

CHAPTER ONE

My interest in radio communications started at St Patrick's College, Silverstream, in the Cadet Forces. In the Third Form, you were in the Infantry Company, Fourth Form - the Air Training Corps and in the Fifth Form you could branch out in to the Signals Platoon, the Band or the Officer Cadet Training Unit. I elected the Signals Platoon as I couldn't play a musical instrument and they didn't think I was officer material.

The OC of the Signals Corps was one of the priests, who happened to be an amateur radio operator and the college discipline master. The priests didn't appreciate my sense of humour and I was sent on more than one occasion to see said discipline master for class disruptions. On entering his office, one could see a large golf bag which didn't hold golf clubs, but a selection of bamboo canes of varying thicknesses. One would be asked why one was sent to see him and he would select the appropriate cane befitting the punishment and make a decision as to how many one should receive on one's tender buttocks. Four was the average.

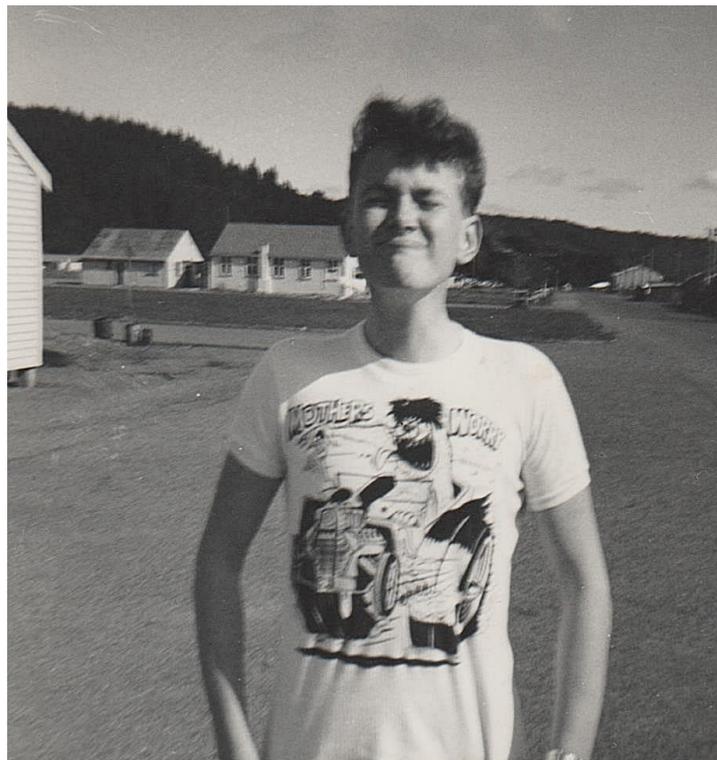
Our principal method of radio communication was the NZ Army No 48 set on which we practiced netting in to a frequency, carrying out cw and voice procedures, whilst wearing our sandpaper uniforms which gave one a rash in the lower regions. St Pat's also taught agriculture and farming so we had plenty of farmland to camouflage ourselves whilst playing at soldiers.



No48 Set

I left college at the end of the fourth year in 1962 aged 15 and joined the NZ Post Office to train as a radio telegraphist at Trentham Camp. In those days, Trentham Camp was not only home to the Army, but also the Police Training College, Immigration, Ministry of Works and the Post Office Training Centre and Accommodation.

There were twelve of us in the class from all over NZ. During the day, we learnt morse code - receiving and transmitting by hand, gradually building up to 25 wpm, Touch typing on Creed reperforators - no page copy to a speed of 60 WPM. Two or three times a week, we would travel in to Wellington for night classes in radio theory at Wellington Technical Institute, which in those days was behind the old Museum. We also visited a Union Steam Ship Company vessel in port to learn how to tune transmitters and operate the MF DF gear.



Trentham Camp

On passing out, we were sent to different areas - Awarua Radio, Chatham Islands, Auckland Radio, Wellington Radio and a couple were sent to Radio Inspectors' offices. I was sent to Wellington Radio - the International Telegraph Office in the General Post Office in Featherston Street, Wellington.

The ITO had a Compac cable teleprinter circuit to Sydney, a radio teletype circuit to Papeete, a radio facsimile/CW circuit to Melbourne and CW circuits to Rarotonga, Nuie, the Tokelaus, Apia, Chatham Islands and Scott Base. The circuits to the Islands and Scott Base were all scheduled circuits. There were six operating bays for the CW circuits. There was an Imperial 66 typewriter in front of you, a morse key to the right and a morse autohead to the left. All CW traffic had to be punched up beforehand on the "Chaffcutter". There were six landline buttons for reception and six for transmission. You rang Himitangi for transmitters and Makara for receivers to see which lines would be used for your circuit. ID's were exchanged by key and the distant stations would send their traffic first. Traffic was normally sent at 28 wpm and if you missed something, you sent BI on the key. This meant pull your tape back an inch and resend.

Telegrams from the Islands were normally sent in their native language. In between telegrams, there were three VEs and during that time, you had to put a Time of Receipt, Op's initials, take out the telegram form. Remove the two pieces of carbon, re-insert in between three forms, put in to typewriter, re-align and be ready for the next CT - commencement of telegram. Definitely good training for Pussers.

After a while, I became bored with the same routine, wanted to go to sea and be hands on with transmitters and receivers. So I went to see the local naval recruiter - one MAA Tasker. He asked me what I would like to join as in the navy. To which I replied "A Radar Operator". He looked at me aghast and said not bloody likely and with my training, would be better off as a telegraphist. After deliberating for 30 seconds, I agreed.

I had to do entry exams and a medical which was carried out at the old HMNZS Olphert building on the wharf. Lt Tom Morrow adjudicated. The medical exam was something to behold. About 50 of us standing in the hall, naked, then asked to do squatting and jumping exercises. I believe this may have been a substitute for grabbing one's bollocks and asked to cough.

All went well and I was to join the May intake, 1964. However, I had one duty to perform and that was to inform the ITO Superintendent that I was resigning and joining Her Majesty's Service. Needless to say, he went ballistic, ranting that it had cost thousands of pounds to train me. To which I replied that it was merely a transfer between Government Departments. This went down like a lead balloon so I did a tactful retreat.

Chapter Two to follow...