



# GREAT SHIP – pity about the fubar\*

PHOTO COURTESY SCOTT MABEY

BY KEITH INGRAM



PHOTOS COURTESY KIM WATTS

When the RHIB was ripped out of her secure cradle and davits, the transom and jet unit was left hanging in the ship

The recent arrival of *HMNZS Canterbury* heralds the start of a new era for the Royal New Zealand Navy, in that we welcome the first of seven new ships for the New Zealand Protector fleet.

The new Protector fleet, consisting of the MRV, two offshore patrol vessels and four inshore patrol vessels, while built for purpose, have taken a significant step away from military standards. Hence the ships were affordable within the budget allowed.

Effectively they are built to civilian standards, with the addition of some armaments, military electronics and seaboats, and are painted grey.

I am not suggesting that there is anything wrong with this concept. In fact, for New Zealand's joint agency needs, such as fisheries protection, border control, Department of Conservation marine protection and Army and Air Force support, the Navy is now well placed to fulfill its contract for services in protecting the nation's 200 mile exclusive economic zone, as well as its commitment to the Pacific region.

This is the good part. The downside is that our naval experts have been trained in warships, and when it came to building the new MRV, they had to rely on the professional advice of the shipbuilders and the principal contractor, Tenix.

*Canterbury's* first port of call on her maiden voyage was

Lyttelton, in honour of the region she is named after. Once the formalities were completed, the ship then sailed for Auckland in rough conditions, but nothing that is not expected in our part of the South Pacific.

Except that on this occasion, while crossing the Bay of Plenty, she lost three-quarters of one of her two seaboats, with only the transom and the jet unit remaining in the after falls and the for'ard lifting point in the for'ard falls. She was physically ripped out of her secure boat station, where she was securely held down by what I would estimate to be five-tonne webbing straps.

It's not good when a purpose-built RHIB seaboat disappears from the captain's slop chit (equipment register). Our naval fathers must be saying, please explain. Why did this happen?

And while the Navy will neither confirm nor deny it, we understand that this ship, under her pre-handover classification and civilian management as the *Nuship Canterbury*, also lost a seaboat while undergoing sea trials in the northern hemisphere. Scuttlebutt maybe – well, maybe not.

Our northern correspondent advised that the seaboat ports in the side of the *Canterbury* were design faults, and would cause future problems for both the safe operation of the seaboats and their safe storage in heavy sea conditions. He stated the obvious that merchant ships stow their rescue boats high on the

upper decks for obvious reasons. The positioning of these vessels was dumb, he advised.

This begs the public question, given that this ship is based on the lines of the modern ro-ro ferry, the *Ben-my-Chree*, currently operating in the Irish Sea. Why?

"*Canterbury* is designed to be fully operational in harsher conditions than the weather that keeps the Cook Strait ferries in port," the Minister of Defence, Phil Goff, said at her launching in the Merwede shipyard in Rotterdam in February, 2006.

"Obviously, not sailing due to inclement weather is not an option when you are patrolling in the Southern Ocean, for example where there is no shelter," Goff said.

But it's not going to be a good look for the Navy if we keep losing a \$150,000 seaboat every time the ship hits a "spot of roughers."

So just what is wrong. Essentially, we have a hole on either side of the ship about the size of a 40ft container, give or take a bit.

In the middle, lashed in its sling and chocks, is about a 7.5m RHIB. Essentially it is a cork, and when any reasonable seas are taken anywhere from the shoulder to the quarter, there is a high probability that these waves will break into this seaboat opening.

Now you start to get the idea. When 40 tonnes of solid water is being driven into a hole in the hull in which a very buoyant boat is lashed, something is going to give. On this occasion, our wayward vessel drifted up onto the back of Great Barrier Island, at Whangapoua, after floating across the Bay of Plenty.

The vessel came ashore upside down at about 1030 on July 14, where local residents initially thought it might have been an injured whale in the surf. A farmer, Scott Mabey, subsequently salvaged the vessel and returned it to the Navy.

The question remains, is the positioning of the seaboat ports an inherent design fault in the ship, and how can this be remedied. Comments from professional masters in the mercantile marine familiar with operating these types of ships have suggested that unless there is some significant design modifications to the position and housing of the seaboats, it will become a regular event, which will further add unnecessary worry of, "Will he



HMNZS Canterbury on her delivery sea trials. Note the boat port in the ship's side

have his boats on return?" on the naval captains' minds when they are proceeding on fishery patrols in the Southern Ocean or cyclone relief in the Pacific.

Doors have been suggested, but if these are not constructed properly, as in stern doors, or ship's side-loading doors, the problem of sea damage buckling the doors and making them inoperable is a real risk. But then superyachts have doors that seal, so this might work. Wave-break doors are another option but these are high maintenance and prone to failure.

Lifting the seaboat to the flight deck would only impede flying operations. So the question remains, should this problem rest with the designer and shipbuilder, or will once again the New Zealand taxpayer be expected to pay to fix what is essentially an operational design fault that should have been picked up during construction, or at the very least during the ship's sea trials in the northern hemisphere.

We understand that the Navy is conducting a full enquiry into the loss, and will be raising the matter with the shipbuilders, Tenix. The outcome will be interesting, so in the meantime the jury remains out.

\* FUBAR – an acronym for "fouled up beyond all repair"

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