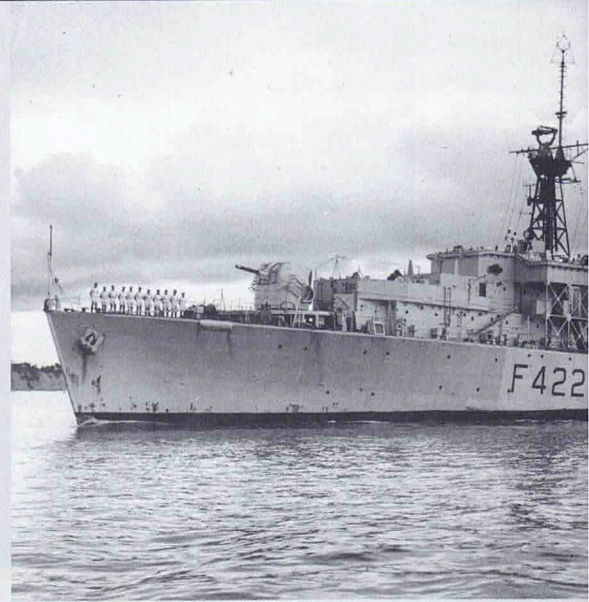


# My Navy Life

■ By Peter Maitland  
Ex Leading Telegraphist



*Peter Maitland, aged 20.*



In 1953, at the age of 19, I joined the Navy. I did my basic training on HMNZS TAMAKI, (The Rock). After three months I went to HMNZS PHILOMEL, where for the next nine months I trained to become a Radio Operator.

On completion of my training all of the class I was in were being sent to join the light cruiser HMNZS BLACK PRINCE, which was in service at that time. The class previous to mine had all been sent to join the Loch class frigate HMNZS HAWEA, which was leaving for Korea in the middle of January. Fortunately for me, one of that class had an accident and broke his leg just two weeks before being due to sail. Because I had come top of my class I was sent to HAWEA as his replacement, which turned out to be the best thing that could have happened.

We sailed for Korea, via Sydney, for two months of working up exercises with ships from the Australian Navy. This involved lots of work for everyone as we prepared to go onto a war footing. Just a few days before we were due to leave Sydney for Korea, the Peace Treaty was signed, and hostilities ceased. This left us a highly trained ship, with nowhere to go. The Navy quickly made a decision for us to do a Pacific Cruise, visiting Fiji and the Gilbert and Ellis Islands (these are now known as Tuvalu).

What a wonderful experience for me, now 20 years old and doing something that people pay many thousands of dollars to do today. Mind you, the conditions on HAWEA were vastly different to being on a cruise ship, but we were young and life was one big adventure.

After visiting Suva and several islands, we arrived at the island of Funafuti, just after 8am on a perfect tropical day. The sea was mirror-smooth, the temperature warm and balmy, and the island was a real picture-postcard type of place with palm trees swaying and a white coral sand beach gleaming at the edge of a beautiful blue sea. The reef was about 100 metres from the shore, with waves gently breaking over it, making it appear like a large white line painted on the blue sea.

As we approached, our Asdic was pinging the reef and the range was being broadcast to the Bridge and all parts of the ship. The Asdic operator's voice kept getting higher as we got closer to the reef. "Range 100 metres. Range 50 metres. Range 20 meters."

Then we hit. At this time most of the crew were on the upper deck taking photographs and just soaking up how beautiful it all was. I was right up in the bow and was watching the reef rising from the sea floor through the crystal clear water. I wrapped my arms around the Jack Staff and hung on just before we ran aground. With lots of noise and the ship shuddering her way onto the reef things got a bit hectic. We were stuck hard and fast.

A Petty Officer came running up to the bow yelling for everyone to quickly move aft to the Quarterdeck. At the same time the order to "Clear Lower Deck" was being broadcast throughout the ship.

As soon as everyone had arrived on the Quarterdeck the Chief Petty Officer took over and yelled at us to all crowd as astern as we could and to jump up and down. With the engines going full astern it was hoped that we could bounce the ship off the reef. This idea did not work, so the Chief changed tactics and ordered everyone over to the Port side, then yelled "Starboard side Go." And we all raced across the Quarterdeck to the other side. This was repeated over and over, and the engines were still going Full Astern. When at last, looking up to the top of the mast, we could see the ship was starting to rock side to side.