

Another Story from Dickie Dallow.

As this covers a commission occupying six months I have split it up into a number of chapters. I trust you will find them interesting.

Chapter 1

In 1950, it was decided to exchange two Loch class frigates of the Royal New Zealand Navy with two RN frigates from the Med Fleet which were based at Malta. TAUPO and HAWEA were the two RNZN frigates selected to go for the period of six months.

I have often reflected on the catalyst for this exchange. Did it arise from the RN or from the RNZN? Was it anything to do with the fact that as the RNZN was a bit short of submarine experience and there were six Anti-submarine frigates which had never exercised with one. The Korean War broke out a few weeks later. Whatever the reason it was a wonderful opportunity to become super-efficient as the Med Fleet was considered the crack fleet of the RN.

We sailed early April 1950. I was a signalman on [TAUPO](#) and our first port of call was Cairns, Australia. Already this was exciting for us as it represented a change from the usual pattern of three types of cruises I had experienced in [BELLONA](#).

1. Australian Cruise – Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart
2. Island Cruise – restricted to islands which had a wharf to berth at, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa
3. New Zealand Cruise – mostly to ports on the east coast.

The first object of interest in Cairns was that all houses appeared to be built on stilts. I understand that this was to prevent the white ant infestation. They sure looked strange. Some 30 years later when my wife and I had a holiday in Cairns, the houses were all down to ground level, except for an odd one or two in the country areas, so the problem had obviously been overcome. Highlight of the stop at Cairns was a rail trip to Kuranda sponsored by Queensland Railways. [Kuranda](#) is a quaint town high up in the hills with several interesting attractions on the way. The rail carriages all date back to early days when the rail was first established. [Kuranda Railway Station](#) is quite unique as it is covered with multiple hanging baskets, particularly over the large veranda area which covers the platforms. Originally, we travelled both ways by train but on my return visit I discovered that a [skyrail](#) had been built, intended for the return trip, which we used. If you ever go to Cairns on holiday make sure you allocate one day for a trip to Kuranda. It is well worth it.

Next stop was Darwin which is where I saw evidence of World War II for the first time. There was a [sunken ship at the harbour entrance](#), and another on the opposite side of the wharf where we were berthed.

The township of Darwin, which it was at the time, was probably about ½ mile away from our berth, so we decided to walk to town. A group of us were overtaken by the local Regional Naval Officer driving an American jeep. About 50 yards ahead he came to an abrupt stop, jumped out, reached into the back, hauled out a snake about 3-foot-long which was very much alive, broke its neck, and chucked it on the road, jumped back into his jeep and drove off. By the time we reached the snake it was in its final death

throes. It was the first snake I had ever seen. The town was full of bombed buildings, predominantly Banks. All the rubble had been cleaned up, but the remains of the buildings were untouched. [The bombing of Darwin](#) was a wake-up call for NZ as some feared we would be next. I remember air raid shelters being built at the school we attended, the home guard was activated, and the [Emergency Precautions Scheme \(EPS\)](#) established.

After the usual two-night stay for refueling and storing ship, we sailed for Singapore via the [Lombok Strait](#). On arrival, I was amazed to see most of the buildings preserved in their original construction. It did not take long to discover how this happened. On the 15th February 1942, with the Japs at the gates of the city, 12 men representing Malaya's Commands most senior leadership, met in a bunker known as the '[Battlebox](#)' which was part of Malaya's Command. Their discussion was what to do with the lives of almost one million civilians and 120,000 troops. They decided to capitulate which changed the course of history forever.

This decision spelled the beginning of the darkest period in Singapore's modern history, and the end of the British empire in the East. The bunker had been preserved for public viewing a few years after the event. One of my sons visited Singapore recently and brought back the history of it.

Another event occurred whilst at Singapore. Details of it are only known to the four participants and a few communications staff. The Chief Petty Officer Electrician on board was Chris Isles. Chris joined the Navy during the 1930's and was probably the oldest, and the most-worldly, in the lower deck. Chris had a truly unique feature – A fiery red beard!

If an artist had to draw a cartoon of a 'Poona Colonel' he couldn't have got a better model than Chris! On arrival at Singapore, most of us had a gin-sling at the Raffles Hotel. We only had one due to the huge cost, for the same amount you could buy two large jugs of beer at the local army mess to which we were all invited. Chris was in the Sergeants Mess chatting to one of the Sergeants who happened to be in charge of the Movements Office, mainly catering for the accommodation of senior visiting officers. He learnt that officers of the rank of Colonel and above were accommodated in [Raffles Hotel](#), plus a number of details such as the hours the movement office was open.

Around 1730 the following night dressed in smart civvies Chris appeared at Raffles Hotel reception, saying "Colonel Wellington, my room key please". When told there was no booking, Chris told the clerk to get hold of Cartwright who as the officer in charge of the Movements Office which closed at 1700. He was given a room pending the matter being sorted out after 0800 the following day. Shortly afterwards, three guests arrived to join Chris, all dressed in smart civvies, where they all drank several expensive cocktails together with the best dinner Raffles could provide. The guests were three other Chief Petty Officers of Chris's mess. Around midnight, the concierge was instructed to call a taxi for the Colonels guests. No one commented on Chris going with them. We sailed for [Trincomalee in Ceylon \(Sri Lanka\)](#) at 0800 next morning, which was rather fortuitous! The story gradually got out to some of the communication staff because Chris was continually asking if any signal had been received, which probably would have been classified confidential. His main worry was that someone at Raffles may have recognised kiwi accents. Apparently, they didn't. With a little bit of luck, they may have been taken for Australians!

[Trincomalee](#) was the headquarters for what I think was known as the Eastern Fleet of the RN. There was nothing to do there other than accept the hospitality of the canteen.

Next port of call was [Aden, Yemen](#) which was a British protectorate at that time, under the Command of a senior RAF officer. Nothing much to do there except enjoy the RAF canteen. One adventure was mentioned, in which a taxi would smuggle you across the boarder to a place in Arabia known as Shaykh Uthman where you could re-live the good old days of the Arabian nights! I did not hear of anyone going as there was a certain amount of risk with it.

Off through the Red Sea to the [Suez Canal](#) which I still have several memories of, such as the Navigation Officer instructing the coxswain to steer 012 and ¼ degrees! The ANZAC memorial which stood out above as we passed, the bridge which pivoted on the side and swung out to cross the canal built by [New Zealand engineers in WWII](#), and looking back at [HAWEA](#) after passing through a bend in the canal. She was about a ¼ mile behind us, and gave the appearance of being in the middle of a desert!

Passing through Port Said there is, or was, a statue of a New Zealander beating back a Turk. I believe the memorial may have been [destroyed in the 1956 Suez crisis](#). After clearing Port Said, we set course for Malta which will be continued in Chapter 2.