

Fred – All at sea

It was 1946, the war was over, I was 20 with no skills or qualifications. I was involved with Ivan (brother) at York Road milking cows, I didn't want that sort of life. I read an advertisement in the Weekly News or Freelance about studying radio at the New Zealand Radio College in Auckland. I probably surprised everyone by saying I wanted to do that. I had to board somewhere and eventually found a place in Herne Bay at 86 Sarsfield Street. I shared a large bedroom with two older men, one was Edwin Greensmith, a retired vegetarian schoolteacher, the other man was a wharfie. The house was owned by the Donnelly family and run as a boarding house by Mrs Donnelly and her daughter. It was clean and the food was good. There were about seven boarders in total.

Whilst at Herne Bay I had mentioned that I played a bit of tennis, somehow someone from the local John Court Tennis Club (located in Hamilton Road) came to see me and I was invited to join. I played number 2 man in their club team, the number 1 man was Howard Hutchinson a fine player and with a high position in the Auckland Savings Bank. The Court family had the big retail stores of John Court and George Court in the city. Also members of the tennis club were Stuart Clarke and his wife Molly, they lived at 99 Sarsfield Street. They had three young children, if I boarded with them while I studied in the evenings they could get out together, a scheme that worked quite well. I still am in contact with their son Tony to this day.

Only afterwards can I know how lucky I was staying in Herne Bay. It was close to the central city, it only cost three pennies on the tram to go from Herne Bay into lower Queen Street. Occasionally on a nice day when lectures had finished early I would walk home up Queen St. along Karangahape Road along Ponsonby Road into Jervois Road and home. It was just before the Harbour Bridge was built and the harbour was full of ferry boats. The 99 Sarsfield Street property backed right onto the beach, you could go down the back steps and have a swim at high tide. On one occasion I had just had a swim and was the only person home when the front door bell rang I greeted two nuns in my undressed state. 99 Sarsfield Street sold recently for a very large sum of money. Over the road lived Mr. Arthur Giles one of the heads of International Harvester Company, who was to play a part in my acquiring a new truck when trucks were very hard to acquire.

The radio college was in Hellaby's Building in lower Queen St. right opposite the main Auckland Post Office. (Hellaby's Building has since been demolished) So I caught the tram in Jervois Street paid my three pennies and went back to school as a full daytime student. The head of the school was Ian McRae, a very good tutor if you were interested, and the place was full of AirForce flying crew radiomen getting civilian qualifications. I slowly progressed with my radio knowledge and passed the examinations for Amateur Radio, 2nd Class PMG, 1st Class PMG and 1st Class Certificate in Radio Technology.

Now I had the chance to get a job in radio. I would have loved to go flying, but my family did not like the thought of me on aircraft, I did not want to join the Broadcasting Service, so I decided to go the ship way. At the time of joining my first ship I only had a second class PMG. I had just sat for 1st Class ticket at Auckland University and was reasonably confident.

Other previous students had told me how to go about getting a job with the Union Steamship Company (their wages were slightly better than the British ships). So I visited a Mr Pengally in the Queen's Wharf Office, who said there would be a job on the Kiwitea in a few days. So a few days later I visited the Kiwitea at Birkenhead Sugar Works where she was unloading coal, met Hughie Shields the previous radioman and my seafaring career was about to begin.

I certainly started at the bottom of the ladder in respect to the ship and radio equipment. The Kiwitea had been built in 1925 her sister ships were the Kartigi and Kaponga, the Kaponga had been lost, wrecked on the Grey River bar in 1932. She was

old dirty and ugly and nearly worn out, but she still carried three thousand tons of coal regularly from the West Coast.

What sort of gear do you wear on a dirty collier. It seemed there was available at Naval Outfitters stores, battledress type gear dyed dark navy blue and you could fasten your rank epaulettes to them. The shipping company supplied cap badge, buttons and gold braid for your number one gear.

The Union Company had their own little "Red Book" which clearly stated the rules and regulations about dress and behaviour they expected. Shorts were of a certain length and height of stockings defined etc, Colliers were real dirty ships, coal dust got everywhere, but they were still essential ships in those days. Once appointed to a ship the Company would give you a letter of introduction to the Captain, who you would meet either on the ship or possibly at the Govt shipping office where crews were signed on, you signed both the ships articles and log where your qualifications were noted. The collier crews were mainly hard living men who had to work in tough conditions and when they went ashore they probably drank too much. Getting the crew together in good condition at sailing time had its problems, also how the cook was feeling showed up in the food quality that was served.

The radio gear harked right back to the days of Marconi. The transmitter was a Marconi Quarter Kilowatt Quench Gap Spark Type, to reduce power we simply jammed razor blades in the spark gap, remember I had just come from Radio School where we were learning about the mysteries of radar which was still pretty secret, commercial radar was just starting to be manufactured. My radio receiver was just a simple TRF style!!! However looking back it was still a rich experience to sail on the collier, and I rubbed shoulders with some interesting people. The first captain I sailed with was Captain Hugh Brown, a quiet efficient man. The second one was Captain Wilfred Kehoe, you could write a lot about him, as an ordinary seaman he had become the hero of the wreck of the "Wiltshire" on Great Barrier Island. We must have sailed short of a deck officer, because he got me to do the duties of a Third Officer at sailing time on the bridge recording the engine movements departing and arriving in port. In Greymouth I came aboard after posting a letter, to find a live seagull perched on the bunk board on the side of my bunk, luckily I got it out okay. I had my suspicions that the Captain had something to do with it because I was new to seagoing. In retaliation, I had noticed a pregnant cat onboard and managed to let it into the captain's cabin, it had kittens on his settee!!! It was all in good fun. A loaded collier bumping on the river bar is a very strange sensation. The modern collier Kaitawa lost with all hands near the tip of the North Island a few years later was a reminder how dangerous colliers were.

My next ship was another on the NZ coast, the Wainui which traded between Dunedin, Oamaru and Timaru with Napier and Gisborne. After the Kiwitea she was a trim little coaster and the radio gear had valves which was a step up. She must have been about the last coastal ships that actually called and berthed at Oamaru. The colony of shags on the breakwater was quite a sight. We actually spent one Sunday tied up in Oamaru, and I remember having a great trek with the 1st mate (Tom Goldie), I think we must have walked 20 miles of more. I think we looked at some memorial to the breeding of Corriedale sheep. Coasters did not have any radar and handling the ship in fog close to the coast is no simple operation.

The next stage of my maritime career was a big lift. Somehow I was in Wellington and a new ship had arrived. The Union Company had started building new ships after the war. This ship was the Kaitoke. I can only think looking back that because I had a first class PMG, that had a bearing on the issue. Radiotelephony was just starting for smaller ships and this ship had gear that could work on 2182 and 2162, as it turned out I was to use it to see how far it would work on a voyage from Wellington to Adelaide. We still had the conventional 500 kc telegraph band gear and also a New Zealand made radio direction finder made by Electronic Navigation. Ltd.

The captain of the Kaitoke was Captain H. Collier (he had the nickname of "Two Gun Pete") I never found out how that name originated. He had just come from being captain of the sailing ship "Pamir". He did not need new fangled gear like radio, and I can remember the Chief Engineer (W. Insley) muttering that this Old Man will find out

that this ship has got engines. The Chief Officer was Gordon Robertson who later became Captain of the "Wahine" that clipped Barretts Reef at the entrance to Wellington Harbour and sank. The Second Officer was Gilbert Inkster who had served on the Pamir but not when Collier was master. So I was a fairly new boy with some pretty experienced "old salts" and my first trip to Australia.

We were approaching the Bass Strait in stormy conditions, when I picked up a radio message from Sydney Radio (VIS) asking ships in our area to indicate their positions. It turned out that a coaster from Tasmania was in trouble, we were quickly ordered to maintain continuous radio watch and go to the aid of the stricken ship. We soon found that this coaster was the old Kowhai, built in 1910 the oldest ship in the Union Co, it carried old spark radio gear, no real radio man, somebody among the officers would have had what was called a Mate operator qualification, meaning he could read and send morse at 12 words per minute. It was dark and very stormy, we were racing as fast as we could and it became very rough, we had no radar so we needed radio signals from them to enable us to use our radio direction finder, signals from a spark transmitter are so broad in frequency that it was not easy to pinpoint their position. However by daylight we found them, their cargo had shifted, luckily the weather started to moderate and they reckoned they could make Melbourne.

This incident was enough to have reporters waiting for us on arrival in Adelaide. The episode showed the importance of radio in respect to safety of life at sea. The old sailing ship captain suddenly seemed to accept my position on the ship. I was invited to have a look at some of his Pamir photos, he had sailed the Pamir to England after the war, loaded with wool and food parcels. Whilst there he had been visited by the then Princess Elizabeth and Philip, we wondered how he conversed with a royal princess without using a few sailor's oaths!!! My only regret in Adelaide was that Don Bradman was playing his last match and I missed going to see him. We loaded gypsum at Edithburgh and general cargo in the gulf, returning to NZ, Napier and Portland where I received a message to go to Wellington for a new appointment.

From the Kaitoke I was appointed 2nd Radio Officer on TEV Hinemoa, the new steamer express on the Wellington-Lyttelton run, looking back it was to give me experience on a ship with a lot of passengers and much more radio traffic. The 1st Radio man for most of the watch was looking after the radio telephone, you could ring up just like at home. My part of it was the telegraphy using the morse code like all conventional ships. We also had to look after the radar, it was wartime stuff housed in its own area, and we had to change ranges as required by the bridge. Hand written messages were not permitted, everything had to be typed. So I had to become much better on a typewriter, I spent afternoons copying American press and stock markets reports till I was blue in the face!!!! Man you learn quickly when you have too. So I was on a real learning curve, I had a first class ticket in radio knowledge, now I was learning how to cope with the telegraphic world. My first night on the Hinemoa was a testy one, I hardly knew which knob to change and Wellington Radio (ZLW) knew there was a new boy on Hinemoa and tested him a bit. I guess my mate the Senior Radio Officer had seen it all before and he backed me up, so I did not have to ask for repeats. Time passed and I caught on, one evening my mate pushed over his McElroy bug key and said call the Wahine. I will always remember what I sent ZMML DE ZMFQ QTC which means Hinemoa calling Wahine I have a message for you. Boy I wanted my own bug key, but you could not buy one in New Zealand. I had made the grade. I spent nearly a year on the Hinemoa. We never missed a sailing despite all the Cook Strait storms and it is a rough bit of water at times. The majority of trips are made overnight, but at very busy times of the year an occasional daylight trip was made, I think many passengers took the opportunity to send a radiogram, the amount of traffic sent increased enormously. The Hinemoa experiences were in the 1948-49 years. The two senior men I worked with on the Hinemoa were Ernie Heather and Jock Lindsay.

At this time the last of the big passenger ships were being withdrawn, the Monowai on the New Zealand-Australia run, and Aorangi on the Trans'-Pacific-NZ-Australia route. The age of the passenger aeroplane was beginning. However the Union Company still had ships carrying 12 passengers on the trans-pacific route to North America and ships to India

and these were interesting runs. Food quality was always good when ships carried passengers, uniforms had to be A1. However the bulk of the shipping trade with NZ ships was to Australian ports, Intercolonial ships only carried one Radio Officer and did not have to have autoalarms, the device that came about after the Titanic disaster to alert ships with only one operator when he was not on watch. All foreign going registered ships had to have autoalarms.

The next couple of years were spent on several ships always trading between Australia and New Zealand. Interesting but I was always hoping to get an appointment on one of the bigger ships on either the American or Indian runs. During this period I had an interesting interlude on another company's ship, the name of that ship was the Springbank.

She was a tramp steamer belonging to the Bank Line operated by the Andrew Weir Company of Great Britain. She was due to sail from Wellington but her Radio Officer was unable to sail and my company the Union Steamship Co. said they would let me go and fill the gap. I had an appointment with the Captain at G.H. Scales office, checked about my pay and agreed to do a trip to Ocean Island for phosphate. The ship was a wartime American built Liberty ship, the sort that were welded, no rivets, designed probably for a short life. I climbed the gangway and immediately the ship sailed. (I have wondered afterwards that I signed no ship's articles or visited the Govt shipping Office, which was the strict procedure of the Union Steamship Co. Maybe not being a NZ registered ship made things different.) I found the radio room full of American equipment which I had never seen before, I wanted to let Wellington Radio know our movements, leaving Wellington and heading for New Plymouth and was dismayed that nothing seemed to work. Somehow I got a weak signal going and passed the necessary information. Then retired to my cabin, we were now out in Cook Strait rolling heavily, the ship was nearly empty of cargo, it was the only ship that rolled me out of my bunk in my seafaring career. Next day I had time to study the gear and found that all the batteries were dead flat, soon we arrived at New Plymouth. I went to the Captain with a chit to get distilled water and was quickly told that no one had ever ordered that. I was quickly aware that the condition of this ship was pretty rough, and things were not done in the strict order I was used to, however I sorted out the radio gear and it worked very well, kippers were the order of the day in food and I suppose I had to remember it was a tramp steamer. Eventually we sailed from New Plymouth to Lyttelton, word came through that the previous radio man would be able to rejoin his ship, I was not the least bit sorry to be paid off and rejoin the Union Co. A happy ship is a great feeling, good crews are proud of their ship, the reverse is very sad and very uncomfortable.

While on the Karitane, Captain C. Dovey came back from Head Office in Wellington with the news that I was going to be sent to the Waitemata, one of the transpacific ships, I was thrilled. In 1947 the trans Pacific service had been reformed into the Canadian-Union Line, it comprised five 10,000 ton ships all Canadian wartime built. The Waitemata was always NZ registered. The other four finished up with the names Waihemu, Wairuna, Waikawa, Waitomo. (They all had Canadian crews) As it happened I was involved with just two of them, Waitemata and Wairuna.

The Waitemata had been built at Burrards in Vancouver and we always drydocked there. The radar was type 268 built by Canadian Arsenal and it was very helpful to have close contact with the servicing people in Vancouver. Our major compass was a Sperry gyro type, and a good depth sounder device was fitted.

Radar was the great invention developed greatly during WW2. All the sets I had to do with were WW2 types, They looked extremely complicated with masses of controls and switches, they had a strict order of switching when turning on or off, which could only be done on the main console, and was in the corner of the chartroom. There was a remote PPI in the wheelhouse, later I will tell you about an episode with the remote unit on the Wairuna. On the ships I served on the radar was only used when really needed. It was not uncommon for the Radio Officer to be summoned at any time by one of the seamen on watch with the message "Captain wants you on the bridge Mister" and to

be asked by the Old Man "is the radar working correctly", and you would spend sometime checking as much as you could. It was amazing after days at sea to be making landfall and picking up land on the screen thirty miles away.

On one occasion we were approaching Golden Gate (frisco) and picking up our pilot, I was watching the radar screen, when a blimp appeared right close to us. Images normally appear first on the edge and move towards the centre, I looked outside and a submarine had surfaced right alongside us. Because the ship carried passengers and was passing through the tropics, you had to have tropical uniforms. It was common practise to get tropical uniforms in Fiji, that would be our first port of call so somehow that was where I stocked up. Indian tailors (Mr Narsey) seem to be able to do it quickly and expertly. On arrival in our first American port, crew clearance for going ashore was being much more closely looked at, the communist element was closely queried, it was not unknown that if crew had communist tendencies that person would be denied entry and an armed guard posted at the gangway stopping that person from going ashore, I had to have a special seamen's pass, to enable me to go ashore in the U.S. I had to do my first trip north using the convention P & T type morse key, and wanted a bug key obtainable in San Francisco. Our first voyage was Fiji, Cook Islands, Tahiti, Vancouver, New Westminster (up the Fraser River) San Francisco, Los Angeles and back to Tahiti. The Waitemata was always dry docked at Burrards Dock in North Vancouver, her bottom sandblasted and repainted, we were able to stay onboard while this took place, she had been built there so they knew plenty about her. By the time we left the West Coast of the US we were very heavily laden, huge amounts of Douglas Fur stacked high on the decks. In "frisco" I had made my purchase of a shining new Vibroflex bug key and was practising to work the famous KFS station at Palo Alto and KPH at Bolinas, all very exciting stuff.

The west coast area between San Francisco and the ports of Los Angeles is often foggy radar was essential, ships totally depended on it, and for the number of ships about, collisions were few. Nuclear testing was taking place on mainland US (Nevada Desert) and our navigator mentioned some change in barometric pressure with one test.

So we loaded the last of our cargo, topped up the fuel tanks, met our new passengers and the next stop was Papeete.

In 1952 I was appointed to the Wairata, (I actually replaced my old friend Jock Lindsay) another war surplus ship but this time another American one. She was what is known as the Cape class her original name was Cape Igvak built at Beaumont Pennsylvania in 1943, it was very superior to the Liberty class ships, I would say her radio room and facilities were among the best of the wartime class cargo ships. The voyage I made in her was from Auckland non stop to Singapore, picking up a pilot off Cape Moreton, through the Great Barrier Reef, dropping the pilot at Thursday Island. On to Singapore then onto Bombay, then down to Cochin on the Malabar Coast, Colombo then Calcutta. In those days ships sent weather messages every six hours, I can remember when near Indonesia (who had just got their independence) sending a weather message with the address Obs Batavia and the very agitated bloke at the other end reminding me that the place was now Jakarta!!!

The other occurrence that affected me was that our Chief Officer suddenly became very ill, ships have free medical advice available via radio, it turned out that he had mumps and that is very serious for male adults, I had to spend quite a lot of time with messages in medical jargon and sometimes asking for clarification. He eventually improved without putting him ashore. The ship had a sizeable medical locker, which the 2nd Officer is in charge of. We all carried United Nations health cards, and occasionally on arrival at port you could be called to the Purser's Office for another jab. Burly seamen would occasionally collapse at the sight of the needle.

At Singapore, armed guards were posted to wharf entry areas (the communist fear was very real) and drunken sailors returning to their ships caused the guards to quickly react. Austin Algae (Purser) and myself had a fair look around in the short time there, much of the city had got out of bounds areas, out of bounds to who? I wonder if the Tiger Balm Gardens are still in existence these days.

From Singapore we moved onto Bombay. While we were there a squadron of American destroyers arrived and the locals put on every sort of show to gain a few dollars. We watched fights between hooded cobras and mongooses, we were told that the snakes had been milked of their venom. Grant Road with its open approach to the sex industry seemed strange to the Western way of life. Liquor was not available, Bombay was dry according to western standards, We saw the large monument stating that this place was the gateway to the East. A sect with links to Judaism had their towers of silence, when their people died the bodies were placed on these high buildings and the vultures reduced them to just bones. Odd to our way of thinking. Muslims were largely outnumbered by Hindus, but I can remember on our ship as it was being loaded seeing a muslim place his little prayer mat towards Mecca on the hatch cover and spend some time kneeling on it, just one solitary person observing his religion alone. India seemed to be teeming with people, okay if you had money, but there seem to be thousands just living on the breadline.

Our next port of call was Cochin on the Malabar coast. We were not there very long so did not have much chance to see things. It seems a pretty attractive area. There seemed to be lots of food available.

Our next port was Colombo in what we used to call Ceylon. Was having a small problem with our autoalarm, knew there was no spares available ashore, so I noticed another American ship of our vintage, (because we were at anchor I had to get a bum boat to get to the other ship). Eventually found the radio man's cabin, was opening a screen door when a monkey jumped at me, he was on a chain and that just stopped him from scratching my face, angry monkeys are quite ferocious. The bloke told me it was like his watchdog.

Our next stage of the voyage was in the Bay of Bengal, Calcutta. We arrived off the mighty Ganges at night, I was surprised the next morning to see we were among dozens of ships awaiting a radio call to proceed up the Hoogly River to the King George docks where we berthed. A pilot had come aboard for that part, he was given the use of a cabin close to mine, he had a manservant and I was appalled at his manner to this man, class distinction must have had something to do with it. I mentioned in Bombay the teeming millions, in Calcutta it seemed worse, I think the temperature was higher the place more oppressive. Still it had some interesting places, if you had wealth some of it

was magnificent, the dress of well to do Indian women is very attractive, then you would return to the street to be challenged by a poor young woman with a new child!!

Whilst docked in Calcutta, we were next to a British ship of the Brocklebank

Line, linked to the Cunard Line. Very pukka. We liased with them, and in conversation asked what's the best place you have visited, I was amazed when one of the blokes said Napier NZ. He said there was a club there where they were made very welcome.

Another ship that was very interesting in Calcutta, was the Flying Enterprise 2nd. There had been a saga in the Atlantic in 1951 with the Flying Enterprise One which eventuall sank while under tow. My interest was because she had been a ship exactly of the same class as we were in Wairata. Our ship was formally the Cape Igvak the Flying Enterprise was Cape Kumukaki. I have always wondered what happened to the Flying Enterprise. I will quote what I have read about the disaster.

Flying Enterprise was about 400 miles west of Lands End, hove to in a gale force wind and rough sea. In the days that followed she suffered structural damage and a crack was discovered extending across the weather deck. Battered by giant waves the ship heeled over to port and failed to right herself -her cargo had shifted. The end after many days was inevitable. She slowly rolled further over and sank while under tow. On the computer I obtained lots of information and photos. It was interesting when we sailed and advised where we were bound etc, Flying Enterprise sent his and he stated that Captain Carlsen the hero of the first ship was still aboard

Ships of this era were designed with winches and derricks, so that they could load and discharge cargo using their own gear. Some even had very heavy lifting gear that could handle loads as big as locomotives etc. The winches were either steam powered or electric.. On our ships the Chief Officer was responsible for the actual loading, on the more modern ships he sometimes had an actual model of the ship, and would load it with weights and be able to know what the draft of the ship would be fore and aft. The trim of the ship had a great bearing on fuel consumption. Cargoes of liquor generally required hold watchmen when being discharged., but still the wharfies seemed to get their share..The age of the container had not yet begun

Food on Union Co ships especially good if they were carrying passengers was excellent, but on the tramp steamer I served on kippers and the like were the diet. Drinking alcohol at sea was a no no, but in port was another story.

The return journey to Auckland must have been fairly uneventful.

My next ship was the Wairuna, one the trans Pacific vessels, very similar to the Waitemata,I joined her in Auckland. Her itinery was a little different, where the Waitemata covered the New Zealand ports, the Wairuna went mainly to Australia, mostly Sydney. She carried cadets which reduced her passengers to six. On one occasion we were in Sydney for six weeks, the longest stay I ever expienced in port. I built a photo enlarger with the help of the ships engineers. We visited a sports goods ship several times I think it was run by Stan McCabe, one of Australia's greatest batsmen. We became like locals, pretty interesting place to have to kill time.

On the first trip after time in Vancouver area we visited a port in northern California called Eureka, mainly to load redwood, inland from there are the giant sequia trees .We had just arrived, I was reading my mail, when a person knocked and made himself known, he was from the local Amateur Radio Club, they had a practice if there was a foreign ship in port, to invite the ship radio man to their club meeting. I agreed to go and a car came early in the evening to pick me up. It was the usual amateur radio meeting, I was introduced and somebody in the hall suggested "how about a few words from our friend from Noo Zealand" I chatted with them and invited them to visit our ship and see the radar gear etc. The next day there was quite a few visitors. Out of that I made friends with Bill Branaman W5FYF and Kelvin Steel W6KTV, from then on I was treated like a tourist , whilst visiting Bill's place we activated his radio gear, he gave me the mike I called and unbelievably I talked to Jimmy Mills at Fernhill. Kelton Steel was a wealthy man,, I was treated to a Halloween dinner in his redwood lined dining room and taken to see an American football game, the crowd at the game only cheered when their side scored bit different from NZ. Kelton's wife got me to show her how we made tea! That covered the first visit, we were to return again next trip which was

wonderful for me. On the second visit, Kelton took me to where they were logging on his property. As we drove to the site I noticed a revolver handily placed, he wanted to give it to me there and then, and was amazed when I told him that weapon was illegal in NZ. We went down a side road by a stream and he let me fire a few shots at a stick poking up in the water. The size of logs and trucks seemed much bigger than in NZ. I was shown a right royal time, Kelton's radio gear was Collins S line, just the very best, we NZers could only dream of it.

Bill's wife Avis was pregnant and a few weeks later as we approached Tahiti I got news that she had given birth to twin boys named Paul & Fred. What a wonderful time I had been shown, I had taken the odd gift in appreciation. I think their harbour areas were affected by the Japanese zsunam in 2011.;

We moved down the West Coast to Frisco Bay, was near San Quentin Federal Prison when a death sentence was being carried out. Plenty to see but not much time to look around. Foggy coast the west coast, radar used extensively, lots of other ships about. Down to LA, scrabble was the in game, suddenly remembered it, made a quick trip into city to get game, took longer than expected, ship was being cleared for departure, I was not aboard, could not sail without me, but just made it, before Captain became involved.

When the Wairuna returned to Auckland I resigned from the Union Co. They were sorry to see me go. It had been interesting, but I had to think of my future, I was now in my late twenties, radio at sea did not earn you very much, you never had any chance to get overtime which made all the other people's wages much higher. I had climbed the ladder in skill and that helped my confidence. At home Ivan was wanting to enlarge the cropping program, with leased land etc. So it seemed logical to return to the land, I first needed a vehicle, and my friend Mr Giles of International Harvester helped me to solve that problem' So I swolled the anchor.

When I came back to Hastings, we were growing crops for Watties, tomatoes, corn, green beans, peas and potatoes principally. The people at the Union Steamship Co Head Office in Wellington got to know about potatoes, it finished up that the order would fill a railway wagon, the wagon would be despatched overnight to the city, I would go down to Wellington in time to unload it and take the spuds to the Head Office where the individuals would pick them up. Plenty of tongue wagging as you can imagine. Most of the order had been organised by Frank Graham, (he had been in charge of the Company's own radio school which trained Mate Operators in the morse code up to 12 words per minute.)

Jock Lindsay came up to Hawkes Bay and spent a few days with us. Also Bill Hall (Engineer) had married, he and his wife (Rosemary) visited us a few times. Bill's wife had been a senior Hansard reporter in parliament. The Grahams made many visits to HB and stayed with us. Who would have thought that the Union Steamship Company would cease to exist in a few years later!!!!

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All at Sea Continued

Odd episodes.

Whilst in Wellington waiting for a new appointment I was sent to the Waipori which had just arrived from Sydney, I wanted to see a particular person and was informed that he was on the focslehead, I made my way down to the foredeck and was standing there when a lion roared, it was very close, I was standing in front of a lion in a cage, it was only feet from me. I thought all my birthdays had come at once!!

During a stopover in Vancouver I was able to visit the Pacific National Exposition. It was like a giant A & P show, there were breeds of draught type horses which I have never seen in New Zealand. I was not able to spend very long at the show but had a try at one of the stalls and won a teddy bear so spent the rest of the time carting a teddy bear under my arm. Back on the ship the teddy bear was often missing from my cabin.

In 1952 the Union Co were sending a crew of New Zealanders to Vancouver to replace a Canadian crew, I was selected to fly to Canada in that crew. However my Mother was suddenly taken ill and I had to go to Napier urgently. I missed the flight but was appointed to the Wairuna when it arrived in New Zealand.

On the Wairuna, we made up a cricket team, our first game was in Fiji, cocanut matting on a concrete pitch. We battered very poorly, they had a fairly fiery fast bowler, I managed to make the best score. That did me a lot of good, the radio blokes mostly are more studious it seemed, and I was a bit of a surprise. In other matches they made me bat first. I remember playing in Victoria on Vancouver Island and wandering around the pavillon and looking at a photo of Bradman and the Aussie team, they must have played there. It was a great way to mix with the whole crew and be accepted.

Working with Jock Lindsay brought to light how some merchant seamen had suffered in the second world war. It's all about the Union Co's Hauraki and her crew. I was shipmates with three of her crew during my period at sea. Jock who was the Radio Officer, Bill Hall who had been a young engineer and Ian Back who was Purser on the ill fated ship. The Hauraki was captured by the Japanese Navy while sailing in the Indian Ocean on 12th July 1942. She was made to sail to Singapore, where many of the crew were imprisoned there. Ian Back was imprisoned there. A nucleus of the original crew, the Captain and Deck Officers, Radio Officer and Engineers stayed with the ship and it was taken to Japan. On arrival there the NZers were led ashore blindfold and told the Hague Conventions (Rules of War) did not apply to them. They suffered severe brutality and starvation for a long time. Weak they were put to heavy physical labour jobs in places like shipyards etc. I don't know how many died. The ship was converted to Japanese transport and sunk by American carrier based planes at Truk, Caroline Islands 17th Feb 1944. Jock has suffered terribly.

I first met up with Bill Hall (William Peebles Hall) when serving on the Karitane, an Intercolonial registered ship doing Wellington and southern ports to Australia. He was our Chief Engineer. The Chief (as he is usually known) Engineer does not dirty his hands, or it is a very rare occasion if he does, has as much gold braid as the captain but it additionally has a purple insert, he generally has at least four other engineer officers and other engineering staff, and the 2nd Eng is heavily involved with carrying out what has to be done. Sometimes there are additional Refrigeration Engineers. If the ship is in A1 condition the Chief Engineer has free time in port and that is how Bill and I spent time ashore together. He was highly qualified both for steam and motor ships. At the finish of his career he was Chief on the Interisland Steamer Express Maori powered with turbo-electric propulsion. He had been at sea all his life, and had visited most places many times, a wonderful mate if you had not visited the place before. I found Engineers and modern engine-rooms very interesting. Starting a big diesel from cold was quite an

operation, I seem to remember one old timer diesel being started with an explosive type cartridge.

Bill Hall had been sent to the UK when the new collier Kaitawa was being built, it was common for the company to send an engineer to observe the building and installation of engines etc prior to launching. The Kaitawa was later lost with all hands off North Cape.

I remember when servicing the radar I caused a bit of a stir in the engineroom. There was a problem with the remote viewer housed in the wheel house, it was probably mid afternoon. The main unit of the radar was powered up, and I had removed the remote unit from its cabinet, to put it back you pushed it in and the back connections made contact. On this occasion I pushed it in and was immediately thrown against the bulkhead alongside the man at the wheel, the sudden short caused the lights to momentarily dip. Immediately the engineroom rang the bridge to ask what was going on. It was that "Sparks" again!!

They used to say that if you entered an engine-room and called Jock you would always get an answer. There certainly are plenty of Scottish sailors and engineers on ships. Our "Chief" on the Waitemata was a Scot, Mr. A. Thompson, he had played a large hand in keeping the "Tahiti" afloat after the shaft driving her starboard engine broke, even with the watertight doors closed she still slowly sank. Radio saved the day by alerting other ships and everybody was rescued. Thompson was 2nd Engineer of the Tahiti. Very close to retirement when on the Waitemata. The Tahiti was lost in mid pacific in August 1930.

The radar sets (Type 268) antenna system were mounted on a mast to get clear of many of the obstructions on the ship. The array is mounted on a motor which rotates it, giving the set coverage over the full 360 degrees. On one occasion there must have been something affecting its turning ability. I had to inspect the thing, and hopefully get it right. So they gave me the assistance of one seaman and we had to climb the mast in fairly rough weather, ship rolling etc. I must have got hold of some heavy weather gear and climbed up with the seaman just below me with some tools etc. Somehow we must have accomplished the job, a little episode that was quite scary.

.Not all messages on the radio circuits use plain language, weather messages used a numeral system. The Union Co. used the Bentley Code system for very confidential information. The Captain had the vital code book nobody else. When the Captain got to know you, he would throw it my way. You had to be very careful about the secrecy of correspondence agreement that you had signed.

Whilst on the Katui (built as a supply ship for Mountbatten's forces in South East Asia) we were doing a pre Christmas run to Fiji for a load of bananas for the NZ market. I was off watch and standing on the focslehead (bow) of the ship, when suddenly a great tail arose out of the water. It must have been a big whale dozing and suddenly hearing our engines made a sudden move. It must have been a pretty big whale.

Again standing by in Wellington, I did a trip on the Karu, the smallest Union Co ship in NZ. Chief Officers on larger ships suddenly get promotion to Master of a small ship. My appointment on Karu coincided with Captain A Crosby's first command. He was very resplendent in his new shining gold braid etc, I guess a very proud moment for him. Our trip was for a cargo of potatoes from Timaru to Wellington. We experienced a very rough return across Cook Strait, I had a porthole right beside my bunk and was able to watch the seas coming right up to it, and my cabin was pretty high.; We arrived in Wellington with the newspaper billboards saying the Dominion Monarch (a large Pommie Liner and a regular visitor to NZ) had rolled 20 degrees in Cook Strait, they should have been with us, I think we were more like a submarine, but we thought nothing of it. Captain Crosby years later had become Chief Marine Superintendent of the Company at the time of the Wahine disaster.

Telegraphy (morse) was a very competitive skill, you are always trying to do it better and faster. I had memories of the testy time I had had when joining the Hinemoa. I had found out who the operator at Wellington Radio (ZLW) was that had given me the "works". Years later when I was on the trans Pacific run, we had just left Papeete, Tahiti and several messages in French were handed to me, I knew the operator at Wellington was probably the same gentleman of earlier acquaintance I gave him a little test!

We were a few hours out of Honolulu on the Wairuna, I was off watch when I heard a very strong loud hailer, looked out to see a large American naval tug close to us. They were making us very aware that we were entering a prohibited area. It was Armed Forces Day in the US and a live shell practise was due to take place on Waikiki Beach out to the area we were now entering. Almost immediately I was summoned by the Captain, asking why don't we know about this! Fortunately I was able to tell him that I had given the bridge a "notice to Mariners" some days earlier about this practise and area information- he grunted and I guess somebody else was on the mat!!!

For those interested in telegraphy it is interesting to see what standards were prevailing in 1947. Morse code was required in all the licences. The tests were set and controlled by the NZ Post Office and in Auckland took place at the main Post Office To pass as a radio amateur, it required a written examination and the ability to send and receive code at 12 words per minute. The 2nd PMG required passes at 20 wpm, and the 1st Class PMG needed a 25 wpm pass. A very senior radio inspector would pass judgement on the result after a three minute test. Also a practical test in a ship's radio room was carried out, something would not be working and you were expected to find it, I did my test on the "Matua", she was the ship doing the Pacific Islands circuit. You felt very pleased when those morse tests were behind you!!!!

Accidents at sea generally got the radioman involved. On one occasion we had just left Papeete dropped the pilot outside the reef, when a seaman fell and smashed his shoulder area and needed urgent help. I called the local radio link and there was no answer!!! He should have been maintaining watch on the frequency I used..... I chatted with the Captain and he quickly gave me authority to do what ever I could to get this man back for hospitalisation. I quickly used the call XXX which said we wanted immediately help but the actual ship was not in immediate danger. I don't know what happened ashore but we soon had contact and that seaman was taken back to Tahiti. When calls like XXX are used all other stations have to stop their traffic and let the XXX station take priority. I expected to be queried later about that call but never was.

Fanning Island. This was a small atoll just 2 degrees north of the equator in what was then called the Gilbert & Ellice Islands now known as Kiribati, it was a cable station and supplies for it came from Australia. Among our passengers was a replacement doctor, immigrant doctors seemed to serve a time there which enabled them to get full registration in Aussie. The replaced doctor came with us to Vancouver. We just lay off the atoll, no anchorage or facilities for unloading, so the crew maintained normal seagoing watches. We had cargo for them in two holds, the Purser and myself landed new jobs of supervising that only the correct cargo was unloaded. Sea conditions were pretty good and the ship was rolling very gently. Among the gear in my hold was a medium sized truck, the island people had to lash together two boats and create a platform large enough to accommodate the truck. We did get it ashore but not before a few people had a sudden dip in the briny. The arrival of a big ship was cause for celebration, we could not go ashore. That cable station had a special privilege, they had a special brand of scotch whisky Victoria Vat a Dewar brand, and by the time we were ready to sail, many of the island people were very happy. I was visited by the local Postal official and he offered me stamps (said help yourself), I did not want to take them as I knew next day he would have to balance his books. However he insisted and I took

At SEA

SEA 14

a few of low value. Apparently those stamps were quite valuable, on my return to Auckland some months later, I had to have a dental job done, the dentist took the stamps and I got a free job done. I wonder if Fanning Island is still a cable station.

Looking back and thinking about it, how did I get interested in communications and telegraphy. I went to Napier Boys' High School in 1940, cadets were still part of school life in those days, somehow I got into the signalling squad, run by Mr C.J. Bagley a signals officer in WW1, we actually learnt to send morse using a flag. Also at that time morse code was being sent over the broadcast band (ZLF) to help future radio operators going into the Airforce. I guess I was fascinated with the stuff..... What a mighty influence a simple dot and dash system had.

1951 Shipping strike

I was Radio Officer on the Waitemata at the start of the strike. Ship's officers voted that they did not agree with the strike. Flying crews were formed to move the strike bound ships around New Zealand.

Whilst in Wellington the ship had to change to another berth. The Wellington Harbourmaster was in charge, our Captain acted as Third Officer and I became Man at the Wheel. We completed the operation quite successfully. When we reached Auckland my duties were very different. I was night watchman on two unmanned ships tied up at the viaduct. Luckily there were no incidents. Ships with no life on them are pretty ghostly at night.