

CHAPTER 5

Shore Expansion

When war was declared the N.Z. Public Works Department had in hand the construction of 70 Defence buildings. Less than two weeks later, on 13 December, 650 defence buildings were under construction. In its 1946 report the Ministry of Works reported that it has been estimated that the provision of the whole of the accommodation which was constructed for New Zealand and Allied forces during the war involved a programme equivalent to building seventeen new towns, each with a population of over 10,000 and complete with all necessary services.

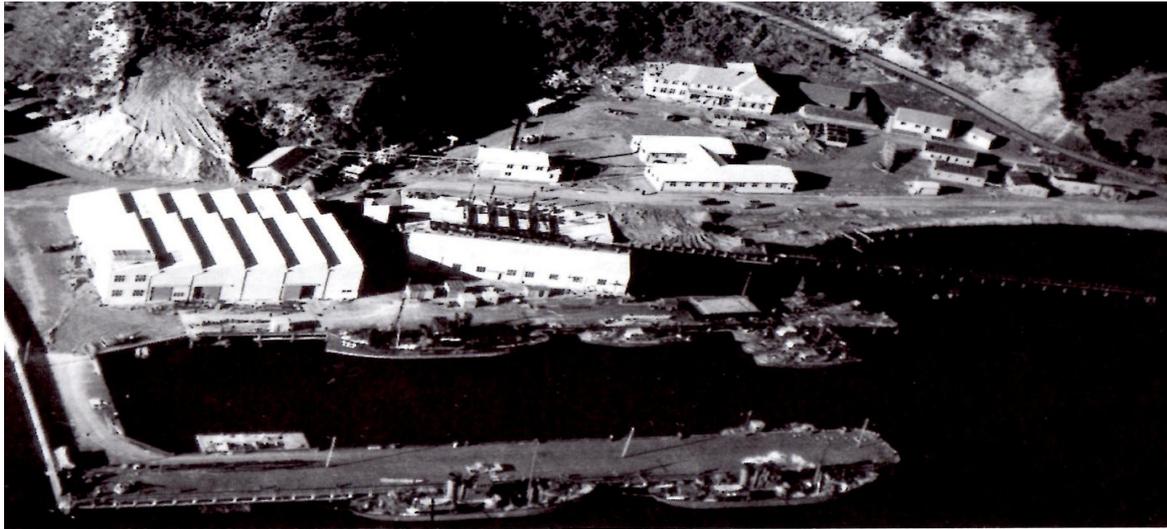
What had started as a modest expansion of the Devonport Naval Base began on the 20th of December, 1940, when an expenditure of \$251,000 was approved for "the erection of necessary buildings for squadron service and for the necessary buildings to replace HMS Philomel.

The contract for the 38-bed depot hospital had previously been let and is not therefore included in the above figure. It is a matter of wry amusement that in establishing the priority for the various barrack buildings, the highest precedence was to be given to accommodation for the training division with the lowest priority being accorded to the Regulating Office.

As the 2nd World War went on and particularly after Japan's entry into the conflict, N.Z. began to experience what would become the greatest aggregation of Allied warships ever assembled in the South Pacific. The construction of the Naval barracks, the dredging for extra berthing space and necessary reclamations for increased shore space were all carried out in the vicinity of the Naval Base. Calliope wharf was extended and the dry dock lengthened for the second time. The mangrove covered area in Shoat Bay and the nine acres abutting Stanley Bay were reclaimed using dredging from the 10.5 acre basin behind the western end of Calliope Wharf together with spoil from the excavations for the oil fuel tanks under Calliope Road. Interestingly, early plans clearly show there was no initial thoroughfare between the Naval Base and Shoat Bay. The now familiar tunnel had originally been built solely as an air raid shelter and was only later enlarged to traffic size and lined with concrete.

While our primary focus has been the Auckland area it is worth noting that a similar expansion had taken place in Wellington where HMNZS Cook was being created almost directly below Mt Crawford prison at Shelly Bay. In view of the tremendous programme of urgent defensive construction in hand the Commissioner of Defence Construction proposed a modified scheme which could be completed in half the time. The Naval Board held out for the full development of Shelly Bay and also proposed taking over the women's borstal buildings on Mt Crawford. Slow progress was made with the Shelly Bay work during 1943, primarily due to the many alterations and additions to the original plans.

In the meantime a temporary base for motor launches was built at Clyde Quay [almost exactly where the Museum of N.Z. now stands].



An aerial view of HMNZS Cook at Shelly Bay, Wellington. After the war the base passed to the RNZAF.

HMNZS Cook at Shelly Bay, Wellington. After the war, the base passed to the RNZAF

Finally, on the 2th February, 1944, Commander Taylor, DSC, RNZNVR was appointed officer-in-charge Shelly Bay and though much work was required to complete it, the base was formally commissioned as HMNZS Cook on 1 June, 1944. Returns compiled after the war showed that expenditure on Shelly Bay between 1942 and 1947 totalled almost \$775,000, almost three times the cost of the complete Philomel barracks, leaving Shelly Bay as the most expensive and least used Naval establishment in N.Z. HMNZS Cook briefly became the primary naval barracks and repair facility for the port of Wellington while on a some what smaller scale, HMNZS Tasman performed the same function at Lyttleton, particularly after Telegraphist training was shifted to Auckland.

In Auckland, HMNZS Tamaki on Motuihe Island already had a colourful past as a quarantine station during World War 1 before being chosen as the site of the new-entry training school. Following an Admiralty request for NZ to expand its training facilities the institution of a new establishment became imperative. On 11 December, 1940 the Navy received Cabinet approval for the occupation of the old quarantine station and on 14 January, 1941, the station was commissioned as HMS Tamaki. Training began almost immediately with 178 men under training and a ship's company of 42.

A building programme was drawn up to give Tamaki a training capacity of 600 "hostilities only" men a year plus 120 continuous service ratings. The building programme was completed within 18 months and on the 1st of October, 1941 Tamaki became an establishment of the new Royal New Zealand Navy as HMNZS Tamaki and by the end of 1943 more than 1000 men a year were being trained. Of the 10,000 men who served in the Royal New Zealand Navy or on loan to the Royal Navy during World War 2, some 6000 passed through Tamaki.

Unfortunately detailed class records appear to have been lost in the passage of time but personal histories reveal that 25 new entry telegraphists joined Tamaki on the 18th of June, 1942, being the 8th class to begin their 17-week telegraphist course. Here it should be mentioned that the primary reason for the courses being of only 17 week's duration was

because almost all the telegraphy candidates had been recruited from the N.Z. Post Office and were therefore already skilled sounder-operators prior to their joining the Navy.

Almost the entire Motuihe Island project was carried out by the Public Works Department whose staff were reported to have been “extremely puzzled and at times vexed by Naval Officers’ references to decks and bulkheads and their insistence on describing sides of the various buildings as being either port or starboard bulkheads instead of the more usual left and right walls.

Other naval activities in the Auckland area included Kauri Point where a mine store had been established in 1941 and the building of a “dome teacher” the screen of which had a diameter of 9.5 metres [yes 9.5 metres] and a ceiling height of 12.5 metres. The dome teaching complex was built on the roof of a cargo shed on Princes Wharf where the Hilton Hotel now stands. Between Whangaroa and Akaroa eight mine bases were built for and manned by the Navy, whereas the 80 coastwatching stations erected around the coast were all manned almost exclusively by Army and lighthouse personnel. The six radar stations at Tiri Tiri Matangi, Baring Head, Beacon Hill, Godley Head, Wedge Point and West Head were all manned exclusively by the Navy.

Lyttleton Dockyard & Base

Pressure on engineering and ship repair industries and the dockyard in Auckland and ship repair facilities in Wellington early in the war led to Lyttleton becoming the RNZN’s second dockyard during 1942-43. A large proportion of requisitioned ships were converted to naval service in Lyttleton, mostly by local firms on contract. Many more naval vessels had been repaired and refitted there by 1945 at which time the volume of work fell away. Nevertheless, in mid-1944 the port was so crowded with naval craft being worked on that those of low priority were moored over in Purau Bay.

Late in 1943 a naval barracks with accommodation for 200 officers and ratings was built at Lyttleton on the site where the oil storage facility is now. The unit was commissioned on 20 January, 1944 by Commander T.S. Critchley, the Naval Officer In Charge Lyttleton, as HMNZS Tasman, in honour of the celebrated Dutch navigator. The establishment was originally planned to be a training facility for telegraphists and anti-submarine warfare seaman specialists and as the South Island’s Dental facility. Shortly after being opened, the training of telegraphists was transferred to HMNZS Tamaki on Motuihe Island in the Hauraki Gulf. Tasman then briefly became a signals training school following the closure of a smaller unit for the training of signalmen which had opened in Dunedin in June 1943. At the end of World War II Dunedin was closed down as a naval establishment but used as a base for the demobilisation of the 2NZEF personnel returning home to the South Island. In September, 1946 work began on converting Tasman to a torpedo, anti-submarine and electrical school, but planned commissioning in early 1950 was deferred, until December, 1955, when it was decided to close the base which was formally decommissioned in 1957. As an aside, the name Tasman was reused in June 1975 for an advanced training establishment within HMNZS Philomel before being closed in 1979.