

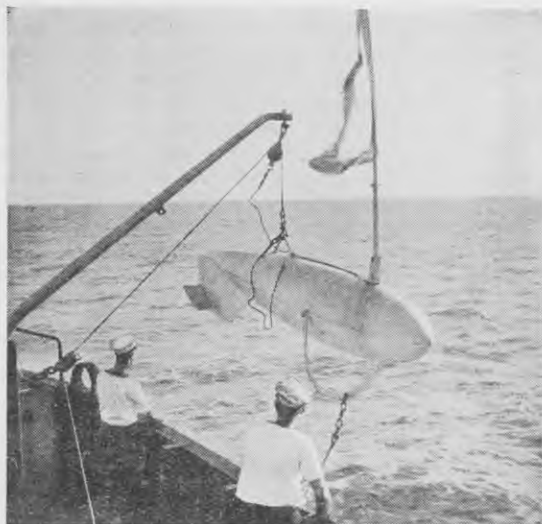
In the meantime enemy activities in New Zealand waters had occasioned considerable expansion of the minesweeping flotillas, and during the period June-September, 1940, these newly-commissioned vessels successfully carried out a major and arduous operation, in the performance of which officers and ratings gave of their best in skill and endurance. The growth of the anti-submarine minesweeping flotillas has been one of the major developments of the Royal New Zealand Navy, notably since the outbreak of the war against Japan. Their work is of vital importance, but, in the main, monotonous and unspectacular. The constant prayer of their ships' companies is to come to grips with the enemy, and on one memorable occasion when it was answered two of them showed that they could fight to the same purpose as their big cruiser sisters.

During the night of January 29, 1943, two little ships of a New Zealand minesweeping flotilla were patrolling off the northernmost tip of Guadalcanal when they contacted a large Japanese submarine. A depth-charge attack forced it to surface, and it opened fire with its 5.5 in. gun. A hot action ensued. The submarine was considerably larger and faster than either of its opponents, but the New Zealand ships were well handled and poured in a rapid fire with their 4 in. guns. One of them thrice rammed the submarine, to such good effect on the third occasion that she rode up on the submarine's deck, listing heavily and firing every gun that could be brought to bear until she was able to clear herself. Firing was continuous for about an hour, the action ending only after the submarine, attempting to escape in the darkness inshore, struck a reef and wrecked herself.

Notable in this action was the conduct of Acting Leading Signaller C. Buchanan, of Port Chalmers. He was mortally wounded by machine-gun fire, but remained at his post operating a searchlight until relieved. He died next day. The successful

action of the two ships earned the congratulations of United States Navy Commanders-in-Chief, the Admiralty, and the New Zealand and Australian Naval Boards. Decorations awarded included the United States Navy Cross to the Commanding Officers of the ships and posthumously to Signaller Buchanan, as well as five United States Silver Star medals and twenty-three letters of commendation to others of the ships' companies. Both Commanding Officers, it should be noted, had gained the Distinguished Service Cross while serving earlier in the war in small craft of the Royal Navy in the English Channel.

The outbreak of hostilities with Japan in December, 1941, found the "Achilles" and "Leander" operating in New Zealand waters mainly on escort and patrol duties. It is not possible yet to tell the full story of their subsequent activities while serving with United States Navy Task Forces in the strenuous operations which checked the enemy's offensive in the South Pacific and ultimately threw him on the defensive in the Solomon Islands and elsewhere. It must suffice to record here that "Achilles," "Leander," and "Monowai," as well as the smaller vessels of the Royal New Zealand Navy, per-



*Department of Internal Affairs.*

**Minesweeping. The beginning of a sweep: the float goes out.**