHENS RESCUE VESSELS CURRENTLY IN SERVICE

The unit currently has three rescue vessels, but will revert to its normal two when PS40 Danial Thain is retired from service. All are purpose built, specialised vessels, crewed by motivated and trained volunteers who can be called upon at anytime, day or night, to head to the assistance of those who call.

A response time of 20 mins or less is estimated from alert to heading to sea. Our vessels boast a comprehensive inventory of the latest navigation, communication, safety and rescue technologies on board.

PORT STEPHENS RESCUE VESSEL *PORT STEPHENS 31*

JOHN THOMPSON



Specifications

Make / Model:	Steber International 38' - Category 3 SAR Vessel
Length:	11.46m (38ft)
Beam:	3.84m (12.6ft)
Displacement:	11.6 tonne
Draft:	1m
Fuel:	1350L
Engines:	Twin 420hp Yanmar diesel
Top Speed:	30kn
Crew:	Operational - normally 4
VHF:	Sailor 6222
Radar:	Raymarine RD418HD 4 KW
MFD's (Multifunction Display):	ES125-12" x 3, ES9-9" x 1
AIS:	Raymarine AIS950
RDF:	Taiyo
27Mhz:	GME GX400B
DCN:	Tait TM9300

Rescue Vessel *Port Stephens 31 John Thompson* was built by Steber International, Taree, NSW and completed in May 2016. Her single hull is made of glass-reinforced plastic.

Port Stephens 31 is fitted with state-of-the-art radar, direction finding and navigation equipment as well as forward looking infra red search equipment.

John Thompson has been prepared to Marine Rescue NSW specifications with minor customisation at the request of Port Stephens Unit and is capable of covering Port Stephens and anywhere along the coast for example Broughton Island, Seal Rocks and 30nm out to sea or further if tasked by MACSAR.

PORT STEPHENS RESCUE VESSEL *PORT STEPHENS 40*
DANIAL THAIN



SPECIFICATIONS:

Length:	17.1m (52ft)
Beam:	5.6m (17ft)
Displacement:	32 tons
Draft:	Aft 1.8m; Fwd 1.1m
Fuel:	Diesel 2200 litre (500 gallons) + 590 litres (131 gallons) reserve
Engines:	2 x D343 Caterpillar 460hp
Range:	Approx 250 nm at 10 knots - 20 hours
Top Speed:	14 knots
Crew:	Operational - normally 6/7

Rescue Vessel *Port Stephens 40 Danial Thain* was designed in 1971 by A. McLachlan of Glasgow for the Royal National Lifeboat Institute (RNLI) in the United Kingdom. She was built as 52-09 in 1978 with a glass reinforced plastic hull and fibreglass house (ARUN Class).

Originally named the '*Spirit of Tayside*' she spent most of her operational career with the RNLI base at Broughty Ferry in Scotland. She was purchased in 1999 by the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol, as a result of a very generous anonymous donation, to be permanently stationed in Port Stephens. All Aruns are self-righting and are considered one of the safest ocean going rescue vessels available.

PORT STEPHENS RESCUE VESSEL *PORT STEPHENS 30*
CODI-K II



Specifications:

Make / Model:	Gemini WR-850
Type:	Rigid-Hull Inflatable (RHIB)
Length:	8.5m
Beam:	2.8m
Engines: -	2 x Mercury Verado four-stroke Outboards 200hp each (150kW)
Fuel Capacity:	2 x 200 litre tanks
Fuel Consumption:	Cruising speed - 50 litres / hour
Displacement:	3.2 tonnes
Survey:	2C
Crew:	4 operational
Speed:	Top speed around 40 knots. Cruising speed 25 to 30 knots.

Rescue Vessel Port Stephens 30 Codi-K II was manufactured in South Africa, prepared by Britton Marine of Taren Point NSW, and completed in February 2012. Her single hull is made of glass-reinforced plastic with alloy longitudinal keel reinforcement and her cabin is glass-reinforced plastic. She boasts among her electronic equipment a Raymarine Radar/Plotter, Furuno AIS Class-A and FLIR Thermal Night Vision System.

Codi-K II has been prepared to Port Stephens Unit specifications in consultation with Marine Rescue NSW, and is capable of covering all of the areas of Port Stephens; ie, the Myall River system, Karuah River, and the other shallow areas of our waterways, as well as outside waters as required.



We would like to thank our regular Sponsors

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 Kunara Charters
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Novus Autoglass Shop
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 Port Stephens Medical Centre, Keel St
 Rock Lobster Seafood – d'Albora Marinas
 Salamander Bait & Tackle (at BP)
 Salamander Centre Pharmacy
 Shoal Bay Pharmacy
 The Cartridge Family
 Vince's Salamander Bay Barber Shop
 Winning Holidays, Nelson & Shoal Bay

MARINE RESCUE NSW – PORT STEPHENS UNIT

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