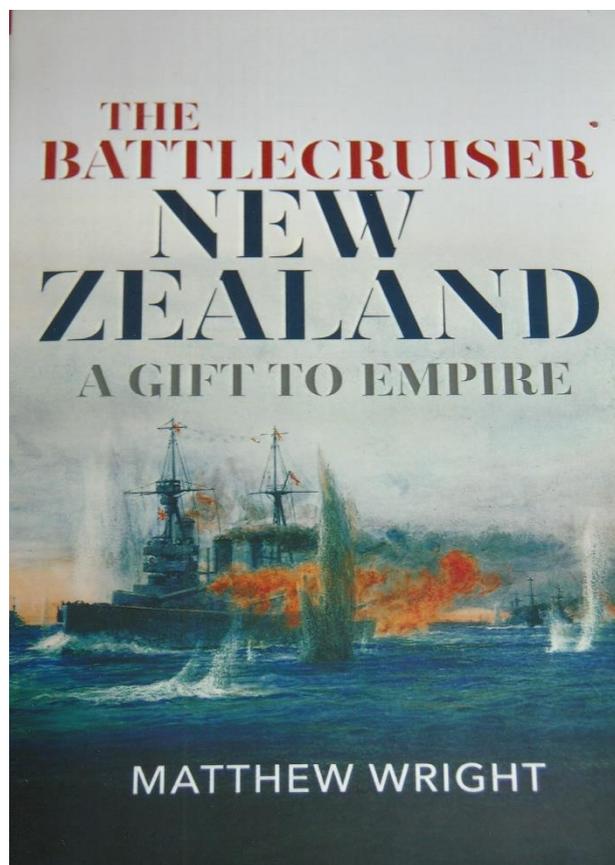


BOOK REVIEW**THE BATTLE CRUISER NEW ZEALAND A GIFT TO EMPIRE**
BY MATTHEW WRIGHT PUBLISHED BY SEAFORTH PUBLISHING**A DIVISION OF PEN & SWORD BOOKS****ISBN 9781 5267 84042 (HB)**

The story which unfolds in this excellent book reveals political tensions, naval rivalry, intrigues, opinions of prominent personalities concerning the building of a donated warship to the Royal Navy in the Edwardian era of the British Empire. In January 1901 a Federation of the colonies was established and after the 1907 Imperial Conference, Australia and other self-governing British colonies were given the status of Dominions within the British Empire. In the same year at the request of the New Zealand parliament King Edward VII proclaimed New Zealand a Dominion with the Empire.

The thousands of miles which separated both Australia and New Zealand from the United Kingdom meant that the latter had a limited understanding of some issues troubling its populace. One such concern was that in times of a conflict in the Pacific Ocean could the Royal Navy protect their coastal waters. Warships had been allocated by the Admiralty which they considered to be adequate for naval defence of Australia and New Zealand. The Admiralty took the view that any major conflict would be fought in the European theatre, where the battlefleets of the Royal Navy would be concentrated, not in the Pacific.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, Germany was seeking to become a global power to rival the British Empire's dominance of the seas by building a navy to emulate that of Great Britain. Under the auspices of the First Sea Lord Admiral Sir John Fisher the first dreadnaught battleship had been constructed and commissioned in 1906. This step forward in sea power unnerved other naval powers, particularly Germany. In response, Konteradmiral Alfred von Tirpitz proposed an increase in the German naval budget. Suspicion germinated within Admiralty about the motives



of Germany and the hidden threat of a naval clash. To maintain the balance of power in favour of the Royal Navy, the Admiralty advocated additional capital warships provoking debate in government circles.

In New Zealand the liberal Prime Minister Joseph Ward and his government were facing mounting internal pressures. To deflect further criticism, he announced, in March 1909, without parliamentary approval, the generous offer of building a 'first class battleship of the latest type' for the Royal Navy. The offer was accepted by the British government, to build a battlecruiser. In addition to battleships, Admiral Fisher saw the need to have a fleet of lighter, faster moving capital ships – the battlecruiser – with the fire power of battleship. A few days after New Zealand's 'gift' to the Empire of a warship, Australia made a similar declaration.

The author in the first three chapters of this book describes all aspects of the political machinations, personalities involved, media reaction, financial considerations, motives and consequences for the Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Dominions aroused by the momentous decision of Prime Minister Ward's government to pay for a battlecruiser.

HMS New Zealand's first commanding officer was Captain Lionel Halsey, appointed in September 1912. Two months later she was commissioned and joined the 1st Battle Squadron. This did not provoke too much comment in the New Zealand press. Worker unrest and miners strikes, occupied the main headlines. As a gesture of thanks for the 'gift' of the battlecruiser from New Zealand the United Kingdom government and the Admiralty organised a world tour for the warship, not only as a public relations exercise but to demonstrate the global power of the Royal Navy. The tour which lasted ten months was an overwhelming success.

The New Zealand leg of the tour was exhausting for Captain Halsey and his crew who had to cope with official visits, V.I.P.'s and the clamour of people who wanted to see and go onboard the battlecruiser. For the indigenous Māori's the ship had a special cultural and political significance. Captain Halsey was presented with a piu-piu – a warrior's skirt or kilt made of flax – and a greenstone pendent – a hei-tiki – with instructions to Halsey that if he wore them in battle the warship would be protected. When HMS New Zealand returned to the United Kingdom in December 1913, over half-a-million people had visited the battlecruiser, two thirds of whom were New Zealanders.

HMS New Zealand re-joined the 1st Battlecruiser Squadron under the command of Vice-Admiral Sir David Beatty. As the war clouds were gathering, HMS New Zealand participated in the Fleet Review at Spithead on the 19th July 1914. Gradually as the remaining days of July passed the ship prepared for war, the crew unaware of the diplomatic exchanges which were

taking place and what the future might have in store for them. A pertinent question is posed by the author as to whether war could have been avoided.

HMS New Zealand was present at the Battle of Heligoland Bight (24th August 1914) and at the Dogger Bank (24th-25th January 1915). On the 21st April 1916, under the command of Captain John Green, she collided with HMS Australia, during the war patrol in the North Sea which caused damage to both warships and they had to return to port for repairs. HMS New Zealand's repairs were completed in time for her to join Beatty's battlecruisers, on the 30th May and to participate in the Battle of Jutland. The clash between the Royal Navy and the High Seas Fleet and HMS New Zealand's part in the battle is comprehensively described minute by minute by the author. He quotes from the experiences and activities of those who were present during the engagement. During the battle HMS New Zealand was struck by a shell from the Von der Tann. The damage was relatively light, and no one was killed which the crew believed was due to the captain wearing the piu-piu and the hei-tiki. Interestingly the author takes the opportunity to consider the overall effectiveness and gunnery skills of the Royal Navy during the battle.

After the Battle of Jutland HMS New Zealand resumed wartime duties and later escorted the surrender of the High Seas Fleet. In February 1919, under the command of Captain Oliver Leggett, HMS New Zealand embarked on another global tour with Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Jellicoe aboard – later Governor-General of Australia – housed in an additional cabin structure on the upper deck for him and his staff. On arrival in New Zealand, although the consequences of the war were tangible, 50,000 people visited the battlecruiser. When she returned to the United Kingdom in February 1920, HMS New Zealand was decommissioned and placed in reserve, along with many other obsolete warships. Under the terms of the 1922 Washington Treaty, agreed by the major powers concerning naval arms limitation, HMS New Zealand was to be scrapped. She was broken up at Rosyth between 1922 and 1924. Artefacts and memorabilia large and small were removed for posterity and returned to New Zealand. The captain's piu-piu was bequeathed to New Zealand in 2005.

The author has produced an absorbing story of HMS New Zealand from its inception to the scrapyard. He explains about the social and military aspect prevalent in the early years of the 20th century and the political reactions generated by the offer of New Zealand to build a modern warship for the Royal Navy. The economic and paper trail of purchasing equipment is of consuming interest. The fitting out of the warship is described in clarity and intertwined with the wider aspects of the early 20th century naval race. He questions some of the decisions which were made or discarded by the politicians of the day and the staff of the Admiralty. HMS New

Zealand's first world cruise is splendidly described and highlights some early colonial history of New Zealand. Attention is given to the views expressed by crew members and personalities as the story of HMS New Zealand is revealed. The battles in which the warship participated are carefully and powerfully conveyed to the reader as the warship surged at full speed through the waters of the North Sea. Financial problems of how the loans, accounting, and repayment of the public debt by the New Zealand government, interrupted by the Second World War is carefully delineated. The battlecruiser's inevitable fate as a 'gifted' warship to the Empire, after 12 years' service with the Royal Navy is fully described.

Within the book are photographs, ships drawings, appendices with HMS New Zealand technical characteristics and costings, plus an extensive bibliography and notes. A foreword by Nick Jellicoe, grandson of the 1st Earl Jellicoe is a heartfelt tribute to Matthew Wright who has taken the utmost care to produce an eminently readable book on the history of the battlecruiser HMS New Zealand.

Roger Coleman