

## CHAPTER 7 - HMNZS Waikato



I joined **Waikato** 4 September 1970 and met by the Chief, Bonga Crengle, who told me that he had arranged for my posting to Blackpool be changed to Waikato. He didn't elaborate. The two LRDs that were on there at the time were Gary Bryenton and Pete Hinton. Gary picked up his POs rate and posted off. Yeoman was Brian Mitchell and the CPOEW was Long John Bruce. Can't remember who the LSGs were but the two LEWs for 1971 were Lionel Tuhiwai and Red Scanlan. Some of the other junior rates for 1970/71 were:

### Sparkers:

Alan Brady	Tiwha Hakaria
Glenn Brady	TAM Kingi
Kevin McNamara	Les Rabone
Bill Welch	TK Maru
Biggy Hunt	Kevin Blundell
Lindsay Brooking	Geoff Gentil

### Buntings:

Zeppy Philips  
Phil Aspinall  
Sid Milner  
Rick Mathie  
Bruce Kenyon  
Blue Thompson

Dave Wistrand was one of the LEWs up until after the fire but can't remember the name of the other LEW.



Dominion Day 26 September 1970  
Otago and Waikato, with HM Ships Minerva and Charybdis in foreground.

In September/October of that year, **Waikato**, as Task Group Commander, sailed with NZ, Australian, US and British naval units for a series of exercises in Hauraki Gulf and off the northern coast of NZ. We were about a week into the exercises, when Waikato caught fire 6 October. This had resulted from a pin prick hole in the hydraulic fuel hose to the starboard stabiliser. A fine jet of hydraulic fluid sprayed onto the hot plates in the Engine Room starting a fire. I was on watch in the Main Communications Office at the time and I noticed smoke coming out of the ventilation system. I informed the Operations Room that smoke was enveloping the office and within one minute, I couldn't even see the back of my hand. The watch left the MCO and headed straight up the ladder just outside the MCO door to Officer country, along the passage to the EWO and then up the ladder to the Flag Deck.



Waikato on fire taken from Charybdis

The Engine Room had become a blazing inferno and within a few minutes the ship had run out of firefighting foam. Up on the flight deck, firefighting crews were directing seawater on to the sides of the ship trying to cool the engine room down. **HMNZS Taranaki** came alongside and transferred all of her foam to us to help but it wasn't enough. In the end, in order to save the ship and the crew, the Captain ordered the engine room to be steam drenched. This was a last ditch effort to put the fire out and it worked. Fortunately, no-one was killed but a few suffered from smoke inhalation. One of the British frigates (**Minerva**) came alongside to begin the tow back to Auckland but prior to that, CRD John Paull (Taranaki) requested that the two LROs and the two LEWs be transferred to HMNZS Taranaki as she had now become the Task Group Commander.

The British tanker, RFA Olmeda, came alongside our (Taranaki) starboard side one night to transfer fuel but refused to hook up – the main starboard High Frequency transmitting whip was arcing from the base across to the guardrail some 2-3 metres away. The cause of this was a broken ceramic insulator at the base of the whip. Pete Hinton suggested using the emergency HF wire. John Paull agreed and we disconnected the whip and insulator, connected the wire aerial from the base to the outer end of the starboard yardarm using the signal halyard. That aerial was being used to communicate back to Waiouru on the Maritime Rear Link and the emergency wire worked fine. Why hadn't the OOW informed the BWO of the fuelling RADHAZ?

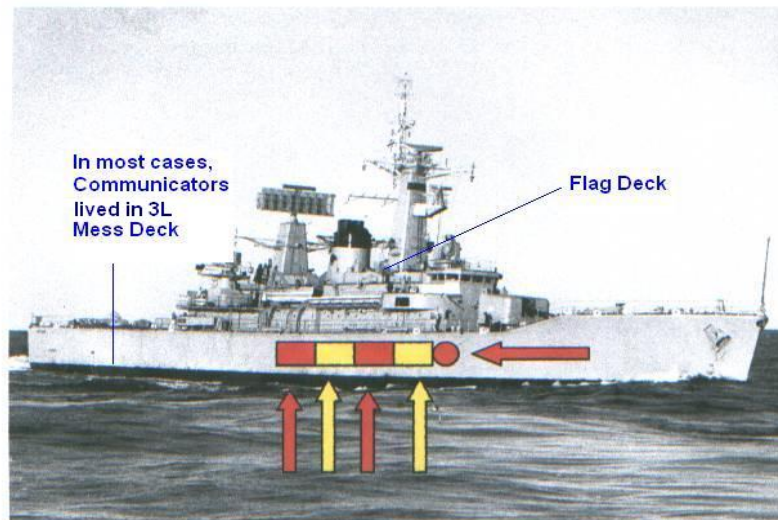
Other ships in the Exercises (AUCKEX/LONGEX) were US Ships Taluga, Knox, Hamner and Menhaden and HMAS Anzac and HMAS Onslow.

We arrived back at Devonport about 10 days later and the first thing that I noticed was that the Main Roof aerial system had been removed off Waikato. Brian Mitchell had been posted off and replaced by Buck Rodgers, Pete Hinton was promoted and also posted off. Graham Cadwallader posted off. Bonga Crengle posted off and I was given a temporary POs rate. The inside of the ship had been stripped of everything because of smoke damage and the bulkheads, deckheads and decks looked like the inside of a chimney. The paintwork had to be thoroughly washed down then undercoated and topcoated. The upper deck and hull had to be done as well. The hull was done by the dockyard when the ship went into dock but the upper deck had to be done by the various parts of ship. The comms department, including the EWs, were responsible for cleaning and painting the following:

Flag Deck (back as far as the RF Transformer), Foremast, including yardarms and Bridge Wings.  
Comms Store - starboard boat deck.  
EWO and Officers heads and bathrooms.  
MCO, CCR (but not the Annex - that was WE) and UHF Office.  
Comms Messdeck 3LZ1.

Another task that had to be done was to replace the Main Roof. The old one had completely disappeared - no wire or insulators. BR 222 had no information on dimensions. I was able to get the part numbers. There were no aerial drawings for the Main Roof onboard or in the Dockyard but found the info in an ASWE Spec. I put in a stores request for the parts and as soon as the Foremast, Main Mast and relevant upper decks had been painted, the sparkers went out on to the wharf and laid out the aerials and insulators on the ground before assembling on the Flag Deck. The radio equipment was starting to come back from the Radio Workshop in the dockyard and the Main Roof was required for tuning. Tuning in ICS1 was done manually and we worked our way through the HF frequency band, tuning and writing down the settings for the two AWFs and the Main Roof.

## Leander Class



From Left to Right: All on 2 Deck

- LMA/CCR – Lower Maintenance Annex and Communications Control Room
- MCO – Main Communications Office
- Operations Room
- SCR – Sonar Control Room
- UHFO – Ultra High Frequency Office – on port side of SCR

Tuning points for the MF ETB were also noted.

The Main Roof on Waikato was very heavy as the HF and MF components were strung between the masts with a lot of glass insulators. The HF part was physically connected to the rear of the foremast as this was required for foremast excitation to give a 360 degree horizontal radiation pattern. At this stage we had followed the Royal Navy guidelines (dead-end eye grips) for attaching the forward end of the aerial array to the foremast. This was to prove detrimental later on.

See here for ICS equipment and aerials:

<https://rnzncomms.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/history-of-naval-ships-wireless-systems.pdf>  
Part XII(A) and Part XII(B)



The Comms J/R's messdeck 3LZ1 was ready to take the bunks back onboard and new curtains were put up to make the killicks area (6 bunks) and the locker area private. These pics were taken much later. I was Killick of the Mess before being promoted late 71.



There were a total of 24 bunks in the messdeck. Six for the Leading Hands, nine for sparkers and nine for buntings. Comms Department was in four watches at sea and carried an extra sparker and an extra bunting for communal duties - Dining Halls, Senior Rates messmen and Flats cleaning party. These two hands were rotated every six to eight weeks. Other departments also had to provide hands for CDs and numbers depended on how big the departments were. Communicators made up approximately 10% of the Ships' Company on Waikato.

The ship settled into Harbour Acceptance Trials (HATs) and the WE staff set about calibrating the 965 radar. To do this, an aircraft was sent out to varying distances and bearings. There were no senior rate or killick RPs onboard so I had to be aircraft controller. The pilot was wearing a throat mike and he sounded as if he had a sore throat. Knowledge of radiation hazards were poor in those days and the 965 was transmitting at the maximum power of 450,000 watts in harbour. Whilst I was doing research on RF Hazards much later, I found a document on the internet relating to a Junior WEO's exam paper. One of the questions concerned the ANZAC Class frigates early warning radar. Apparently, the radar was not to transmit whilst in harbour. The safe distance required for the 965 was approximately 400 feet in an uncontrolled environment.

At a predetermined time, we had to transmit the alphabet by CW with no callsigns on different HF frequencies for identifiable keying characteristics. These signals were monitored and recorded by the GCSB station (NR1) at Waiouru.

Some more crew posted on and some off toward the end of April after HATs, including PRD Jeff Still. I relinquished my temporary rate the day that Jeff arrived. The other LRD, Chris Farrow, was yet to post on. He was doing the Advanced Radio course and I can't remember the day he joined us. Chief Yeoman Bill Bartlett replaced Buck Rodgers and POEW Graham Cadwallader came on as the senior rate EW.

May was busy with Sea Acceptance Trials (SATs), including calibrating the MF DF equipment (FM12), settling into four watches and a visit to Tauranga, where we made welcome by the RSA. The ship sailed mid-June for Australia for post-refit trials and command team training and to participate in Exercise SOUTHERN CLIME in August before returning to Auckland. This exercise included units of an RN Task Group and took part initially in the Tasman Sea and then in Tasman Bay where our Wasp Helicopter suffered gear box failure. Signals were going back and forth between Waikato, the RN ships and MODUK Navy. A signal that we were not supposed to receive from MODUK Navy stated that under no circumstances were we to be given a new gear box for nothing. The RFA supply ship in the group just happened to have a spare and a visit from our pilot and Flight Sergeant tech (with two 40oz bottles of navy rum) procured said gear box. The Wasp was operational within a few hours. This was not the first time that I was to see what navy rum could do in an emergency.

The ship sailed in September for Pearl Harbor via Pago Pago, Eastern Samoa, where we stopped for fuel and pick up our mail - Red Scanlan and I went to the US Coast Guard station where our mail was being held but when we got there, found that it hadn't arrived but was expected that day. I advised the ship of the delay and was told to stay there until it arrived. The Coast Guard were excellent hosts and shouted us a couple of beers. Eventually the mail arrived and we returned to the ship, where the SCO, S/Lt Chandler, was impatiently pacing up and down the flight deck.

Whilst en route to Hawaii, the ship sailed into a storm, during which the Main Roof came crashing down to the Flag Deck. The dead-end eye grips had given way. I was piped to the Bridge and informed of the event and I mustered my aerial team to repair the aerial system. First, I had to ensure that all the safe-to-transmit keys for all radio and foremast radar systems were collected and put on the Radiation Hazard board on the Bridge. We then collected safety harnesses and myself and two others (Glenn Brady and Kevin McNamara) went up the Foremast to lower ropes down to others on the Flag Deck to pick up the ends to hoist the aerial wires back up. We secured the wires to the Stay at the rear of the mast using Marconi splices. I noticed that the 965 on the main mast was still rotating.

I didn't worry about it at the time as the Radiation Hazard board didn't require that particular radar to stop if someone was working up the Foremast which was also confirmed by the OOW. By sheer coincidence, the three of us that were up the mast that night were later afflicted with prostate cancer (30 years later within 12 months of each other) as well as other cancers and health issues.

Two years ago, Kevin applied to VANZ for his health problems to be recognised but was turned down. His local RSA had an excellent Welfare Rep who organised an appeal and asked if I would be willing to attend the hearing as a technical witness. I agreed and duly fronted up to VANZ in Wellington. Sadly, Kevin had already passed away but his partner attended in his place. As soon as I saw that there was a surgeon on the panel, I knew he was going to be a problem. The panel consisted of the VANZ General Manager, surgeon, lawyer and three doctors. It took me an hour and a half to do my presentation and at the end of it, the three doctors were in favour but the surgeon said that it was due to old age. He obviously didn't know that Prostate cancer took years to surface. I suggested to them that they should have an epidemiologist on the panel. This is someone who specialises in health problems that are common to a particular work force, population, etc. My research over the past 20 years has shown that communicators, especially sparkers, have suffered from similar problems associated with electromagnetic radiation from radio, radar, AC and DC supplies and melatonin deficiencies as a result from doing shift work under bright lights. I notice in amongst all the info that Frank has put up on the website, that the VANZ panel now includes an epidemiologist.

Waikato arrived in Pearl Harbor and as was the practice, had to go to the Ammo Depot to offload half of her ammunition before proceeding to her berth. Whilst there, the seaman Leading Hand of the Watch on Deck noticed that the insulators of the Main Roof above the funnel were covered in soot and decided to do us a favour by hosing them down – unfortunately, the glass insulators were red hot and cracked as soon as the cold water hit them! Once again, the aerial party had to reconstruct the aerial system before we could get under way.

John Rowles was performing in Waikiki at the Duke Kahanamoku hotel. The ships company were given free admission and one Maitai drink. This was over two nights so that all onboard could go. The Blue Rinse Brigade in the front row threw their hankies on stage (thank god it wasn't their knickers) and he would pick them up, wipe his brow, then throw the hankies back. We met him after the show and we were surprised to see how short he was. This was disguised by his stacked shoes and high hair style. Excellent show with a couple of Maitais under the belt. The ship's Concert Party were invited to perform and this went down a treat with the audience.

The Operational workup and Exercise Rimpac took about 2 months and I was promoted to Petty Officer Radioman 1 October and shifted to the Forrard POs Mess. They had a spare locker but not a spare bunk. I went back down to the Comms messdeck and grabbed my mattress and bedding. Just inside the POs Mess on the Forrard, Port side, was a row of lockers and I threw my bedding up there - no rails for use during roughers. I noted a few years later that this had become a permanent bunk space with shock mounts and a railing! During the workup, the Mess became the watering hole for one of the Fleet Training Groups Machinist Mate 1st Class (POME). He was promoted to CPO and after the ship had completed its workup, he invited all of the FWD POs to his home on base for a BBQ. He had a conservatory at the back of his house which contained two large fridges - one for steaks and the other for beer. He had a large lounge with thick white carpet in it and we made it our bed for the night.

Exercise Rimpac 71 consisted of US, Canadian, Australian and NZ air and naval units.



One of the participants in Rimpac - USCGC Rush

On the 19th November, myself and Lt Chris Freebourne, RNZN, were driven to Naval Air Station, Barbers Point, for our lift home. A RNZAF P3 Orion had taken part in the exercise and had a C130 Hercules along with support crew. The Herc was to be our taxi home. She was last in a long line of military aircraft taxiing, waiting to hit the main runway for taking off. Chris and I noticed that the Herc wasn't going to stop at the terminal where we were waiting, so we grabbed our bags and ran outside. Dropped the bags, jumped up and down whilst waving our arms in the air. The Herc slowly came over and the starboard side door opened up and the loadmaster told us to run over. The aircraft kept moving as we threw our bags in, then ourselves. Don't know why it didn't stop as we had to wait for 45 minutes before we were given clearance to go to the main runway for takeoff.

It was to be an 18 hour flight - 6 hours over the pilot's allowable flight time, so we stopped at Nandi for the night. Arrived back at Whenuapai on the 20th November and I posted into Philomel the next day to take up my appointment as an Instructor at the Communications Training School.

Waikato continued on to take up her operational deployment in Southeast Asia.