

CHAPTER 12 - HMNZS Canterbury - Part 1

HMNZS Canterbury 1981/82 Commission
Commanding Officer Captain C. Carl, RNZN, F11



Posting in date to Canterbury was 6 April 1981 but we took leave mid-march to get to Auckland to move into a navy house at 41 Greenslade Crescent, Northcote (yes, the same house as before), to sort out our wedding arrangements and get Tony settled into Northcote College.

The wedding was set for March 28th and the Decree Absolute arrived two weeks beforehand. When I took the DA and other documents required to the Takapuna Registry Office, the woman behind the counter looked at the dates of the DA and intended wedding date and remarked that I must be a glutton for punishment.

The wedding reception was to be held in the Junior Rates Dining Hall, HMNZS Philomel and I arranged the menu with the Chief Cook and beer and wines with the Wardroom Chief Steward. The Hall was rigged out with bunting during the afternoon of the wedding which was at 1630 in St Augustine's Church, Calliope Road, next to RNZNH. On the morning of the wedding, myself, Scouse (who was now a civvy working in Tokoroa as an instrument technician) and my father-in-law to be, Alan, went down to Philomel to check on progress and ran into TC Topine. When he heard of the news he invited us up to the Senior Rates Living In Mess for a drink. He brought out a bottle of Glenfiddich. Alan and I took it easy but Scouse had a little too much to drink. We were staying at Barry Dittmer's house, two along from ours in Greenslade Crescent, and when we got back, had to throw Scouse in a cold bath to sober him up! The bridal party in our house were getting anxious and waiting for us to leave for the church. Eventually we got Scouse dressed and made it to the church. He was the best man, John Bullock was the usher and Rock was the Master of Ceremonies. The officiating minister was a navy chaplain, Tom Hill, who was dressed in Jewish robes. We managed to get through the ceremony but our marriage certificate had been signed in the wrong places by different people. I ended up being married to Scouse with Vicki being a witness. Our bit of paper is covered in twink. I found out that the arches of my shoes had the words HELP on the left and ME on the right and when Vicki and I knelt down at the altar, the congregation could read my dilemma.

While everyone meandered down to the Philomel J/Rs Dining Hall, Vicki, her bridesmaid and flower girls went to the rose garden at Belmont to have photos taken. The reception went off alright and at the end of the evening, some of us went back to our place for more drinks. Vicki, in her wedding dress drove one lot of drunks out of the base in our car and I drove another lot out in Barry's car. Eventually, the house was left to us but we only had a couple of hours before Scouse was heading back to Tokoroa and dropping us off at the airport on the way for our flight to Fiji. We spent a week on Treasure Island and son, Tony, stayed with the Dittmers - after all, one didn't want one's son along at one's honeymoon, did one.

Canterbury had been in Refit since April 1980 and myself, the Yeoman (Charlie Matenga) and the POEW (Roger Sheehan) found ourselves on board a ship that still had Dockyard workers milling all over her and spaces that didn't look like Communications offices and mess decks.

At that stage, we had no junior rates posted to the ship except for one signalman to run back and forth to NCC Auckland.

As well as organising the MCO, CCR, UHF and LMA offices during the refit, I was also voted into the position of the After Chiefs as President of the Mess. This Mess was the residence of the regulating Chiefs of the different branches on the ship. There were eight bunks in the Mess and the MAA, who lived up forward in his own cabin, the PO Medic who lived in the Sick Bay, made up our numbers to ten. We had to ensure that our mess deck living space and the Communications office, mess deck (3LZ1) and equipment areas were up to scratch and habitable. In order to get everything ready on time for Harbour Acceptance Trials, I helped the Dockyard workers along with the odd tot of rum and the occasional can of beer.

The majority of the Ship's Company posted on approximately three months prior to Harbour Acceptance Trials and the Communications Department set about getting the Flag Deck, Foremast, communications areas and mess deck ready. A new HF and MF main roof had to be made up prior to hauling up. The easiest way to do this was lay out the wire and insulators on the jetty using dockyard plans (finally) to get the correct lengths. The HF section was hauled up to the spar, aft of the foremast, one wire at a time and the ends secured by using a Marconi splice. Dead end guy grips were supposed to be used to do this but I had learnt from past experience on **Waikato** that these things were prone to unravel, particularly in heavy seas. The MF section was no longer attached to the end of the HF section but from spars either side of the funnel to the Mainmast yardarms and this made the HF section a lot lighter. An earthing stick and emergency HF and UHF aerials were also made up.

The Communications crew for that deployment were made up as follows:

Radio

CPORS, 3 x LRO, 6 x ARO.

Signals

POYS, 3 x LSG, 5 x ASG

The EW Branch had 1 POEW who was an ex Sparker but the rest of his staff were EW Seamen. Two ARO's were seconded to the EWO for watch keeping duties with two of the LROs having to keep watches in the MCO. The senior LRO was Greg Hartley who I made dayman. Greg had left the navy for a couple of years to do a carpentry apprenticeship and had to drop a rank when he came back. The Communications Branch on Frigates in the RNZN had been permanently on a three watch system at sea ever since Canterbury first arrived from the UK so we were not required to supply Communicators for communal duties.

During the refit, I had to accompany one of my sparkers to the Auckland District Court. He had been caught urinating in a public place over in Auckland. I was to appear in uniform as his "friend" and speak on his behalf. Before we left, I went to see the POWTR as to what Consequential Naval Punishment my errant sparker would receive as a result of appearing in court. Duly armed with the information, we set off and when the time came for me to stand up and speak, I gave the lad a glowing report and told the judge what punishment would be metered out on the ship - stoppage of leave and pay. The judge was duly impressed and let him off with a warning. We were waiting outside the courtroom for the navy driver to pick us up, when I was approached by an elderly gentleman who asked if I was the MAA on the Achilles during WW2. I replied that it was a bit before my time.

Canterbury commissioned and passed her HATs and SATs and in October 1981 she sailed for Sydney to start her Operational Workup. Once again the RAN WORS was Reg Foden. He did the harbour alongside part of the workup but for the Final Battle Problem he sent CPORS Pedro Franklin from HMAS Torrens to do the evaluation. I knew that I would be spending the day at sea in my Mess so Greg was to be in charge in the MCO, LRO Alan Belcher the CCR and LRO Chris Stokes in the UHF Office. 1 December 1981, **Canterbury** passed her Final Battle Problem and earned the right to be called an operational frigate. She sailed back to NZ for the Christmas period, departing Sydney 7 December 1981.

On 14 January 1982, **Canterbury, Waikato** (minus 965 radar aerial) and **Taranaki** sailed for **Squadex 82** during which, we landed at a remote beach on the Coromandel for a banyan and sports. **Monowai** joined a few days later with **HMAS Vampire** also participating. It was during this time that **Canterbury** and **Waikato** carried out UWT (Underwater Telephone) trials using secure RATT (Radioteletype). As sound carries faster underwater, the teleprinters had to be changed to 50 bauds instead of the usual 75.

15 February 1982, **Canterbury** sailed for Sydney in company with **Taranaki**, to participate in **Exercise Sea Eagle 82**, arriving Sydney 19th February. During passage across the Tasman, I was shaken in the early hours of the morning by the killick of the watch who said that the RS (Gunther Henman) on Taranaki wanted to speak to me on Secure UHF voice.

I stumbled up to the MCO and got on the circuit - "What's up Gunth?" "James, ma boy - I've lost CCK10 (This was an allied crypto material). What are we going to do about it?" My response was "Waddya mean - We - Leading Hand?" It was two in the morning and I hadn't lost my sense of humour. His operators had done the settings for working the RAN for the 18th but had no means of setting up for the 19th. I got the Duty LRO to pass the required settings only for the 19th on the intership covered ratt circuit. It appeared that the boys had been shredding the confidential waste and the crypto material had been shredded as well. When I asked where the shredded waste was, Gunther replied that it had already been thrown in the briny and was probably about 20 miles astern by now. The two ships arrived AM 19th February. Taranaki went alongside and we went to a buoy. About thirty minutes later, Taranaki's whaler came alongside with LRO Danny Kaye handcuffed to a briefcase. He had the crypto boards inside and was coming onboard to set up for the 20th. A board of inquiry was held on Taranaki with Neal Catley arriving from Auckland to convene the hearing. Everything was found to have been correctly carried out and Gunther heaved a sigh of relief - after all, the crypto material that had gone was Edition RS...

Sailed 21st February for the Exercise Sea Eagle which lasted until 3 March. This exercise was to prepare RAN and RNZN units for **RIMPAC 82**. Alongside in Sydney, I was told to go in No10s uniform to the Photographic Centre at HMAS Kuttabul to have my photo taken. My photo was then attached to my Service Documents which were sent back to Auckland for the Warrant Officers Selection Board.

On the 19 March, TG627.3 under the Command of **HMAS Hobart**, sailed for Hawaii via Fiji. Ships in the Task Group were **Hobart (CTG), Canterbury, Brisbane, Stalwart** and **Yarra**. All the RAN ships had FLTSATCOM and **Hobart** did a UHF to UHF rerad for us. We arrived in Suva on the 25th March (where I was met by my Uncle and Aunt), stayed for three days and departed on the 28th, arriving in Pearl Harbor 6th April. There we were issued with a special Jason keylist for the allied ships to copy their own HF, single channel, secure RATT Broadcast. **Canterbury, Hobart, Brisbane, Yarra** and **USS Cimarron** (a SATCOM fitted fleet tanker) made up the Orange Force with the **USS Ranger Battle Group** sailing from San Diego, making up Blue Force. **Canterbury** was the only unit in Orange Force that had a helo, which meant that we were going to be the radar picket for the group, with the helo scouting ahead looking for the enemy. In order to achieve maximum infiltration without having our communications intercepted a plan was devised to achieve this. I obtained permission from COMTHIRDFLT to transmit on 400 kHz as I knew that the USN ships were unable to intercept or DF that low in frequency and probably no longer able to read morse code. The RAN units could receive only on MF using their B41 receivers.



Arriving Suva

My Uncle, Ken Dell, took some of us out on a fishing trip and also to a small island looking for sea shells, which he had taken up as a hobby and had a large collection. He was a mining engineer, contracted to the Fijian Government.



Ken, me, Stores Chief Spike Hughes and Chief EL Ross Campbell

Getting back to the Exercise - Orange Force headed east toward CONUS and at the appropriate time, **Canterbury** went ahead and during the night (darken ship, radio and radar silence were in force), Lt Cdr Joe Tunnicliffe took off in the dark and flew at 100 feet above sea level. He flew right into the middle of Blue Force, noted the position, flew back to **Canterbury** and the MCO then sent the Enemy Contact Report back to Orange Force on 400 kHz. Unfortunately, Orange Force CTG didn't send the confirmation back through **Cimarron** for rerad back to us acknowledging receipt. We didn't know until after that phase of the exercise that CTG **had** received the ECR. As a result of not knowing, our Ops Department panicked and sent the ECR via HF. This was immediately picked up by an AWAC which was near us at the time and we were attacked by F14s from USS Ranger and put out of the exercise for several hours.

As a note of consolation, **Canterbury** received a commendation at the debrief for her performance from COMTHIRDFLT who also acknowledged that they had been well and truly caught off guard. They must have messed their pants when they found out that a helo had flown right in amongst them and not picked up by their sensors!



The above pic shows USS Cimarron fuelling an Aussie DDG on her port side.

RIMPAC went from 8th - 19th April which left us with 11 days alongside to enjoy the delights of Oahu before we sailed for Hong Kong in company part of the way with the Ranger Battle group.

A small island was used by the USN for target practice and during the gunnery phase of the exercise, simulating a shore bombardment, Canterbury refused to fire - something about upsetting the ecology. Anyway, the press got wind of this and when the ship got back to Pearl, the CO was interviewed on his actions. During the interview he remarked that seeing all the advanced weaponry on all the other ships berthed in harbour, we were only a "Bow and Arrow" navy. This went down like a lead balloon back home and the PM, Rob Muldoon, was heard to say that when that man gets back to NZ, the only thing that he would be in charge of would be a patrol boat!

Received a phone call from Vicki whilst alongside. WO Gary Johnstone (Non-Technical Posting Warrant) had said that I would be coming off the ship when it returned to NZ and I had a choice - Comms School or back to Waiouru. We decided to go back to Waiouru.

The After Chiefs visited the Arizona Memorial. To get to the departure point, we had to travel to Pearl City on the north side of Pearl Harbor and on the way back, we stopped at the monkey bar, Pearl City Tavern, where monkeys lived behind a long glass partition. I had previously visited this bar in 1971.



We went on a happy hour run in Waikiki and this photo was taken at the Armed Forces Hotel. The gentleman on the left is CPORM Dave Preston, ex-RN. He had served on HMS Ark Royal and in one of the episodes of the TV doco about the ship, Dave can be seen as a defaulter for being adrift!

On ANZAC Day Canterbury and the RAN ships provided a guard of honour at the National Memorial Cemetery, Diamond Head. Many of the ships company also attended.



In the afternoon, I had arranged to meet the Senior Chief Radioman off USS Ranger in the grounds of the Armed Forces Hotel to discuss the possibility of them taking communications guard for us and HMAS Brisbane. A couple of beers cemented the deal.

We departed from Pearl Harbor 30th April as part of the **USS Ranger Battle Group**, including **Brisbane** - the **Ranger** was ship/shore and broadcast guard for the both of us. En route we were treated to a fire power demonstration of the Phalanx CIWS from the Battle Group's Cruiser – USS Horne.



USS Horne

Very impressive. At some point, the Battle Group headed for Guam - what we didn't know was that we would see them again. Brisbane and Canterbury proceeded to Hong Kong and we set watch with GZO on the MRL that I had booked six months earlier. Arrived in Honkers 15th May and five days later, everyone on board received a huge adrenalin rush.