

History of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Police

By Commander Peter Mangan, RAN

Introduction

The formation of the Naval Police occurred on the 1st July 1913, when the Royal Naval establishments in the Sydney area were handed over to the Royal Australian Navy.

The branch was at that time known as the Naval Dockyard Police. It had been established to relieve the Royal Marine Light Infantry members who had carried out the guarding and policing duties at Garden Island, Spectacle Island and the Royal Edward Victualling Yard since 1867. Since the Commonwealth Government had acquired the Cockatoo Island Dockyard from the NSW Government on 31st January 1913, it was also decided to have Naval Dockyard Police take over from the six civilian Special Constables who had been employed by the NSW Public Works Department.

Although it had been decided, as early as 18th May 1911, to form a 'Special Police Force' of the Permanent Naval Forces to relieve the Royal Marines, it was not until 8th May 1913 that the Minister for Defence, Senator PEARCE, approved the formation of the 'Naval Police Force' with a complement of forty members.

On the 13th May 1913, the first of a series of advertisements appeared in all the major daily newspapers throughout Australia, inviting ex-members of the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and the Royal Australian Navy to apply for the new 'Force'. The advertisement read

"Applications are invited from persons qualified for appointment as NAVAL POLICE at HMA Naval Establishments Sydney.

Applicants must be not less than 30 nor more than 45 years of age on the 1st July 1913. Preference will be given to married men who have completed not less than five years service in the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, or the Royal Australian Navy.

Applications must be made on the prescribed forms which may be obtained, together with full particulars as to rates of

pay, conditions of appointment, etc, on application to the District Naval Officer,

Naval Staff Office (in the state of application).

Application must be sent direct to the Naval Secretary, Navy Office, Melbourne, to reach him not later than 9th June 1913."

S.A. PETHEBRIDGE

Secretary

Before the enrolment of the successful applicants the title of the Force was changed to that of "Naval Dockyard Police".

This came about at the request of the Captain-in-Charge HM Establishments, Sydney, Captain C.F. HENDERSON, RN, who stated that: "In view of the fact that the Active Service

Police employed onboard HM Ships are termed Naval Police it would appear to be more suitable to class the newly formed Corps under some other name, such as 'Dockyard Police'." And as the Active Service Police apparently suffered an unsavoury reputation; in fact, Admiral CRESWELL stated that he had 'the strongest objection to anything that savours of the ships police"; the Naval Board, On the 4th June 1913, approved the title Naval Dockyard Police.

The Formation of the Force

As the formation of the Force had not been given a great deal of consideration between 1911 and May of 1913, very little time was available to develop a satisfactory uniform and an adequate set of conditions of service. So, for the sake of expediency, the Naval Board accepted the recommendation of the Director of Navy Accounts, Honorary Fleet Paymaster A. MARTIN, that the the Naval Dockyard Police conditions of service, including pay, be aligned with those of the RAN Academic and Instructional Staff; and that the uniform of the NSW Water Police be adopted. However as no uniforms were available at the 1st July 1913, the branch began its service in civilian clothing wearing Naval Police armlets until they were subsequently supplied with uniforms.

From the inception of the Force all members were placed on a six month probationary period, including the appointed Sub Inspector, Mr Albert Jesse MERRY. Mr MERRY's immediate task was to select his Senior Constables and Sergeants who would supervise the personnel and functions at each of the establishments. In this matter he chose former Royal Marines who were familiar with the various Acts and Regulations applicable to the Naval Establishments and were capable of ensuring that they were carried out. The majority of these selected members proved very satisfactory and continued in service for many years.

The same could not, however, be said for many of the other inaugural members. Over fifty *per cent* of the initial Constables had to be 'weeded' out because of unsuitability and unsatisfactory performances.

A classic example of this unsuitability and the manner in which Mr MERRY 'weeded' them out, is that of Constable EVERETT.

Constable EVERETT had joined the force on 1st July 1913, and was discharged 'Unsuitable' in August 1913. Two months after his discharge, it was discovered that he was responsible for the theft of certain Government stores. Sub Inspector MERRY subsequently investigated the matter, traced EVERETT's whereabouts to Brisbane and travelled there to effect his arrest. Sub Inspector MERRY was then able to recover the whole of the stolen property; brought EVERETT to Sydney and prosecuted him with the result that he was sentenced to two years imprisonment.

There were many other major concerns that effected the development of the Force in its early years and were to have far reaching ramifications in its later history. Among these was the dubious legal status of the Force. As civilian employees of the Royal Australian Navy, they had no legal authority to detain or search any personnel employed in the various establishments.

This situation was not long in being brought to the attention of the Naval Board, for on 22nd July 1913, the Executive of the Ironworkers Union lodged a complaint about their members being searched by Naval Dockyard Policemen.

As members of the Force had no legislated powers whatsoever, these early complaints were resolved by the Naval Board entering into an agreement with the Union that searches would be conducted only of a person suspected of having committed an offence and that the search should be conducted in a private area out of the public gaze. This agreement was subsequently incorporated in the *Instructions for Naval Dockyard Police* in 1914, which were issued with the authority of the Naval Board.

Although this measure enabled the Force to administer local orders and instructions applicable to each establishment, it offered no real police powers to arrest an offender or any power that was recognised by the law. Therefore, the Naval Board set about trying to remedy the situation and obtain specific powers legislated for the Force. However, before this was ultimately achieved, the First World War had begun and the matter fell into abeyance.

The First World War

The First World War was also to create several problems that would change the direction of the Force in years to come. The first of these was the need to provide additional guards at an increasing number of Naval Establishments and associated works and, at the same time, provide a counter espionage service that could carry out secret investigations into such concerns as sabotage and the location of alien agents. Hence, the Naval Board determined that the additional guarding services would be provided by the Royal Australian Naval Brigade members who were unfit for active service. The task of counter-espionage fell on the Naval Dockyard Police. In the main because Sub Inspector MERRY was an experienced Detective formerly of the Metropolitan Police.

In the field of 'secret service detective' work, Mr MERRY proved a great success; not only through his own investigations but in his effective training of other Naval Dockyard Policemen for the duty. This is highlighted in a letter written by Commodore C.F. HENDERSON on 30th May 1916 where he stated: "He has also carried out numerous special investigations and secret service detective work, with very prompt and successful results." Since these very early investigations, the Force has been responsible for the investigations of offences in the RAN.

Because the Force was still a civilian unit, without any conditions of employment, many of the early members seeking to 'do their bit for the Empire' simply walked out and enlisted in either the AIF or the RAN. As some of these members had not sought permission to enlist for active service, they were posted as deserters. One of those listed as a deserter was the former Constable G.F. TURNER.

TURNER had joined the 1st Battalion of the AIF on 17 August 1914. Prior to his departure for Gallipoli, he wrote direct to the Minister for Defence seeking a leave of absence. However, as he had already been enlisted in the AIF the application was not approved. He subsequently served at Gallipoli and in France, was wounded four times, promoted through every rank to that of Regimental Sergeant Major, awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for Gallantry and offered a Commission in the Field.

He was subsequently demobilised on his return to Australia on 15th April 1919, and immediately applied to re-enter the Naval Dockyard Police. This began what was to be a very long and emotionally charged effort that involved the Prime Minister, half a dozen Ministers and the Naval Board in determining whether TURNER had any right to re-entry, and furthermore highlighted the need to formalise the conditions of service for the Force. In the meantime, TURNER continued to write to anyone, willing to listen or otherwise, claiming that he had been victimised and should be re-entered. He continued these efforts until 1932 when the old warhorse finally gave it all away.

Post-War Problems

After WW1, when the nation was settling back into a more stable existence the problems of legal status of the Force again raised its head. Yet no effective resolution was found until the Naval Dockyard Police were appointed to Flinders Naval Depot in 1921.

Before its commissioning on 1st April 1921, over 800 rowdy workmen had been employed at the Base and because of their mischievous behavior the Victoria Police established a permanent Police Station there. When the Victoria Policemen were relieved at the Base by Naval Dockyard Policemen, an arrangement was entered into between the Naval Board and

the Chief Commissioner Sir John GELLIBRAND, whereby the three members of the NDP all became supernumerary members of the Victoria Police. As a consequence Senior Constable Thomas BLAKE, Constable Alfred DALY and Constable Patrick SWEENEY, all became Constables on the Victorian Police Force on 25th August 1921, with all the powers and privileges of a full member of the State Police Force.

Immediately, the Commodore-in-Charge, Sydney, saw this move as the answer to all the earlier problems relating to legal status and the lack of powers that the Force had suffered since its inception in 1913, and made application to allow him to approach the Commissioner of the NSW Police Department to have all members of the Force made Special Constables of the NSW Police. On 2nd November 1921, all Naval Dockyard Police in the Sydney area were sworn in and issued their Warrant Card as members of the State Police, which gave them powers of arrest, search and detention under the various State Acts and Regulations.

When Sir John GELLIBRAND was replaced as the Chief Commissioner of the Victoria Police in 1923; his relief, Mr A. NICHOLSON was not willing to maintain the three NDP members at HMAS CERBERUS as supernumeraries and on 30th June 1923 they were discharged from the Victorian Police. It probably had a lot to do with the fact that the Victoria Government had been required to pay the wages of the three Naval Dockyard Policemen.

Because of the breakdown in this arrangement, CMDR C. SPURGEON, Head of Navy Branch, was directed by the Naval Board to investigate an alternative. His proposal was to enter the force into the Permanent Naval Forces (Auxiliary Services) which would not only establish the Force on a permanent footing with more equitable conditions of service, but would also give them authority under the Naval Defence Act. The proposal was approved by the Naval Board and the Force ceased to be a civilian organisation on 31st August 1923, when they entered the Auxiliary Services of the RAN.

With the entry into the PNF, many amendments were required to the Consolidated Orders and Regulations, Naval Financial Regulations, Naval Defence Act and the like. It was during these many changes that it was proposed the Force be given its own Statutory powers of arrest, search and detention.

And after the matter had been given some considerable debate by the Attorneys' General Department, the Naval Establishment Regulation 101 received Royal Assent on 26th July 1934. This regulation literally made the Naval Dockyard Police a Statutory Force with powers that have remained as powerful today as they were more than fifty years ago.

Apart from variations to rates of pay and several other financial aspects, no further changes occurred to the Force until the outbreak of World War II, when changes began to occur at an imperceptible rate.

As the responsibility for guarding Naval establishments during WW1 had fallen on the Reserves, the same task was given to the RANR and the RANVR at the outbreak of WWII. However, it quickly became apparent that these personnel, who were, in most cases, young seaman; were a misuse of fit potential fighting manpower. So on 10th February 1940, the Minister for the Navy placed a proposal before the War Cabinet that the existing Naval Dockyard Police should be temporarily expanded to form a Guard Section for the provision of security protection to Naval Establishments and vulnerable points whilst under war conditions.

The Guard Section

On 21st March 1940, the War Cabinet approved the formation of the Naval Dockyard Police (Guard Section) with an initial complement of 169 to serve in all states except South Australia.

The conditions of entry for the Guard Section was that recruits were to have served on Active Service, or for not less than five years man's time in peace, and not to be less than 40 years of age or more than 58 years of age. Retiring age was set at 60 years of age and each

engagement was for two years or for the period of hostilities and 6 months thereafter. All members were recruited within the State they were to serve in and although their pay and allowances were aligned with the Commonwealth Peace Officers scale, they were subject to the Naval Discipline Act and Regulations for the Auxiliary Services.

Recruiting for the Guard Section began immediately and as newly recruited members began their service a serious anomaly in the pay structure became obvious. On the scale set down for the Guard Section, their Senior Constables were receiving less pay than Constables of the Permanent Section. So on 15th May 1940, the situation was rectified by altering the rank structure to:

Sergeant 1st Class

Sergeant 2nd Class

Constable 1st Class

Constable 2nd Class

This basic rank structure remained in force until 21st January 1972 when the Warrant Officer and Senior Constable ranks were re-introduced.

As Australia's war effort accelerated, so did the development of the Force. Within 18 months of the war's commencement the Naval Dockyard Police had risen to 472 with the following disposition:

Sydney and Newcastle 254

Western Australia 160

Victoria 31

Queensland 20

Tasmania 7

At the peak of the war effort, the Force had a strength exceeding 600 members who were employed on guarding duties at Wireless Transmitting Stations, Armament Depots, Oil Fuel Installations, Dockyards, Naval Stores Depots and even points of vulnerability like the Victoria Markets.

At the war's end, very few of the Guard Section were demobilized as the Naval Board had not determined a policy for the future guarding of Naval Establishments. Hence, members were requested to re-engage for further periods of either 6 or 12 months until the Force could be reorganised on a permanent basis. However the government did not approve the Naval Board's recommendations concerning the re-organisation of the Force until December 1948, and the Guard Section members were retained until 1st January 1949 when demobilisation actually began, although many were able to remain in service until November 1950.

Interim Force

Prior to the disbandment of the Guard Section, an "Interim Force" was established on 29th July 1946. This force was established to replenish the Permanent Force, which had fallen to a total of 9 members at the war's end and three of those were due for retirement before February 1947. The Interim Force had an approved complement of 272 and its members were recruited from ex-RAN members of the Seagoing Forces who were aged between 21

and 45 years of age, thereby creating a more virile and active deterrent to "Black Marketeers and other ill-disposed persons".

The excellent results of the Interim Force personnel effectively meant the continuance of the Naval Dockyard Police as a part of the RAN and established a standard of protection of Naval Establishments and Installations that the Government could ill afford to lose. Hence, the re-organised Permanent Force of the Naval Dockyard Police was approved on 1st March 1949, with a complement of:

1 Superintendent NSW

1 Inspector NSW

3 Sub Inspectors 1 NSW,

1 WA , 1 VIC

47 Sergeants, and

256 Constables.

The interesting point here, is that the Superintendent's position was filled by Commander N.H. SHAW, RAN. CMDR SHAW had, immediately prior to his appointment as Superintendent, been the Commanding Officer of HMAS KUTTABUL and had headed the Naval Board Committee on the 'Re-Organisation of the Naval Dockyard Police' which met on 3rd July 1946, and recommended the establishment of the Superintendent position. The other interesting point is that he was, and remains, the only 'gold ring' officer to have been appointed to the Naval Dockyard Police of Naval Police Officer ranks.

A Permanent Footing

With the establishment of the post-war Naval Dockyard Police on a permanent footing, the branch settled down to a steady existence, generally devoid of major turmoil that affected the branch structure.

Although a number of changes to uniform, complement and pay rates occurred after the war, it was not until 21st January 1972 that any major change to the Force's structure occurred. It was on this date that the Force became a branch of the RAN and thereby no longer existed as part of the Auxiliary Services. It was also at this time that history had turned full circle and they became again titled 'Naval Police' and re-introduced the ranks of Warrant Officer and Senior Constable.

The current complement of the Naval Police is 16 Officers and 366 Policemen and women, who are employed in Physical Security, Fire Protection and Investigation functions:

ACT Navy Office, Canberra

HMAS HARMAN

NSW Garden Island Dockyard

HMAS KUTTABUL

HMAS NIRIMBA

Naval Stores Centre, Zetland

RANAD Newington

RANAD Kingswood

RANAD Spectacle Island

Naval Stores, Randwick

RAN Trials Assessing Unit

RAN Research Laboratory

RAN Torpedo Maintenance

Establishment

Naval Stores, Leichhardt

HMAS ALBATROSS (Dog Squad)

VIC HMAS CERBERUS

Naval Police Headquarters

Williamstown Naval Dockyard

RANAD Somerton

Naval Stores Maribyrnong

WA HMAS STIRLING

HMAS LEEUWIN

QLD HMAS MORETON

NT HMAS COONAWARRA

It is also of interest to note that WRANS are now eligible to transfer to the Naval Police Branch, and the first three Policewomen entered on 10th January 1983. There are now a total of eight girls serving in both Sydney and Melbourne, all of whom have proved themselves very satisfactory and capable of performing all functions of the Naval Police Branch.

THE AUTHOR:

Commander Peter MANGAN joined the RAN in 1962 serving as an engineering branch sailor until transferring to the NDP in 1971. He was commissioned as a Sub Inspector in December 1977 and has since served in the Victorian, NSW and WA Commands in a variety of positions.

He became, in 1988, the last officer to be promoted to the rank of Superintendent and was the last member of the Naval Dockyard Police serving in the RAN. He retired from the PNF in May 2000.

Further to the Story

In November 1989, as the result of yet another reorganisation, the Naval Police and Coxswain categories were amalgamated to form the Naval Police Coxswain category. The category is now responsible for discipline, movements, personnel management and investigation duties ashore and at sea.