

CHAPTER 8 - Communications Training School - a short draft. IRIRANGI - a longer one.

Posted in 22nd November and given the Basic Radio Class, consisting of Robin Allen and Geoff Butterini. Their previous instructor, Tony Locke, had been posted to IRIRANGI. I was also instructor for Radio Communication Instruction and Wireless Telegraphy Procedure.

During the December/January period I was involved in two events. One of them was to be a Watch Supervisor for an exercise at Civil Defence Headquarters, Wellington. Myself, Jim Harvey and one other instructor from CTS travelled down to Wellington on the "Luxurious" overnight sleeper, the Silver Star. We could order drinks by pressing the buzzer for the steward, who also brought us tea and bikkies in bed in the morning, an hour before the train pulled into the Capital. Very civilised - must be similar to how Officers were treated at Philomel.

Second event was to be "volunteered" for a Guard for the Flag Officer 2nd in Command, Far East Fleet (FO2FEF). I ended up as left-hand marker.

In April, the Comms Training Officer, Terry Appleby, came up to me and said " PRD John Bullock, IRIRANGI, is looking for an exchange posting." John was in Waiouru unaccompanied, meaning that his wife and family were in Auckland and he wanted to get back to them. Al Tritt was another PRD at IRIRANGI who was there unaccompanied and he had a navy house in Hillary Crescent at the other end of where I was living. I talked it over with my wife and we agreed to shift. The exchange went through and I went down to Waiouru unaccompanied as a house was not yet available. Caught the "rattler" which left Auckland at 1600 and arrived Waiouru in the early hours of the 9th May. A brisk morning greeted me along with the duty driver - a Maori General Dutyman. It wasn't Mick Kereti and I think his first name was Pete.



The driver dropped me off at the Senior Rates accommodation at IRIRANGI, which was about 5 miles south of Waiouru. Only managed about two hours sleep before I had to get up. Did my ablutions and then went to the S/R's Dining Room for breakfast. The PO Cook was Henry Hay. Just after 0800, I reported to the MAA to do my Joining-In Routine and to meet the SCO, WORS Tug Wilson.

This was followed up by a visit to Receivers (NR2) where I met CRD John Paull, who acquainted me with the various aspects of the building and told me which watch I was to be in and when. There were four watches with a few daymen. The PRDs were Doc Watts, Al Tritt, Tony Locke, myself and one other.



HMNZS IRIRANGI

Joined up with my watch for the first time and my killick was Bud Abbott. At that stage, we were in a three-watch system. 0800 - 1600, 1600 - 2300 and 2300 - 0800. Later, this was changed to a two-watch system - 0800 - 1600 and 1600 - 0800.

I was eventually allocated a house at 22 Ballance Road, Waiouru. Across the road was Tony Locke and next to me in No 20 was a man who was to become a great friend and a bad influence - one PORM William John Newell - Scouse! Scouse was in the same watch and my opposite number at Transmitters. This meant that we had far too much time off together...In addition, PORM Bill Fraser was the PORM in Fixed Services in the same watch!

Another mate, Colin MacDonald had also been posted to IRIRANGI, was now a Leading Seaman and one of the Duty Drivers. I had never driven before and I obtained my licence by learning to drive in a NZ Army short based landrover. I purchased my first car, a 1951 Ford Prefect (known as the high-roller - if you went around a corner too fast, the car was prone to roll over...)



1951 Ford Prefect - similar to mine. The front and back seats were both long ones - all leather.

Anyway, it cost me \$40. The engine needed a re-bore and new pistons. Colin MacDonald organised everything and with me as an assistant, put the engine back together. Overall, the cost of the car, plus repairs came to a total of \$90. It would do as the first family car. The paintwork wasn't the best, so I painted the car a light blue, using a two-inch brush. After a suitable running in period, I took the car up the Desert Road and opened her up - blatted along at 70mph, overtaking far more modern cars with their astonished occupants. The car only had one problem - it didn't like cold, frosty nights. Many a time after a function at the Senior Rates Mess down at the old camp, we would have to be pushed to get it started. On one trip down to see the family in Wellington, my father spotted the problem - the earthing strap was too long. He shortened it and we had no problems after that (the battery was probably knackered too). Did a lot of travelling in that old car with trips to see family in Wellington and Hawkes Bay and down to Taihape every week (got up the Deviation no problem).



Naval Receivers (NR2)

Purchased a Hillman Imp after the Ford but ended up rolling it on a corner near Ohakune during a race from Waiouru with Bill Fraser in his Volkswagen. Bill came to a grinding halt and raced over yelling me to turn the ignition off. I said not to worry about it as the battery had fallen out. Fortunately, Scouse had decided not to come with me. Had he done so, he wouldn't be here today as the passenger side of the Imp had completely caved in.

My next vehicle was a Vauxhall Viva and as it was comparatively new, decided that a garage would be in order to keep it safe from Waiouru harsh winters. The Army didn't provide garages in the older part of the housing area (where we were) - only the new houses at "Pleurisy Point" at the northern end of the camp.

Brought one cheap off a soldier posting to Papakura - four heavy wooden walls, tin roof and a door that needed good hinges and a wheel as it was that heavy!



Garage erection team - Sgt Herbie Lewis, MAA Fonce Lora, REA Ray Jensen, PORM Scouse Newell and yours truly.

The car never saw the inside of the garage. Instead there was a mini pool table, old couch and arm chairs.

At the end of Ballance Road where it curved round to the left, was a hall. The Senior Rates used this one night to hold a vice-versa night. We also invited NR1 staff and the local farmers.



In the above pic, that well-known harlot, Willemina Newell, is at the front. Behind "her" to the left is the back of ex-sparker, Dave Stade (NR1) and to the right is Theresa Peters - Brian's first wife. All pics of myself in drag have been destroyed...

Thorne Park, down at the old camp, was used a lot for Sports and Family events. The pic below was taken during a family sports day.



Tug O' War - the balding head on the left belongs to the XO, Lloyd Mitchell, then PORM TC Topine, then MAA Fonce Lora, then ??? and on the end as anchor, REA Ray Jensen.

One Saturday, the IRIRANGI Navy Rugby team played an army team on the large sports field opposite the new Frigate Block. IRIRANGI were short of two players so Al Tritt and myself filled in. Unfortunately, the two players that were absent were both locks and Al and myself were like chalk and cheese - he was large and me, small. The first scrum of the day saw us locking together - I was on the right and as we locked together and pushed forward, I felt something go in the rib area. Didn't think too much of it at the time but the following day felt as if something sharp was sticking in my back. I immediately thought that someone was trying to clear the roster...

On Monday, I reported to the Medical Infirmary Room (MIR) at the edge of the sports field where we had played on the Saturday. IRIRANGI's Leading Medic worked at the MIR, which was the equivalent of a ship's Sick Bay - where one reported for coughs, colds, sore holes and pimples on the dicky. He thought I might have cracked ribs, wrote me a chit to take down to the Hospital at the other end of the camp. There they took an x-ray which confirmed two cracked ribs which they then taped up with several layers of adhesive tape. The time came for me to go back to the hospital to have the tape removed. The Matron, a Major in the Nursing Corps, later she would remind me of Hot Lips Houlihan from MASH, was going to take off the tape. She was a buxom blonde and not bad looking either. She asked me if I would like the final few inches of tape removed slowly or quickly. As I had a few hairs on my manly chest I said slowly. She ripped the tape off in one quick move as I vent forth some naval expletives. I said "I thought you were going to do it slowly?". To which she replied "I lied!"

The Leading Medic had a typical pusser's sense of humour. On one occasion, a grunt came into the MIR complaining of pains to his lower right stomach. The army medic told him to drop his trousers and undies and bend over the desk. The medic put a glove on his right hand so that he could check the man's appendix via the anus and put his left hand on the patient's left shoulder. The navy medic snuck up behind and put his right hand on the patient's right shoulder. The grunt suddenly put two and two together, came up with five, swung round to his left and hit the army medic in the jaw.

Speaking of humour. I did a stint as Dayman PO which meant that I was on the Day CPO/POs' roster for doing Officer of the Day at the Frigate Block. Duty Commanding Officer was rostered between the Officers and Warrant Officers. One night I was duty and the DCO, Lt Tony Blount (XO), came up from the Old Camp to do rounds. We had just started in the Junior Rates Accommodation area when we heard giggling from one of the cabins. I knocked on the door, opened it, and lying in one of the beds was a sheep with the bed clothes drawn up to its neck and two sparkers standing beside the bed. The XO and I looked at each, grinned and the XO ordered the two miscreants to get rid of the sheep. Nothing more was said but I don't think that the owner of the bed (who was on watch at the time) would have been too happy with the mess between the sheets.

Bill Fraser had a party at his place one evening and I saw a large, tropical fish tank in his lounge. Upon closer inspection, I saw that a lot of his fish had ich (small whitish spots). I had tropical fish as well and had the required medication to treat the fungus. I went home and got the medication and squirted it into the tank. Unfortunately, I put too much in and the water went green. Bill was getting a bit upset about this but I told him not to worry as we could siphon out some of the water and then fill the tank up again. Bill went into the garden and passed the hose through the open window and I placed it into the tank and told Bill to start sucking from his end. The water started flowing and Bill came back inside to finish his beer. We noticed that the smaller fish were disappearing down the hose and went outside to retrieve them. However, Bill's cat had beaten us to it and was sitting there with a satisfied grin on its face and a green tinge around his mouth - fish, but no chips...

Carl Edwards (didn't bring his cane...) replaced Tug Wilson and one of his first jobs was to ensure that security rounds at night of the perimeter fence could be carried out. The northern end of the Receiver's perimeter was all swamp and you couldn't walk around it. The Ministry of Works brought in tons of earth and dumped it in the grounds and during the week, the day staff had to transport the earth over to the swamp end and slowly build up a track on the inside of the fence. The weekend day watches carried on when not busy. Eventually the track was finished and the night watches had to carry out rounds at irregular intervals. Bill Fraser went on leave and a recently posted-in LREM took over. One night, we were busy with a Task Group so I got the Fixed Service staff to do rounds. About 10 minutes later, the LREM came into the building and said that he had got the Fire Truck stuck. I said where - he said on the rounds track. He obviously hadn't been briefed that rounds involved walking the narrow track around the swamp part.

Off watch, some of us were able to get work around the area. Scouse was busy working for Trevor Woon (an ex-LRM), the Waiouru Coal & Wood Merchant. I worked with Scouse once shovelling coal out of a railway wagon that held 20 tons. 20 hundredweight made one ton and each sack held a hundredweight (CWT). We were paid 90 cents per sack. By the end of the day I was knackered and didn't do my lower back any favours either. Scouse stuck at it because he said it was a good way of keeping fit for rugby. He used to smoke like a chimney and I didn't need an alarm clock in the mornings as he used to cough like crazy to kick-start his lungs.

How Scouse managed to keep refereeing matches and smoking all those years, I will never know.

I was getting petrol at the BP station on the Main Road one day, when the owner, Bob Eriksen, came up to me and asked if I wanted a job painting his house next to the garage. He would provide all the materials and pay an hourly rate. It would need two of us, so I asked Bill Fraser if he wanted to come in on it. Yes! Well, we must have done a good job because after we finished we were approached by a farmer who lived in the back blocks between Waiouru and Ohakune if we would like to do all the houses on his farm. This included the homestead and six farm workers' houses. This took a couple of months and we had built up a tidy sum. I was able to take my wife Jenny on a trip to Sydney for a couple of weeks.

Had a few changes with the PO Sparkers over time. Al Tritt and Doc Watts left - Doc left to join the staff at NR1 and lived in a house down at the old Peters' Homestead. At one stage we had four PRDs that had done the Advanced Radio Course together - me, Greg Hartley, Tony Locke and Gary Johnstone. Fish Haddock and Ray Jones also did time at ZLO as POs.

In 1974 it was decided that the Navy needed new patrol boats to replace the 72-foot motor launches and to replace them with a vessel that could handle the large swells around the NZ coast. The distance between the crests of the waves are typically 50 metres and an order was put in to a UK company (Thorneycroft) to build six boats that would be 50m in length. Unfortunately, there was a change in government and the new Labour government reduced the number of boats to four and the length of the boats to 32m so that they could be shipped to NZ on a heavy sealift ship. Prior to there being a change in government, my posting came out late 1974 to go to the UK and be the Squadron Radio Supervisor. Once the building contract had been changed, it was decided that the Squadron didn't need an RS and my posting was cancelled.

Next, HMNZS MONOWAI was undergoing her conversion in the UK and my next posting order was for me to join her in England. Pat Haddock was posted to Otago but that changed within a month and he went to MONOWAI and I found myself posted to Otago in his place. Scouse was also posted to Otago until someone in Posting Office pointed out that the two of us should not be posted to a sea billet together. I thought that this was unfair - we may have enjoyed ourselves when off watch but we both acted professionally when working. The hierarchy decided that Scouse would be better off on Taranaki.

I was to report to Otago 1 August 1975 and it was the middle of winter (July) when the household removal truck came to pick up our household effects. The snow was quite thick on the ground and the truck couldn't get back on the road. The MOW had to bring a grader in to tow the truck out. We moved into our allocated two-storey house at 41 Greenslade Crescent, Northcote, and I did my Posting-In Routine 1 August.

We had thoroughly enjoyed our time in Waiouru and didn't know at the time that we would be back there in less than 18 months.