

PORT CHATTER

MARINE RESCUE NSW
PORT STEPHENS UNIT

10 FEBRUARY 2017

"Volunteers doing our jobs professionally"





MARINE RESCUE NSW – PORT STEPHENS UNIT

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OUR GOAL

To be the most effective Marine Rescue Unit in NSW

OUR PRIMARY FOCUS

Saving lives at sea on open and closed waters in and around Port Stephens



Soldiers

POINT BOWLING CLUB

Phone: 02 4982 7173

W: soldierspointbc.com.au

118 Soldiers Point Road, Soldiers Point NSW 2317

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A brand new development open to over 55s retirees, offering residents the chance to live in the heart of this scenic suburb.

Greenside
PORT STEPHENS

**LAURIE NOLAN RECIPIENT OF
THE INAUGURAL MEDAL FOR VALOUR FOR
MARINE RESCUE NSW**



On behalf of all the recipients of today's awards, I would like to thank Marine Rescue NSW for recognising us for our contribution to the events that happened on 6/7 January 2016.

In particular, thank you for nominating and selecting me for this special award. It is a great honour, and it came as a complete surprise to be singled out from all those who were involved on that momentous day.

The weather was horrendous on that day, one of the worst storms to ever hit the coastal waters off Port Stephens. Its hard to describe to you the conditions that we all faced – certainly by far the worst I have ever experienced, with five to six metre seas, and winds up to 50 knots - the boat being tossed around like a cork, and in our case at night, in absolute darkness without moon or stars or any land-based reference points. Never knowing when the next wave would hit, or which way the wind would blow us.

This award ceremony acknowledges the skill, dedication and training of all those involved. I humbly and very proudly accept this medal, not just for myself, but for all the volunteers of Marine Rescue Port Stephens, and in particular I accept it on behalf of the 21 volunteers who put their asses on the line that day, all of whom demonstrated the very best that we have to offer. In accepting this award, I would like to pay tribute to the following.

Firstly, to all previous recipients of Marine Rescue NSW courage awards, many of whom are also from Marine

Rescue Port Stephens – for the July 2002 *Trade Winds* operation, the September 2002 *Excalibur* operation, and the April 2015 *Reef Dragon* operation, five of whom are serial offenders and here again today.

I pay tribute also to the six Watchkeepers and Radio Operators who handled the communications that day, all of whom displayed a calmness and professionalism that came through in their radio calls, and instilled in us a level of confidence that we would get the job done even in those wild conditions.

Special tribute to the eight crew of *Danial Thain's* first two sorties that day, who faced deteriorating conditions and a variety of challenging scenarios that tested their skills and experience to the utmost. I think it's incredibly brave the way they come back to the berth after the first hours of exhausting battering in those seas and winds, and then turned around and went straight back into it, already knowing what was in store.

And in particular, I pay tribute to my six crewmates on *Danial Thain*, who frustratingly chased *M3* for about five hours in total darkness, battling large and unseen seas and a howling wind, only to end up having to abandon *M3* and her crew and save ourselves from near disaster. I'm proud to part of that crew, and would welcome being in a crew with you any time.

Like many recipients of courage awards, I would like to say.... "I was part of a team. I was just doing my job."

But the job that we do cannot be done without the resources provided to us, and the training that we receive, and the support of management. Those resources, and that training, do not come easily. There is a lot of very hard work and dedicated effort that goes on in the background before any of us gets behind a radio microphone or onto a rescue boat.

We have a very professionally run umbrella organisation, which provides the legal infrastructure and sets the parameters and guidelines around which we operate. We have training protocols and qualification requirements; we have vessel operating and equipment standards, minimum manning levels, and all the other guidelines by which we operate.

In Port Stephens, we have a very professional approach to management, resourcing and training, and our volunteers display a dedication which is infectious. Whether it be maintaining the grounds of our beautiful and historic base on Nelson Head, or manning the Inner Light Museum or Gift Shop, or setting up and maintaining the equipment, or working shifts in the radio room or on the boats..... we all have a job to do and I believe that we do it very well.

All of this is in place so that, when called upon, we can do our job professionally. I believe that all 21 volunteers involved operated very professionally that day.

I can't finish without paying tribute and respect to the real hero of the Mayday operations on that day, and many other similar operations over the years. It is, of course,

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

our grand old lady.... Port Stephens 40 *Danial Thain*. Many have said that she is a boat that looks after her crew. This was proved beyond doubt when we felt her coming back upright after being knocked flat by that first enormous wave. It's so sad that we will shortly be saying our final farewells to her.

Finally, if you are ever asked to contribute to the financial viability and support of Marine Rescue, just remember

that it could be one of your family or friends that needs our assistance one day.

Thanks once again to Marine Rescue NSW for honouring all 21 recipients of these awards today. We are all very proud to be here today - It is a great honour that you have bestowed on us, and one that will live with us, and with the Marine Rescue Port Stephens unit, forever. Thank you.

Laurie Nolan



STACY TANNOS PRESENTS THE COMMISSIONER'S COMMENDATION FOR COURAGE AND THE COMMISSIONER'S CITATION TO RECIPIENTS



The Commissioner's Commendation for Courage

From top: Skipper David Jack; Skipper Ron Lighton; First Officer Kenneth Johnson; First Officer Michael Smith; Eryl Thomas; Richard Pizzuto; Peter Merlino; Tom Miller; Suzanne Freeman; Ian Drummond; Paul Sullivan; Michael Duggan and Noel Corcoran (unable to attend Nigel Waters).



The Commissioner's Citation was awarded to:

From left: Watch Officer Stephen Alta; Marine Radio Operator Peter Baldwin; Watch Officer Colin Cahill; Watch Officer Michael Grover; Marine Radio Operator Ian Peacock and Watch Officer John Vassallo.

IAN DRUMMOND'S ACCOUNT

We got the call out late in the afternoon of the 6th, during an extreme east coast low that was lashing the coastal waters.

We were told that we would be taking over from the crew that had been out for many hours. They arrived back at



dock approx 1700 and we took over. The engines were not even stopped. Some of the relieved crew commented on how "horrendous" the conditions were.

Our task was to assist a stricken yacht, 15-20 miles due east of us. We headed out.

It was soon realised that the yacht was being blown by 50 knot winds, and lashed by six to eight metre seas and swell - thus pushing it in a NW direction. We then changed course and took up a chase and catch-up task. It was estimated that the yacht was moving at approximately four to five knots and the best we could do in the conditions was seven to eight knots. So our gain was not good.

The conditions on board PS40 were severe, as we were being thrown about in the cabin and it was near impossible to walk, let alone stand without support.

I can only imagine what Ron was going through on the bridge trying to keep us on course, while negotiating the peaks and troughs of an 8m sea and swell, and gale force 50kn wind with horizontal rain. A mammoth task.

The cabin floor was covered in everything that was not tied down and we gave up putting it back because it would be on the floor again in seconds.

I believe every man on board was seasick in various forms, and we started off being "gentlemanly" by going to the rear deck rails. That was deemed too dangerous. Then the fire bucket, but we couldn't wash it out.

Then, "what the hell", open the door, be sick on the deck, close the door. The next green water wave would wash it off in seconds.

After a long chase, we caught sight of lights. M3. Then the task of readying the tow line on the rear deck. This was extremely difficult and all four crew were on hands and knees, while holding on where possible. The tow line was flaked, heaving line attached, second heaving line at the ready. Ron was trying to get us close enough for a throw. I was at the starboard aft quarter with tow line in hand ready to deploy. Paul had heaving line in hand on port side. Tom had a second heaving line ready if

needed. Laurie was overseeing the situation to assist if needed.

Then, all hell broke loose, as we were hit from the stern starboard quarter by an enormous wave which flooded the rear deck with a half metre of green water. PS40 was on her side. We were all thrown to the deck. I was on my back and looked up to see Paul, with his legs either side of a railing upright, and hanging over the side, holding on to the railing.

The towline was a mangled mess, with heaving lines mixed with it. We got to our feet and were immediately hit by another, if not larger wave which knocked us all flat again.

I landed on my back and was holding on a rail with my left hand, and then Paul landed full length on top of me. The force of that dislocated my shoulder and bent my left knee backwards (hyperextended). I blacked out temporarily and remember hearing ("Get inside - get inside!!"). After cutting my lifeline I was then dragged through the door, and put on my side on the floor. Tom had blood streaming from a gash on his forehead.

Pretty well immediately, we were hit by another enormous wave which knocked our boat flat again, this time stalling our port engine. Ron was trying desperately to get us out of the surf and into deeper water - only now with ONE



engine. I heard the radio bark "**Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, M3, abandoning ship**".

We could do nothing to assist them at that stage.

Mike was on duty at the radio to Base and called our MAYDAY and that we were having to save ourselves.

With the port engine out, the **stall alarm** was blaring and after the second or third attempt Mike got it restarted. Ron had managed to get us out of the surf on one engine at that stage.

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

With both engines running, and heading back directly into the storm, we slowly bashed our way back to the entrance and into Port Stephens.

We heard that the *M3* crew had all made it to the beach, and were met by the Police.

Nelson Bay Water Police had come out again because of our plight - and they met us north of Broughton Island. They shadowed us back into Port.

A day and night never forgotten and I hope never repeated.

Ian Drummond



On 13 February 2017 Dennis Cooper wrote:

Hi

As skipper and owner of the yacht *Amante*, I'd just like to say how pleased I was to see so many of your unit being recognised for the outstanding devotion to us as members of the sailing public last year.

I am personally very grateful for the support given to *Amante* during those dreadful few hours a year ago.

My very best wishes and thanks,

Dennis Cooper



MARINE RESCUE PORT STEPHENS AWARDS CEREMONY - 10 FEBRUARY 2017

Operation involving "OUT OF SIGHT", "AMANTE", "JEM" & "M3" - 6-7 January 2016

On the 6 and 7 January 2016, twenty-one volunteer members of Marine Rescue Port Stephens did what they had been trained to do in the radio room and on our rescue vessels. They performed their duties with distinction and courage in some of the worst weather and sea conditions during an east coast low off the coast of Port Stephens. This operation involved recovering a vessel which broke its mooring at Salamander Bay and had washed ashore and then handling five "May Day" calls. The terrible weather conditions ultimately saw Port Stephens 40 "*Danial Thain*" being knocked down three times before being escorted back into port.

Despite the incredible efforts of Marine Rescue Port Stephens and Nelson Bay Water Police,

one life was lost when the helmsman from racing yacht *Amante* was swept overboard. Racing yacht *M3* was also damaged when it was washed ashore and abandoned on Treachery Beach near Seal Rocks.

As a result of the collective efforts of Marine Rescue Port Stephens and Nelson Bay Water Police, there was no further loss of life or sailing vessels.

On behalf of Marine Rescue Port Stephens and the broader Port Stephens community, I thank those involved on 6 and 7 of January for their courage and service and congratulate them on their awards.

Marine Rescue Port Stephens enjoys an enviable working relationship with the Nelson Bay Water Police. The close working relationship we share was very evident and on display during this operation. Sergeant Tony

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

Hogg and his team were on the water for longer than our crews and towards the end of the operation escorted Port Stephens 40 “*Danial Thain*” back into port after those knockdowns. Marine Rescue Port Stephens is grateful to Nelson Bay Water Police and thank them for their courage, assistance and friendship.

Message from Detective Superintendent Mark Hutchings, Commander of the Marine Area Command of the NSW Police Force:

“I would like it known to your officers how much I appreciated their efforts and courage on the night. The awards have been well deserved. It was a difficult operation and I was aware of their actions as I spent the entire night in our search and rescue coordination centre monitoring the situation. Again, sorry I am unable to attend, I would have loved to have been there. Kind regards, Detective Superintendent Mark Hutchings”.

For their courage, Sergeant Tony Hogg and Senior Constables Matthew Gray, Andrew Parker and Nick Leach were awarded the “2016 Pride of Australia Medal”.

The Marine Rescue presentation morning was unique for two reasons. Firstly Commissioner Stacey Tannos presented the inaugural Medal



for Valour for Marine Rescue New South Wales.

The other aspect that made the awards ceremony unique in Marine Rescue New South Wales history was the large number of awards being made – 21 in total. Unfortunately Nigel Waters was not able to be in attendance.

Three recipients are serving members of the Australian defence force; two senior officers from The Royal Australian Air Force at

Williamstown and a seaman from HMAS Cerberus.

The honour roll of Marine Rescue New South Wales lists seven operations that have resulted in awards for courage. What I find extraordinary is that Marine Rescue Port Stephens was involved in four of these operations. To me this demonstrates the dedication, seamanship and courage of the past and present volunteers of Marine Rescue Port Stephens and the vital importance of its search and rescue capability on this part of the coastline.

Whilst the courage awards go to the crew of our rescue vessel, we must acknowledge the efforts of those in the radio room. We must also recognise the army of volunteers who have provided leadership, training and mentoring over the past decades so that those who were called upon had the skills and confidence to perform their duties.

On 10 February we recognised the deeds of twenty one members for meritorious service and courage, it would be remiss not to mention those involved in the three other operations:

The “*Trade Winds*” operation in July 2002

The “*Excalibur*” operation in September 2002

And the “*Reef Dragon*” operation in April 2015

Present at the function were a number of members of Marine Rescue Port Stephens who were involved in those three operations. Regrettably several could not be at the ceremony. The honour roll includes:

Geoff Moore

Rod Reeson

Eryl Thomas

Ron Lighton

Malcolm Milliken

Michael Brown

Barbara Cole

Robert Johnson

Peter Merlino

Laurie Nolan

Barney Pinney

Richard Pizzuto

Michael Smith

Paul Sullivan

Colin Foote

Angela Tilling

Tony O'Donnell

And we remember those who have crossed the bar:

The late Peter Fisher

John Thompson, ESM and

Colin Wynn

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

Marine Rescue Port Stephens is a large volunteer organisation with nearly 200 members. Whilst we appreciate the funding we get from Marine Rescue New South Wales, many present today will be surprised to learn that Marine Rescue Port Stephens needs to raise \$160,000 annually to meet its operating expenses, to purchase minor capital items and to put funding aside to meet the future replacement costs of major assets such as our rescue vessels.

The large majority of our funding is self-generated and of course our Gift Shop at the Inner Light is a major contributor as is the contract we have with the Rural Fire Service. To make up the shortfall, we rely heavily on the community for sponsorship and financial support.

There were a number of organisations represented and individuals in attendance who generously support Marine Rescue Port Stephens. In no particular order, I'd like to thank:

Mr John and Mrs Yvonne Almgren
Mr Sam and Mrs Rosemary Pratten
The Edward C Dunn Foundation
Soldiers Point Bowling Club
West's Diggers Nelson Bay
Soldiers Point Marina
Port Stephens FM 100.9
Rural Fire Service Lower Hunter District

I'd also like to publically acknowledge those who pay for advertising in our magazine Port Chatter and those businesses who have our donation boxes on their counters.

Marine Rescue Port Stephens has five patrons who promote our cause and assist in many different ways.

The ceremony would not have been possible without the dedication of a team of members from Marine Rescue Port Stephens who worked very hard to organise the event. I won't name the key players for fear of omitting someone but my personal thanks to you all for your efforts. I also thank head office for its support and assistance.

In conclusion, I need to pay the greatest accolades to the volunteer members of Marine Rescue Port Stephens. You do yourselves, your families and your community proud. I also applaud the patience and perseverance of your partners, family and friends.

The primary focus of Marine Rescue Port Stephens is "*saving lives on open and closed waters*". I hope you are proud of your selfless volunteering because the work you do does save lives which makes a huge difference to everyday Australians And that is very Australian!

Lee Uebergang

"Volunteers doing our jobs professionally"





VESSELS INVOLVED

WP 24

PS40 Danial Thain

Amante

Jem

M3

Out of Sight

