

## **A SURVIVOR FROM THE “ROCK” - HMNZS TAMAKI MOTUIHE ISLAND. Jack Donnelly**



**The year was 1960, and I was a 15-year old boy from Gisborne who was so looking forward to becoming a sailor. After signing on to join the RNZN we boarded a Navy ML (Motor launch) and a forty-minute trip to Motuihe island in the picturesque Hauraki gulf which was the home of HMNZS TAMAKI the RNZN's training establishment.**

**My first impression of the island was one of natural beauty and tranquillity, with its sandy beaches, pleasure craft moored, pine trees scattered throughout the island. Little did we know at that point in time how different the island would look and feel for us as trainees.**

**Motuihe island had a distinct and colourful history in which we never informed about as the Navies focus was on our basic training. The RNZN occupied Motuihe as a basic training camp for twenty-two years from 1941-1963 where over 15,000 naval personnel served during its existence on the motu. When it was decommissioned, the establishment was moved to Fort Cautley on the North shore.**

**HMNZS TAMAKI, whose motto was, “*Ake Ake Kia Kaha*” (Forever and ever be strong) and we had to be strong as Seaman Boys we spent twelve-months and had to endure instant discipline, physical hardship in a very harsh environment. Many of the training instructors were “old school” former the Royal Navy, WW2 veterans who ruled with an ‘iron hand’ were strict disciplinarians and instant discipline was enforced. Their instructional techniques were very basic but effect. The punishments that they administered were painful, brutal and spiteful to the point that they were cruel.**

**Some ‘boys’ may say that they turned them from boys to men in a short period of time, others will say that they were hard but fair, while certain ones will say that they expected it to be tough and then there will be those who felt that, that was the mentality and way of military instructors of those days. For me undergoing this type of training helped develop me personally with such values as confidence, independence, pride and maturity which stood to me for life. It was a tough existence on the ‘Rock,’ however, once you settled into the daily routine, learnt the ropes and began to work as a team, life became almost bearable.**

**There were relaxation times when we could enjoy ourselves such as “Free to roam” on Sundays after church we were allowed to go anywhere on the island until sunset. In the summer months the ferries would arrive from Auckland loaded to its gunwales with young ladies. Then there were the Sunday night movies on the island, many sports featured in our training, we were given liberty leave on weekends Friday was 4 hours, Saturday and Sundays were 8 hours, but only if you met certain training criteria which were tough to achieve. My favourite relaxation period was on Sunday afternoons when you could lie in your hammock to catch up on well-earned sleep.**

**A normal day would begin at 0530 when you were shaken, had two minutes to get into PT rig and every morning of the year rain, hail or snow it was down a steep 150-yard hill and into the sea, then 20 minutes of intense physical workout before it was back up the hill, lash up your hammock, shower, change into training uniform, breakfast, “clean-ship” (dorms, heads, bathrooms, dining all etc) then prepare for morning divisions on the parade at 0730. The rest of the training day was full on with doubling every where between periods of instructions which consisted of seamanship, drill, naval history, first aid, weapon safety and live firings, sailing, rowing boats, personal hygiene, washing ironing your kit (uniforms) physical fitness, sports, ship board safety, a session with the padre and other activities I have now forgotten.**

**1600 was tea time, then work-ship or drill for an hour before you showered, cleaned into night clothing uniform, had supper, time to work on your kit with washing, ironing etc before it was lights out at 2100 (9pm) If you happened to be under punishment your day was even longer beginning at 0500 with rifle drill or working in the galley preparing breakfast (you were excused the swim though!!) 30 minutes at lunch time for extra drill then again at 1900 (7pm) for another hour, you had very little time for anything else, it also meant no liberty leave and a reduction in what little pay you did receive. As “boys” we received one pound 10 shillings in our hand a fortnight and nine pounds was automatically put into our bank account, not too bad in those days.**

**After having served one week short of a year on Motuihe I finally graduated as a Junior Seaman. I will never forget the final day when I boarded the ML which was to take us onto the naval base HMNZS Philomel for our next stage of training. As the boat pulled away from the jetty, I took one last look at the island and sadness, total relief and emotions took over as to what I had been through and how I had survived. I knew that I would never return to the island. However, fifty-seven years on and I have the opportunity to return in February 2020 as part of our reunion, it will be quite an emotional occasion for all of us.**

**I went on to serve thirty-three years in the RNZN, attaining the rank of Warrant Officer Gunnery Instructor. I attribute much of the basic training that I completed on Motuihe in that first twelve months to my attitude, determination and discipline throughout my naval career.**

***“Tell me and I forget  
Show me and I remember  
Include me and I learn”***

**Jack Donnelly, BEM.  
Former Warrant Officer,  
Gunnery Instructor.**