

Reminisces of a Telegraphist – Albie Cross

We Joined the Navy

The name Te Kani Takirau Frank Hunter, also known to us as "Mick" may not be generally known to older Sigs and Sparkers, but he joined with us in the 12th Seaman Boys of November 1947 and rose to the dizzy heights of Able Seaman.

Before he joined, Frank was a "penny diver" from Rotorua and he bought with him this fantastic ability of being able to impersonate other people, very much along the lines that the late comedian, Peter Sellers (of Goon Show fame) aspired to.

Down on the "Rock", Boy entrants, also known as "Tamaki Horses" were subjected to getting around the base "at the double" except on Sundays. On this occasion Frank yelled out, "What are you WALKING for?" in a voice identical to Petty Officers Alderton, John Harman, "Killer" Cole, ah ahh Algie Walton or any other Training Division Instructors for that matter, had you break into a trot.

He was drafted to Bellona just before us and was a Quarterdeck man. The Captain of the Foc'sle was PO J. ("Pop") Barker, his official number being NZD 906. "Pop" grabbed him by the ear lobe one day and said, "Coom 'ere 'Untah, you little b-----d. You've bin knickin the foc'sle's baysol, 'avent cha. ".

Another of his favourite tricks was emulating the ring of the "sound-powered telephones" He would station one of us boys down at the end of the quarterdeck and then stand by the bulkhead immediately under "Y" turret which along with "X" was manned exclusively by Royal Marines.

The R.M. quarterdeck sentry had a telephone in front of "Y" turret. Mick would "ring" the sentry and then wait for him to answer. He would get a cue from his off-sider when the sentry took a walk and then would "ring" him again, each time giving it a bit more curry than before. I was the one standing down aft by the White Ensign and recall we were just coming past Rangitoto Lighthouse at the end of a NZ cruise and the date was April 1st, 1949. The Quarterdeck sentry got his fair share of calls that morning!

It was one Sunday morning and we were "piped down" at 1030. The Officer of the Day was L/Cdr JPS Vallant, At 1105, Mick rang the Quartermaster and impersonating the O.O.D. who had a rather high- pitched voice, said, "Why aren't you ringing the BELLS?"

Come 1130 and the peace and tranquility of the Calliope Jetty and surrounding basin were rudely disturbed by the sounding of "Seven Bells".

The Quartermaster got a visit from the Officer of the Day and I think he was most happy to hand over the ship to his relief at "eight bells".

The Rock

Everyone who went through training down on the "Rock" which was also known as Motuihe Island, will remember that there was a graveyard at Cemetery Point in which was interred the victims of the 1918 "Black Flu" epidemic when Motuihe was a quarantine station.

The hours that the resident stokers were made to work qualified them as "Watchkeepers", as they had to continually keep the boilers stoked up for the galley, ablution blocks and sick bay etc.

Their mess was the last building at the end of Cemetery Point, next to the graveyard and provided them with a certain degree of peace and quiet to catch up on a bit of shut-eye.

A member of the 13th Seaman Boy Intake whose surname I believe was Cowan (and who I believe he was related to another long serving member of the same name), brought along with him a human skull which he had apparently acquired at a very early age and was not going to part with it.

Just on dusk one clear summer's evening, dressed in his bellbottoms and buttoning up his greatcoat so that his head was completely enclosed within, he snuck around the back of the Stoker's Mess and stood on one of the concrete tombstone slabs with the skull tucked in the crook of his right arm.

I must admit with all due respect to the engine room staff that their appointment on the "Rock" was about as good a rest home as they could expect, considering their length of service and age.

After tot time, they would usually hit the sack for a few hours.

It appears that one member whose name eludes me, had just awoken, and in the process of wiping the sleep from his glazed eyes, he looked out of the window....

The rest of the story was played out down at the Sick Bay where the poor individual was told to rest-up, relax for a couple of days and everything would be "alright".

A Vice Regal Visit

Around about February of 1948, the Governor-General of NZ Sir Bernard Freyberg VC and his good Lady Freyberg paid an official visit to 'The Rock'.

Nelson Division, also known as the Boys Division was chosen to be the Royal Guard.

Everyone was fell in: Nelson, Drake, Cook, Jellicoe and the Ships Company Division.

Lieutenant H.T.A. Winnall RN (the "Jimmy") was in charge and was standing in the middle of the parade ground. The P.O. of the guard was P.O. Dave McCurrie. Lady Freyberg, who was resplendent in a two piece matching ensemble and wearing Court Mounted miniatures, was standing at the edge of the parade ground.

I was somewhat bewildered by the fact that I was about to come face to face with the highest authority in the land whilst standing alongside a Mk 4 .303 fitted with a 17 inch bayonet, which combined were about the same height as I was.

Our Divisional Officer, Archie "Daddy" Cox gave the order and we "open order marched" and he invited the Governor to inspect the Guard.

I was standing in the middle rank about amidships. I had a good view of what was going on both left and right.

The G.G. commenced his inspection and he paused briefly to speak to P.O. McCurrie. When about halfway down the front rank, he enquired of Mr Cox, the name of the Petty Officer of the Guard.

"Very smart man, a VERY smart man," he replied in his crisp manner of tone.

The "Jimmy", had a pet Staffordshire Bull Terrier which to me was the most repulsive looking animal you could ever wish to see. It looked like it was a cross between a ground shark and a stingray.

This animal was standing on the edge of the parade ground next to Lady Freyberg and when it decided to venture further, the eyes of the "Jimmy", who was standing rigidly to attention began to resemble those things that revolve around on "one arm bandits".

As the G.G. moved down the centre rank, the dog wandered over and began taking an interest in P.O. McCurrie's rifle butt, more particularly, took to sniffing at his immaculately white blancoed spats.

Lady Freyberg was completely aloof, her gaze meandering somewhere about 30,000 feet above sea level.

Not so much for the Jimmy who was by this time, to quote a phrase, halfway between having you know what!

As the dog began to raise his left rear leg as a token of appreciation, P.O. McCurrie in a manner which I can only describe as "not having wasted his time at Whale Island", raised the butt of his rifle about two inches and with a deft "flick" of his right boot, quietly despatched the slightly embarrassed dog to the outer confines of the parade ground.

The look of relief on the Jimmy's face said it all and did I detect a flicker of a smile from the Vice-Regal lady?

Who knows?

A Fishy Story

One Sunday afternoon, I had occasion to visit the Sick Bay and on entering I saw one of the Stokers from the Cemetery Point Mess, sitting in the surgery with his hand heavily swathed in a "battle dressing".

He was waiting to see the Surgeon Lieutenant who was indisposed at the time.

Knowing full well that I could be told in no uncertain terms to mind my own business, I enquired as to what his problem was!

It transpired that he had been down on a rocky ledge directly below the Water Tower and was casting out an 80 pound corded line, complete with a No. 4 snapper hook and 8 ounce lead sinker.

During the casting procedure, the sinker apparently snagged an overhanging Pohutukawa branch and at this point in the conversation, he removed the "battle dressing".

With the palm of his hand facing upwards, I saw the eye of a No. 4 snapper hook protruding from it, smack dead centre.

As he turned his hand over, the curve of the No. 4 hook was visible, but the shank and barb were nowhere to be seen. Whether the bait was still attached is something I did not investigate.

If he was not ambidextrous, then he only had a short space of time to learn how to be!

Overseas at Last!

On September 29th, 1949, Bellona and two frigates slipped their moorings and set sail for Sydney.

Somewhere off Cape Brett, the Navigating Officer advised that we would be rounding Cape Reinga at 0200 and the weather forecast was not too favourable. He advised that anything that was not already tied down should be tied down.

Came 0200 and all hell broke loose. We were on a heading of 270 and the oncoming sea was 090.

Mess 5 being the Boy's Mess was in the Lower Foc'sle and I was Cook of the Mess.

I went to the galley and picked up two trays, one containing the fried eggs and bacon and the other was laden with spaghetti.

Having navigated back to the Capstan Flat, I paused at the hatch where the ladder lead down to the Lower Foc'sle and attempted to synchronise my next move with the motion of the ship.

At the bottom of the ladder, a mere 3 feet of space, there was a bloke's locker and one of the doors which had popped, was slowly opening and shutting as the ship rolled

Half way down the ladder my synchronisation equipment started to desert me and I realised that a catastrophe of monumental proportions was about to take place. No prizes for guessing what happened next!

Fortunately for me the spaghetti remained virtually within it's boundaries but the eggs and bacon had a rendezvous with some items of kit.

When it came to dishing up breakfast, I was the only one who fronted up, as all the others were "Up Top" to feed the fish and were in no way interested. After consigning breakfast to the Gash Shute, I washed up the trays, cleaned up the mess and by 0830 I was beginning to feel bloody awful, so I went up top for a breath of freshers.

We had two Type 87's (which I think were VHF aircraft transceivers) and they were located in little cabooses at the head of a narrow companionway on the port and starboard side, just aft of the bridge.

It was there that the elements caught up with me and that I eventually "Mustered my Kit".

Paint Ship

In early 1950, the New Zealand Squadron was assembled in Port Fitzroy, Great Barrier Island and although the fishing was good, we were all occupied with the onerous task of "painting ship".

Stages were swung over the sides and pots of unadulterated Admiralty Pattern 406 Battleship Grey were suspended from cod lines. The paint was about as thick as cold tar and equally as difficult to slap on.

Our Commander (Watkin) was taken out in the "skimming dish" and from a distance of about 300 yards was able to spot any "holidays" and anything else that needed to be tidied up.

This painting episode took place within the confines of Port Fitzroy with a magnificent back-drop of Great Barrier Island flora and fauna.

The NZ Squadron steamed back to Auckland and it was not until they had Rangitoto as a back-drop that, spectators at Cheltenham Beach noticed that something was amiss.

It appeared that Commander Watkin's eye for detail was not quite as perfect as he would have liked.

The Rotoiti which was the last in line ahead was conspicuous in "duck egg green" and as there was no love lost between her C.O. and the Senior Officer of the Squadron, you could say that the "ugly duckling" was the picture postcard of the fleet.

A posting to Waiouru

On May 16 1950, I was drafted from Bellona to Waiouru W/T (later to become Irirangi)

At Irirangi, we maintained a 24 hour watch on 16 megs Ship-Shore (16540 to 16580 kc/s) from about 0600 or sunrise whichever came first, that was when the band came alive and as we covered Area 5, there was an influx of traffic, mainly WX for Wn, Ship Letter Telegrams (SLT's) a lot of Christmas grams from the Norwegian whaler (Balaena) when she was in Antarctic waters and the odd SVC enquiry.

Sometimes, we would hear from a compatriot who couldn't get back to ZLO fast enough Yeah - right.

The MV "Aorangi" (GDVB) which used to ply the Sydney to San Francisco run was a frequent caller and a pleasure to work. I asked what type of transmitter they had and it was called an "Oceanspan". As you heard it tuning up, all you had to do was send "GDVB K " and it went straight into it. It delivered the nicest drop of MCW and you could sit and listen to it all day.

Come nightfall that was the end of any traffic reception partly due I was told in W/T theory to the findings of a bloke called Appleton and his Layers. Why we maintained a "swinging" watch is beyond me. We could however at times hear the Queen Elizabeth (GBSS) and Queen Mary (GBTT) when they were somewhere between Southampton and New York working GKL at Portishead Radio.

I was on 16 Megs on February 6th, 1952, and the receiver was the good old faithful AR 88.

Having made an entry in the log at 2130 "swinging", I dropped down to 31 metres

(9575 kc/s) and with a choice of up to 10 different aerials at my disposal, I picked up a broadcast from the BBC. QSA5.

I called to the POOW to eavesdrop on to my bay and he was able to verify that what was coming over the air was in fact legit.

A bulletin from Buckingham Palace advised that His Majesty King George VI had died peacefully in his sleep.

The POOW got on the phone and informed our C.O. Lt. Cdr L.G. Carr.

Could I take credit for being the first in NZ to hear the sad news or would I have to explain what the hell I was doing DX ing on 31 metres instead of "swinging".

Travelling on the Hop!

Did you know that in the very early 1950's it would cost you thirty one shillings and nine pence (31/9d) to travel by "ye olde three o'clock mule train" from Waiouru to Auckland? For the benefit of you "baby-boomers", that was about \$3.15 cents in my calculations.

There was a system where you could reduce this exorbitant fare but was only used when you were on your extended long-weekend leave (Friday to Wednesday), once a month and heavy snowfalls had closed the Desert Road and State Highway 49 (Ohakune-National Park) for hitch-hiking.

The train left Waiouru at 2200 and you purchased a single ticket to Ohakune for three shillings and sixpence (3/6d). The Guard would come through just before Tangiwai asking in a very subdued voice for "tickets from Waiouru please."

From the next stop at Ohakune until Frankton Junction, no more tickets were punched by the Guard. (Good night Taumaranui and Te Kuiti).

At Horopito, about midway between Ohakune and National Park, the south bound express met the Northbound and the engine crew and guard swapped over.

At 5 a.m. when the train arrived at Frankton, it was in your best interests to be wide awake as you had to hop off and while everyone else were scrambling for a cuppa and a cold pie, you went to the ticket office and purchased a single ticket to Auckland for seven shillings and sixpence (7/6d).

"ALL tickets PLEASE ", was the call as we roared through Te Rapa.

Hitchhike and Politics

You had a better chance of hitch-hiking a lift at Irirangi if you were to "pair off", as a threesome was sometimes by-passed through lack of space. In which case, George would go down the road towards Taihape and wait around the corner. He would ask the driver if he had room for two mates who were just coming down from the camp. Usually this was no problem.

One particular Friday back about 1952, a black shiny vehicle stopped and all three of us piled in

The passenger in the front seat said that they were heading for Wairakei to a conference and were we happy to tag along?

As we approached the "City of Waiouru", the passenger asked how things were at Irirangi.

Neil replied ; "Aw bloody orful, the scran is yuk, the beds is uncumfortable" and so on and so on

George and I were starting to shrink into our posh leather- covered seats, wondering what the hell he was going to come out with next!

The passenger was quite taken with these remarks and said: "Oh my goodness, I didn't think that things were that bad. Maybe I should call in sometime in my official capacity."

Neil mused for a second or two and then enquired as to what this "Official" capacity was.

"Oh, I'm Keith Holyoake, the Deputy Prime Minister"

We never did get a visit from Keith (call me" Kiwi "Holyoake) but we did from his side-kick Sir Sydney Holland who, in company with a bloke called Sir John Cockcroft were just returning from a visit to Wairakei where I understand Sir John was interested in the "heavy water" that was prolific in the region but not the Waikato Four-X variety.

They had a bite to eat in the Wardroom and when they vacated same for their car, which was surrounded by Secret Service men, we were told to keep a low profile and remain in the messdeck.

After they had departed, the Captain's steward came into the mess and said that the C.O. wanted to know the name of the rating who shouted out "GIDDAY SYD "as they were boarding their car.

It is fair to say that Ross Wolfgram was a hell of a nice guy!

Rounds in the Sticks

Wednesday was the day for "rounds" at Irirangi.

Starting off from the Admin Block, the C.O and Master at Arms would set sail through the various departments, being greeted on the way by their representatives.

The two messdecks were followed by the galley, wet canteen and then they proceeded up to the Wrennery.

Lt.Cdr Carr, who had recently taken command, completed his first "rounds" at Irirangi and upon returning to the Admin Block, he called the "Jimmy", the Master at Arms and the Stores C.P.O. into his office.

He queried the Stores Chief as to whether his department was devoid of supplies.

Feeling somewhat bewildered the Stores Chief was at a loss for an answer, until the C.O advised the group that as he was passing through the messdecks, the Comms one in particular which had the cutlery laid out portraying our callsign Z L O. He noticed some cups and saucers had the initials NZR emblazoned on them and also the ash trays were displaying D.B. Bitter.

While inspecting the Wrennery he apparently lost count of the number of pillow slips which also bore the NZR logo. Underneath that pillow slip was the best bob's worth you could ever wish for, much softer than the "horse-hair" variety gathering dust on the Store shelves.

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Speedway News

Numerous personnel who came out from the United Kingdom on the Loch class frigates and were drafted to Waiouru, missed the "Speedway News" which was a popular item back home and there were quite a few fans of "Split" Waterman to name but one.

It was suggested that in order to obtain these publications, el cheapo, it was decided to form a club and Tel. Frank Glass (hereinafter known as TUB) was elected President (unopposed). The motion was carried and no correspondence was entered into.

By the marvels of modern day pigeon post, Tub was able to secure the services of a young lady somewhere up in the Midlands, who was only too happy to forward any material to a struggling and financially strapped club away down there in little old New Zealand.

So the Waiouru Speedway was officially launched and soon copies of the long awaited Speedway News started to flow in.

However, it began to get a little bit embarrassing when our correspondent in the UK requested such material as: photographs, venues, team colours, programmes, type of bikes and did we run JAP engines?

The Waiouru Speedway was involuntarily wound up when the President resigned after he received a draft chit to the Bellona for a freighting cruise to the UK in 1951.

But the legend lives on....

For nearly two years, Tub pressured the C.O. (Lieutenant Iggy Biggs) to get a screening of the 16mm film "Mutiny on the Bounty" which starred Charles Laughton as Capt. William Bligh and Clarke Gable as Fletcher Christian. Eventually the film arrived and was viewed in the YMCA in front of a packed house.

Shortly afterwards when we were on the walking track coming back from NR2 and about 100 yards from camp, Tub (who bore a remarkable resemblance to Charles Laughton, both in stature and mannerisms) gave his rendition of Bligh's famous speech.

"SO, you've cast me adrift in an open boat. I'll get you for this CHRISTIAN, you mutinous DOG"

"I'LL SEE YOU HANGING." "HANGING FROM THE HIGHEST YARDARM IN THE BRITISH NAVY"

Anyone passing by and seeing this spectacle of a man supposedly gesticulating whilst standing upright in an open boat might have wondered just what they were putting in the rum down here.

A Posting to OZ

Two years and eight months passed and I found myself along with four others on the "Wanganella", heading for Sydney in transit to HMAS Cerberus. The fresh water drinking fountain onboard ship was not refrigerated and when we arrived at Sydney, we all had dysentery.

During my sojourn at Irirangi it was not a requisite to muster your kit as was done in Boy's Training, primarily because of the lack of space - cabin wise.

Therefore, it was not until I arrived at Cerberus and attended divisions in which the rig of the day was to be No.10's that I suddenly realised that a pair of "trop socks" had long become a non-existent item of kit.

Getting anything out of "slops" in the RAN was harder than getting gold out of Fort Knox.

I sorted out my "longest" pair of short socks and with the aid of a pair of scissors from my housewife; I proceeded to cut the toe section off.

By inverting the sock so that the heel was in the upper position and disguised by the tongue of the shoe, I was able to pull the sock up far enough to "regulation height".

This of course exposed all my toes and a portion of the sole of each foot.

The day (Friday) dawned beautifully; the air temperature at 0630 was already 100 Fahrenheit.

Our Comms Section had drawn the short straw and was to be inspected by the C.S.T. F.N.D. (Commodore Superintendent Training. Flinders Naval Depot)

Australia is blessed with a small black fly which has a voracious appetite for gorging on perspiration which is secreted from the soft flesh found at the back of one's knee. It feels like a bee sting only worse. A sword-toting Gunnery Lieutenant bedecked in No. 6's walked between the ranks barking "keep your legs still" He may have had a better idea of why we were dancing if he had been wearing shorts.

Our Divisional Officer tapped me on the back of the thigh and told me to "get some LEGS on those SHORTS, Laddie".

I think that the Commodore was wised up before he started his inspection and his comment afterwards was: "maybe we should put the Kiwis in a section of their own." Whether that remark had anything to do with our Aussie counterparts "long-shorts" appearance is debatable. (We could have invented a new rig "SIX - TENS")

Fly bites and short shorts I could live with but when the rising temperature from the parade ground asphalt climbed into the 100's, the soles of my shoes had a BBQ effect on my bare toes.

After 50 minutes we marched back to CT. 4 where we dismissed. My first port of call was to the ablution block where I dunked my feet in cool clear water for what felt like an eternity.

Midway through a Leading Tel (Q) course at Cerberus (January to April 1953), I was "drafted" along with Mike (MAS) Miller, Bud Thompson, Rex Parr and George Hilliar up to Sydney for seven days to help out with a JASEX (Joint Anti submarine exercise) which was held out off Jervis Bay.

George and I went to NAS Nowra, the other three opting for the bright lights and pleasures available in the big city.

I did not touch a morse key nor did George and our duties were decoding enemy reports using "speed is essential" methods, passing such reports coming in from Sea Furies and Fireflies to HQ in Sydney via their teleprinter land-line.

The middle watch (12 to 4) is one that I will always remember. Having just come off watch and climbed into my bunk, all hell broke loose when the percussion cartridges were fired to start up the Sea Fury engines and raising hell with the Kookaburra population in the trees outside, whom vehemently objected to being woken at such a bloody awful hour.

The C.B's were kept in a safe which was mounted on a table at about eye-level. It was painted a khaki colour and must have been purchased from the Army Surplus stores. It was the combination type and as speed for de-coding was a requisite, it was left in the "ready-use position". i.e. the door was closed but the combination had not been set.

There were two Ockers in my watch - one a Killock and the other a Tel.

During the middle when traffic tailed off a bit I couldn't resist the urge to see how these combination safes worked so I moved the dial ONE notch. Kerlonk - and we had a locked safe!

I turned to the Killock and told him the bad news.

"Sheez right Blue" he said. The combi's scratched into the paint on the top of the safe!"

Up on a chair and behold: - 35L 69R 39L

We were back in business!

(I might add that I failed my Killock's course as my marks for cryptography were 47/100 and R/T procedure was 83/85. But, that's history.)

Sunset at HMAS Cerberus

The grounds of HMAS Cerberus which incorporated the parade ground and two large football fields covered an area of about 18 acres. At the western end was a flagstaff from which the Australia Commonwealth Blue was flown and the eastern was for the White Ensign.

The White Ensign fluttered from a jackstay about 80 feet above ground-level.

To compensate for wet or dry weather conditions and to keep the Ensign hard up against the block at all times, a genuine cannonball sewn in canvas and weighing about the same as the Olympic shot-putt was attached to the hauling up halyard, thus exerting downward pressure at all times

I and an Aussie Sig were detailed off as Sunset Party to lower the Ensign.

Whoever raised the flag that morning had no idea how to tie a bowline with or without a bight, so tied the crudest knot you could ever imagine.

During the day it poured down with rain and the weight of the cannonball and the subsequent shrinkage of the leader that attached it to the halyard made it impossible to undo the knot before Sunset, which was rapidly approaching.

"Sunset Sir" was piped and the Officer of the Day took the salute outside the Drill Hall (for which I was thankful, was about 300 yards away)

My Aussie oppo lifted the cannonball up as far as he could and then we reverently proceeded to lower the Ensign. Raising a cannonball is not something that you practice every day, but they say that desperate circumstances necessitate desperate means. How true!

The next minute seemed like an eternity and the sound of the bugle wafting across the playing fields was drowned out by the agonising squeals that were coming from the block which was in desperate need of some lubrication.

Looking up and seeing the cannonball ascending and the jack stay supporting the block looking as if it was about to descend sent more than a shiver down one's spine.

Right up until the Ensign reached the deck, the block kept up this terrible cacophony of torturous sound.

With one of us holding the halyard supporting the cannonball, we carefully disengaged the Inglefield clips, removed the Ensign and re-joined the clips, we reverently lowered the cannonball.

(Whenever I hear that parody about "Murphy and the Bricks", I can sympathise with his dilemma)

(The findings of Sir Isaac Newton also crossed my mind at one stage, only we weren't dealing with an apple!)

Pukaki 1953

We boarded the Pukaki on August 7, 1953 after she had undergone a "mini" refit in which we completely re-rigged the aerial system. Up until that time, we had been accommodated in Philomel.

I was advised at Divisions in Philly to have my hair cut before I proceeded on my next run ashore.

The barber's shop at Philly had two chairs and when I presented myself, I was duly ushered to the starboard side chair.

The portside chair was occupied by Cdr Richard E. Washbourne who I surmised had received the same instructions as me but obviously from a higher authority.

The barber who was carefully navigating the clippers around the base of the Commander's neck made reference to a "Legacy from Adolf", left behind following the Battle of the River Plate.

At that moment the phone rang and it was passed to the Commander:

"Washbourne speaking" Yes, yes, You don't say, Is THAT so? , well thank you, thank you very much ".

For about ten seconds there was dead silence, not even the whirr of clippers nor did the snipping of scissors prevail.

"That was to inform me that I have just been made an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours."

"I don't want any more of them BIG WHEELS"!

Cruising and minding our own Business

It is not every day that you are sedately cruising along, enjoying the serenity of a fair sea and a fair sky when suddenly your optics focus on two aircraft carriers and a bloody great battleship!

Well, that's what happened to the Pukaki in November 1953 when half way between Okinawa and the port of Sasebo, Japan.

Over on the Port side about 5 miles away were the USS Saipan, Tarawa and Wisconsin in line ahead.

Spread out over an area of about 15 miles was the remainder of the US 7th Fleet of which from memory comprised something like 39 ships - all told.

For some unknown reason, we suddenly became the focus of attention from a helicopter and even though we had the Union Jack prominently painted on the roof of the 4" gun turret and F424 on the sides and stern, he continually buzzed us, probably waiting to see if we wanted a bit of target practice.

The next thing was a Destroyer Escort who screeched up to about 1000 yards distant and demanded by 10 inch lamp to know what the "password" was. We replied, only to be told: - "that was yesterday's, now give us today's"

After identification had been completed, we received a message which stated among other things that it was "most inappropriate" for the junior ship on the Far East station to pass through the centre of a Fleet.

Our reply was something like: "My actions are regrettable, but at the moment I have insufficient fuel - oil to go around you!"

I personally think that there was an element of sour grapes as there may have been a few red faces in the USN hierarchy as to who allowed an "intruder" to get within spitting distance of their prize possessions without being detected electronically and if we had been, why were we not reported 50 to 100 miles away?

Someone in FLEACT Sasebo must have been informed and sent out a "home base" recall and as the submarine net was lowered for us to enter port, we noticed that the entire 7th had beaten us to it.

We tied up to a buoy with the Wisconsin tied up to a neighbouring buoy.

Her foc'sle which was about as long as we were, had these two massive 15 inch gun turrets which were just forward of the bridge, the barrels looking like tree trunks.

I remember Clem Mellish looking out of a scuttle in 2 mess and saying: Gee, will you look at that CRUISER, eh boy!"

SASEBO 15 November 1953

We relieved the Kaniere in Sasebo about 15 November, 1953. I paid a visit to their W/T office and found Peter (Bones) Hunter was covering the Fox-Fox broadcast from GZO, Hongkong.

Traffic came through those days at 28 wpm, and you had approximately 7 seconds between messages to put on the TOR and crank up the triple roll in readiness for the next. This was continuous and when it came to a watch change, the scene in the W/T office somewhat resembled a driver changeover at the Bathurst 1000.

Bones was decked out in his No. 8's and he was also wearing one of those "G. I." jackets , the ones with what looked like brown leather on the outside, a high backed collar and a fully fleeced sheepskin on the inside.

It was the sort of thing that (Five Star) General Matthew B. Ridgway wore.

I sat down next to Bones and as he completed the necessaries during the 7 second break, he reached inside his "G.I." jacket and pulled from a shoulder holster, the meanest looking .45 Automatic you could ever wish to see.

Apparently in the Yellow Sea it was not difficult to purchase any sort of "hardware" from gun-runners who were not fussy about what type of currency you bartered with.

Waitangi Day 1955

The Waitangi Day celebrations of 1955 turned out to be a little bit more than a celebration for the Pukaki and five our her crew.

We had been designated as 'guard ship" and were anchored in Renown Anchorage. On the eve of Waitangi Day, five of our shipmates whose rating and branch shall remain anonymous, paid a visit to the Duke of Marlborough in Russell and consumed a few pints of the local brew.

Having missed the 6 o'clock liberty boat back to Pukaki, they walked to the end of the jetty and decided to fill in time by indulging in a bit of "skinny dipping".

At "Clear Lower Deck" at 0830 on Waitangi Day morning, our C.O. had all five miscreants paraded on the quarterdeck and informed us that their conduct in divesting themselves of clothing and jumping off the wharf was totally unacceptable, inasmuch as one of them got into difficulties, had to be pulled out of the water by the others who nearly succumbed to the same predicament.

The offender was taken to the Russell Hospital where a suction device was used to remove his entire stomach contents, which among other things contained a quantity of sea water.

Our C.O. made it known that the residence in which the Governor-General Sir Willoughby Norrie and his wife Lady Norrie were staying in, had a panoramic view of the whole Bay of Islands including the Russell Wharf.

Time to Discharge

I was due for discharge on January 2, 1956 and was drafted from Irirangi up to Philomel on December 23rd 1955. I was victualled in and issued a leave pass which expired on December 28th (on or before which date I had to return onboard HMNZS "Philomel"), wording which no doubt will bring back memories to many.

I was gainfully "employed" during my last 4 days of service at ZLE29, (Port Wireless) and the man in charge was P.O. Tel Len Bates.

The next senior member was Tel. Peter (Bones) Hunter and during one forenoon an argument of monumental proportions took place between the former and Len Bates.

I could only stand back and watch in total dismay as these two verbally slugged it out and I thought that it was only a matter of time before Len pulled rank.

Well, it soon became inevitable that I was going to be in sole charge while Bones was marched down to the Admin Block.

However, that was not to be: You see, Len commuted daily from home to Philomel in mufti, his shoes being a tan colour. He did not own a pair of black shoes and was able to avoid going to Divisions on the pretext of "being required" at the W /T Office.

If for any reason he had to show his presence up at the "sharp end", he would borrow Bone's shoes.

During their heated argument, Bones made it quite clear that they would probably make biological history if they fronted up before the Officer of the Day wearing the same pair of shoes!

Not to be outdone, Len went down to the P.O.'s mess and bludged a tin of black nugget with which he set about camouflaging his tan shoes.

The more he spat and polished them the more the tan shone through and, yes, you guessed it. Bones was given a reprieve.