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## NEWSLETTER No.29

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### GENERAL

Unfortunately we received details of the AIMA/NAS Maritime Archaeology courses rather late and could only advise members earlier this month of the NAS Part 1 & 2 courses scheduled to be held during the month at venues in Dunedin, Wellington and Auckland. The Nautical Archaeological Society (UK) courses were supervised by AIMA instructors from Australia and sponsored by DoC and AIMA. Fortunately some UHG members were able to join the course and more on this will be reported in the next Newsletter.

The “Shipwreck Tales” event we held in Dargaville in conjunction with the AGM last month attracted the attention of media interests, especially the German U-Boat tale, which featured on the front page of newspapers and on National Radio. Noel Hilliam was interviewed on radio and the publicity attracted a lot of attention for the UHG with people coming forward offering further information concerning the U-boat story and other items of interest.

Designs for the UHG logo for use on tee shirt, hats etc are being finalized and it is hoped UHG apparel will be available early in the New Year.

The latest issue of Dive NZ magazine has an article written by Piers Davies on the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage, which

comes into force on 2 January 2009. Although NZ has not ratified the Convention it will have major bearing on the future of shipwreck exploration and maritime archaeology in this country.

Don't forget to pay your 2008/09 UHG subscription - \$25 single, \$30 couple and students \$15. If you are not sure if you are financial please check with the Treasurer, Nick Freeman, email; [freemannz2000@yahoo.co.nz](mailto:freemannz2000@yahoo.co.nz)

### NEWS & HAPPENINGS

1. The book launch of UHG member John Pettit's book "Treasure Below" was celebrated at Kelly Tarlton's Underwater World, Auckland, on November 10. Many old wreck divers attended and enjoyed the evening reminiscing about past wreck diving adventures. John's book is available with a treasure coin from the wreck of the *Elingamite* for \$35 p&p – contact John Pettit at [bingley@ww.co.nz](mailto:bingley@ww.co.nz)
2. Ken Scadden is involved with organizing the National Maritime Heritage Seminar in Wellington, May 15-17. The Seminar will feature a number of interesting presentations on shipwreck matters and will be of interest to all involved with such subjects and maritime heritage. Further details will be advised as they come to hand.
3. UHG member Pete Mesley was conducting another of his tech wreck group dives on the Russian liner *Mikhail Lermontov* sunk in Marlborough Sounds, when one of the group, Australian Mischa Temple, discovered a bell while exploring the engine room on the third level forward of the main engine block. Pete describes the visibility as "horrendous" but managed to photograph the bell in situ before it was recovered.



*Michael Lermontov* engine room bell and main engine machinery

4. The search for HMAS *Sydney* and HSK *Kormoran* and the discoveries of these wrecks off Western Australia have been covered in previous Newsletters, however the discoveries have not stopped the controversy over the loss of the Australian warship. A public quarrel has now erupted over

whom really located the wrecks. The Cole Commission of Inquiry into the WWII sinking has requested information that has set off the controversy. Two University of WA academics Prof. Kirsner & Dunn have claimed they have been ignored and have documented their claim that they provided the location of the wreck 10 years ago. They also claimed that an earlier research group, a self-taught historian, a wreck diviner and the inventor of an unworkable sonar system, sent the navy on a secret search which wasted \$1 million and delayed the discovery of the wreck. Their paper is reported to have further inflamed a public row involving David Mearns, the American wreck-hunter who is credited with the wreck find. Mearns has described the two academics and other researchers as “armchair quarter-backs” who “ had never, ever in their lives found a deepwater shipwreck, or even a shallow water shipwreck”. They have responded to Mearns statement saying, “Wreck-hunting is not a dark art that depends on individual genius.”

Cole Commission documents released to the media show that at a meeting in 2004, Kirsner gave Mearns the location of the German raider *Kormoran* to within three nautical miles, while the three search boxes presented by Mearns all missed the wrecks. It is claimed that when Mearns set out earlier this year to find the wrecks, he discarded the original 1600 square nautical mile search area he had identified and steered the search vessel straight to the area he had been given in 2004 by the University researchers and found the *Kormoran* in 64 hours instead of the allocated 35 days. The *Sydney*, a short distance away, was found after another 67 hours.

5. The recent discovery of a 500-year-old Portuguese shipwreck off the rugged south coast of Namibia has archaeologists racing against time to salvage a fortune in coins and artefacts. Described as the best-preserved vessel outside of Portugal, the vast amount of gold coins expected to be recovered from the wreck could be the largest discovery in Africa outside of Egypt. The 16<sup>th</sup> century wreck was found by chance in a restricted diamond mining area when workers, using bulldozers to build a seawall, uncovered the buried wreck. Six bronze cannons, 13 tonnes of copper ingots, huge elephant tusks, pewter tableware, navigational instruments and a variety of weapons have been recovered from the sand. More than 2300 gold coins weighing about 21kgs and 1.5kgs of silver coins have also been found. Maintenance of expensive sea walls built around the wreck-site to keep the Atlantic at bay was to cease last month allowing the ship's remains to be claimed by the sea again. It had been thought the wreck was the ship of Portuguese explorer Barrolomeo Diaz who went missing around 1500. Diaz was the first known European to sail around the southern tip of Africa in 1488. Following the custom of Portuguese explorers of the time, Diaz left a huge stone cross called a “padrao” at today's town of Luderitz, 750kms SW of the capital Windhoek. However coins recovered from the wreck are dated some 25 years after Diaz went missing. The Government is planning an exhibition of the finds and later a museum to house them.
6. The *Holmglen* foundered off Timaru 24 November 1959 with the loss of all her crew of 15 men. The reason for the sinking has not been established. In May 1999 UHG members Chris Glasson, Win Christie and Keith Gordon with Artie Heineman explored the wreck, which is sitting upright in a depth of 60

metres. An ROV was used to film the wreck for the TV documentary series “Shipwreck”. The wreck was found fairly intact but after 40 years underwater was starting to show signs of deterioration around the wheelhouse with holes appearing in the rear steel bulkhead. The wreck was again visited this month by three divers; Kevin Bailey, Pete Spegal and Mark Gibson. The wreck is reported now, after nearly 50 years on the ocean bottom, to be in an advanced stage of collapse with the wheelhouse area and upper structure now gone and wreckage is scattered across the seabed alongside the hull. A futile search for the ship’s bell was carried out around the area of the mast, which has collapsed and is shrouded in fishing nets, however the bell was then found lying on the foredeck, an area that had been documented during the earlier 1999 exploration. As with previous recent discoveries of the *Niagara* and *Port Kembla* bells, it is interesting to note how these sought after relics seem to often end up in unexpected areas of a shipwreck. Unfortunately the dive ended in tragedy when Kevin failed to surface, his body was recovered some days later.



1999 images of the *Holmglen*. Left – ROV photo of the wheelhouse rear bulkhead area, note the corrosion hole. Right – Encrusted bow anchor provides shelter for a Jock Stewart. (photo Chris Glasson)



7. UHG Treasurer Nick Freeman has been working on making a prop wash unit for his outboard. The unit is designed to divert the prop wash from his boat downwards to the bottom to blow sand and sediment off objects so that they can be further investigated. Nick is planning to have the unit in operation in the near future.

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