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Service Story of Commander John Berridge RNZN

This is my contribution as a Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN) Instructor Officer from 1970 to 1990 and is about the Instructor Officer branch of the RNZN as well as my own recollections of my time in the Service.

I also have a strong affinity to the Royal Navy (RN) as my late father was a Chief Electrical Artificer (CEA) in the RN from 1928 to 1950 serving in HM Ships *Ramillies*, *Achilles*, *Renown*, *Cleopatra*, *Manxman* and *Cossack*; of great significance is the fact that his last posting was to the RNZN on loan. He then spent 20 more years in the Devonport (Auckland) Naval Dockyard as a fire control technician. He met my mother in 1936 in Auckland while serving in HMS *Achilles*; she travelled to the UK in 1941, where they married and she then worked for the NZ Government in London for the rest of the war years.

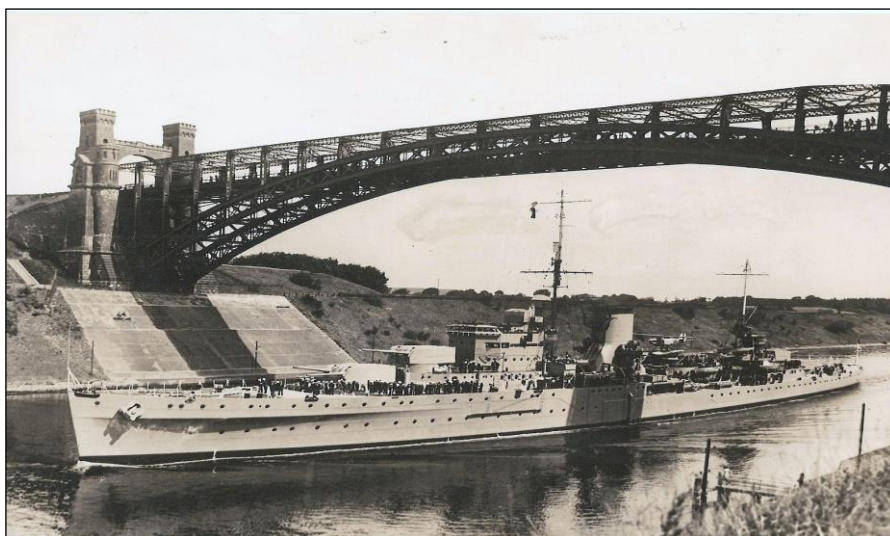
The cruiser HMS *Achilles* was launched in 1932 before being transferred to the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy in 1936. Following the formal establishment of the Royal New Zealand Navy in October 1941, the ship became HMNZS *Achilles*.



HMS *Achilles* alongside Aotea Quay, Wellington, during the late 1930s

Source: Photograph by Sydney Charles Smith (New Zealand Government History website)

In July 1948 HMNZS *Achilles* was transferred to the Indian Navy and became the INS *Delhi*. The ship attended the 1953 Coronation Review and also played itself in the David Lean film "Battle of the River Plate" before it was eventually decommissioned and scrapped in 1977. The ship paid a nostalgic visit to New Zealand in 1969. There was an Achilles Association for those kiwis and others who had served in that ship and my father was a long serving office holder. They lobbied the then New Zealand Prime Minister Sir Robert Muldoon and when INS *Delhi* was decommissioned one of the four gun turrets and the director were shipped to NZ and initially displayed at the Museum of Transport and Technology in Auckland. They are now at the main entrance to HMNZS *Philomel*. The Honours Board is also in the Chapel there.



HMS *Achilles* thought to be passing through the Kiel Canal, date unknown: Source John Berridge

The Instructor Branch of the RNZN

We were a relatively small Branch, and during my time our numbers ranged from nine up to 25 with an increasing number of female officers. We generally recruited secondary school teacher-trained graduates in maths and science, since most of our “in branch” postings involved teaching artificer apprentices, mechanics and Weapons Electrical (WE) recruits. Most were in their twenties but at times older individuals were taken on to fill specific needs; one was aged 51 but was a technical drawing specialist.

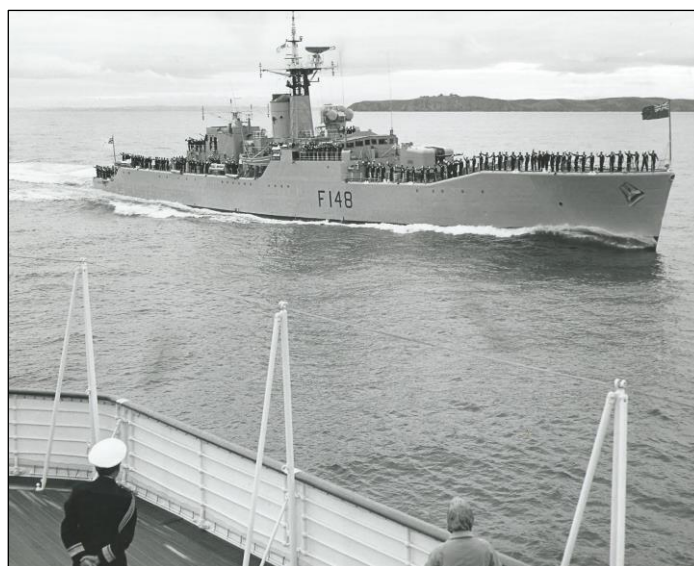
Initial training was minimal and ad hoc, but more recently IOs have undertaken the same and far more comprehensive initial training that is provided to all specialisations of Direct Entry officers.

Many of us also served “out of branch” helping alleviate the overall shortage of General List officers for shore-based postings both in the Navy itself as well as in Defence HQ in areas such as Personnel and Electronic Data Processing (EDP).

There used to be sea postings for IOs in the 1950s and 60s when the RNZN has two cruisers and six frigates, and many IOs at that time served in the Far East on board the cruisers. After the cruisers came to an end with HMNZS *Royalist* we ended up with only four (and now two) frigates and sea postings came to an end. In the 1980s there was one sea posting for an IO as the Training Officer of the frigate HMNZS *Taranaki* when it was designated a training and resource protection ship and operated only in NZ waters.

RNZN IOs did not really have any involvement in either Meteorology or Navigation training, albeit we did have one ex RN schoolie who joined the RNZN and became the RNZN’s Navigation Training Officer for some years in the 1980s. His name was Ken Brierley. We also had at least one other ex RN schoolie - Peter Turpie, who served in the RNZN in the early 1970s.

In the mid 70’s the RNZN adopted “systems training” and this was an area where we did become involved; an RNZN School of Training Technology was established in the training establishment of HMNZS *Tamaki* in the early 1980s. Prior to that there had been a role of an IO on the staff of the Commodore Auckland as the Command Instructional Technique Officer. Over this period we had a connection with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN)’s School of Training Technology in HMAS *Cerberus*. We had hoped to do likewise with RNSETT in the UK but the ANZUS breakup and our country’s nuclear free stance put paid to that and many other connections with the RN.



HMNZS *Taranaki* 1981 – taken from the Royal Yacht at the end of her escort duties: Source John Berridge

There was an informal “schoolie reunion” in 1991 when the RNZN celebrated its 50th anniversary; in planning for that event the names of around 70 former and serving RNZN IOs were identified.

In the 1950s and 60s there were relatively few RNZN IOs and most were on permanent commissions, eventually retiring as Lieutenant Commanders or Commanders. After that it became the norm to offer applicants a five-year short service commission that could then either be extended to eight years or become a permanent commission with retiring age for rank of 45 or 50.

Changes to conditions of service in the mid 80’s and the introduction of a new Armed Forces Pension Scheme resulted in the departure of many longer serving naval personnel, including some IOs. Being able to count up to 10 years prior service as, say a teacher, meant an IO then only had to serve 10 years to qualify for a naval pension after 20 years contributory service. For a period there was then a shortage of “teaching” IOs, and civilian teachers were employed to make up for the shortfall.

My Own Career

I joined the RNZN on 12 January 1970 at age 23 as an Instructor Lieutenant. I had been a sea cadet since the age of 13 and was one of the first sea cadets to “come through the ranks” and be commissioned as a Cadet Officer at TS *Achilles* in Auckland in early 1968.

On completing my maths degree at Auckland University, I undertook a one-year training course to become a secondary school teacher in 1968. In 1969 I taught maths, physics and science at my old secondary school of Auckland Grammar School. As somewhat of an aside, I was in Form 3 for the school’s 90th anniversary, on the staff for the centenary in 1969 and last year attended the 150th anniversary.

On joining the RNZN my initial posting, after a two-week Divisional Officers’ Course, was to the Academic School in HMNZS *Philomel*, the main naval base in Devonport. The Senior Instructor Officer (the SIO) was Lieutenant Commander Alan Patterson, who became increasingly well-known and internationally recognised as a poet, with a staff of eight other IOs. We taught Weapons Electrical Mechanic recruits (WEMs) basic electrical and electronics theory as well as maths, physics, mechanics, electrics and electronics to year one to three control electrical, radio electrical, weapon electrical and marine engineering artificer apprentices. Similar subjects were also taught to petty officer weapons electrical and marine engineering mechanics undertaking a two-year full time course to transition from being mechanics to technicians.



HMNZS *Philomel* at Devonport, Auckland. Source RNZ Navy

There was also an Advanced Education Class – a one-year course for a small number of ratings considered to have officer potential but who lacked the NZ School Certificate (UK O level equivalent) subjects they required to qualify. They were taught English, Maths, Mechanics, Science and Geography.

I recall our very stressed SIO once bounding out of his office with cigarette ash going in all directions as he urgently sought our advice as to who was taking the Apps1 (first year apprentices) for Geography – much laughter followed!

I also recall another very new schoolie forgetting the correct order to get his platoon to start marching at Divisions, and he resorted to the never-to-be-forgotten order (especially by the parade Gunnery Instructor - GI) of “My Platoon, follow me!”



1972 GL Midshipmen; Lt Cdr J A B Lewis RNZN and Ins Lt J M Berridge RNZN (3rd right front row)

After two years I was then posted to HMNZS *Tamaki* to Tangaroa Division, later renamed the Officer Training School, as Assistant Midshipman Training Officer (GL); in essence I was the Divisional Officer for the 20 or so GL Midshipmen who attended Auckland for three or four years to gain their degree in Arts or Science if a Seaman, in Commerce if Supply and Secretariat (S&S) and in Engineering if Mechanical Engineering (ME) or Weapons Engineering (WE).



Form 4 in 1977, NZ Services School, Sembawang (John Berridge left)

After two more years back in the Academic School I was then posted to Singapore where I was one of the two maths and science teachers in the NZ Services School in Sembawang. These two positions were filled by NZ Army, Navy and Air Force education officers on a rotational basis. The School provided primary and secondary education to the children of NZ service personnel of NZ Force South East Asia. The naval component was very small, with an infantry battalion and a transport squadron being the main units.

On return from Singapore I found myself embroiled in the recent adoption by the RNZN of “systems training”. Along with a WE Lt Cdr, I undertook a number of introductory courses at RAN’s School of Training Technology in HMAS *Cerberus*. We then brought those courses back to NZ and commenced “training the trainers” in this approach and related procedures. There was, however, almost universal dislike for what had been decided on as naval policy on individual training; there was much resistance to change and the small group of us charged with implementing it became known as ‘the Wombles.’



The CNTD Group 1989 - “The Wombles of Wimbledon” – Training Development, Quality Control, School of Training Technology, Fleet Examination Centre and the Psychologists

I was meanwhile completing a post graduate business diploma in which “change management” was an integral part of the course the introduction of “systems training” became a very realistic case study for me!

In early 1981 I was posted to the then one sea-going post for an IO; Training Officer of the frigate HMNZS *Taranaki*. This ship had a dual training and resource protection role and over that year we spent time in the southern oceans as well as trips to Australia, Fiji and Campbell Island. The highlight of the year was being the escort ship to the Royal Yacht during the Royal Tour and I was privileged to meet both Her Majesty and Prince Phillip.

1981 was also a defining moment in NZ’s history. The Springbok Rugby Tour resulted in wide-scale protests and never before seen riots and demonstrations that even now people recall for the violence and the divisions it caused through both the country and even individual families.

In early 1982 I was posted as Staff Officer (Manning) on the staff of the Commodore Auckland. This was an “out of branch” posting and one of the most enjoyable of my naval career. Working for the Fleet Personnel Officer I led a team that was responsible for the selection, appraisal, promotion, rotation and mobilisation systems and all related personnel management functions for 2,300 naval personnel.

Selection for promotion to Commander then led to another “out of branch” role as the Director of Personnel Policy in the Ministry of Defence in Wellington. Part of my role was being Defence representative on the State Services Coordinating Committee - a group that meet regularly to ensure there were compatible conditions of employment across the whole public sector.



Commander John Berridge RNZN in 1990

In late 1995 I returned to Auckland to the dual roles of Fleet Instructor Officer (FIO) - the senior schoolie, on the staff of the Commodore, Auckland in Devonport, Auckland - and Commander Naval Training Development (CNTD) at the naval training establishment of HMNZS *Tamaki*, which over that period was at Narrow Neck, another seaside suburb on Auckland’s North Shore and close to Devonport. As CNTD I spent a lot of time in officer selection and performance review as well as managing the training of trainers and training development.



Commodore I A Hunter RNZN appointed Commodore, Auckland 5 February 1988; with Commanders Denis Reid, John Berridge, David Pomeroy and Peter Baldwin and financial advisor Mr Ed Cooper.

I retired from the RNZN on 30 March 1990 with the rank of Commander, Branch List Education. The Instructor Officer List had earlier been subsumed into the Branch List of officers that also covered the non-seagoing specialisations of Wardmasters, Psychologists, Works, Computer Programmers etc.

Since retiring I have held a number of roles in the professional services sector, more recently at GM or CEO level. In my last position I spent eight years managing a nation-wide managed apprenticeship scheme. I am now semi-retired and living in Auckland but still involved with people as the owner of an internet-based business involved in compiling CVs and cover letters, and providing interview skills coaching.

John Berridge

19 March 2020