

To any ex-sailor who thinks the modern matelots aren't as fit or tough, Jim Blackburn BEM Ld'H has a simple answer for them. "They are no different to what we were."



Great-Grandfather Rates Today's Sailors

■ By Andrew Bonallack
Editor

The World War 2 veteran and former Chief Petty Officer has seen many young men and women pass out. He's a regular guest to Basic Common Training graduations as president of the HMNZS Otago Association and member of the Senior Rates' Mess. However, last month's BCT 19/01 graduation was special, as he watched his great-grandson, Ordinary Electronics Technician Ben Johnston, graduate.

"The old hands say, what happens when 'it' hits the fan? Okay, I don't want to ever fight another war. But they will be just as efficient. Yes, I know conditions today are vastly better and softer than we endured, but just because we lived like pigs, doesn't mean they should."

Mr Blackburn had his own naval legacy to live up to. His father, AB Frank Blackburn, joined the Royal Navy in 1895 and went to China in battleship HMS BARFLEUR in 1900 to help contain the Boxer Rebellion. He remembers his father had an aluminium bowl – his plate, his saucer, his cup, with his number stamped in the bottom. "He never wore his medals. He always threw them in a drawer. In those days, there wasn't much justice. It was all punishment and discipline."

Mr Blackburn, who turned 93 this month, joined in 1943 as a Boy Second Class Communications Branch and then progressed to a Boy Telegraphist. At age 17, he served in HMS DUCHESS OF FIFE, a converted minesweeper. He was out early the night before D-Day, sweeping off the coast of Normandy. "I don't know where we went, nobody told you in those days. We weren't