

Anecdote; John David Mills UI7268. Joined 17 January 1962

I was born in Devonport Auckland of Naval Officer parents. Dad was a Lieutenant RNVR and RNZNVR 1938 to 1946. Served in coastal forces UK till 1944 and NZ from 1944 till discharge. Mum was a Third Officer Wren in Auckland.

My growing years were spent in Waimate, a small rural town of approx. 2000pax. The climbing of the Hunter Hills and hunting in that area were to stand me in good stead for the future.

To say I was educated in Waimate would be a misnomer, however I did attend school until the 5th Form enjoying the rugby, cricket and swimming!!!

Aside from being brought up under the Naval Discipline Act, the frequent visits of ex Naval personal to our house had me leaning in the direction of a career in the RNZN and a good reason to leave school and look for the good times I heard these ex Navy men talk about!!

Dad surprisingly wasn't that supportive of me joining the RNZN (prior knowledge I expect). He steered me in the direction of Deck Officer Cadet with the mercantile marine. After interviews with the P&O shipping and the Shaw Savill and Blue Star lines about a career with them, I remained keen on the RNZN, the Naval Recruiter convinced me with some well-practised words about joining them.

Boys from Waimate had already joined in earlier times, two from the Dennison family, George Bell, Graham Rooney and my father to name a few.

Having passed the entrance exam (must have been easy) done the medical with the port medical officer in Timaru, my school mate and friend, Ian (Buff) Mathison and I boarded the Steamer Express at Studholme Junction to begin our new life with a three day journey to Auckland. Another mate Brian (Kips) Palmer came up later to join as a trickle entry.

Our parents were so sad to see us depart, that even as the train pulled out of the station we could see them disappear into the Studholme Pub. As Buff said what show did we have, my parents ex Navy, Buffs dad ex RSM Scottish reg.

Train to Lyttelton on to the MV Maori overnight to Wellington, first sea time!

All day in Wellington waiting for the overnight to Auckland. How many young recruits from the south island and Wellington got chatted up about insurance by the Government Life Insurance agent? He approached us and I told him I hadn't enough money for a cup of tea let alone insurance. He said if I buy you a cuppa will you sign up. I think the words go forth were uttered at that point.

The Second Class smoker from Wellington to Auckland was bloody awful, didn't have the sixpence for a pillow for comfort. Most miserable, but prepared me for going home on leave later. Make sure you had money for pillows and cuppa and cake at Taumarunui. Got easier as the pay increased!!

The arrival in Auckland remains a blur, sleepless, sooty and disorientated, I think we were herded into buses or trucks by patient and friendly persons in navy uniform and thence to Admiralty steps to board the Philomel's pride of the fleet, 'The Cattle Barge'. I well remember the expletives from the cox'n during the crossing to Philomel and thinking it must be a bitch to drive!!!

From the steps at Philomel we were guided, still humanly, to the room opposite the CRO. There we were lectured on the fact that besides Nelson we were the new heroes of the RNZN and all our training from this point would be for 7 minutes of intense action and other bullshit my father had warned me about! He also advised me to volunteer for nothing as it would usually be different than what you volunteered for.

On completion the officer advised, "If any of you wish to leave now, we will give you a travel warrant no hard feelings and leave". I swear, if one person had gone half the room would have gone. As it turned out five or six copped out on the island.

At that point 17 January 1962 we swore allegiance to HM the Queen and our country. Feeling very proud, we were directed through the Shoal Bay tunnel to Naval Stores (and sports outfitters)

From this point on our relationship with our 'guides/instructors began to deteriorate!

We got a 30sec lesson on packing a kitbag, not sure if we got hammock mattress at that point! Back to Philomel carrying our kit through the tunnel and boarded the Fairmile to begin the journey to our new temp home best described by our new best friend instructor as a holiday camp!

Motuihe Is. looked tranquil and tropical on approach with the sandy beach, Norfolk Pines and flowering Pohutakawa.

On securing alongside the jetty, the spell was broken 'gently' by the awaiting instructors as we formed a group, "pickup yur kit" was the shout, "break step down the jetty". On to dry land a straggle along the road to the base gates and then joy of joys, A Hill. "you will see plenty of this hill" the PO with the strange accent said.

At the top fallen in on the parade ground, names called, Divisions given and directed toward our class Petty Officer P.O John Carter. Our class Drake 1 CS27, led into our dormitory, allocated a locker, hammock sling and boot locker. At that point I remember being taken to the dining hall and experience our first naval meal. Can't remember what but so hungry it was good.

The next couple of days was wooden name blocks, red paint, and red embroidery thread. Stamping, sewing, washing folding etc.

Day 3 the shock of wakey wakey at 0600 down the beach, quick dip back up the hill shower, of to breakfast, colours then the first lesson in kit musters.

The next three months were a haze of class for seamanship, boats, PT, religious study, parade ground, rifle range and school. Doubling everywhere between lessons, except on the jetty!!

Turn in exhausted only to be turned out by the duty PO because someone had talked in their sleep or farted etc. Boots on, down the hill with hammock or a post between three. Back up turn in nice and sweaty to wake up again at 0600, run, swim, breakfast, colours. And so it begins. I was promoted to Class Leader and often stood my corner to defend my class mates from inane treatment only to find myself in trouble.

Some of the punishments were mindless, the collecting buckets of sand from the beach, dumping at the door of the Senior rates mess only to be yelled at "what's this sand doing here? Take it down to the beach'.

Around the parade with a Lee Enfield at the high port or holding a 4inch proj.

I spent a lot of time under punishment for minor reasons and missed a couple of shore leave through that.

The instruction was good. Enjoyed seamanship, boats, rope work, RAS, and PT. POPTI Lamb seemed to get some joy from making us hang from the wall bars for no apparent reason. Loved the climbing ropes to. Parade drill became an interest and I seemed to do well with that.

Wednesday arvo, cross country was great, Algie Walton often ran with us or ahead of us, he used the runs to select his rugby team I think.

Deck hockey vs the instructors was a good opportunity to 'strike back' however futile as in the end they always had the last say.

Parade training was harsh under TPO Joe Murray who had little patience with his charges, although I enjoyed it mainly. I am sure part of my hearing problem today comes from Joe yelling into your ear.

Our class instructor PO John Carter was a very good instructor, patient, and a good listener, helpful and had some humour.

PO's Rogers and Aranga were patient but strict on instruction with the whalers and cutters.

The schooly was a good teacher who managed to teach me more in 3 months than I had learnt during school years.

Padre Taylor was always around, offer an ear and enjoyed PT runs with us and helped with the rugby team

I well remember saying to myself on leaving Tamaki and after sea training, "If I ever become an instructor I will treat my trainees with more respect than what we had just experienced. I did become an instructor and I hope I did practice that thought.

Sunday Free to Roam was a good on island break and sitting on the beach and swimming and talking to the young ladies that poured onto the island from the ferries on a sunny Sunday.

The beach kiosk was a haven for nutty and toasted sandwich. I think most of us went to the kiosk to ogle over the canteen managers' daughter who as I remember was good looking. However her father kept her well away from young sailors.

At one point I got so fed up with the bullshit and the way we were treated by some of the staff I put in for a discharge.

It got all the way to Commander Kempthorne who listened to me patiently, then asked me what I thought my father would say in this situation. Shock horror, at that point I was made aware that Dad, Mum and Kempthorne had all served together.

"Request denied, go back to your class and get on with your Naval career".

So I did, off to sea training as 19 Ords and new adventures.