



At Home between Worlds: Royal Navy Cadets and Officers of the Empire

Tim Doebler, M.A.

About the Author

Tim Doebler, M.A., joined the German Navy as an officer cadet in 2012. As part of his training, he studied History at the Helmut-Schmidt-University, University of the German Armed Forces Hamburg (HSU), from 2013 to 2017.

During this time, he worked at the Seapower Centre–Australia as an intern, researching on maritime warfare in the Indo-Pacific region during the First and Second World Wars. In 2017 he graduated with a thesis on the foundation of the Royal Australian Navy.

Following his academic education, he served as bridge watch-keeping officer and junior supply officer on frigates. He is currently appointed to the German Naval Academy in Flensburg as divisional officer. Since early 2021 he is a PhD candidate of PD Dr Michael Jonas at HSU, researching the segment of Royal Navy officer cadets and officers born in the British settler colonies in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa.

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY

SEA POWER

SOUNDINGS



Issue 22, 2021

© Commonwealth of Australia 2021

This work is copyright. You may download, display, print, and reproduce this material in unaltered form only (retaining this notice and imagery metadata) for your personal, non-commercial use, or use within your organisation. This material cannot be used to imply an endorsement from, or an association with, the Department of Defence. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved.



ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY

SEA POWER

SOUNDINGS



Issue 22, 2021

‘So far as the Colonial Cadets are concerned, I think it is only right to say that those who have been examined out in Australia are found not to be up to the standard of education which is prevalent amongst the same boys in England, and a good number have been rejected.’

Lord Tweedmouth, First Lord of the Admiralty, London 8 May 1907¹



Introduction

Edward Marjoribanks, 2nd Baron Tweedmouth, First Lord of the Admiralty from 1905 to 1908, expressed this reservation in a discussion on the naval defence of the British Empire during the 1907 Colonial Conference in London. He wanted to stress the fact that the Commonwealth of Australia did not take full advantage of a vital concession made by the British Admiralty in the Naval Agreement, signed during the preceding Colonial Conference in 1902.

In the Naval Agreement, the Admiralty offered, among a host of other things, eight cadetships to Australia, two to New Zealand, two to the Cape Colony, one to Natal, and two to the remaining colonies.² Tweedmouth had the impression that ‘the idea has been that the nominations given were supposed to be absolute cadetships; whereas, they were only nominations to candidates in order to ... go through the examinations, and so enter the same way as the cadets enter here’.³ Additionally, Tweedmouth enumerated the rate of Australian applicants who failed the examination as follows: ‘Take 1903, for instance. In that year there were six Australian nominations – three passed and went in. In 1904 there were again six boys examined, and three passed into Osborne. In 1905 Australia sent eight, of whom two passed in. In 1906 five Australian cadets came up, of whom four passed in, and in this year I think four have come up, and one has passed in and one has not yet been examined.’⁴ The Minutes of Proceedings of the Conference reveal that no colony mentioned achieved the numbers listed above in all given years.

Although this segment of future Royal Navy (RN) officers from settler colonies was spoken about at the time, extraordinarily little has been written about them. In contrast, we find a large variety of published and unpublished studies emphasising different aspects of cadet recruitment into the RN and the emerging Dominion navies. To mention a few examples: Peter Jones’ *Australia’s Argonauts*⁵ is a comprehensive study of how a Dominion established its own naval officer training in the early 20th century; John Bettie’s *The Churchill Scheme*⁶ examines a major recruitment scheme that enabled the RN to accept older applicants as usual



into the service; and finally, Mary Jones' *The Making of the Royal Naval Officer Corps 1860–1914*⁷ analyses the social and geographical background of cadet intakes into the Victorian and Edwardian Navy.

In this article, I address this gap and introduce this segment of the RN officer corps, focusing on those cadets and officers of the RN born in the colonies. I also address a number of still largely unanswered questions surrounding this group. Based on selected examples, I want to examine the question how they became eligible for service in the Royal Navy? What were their perceptions of the term 'home'? And how did they deal with the distance from their families? Simultaneously, a deeper understanding of this cohort of RN officers may reveal another aspect of the mobility of imperial subjects within the Empire, both in terms of geography and mentality. It furthermore allows for a deeper assessment of how long the colonies contributed to its naval defence before forming their own naval services.

Officer Training Becomes Institutionalised

The way towards a standardised training scheme can be described as a struggle between the Admiralty, on the one hand, and the Commanding Officers of the Royal Navy's ships, on the other hand. Despite its size and importance to the British Empire, the RN had developed a 'chaotic system of allowing individual Captains to enter cadets into their own ships ...'⁸ since the 17th century. The advantage of this decentralised recruitment scheme was that it left the various Captains with the freedom to choose their officers and cadets. Consequently, the officer corps could be expanded relatively easily if needed.

However, this decentralised system resulted in severe disadvantages for the Admiralty. With recruitment and training being up to individual Captains, the Admiralty had no control over the number of cadets entering the service or the standard of their training.

The Admiralty made unsuccessful attempts to regain control of recruitment and increase the efficiency of the whole service by establishing a Naval Academy in the 18th century. Many Commanding Officers refused to accept the loss of their freedom, as well as the



modernisation of officer training. Only in December 1847 was a compromise found when ‘brigs attached to flagships were being employed specifically for boys’ training’.⁹ Although their purpose was to accommodate training for ordinary sailors, they can be seen as the standard for further developments and modernisation in RN officer training.¹⁰ Nevertheless, there was still room for improvement. Although the curriculum was set by the Admiralty, the recruits were scattered across the RN, which made direct control of training impossible.

The Admiralty achieved a breakthrough in 1857 when Circular No. 288 came into force, which, for the first time, dictated the terms of entry for a potential cadet.¹¹ To become a naval cadet in the RN, a candidate had to obtain a nomination, but both the number of nominations and nominees were limited by the Admiralty. Furthermore, ‘[n]ominated candidates were to present themselves for quarterly examinations to be held at the Royal Naval College Portsmouth, where those aged 13 were required ...’¹² to pass several tests.

Next, the Admiralty sought to expand its control by centralising training. For this purpose, H.M.S. *Britannia*, a 120-gun first-rate ship-of-the-line was commissioned as a harbour training ship for naval cadets in 1859. The small town of Dartmouth, Devon, became her final berthing place, and she and her successors would accommodate training there until 1905.

The first time colonials were distinguished from British cadets was in Circular No. 393 of 23 October 1859, which was an update of the entry regulations for candidates. Among other things it stated: ‘In the special cases of nominations granted to the sons of natives of her Majesty’s Colonies, a Candidate will be allowed to pass a preliminary examination on board the Flag or Senior Officer’s Ship on the Station’¹³ Even before 1859 colonials had been recruited as naval cadets. One example is Rear Admiral Phillip Parker King, who was born on Norfolk Island in 1791 and joined the RN in 1807. However, with the newly introduced examinations, the Admiralty wanted to ensure that every candidate would face equal circumstances.

Initially, the regulation of entry did not specify the number of colonial candidates. However, indications suggest that the Admiralty did try to influence the number of candidates coming from each colony to achieve a somewhat equal distribution while respecting the size and



importance of each colony. For instance, the Melbourne newspaper *The Age* published correspondence by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Duke of Newcastle, to the Governor of Victoria, stating:

Hitherto I have been enabled to present to Victoria a nomination annually, but I regret that for the future it will not be in my power to place a nomination at your disposal more frequently than three times in each period of four years. You will be at liberty to nominate in the years 1863–4 and 5, but I must request you to forego the privilege in 1866, and again in 1870 and in each succeeding fourth year thereafter, so long as the present rule subsists.¹⁴

Apparently, the Admiralty reserved a nomination each year for the Australian colonies. Victoria, as the richest and most populous of the Australian colonies, had the right to nominate a candidate three years in a row; the other colonies, such as South Australia, had to share the cadetship every fourth year: ‘Once in four years the Colonial Governments have the privilege of nominating a youth as a cadet in Her Majesty’s Navy, and the Government of South Australia has recently availed itself of the privilege’¹⁵ It is questionable how effective this system of distribution was, though, as South Australia nominated a candidate in 1868, even though – according to the Secretary of State for the Colonies’ declaration in *The Age* – the years 1866 and 1870 were designated for nomination from the Australian colonies other than Victoria. The reasons for this obvious change of distribution of nominations remains uncertain.

The number of colonial nominations in general was included in the regulations of entry in 1883, when the Admiralty granted four cadetships to the colonies annually, and from 1897 onwards six cadetships.¹⁶ In turn, this probably did not change the fact that the colonies still had to share the right of nomination. However, up until 1902 we witness a gradual incorporation of the colonies into the RN’s recruitment schemes.

Trans-imperial Mobility of Naval Cadet Training



In recent years, historians have increasingly focused on trans-imperial mobility. This included not just the mobility from Great Britain (the Empire's metropole) to the colonies (its periphery), but also mobility in the opposite direction, from the colonies back to Great Britain and even between the different colonies.

The colonial-born candidates for a naval cadetship are an excellent example of this trans-imperial mobility, because a certain degree of mobility was expected of those who applied for a naval cadetship. As an article in the *South Australian Register* indicates, to be examined the candidates had to travel not just through their own colonies, but also to other colonies: '[T]he Government of South Australia has recently availed itself of the privilege by conferring the nomination [for a naval cadetship] upon Master H. Duncan, son of Dr. Duncan, of Port Adelaide. He proceeded to Sydney a short time back to undergo the necessary examination'¹⁷ In this case, the candidate had to travel from South Australia to New South Wales, due to the location of the Station's flagship in Sydney.

After passing their examinations, the colonial candidates travelled to Great Britain to join the training ship, H.M.S. *Britannia*. To do so, they either had to take a troopship that carried members of the military back to Great Britain, or in the absence of such troop transports they organised the journey themselves. In that case they would sometimes be accompanied by family members, who the opportunity to visit family and friends in the 'old country', wanted to start an education in Great Britain, or even sought to find a marriage partner. A successful New Zealand candidate for a naval cadetship, Hugh B. Anderson, wrote in his autobiography that he was joined by his older sisters and that they were all welcomed in London by a cousin.¹⁸ Anderson and his sisters are just one example of imperial mobility and the mechanics of effectively globalised family networks. Zoë Laidlaw identifies these motives in her work as quite common in the early to mid-19th century. According to her study, 'Colonial elites also believed that the business of marriage was best conducted in Britain. ... For those families who could afford it, and bear the separation, education was another tie between Britain and the colonies.'¹⁹



Given that the naval training came with costs, the candidate's parents belonged to the wealthier part of society, as Laidlaw describes. As a result, some colonial candidates went to Great Britain for educational reasons even before they were nominated and were consequently examined in Great Britain. Admiral John Gregory Crace (1887–1968), for instance, who was born in Gungahleen – today's Gungahlin, a suburb of Canberra – stayed with an uncle in London to prepare for his examination. Interestingly, he was still examined as a colonial, because 'as an Australian he was eligible for a reserved vacancy known as a colonial cadetship, and he was only required to achieve sufficient marks to qualify'.²⁰

For a better understanding of the cadets' mobility, it is useful to draw on a model introduced by Daniel Lambert and Alan Lester. They identified three different types of colonial inhabitants: (1) those who settled permanently in a colony, (2) those who travelled through the colonies, and (3) those who settled in a colony for employment reasons but moved on to other colonies.²¹ The first and the third groups are of importance to my work, as travelling through the colonies and living in one or more colonies are not comparable in terms of involvement with the respective colony. Anderson and Crace both fall into the first category, as their parents came to Australia and New Zealand on a permanent basis. However, there are examples of colonial candidates who belonged to the third group of Lambert and Lester's concept. Two of them should be briefly described. Rear Admiral Cosmo Moray Graham (1887–1946) was born in the Cape Colony, but according to Australian accounts he joined the Royal Navy as a colonial cadet from there.²² His example highlights the connection between Great Britain and its colonies and displays the interconnectivity of the Empire. A further example is Rear Admiral John Saumarez Dumaresq (1873–1922), who was born in Rose Bay, Sydney. His grandfather came to Australia in 1825 when his great uncle became the secretary to Sir Ralph Darling, the governor of New South Wales. From the age of two, he was brought up in England,²³ which indicates that his parents returned with him to Britain.

Colonial Cadets' Family Ties and Connections to their Mother Colonies

To understand the colonial cadets' family ties better, one needs to distinguish between the ties to the family back in the mother colony on the one hand, and the relations to family in



Britain on the other hand. Due to the distance between Great Britain and its colonies, commencing training as a naval cadet meant leaving without the possibility of returning for several years. In a world where modern communications techniques had just started to emerge, the best way to stay in contact was by writing letters. In some cases, we find reference to such correspondence in biographical or autobiographical accounts, but in one case the correspondence has been published by descendants. New Zealand-born Lieutenant Peter Russel Hay Allen (1921–1942) joined the RN in 1939, and started to write to his mother at home from his departure from New Zealand until his submarine was lost in the Mediterranean in 1942.²⁴ His letters revealing how a colonial cadet experienced the journey to Great Britain, and tell us much about how connected colonials were, and how they were received in Great Britain.

As several cadets were the first generation born in the colonies, they often had family members to rely on when they arrived in Great Britain. As mentioned above, Admiral Crace stayed with an uncle before joining *Britannia*, and Hugh B. Anderson's relatives received him and his sisters upon arrival.

Nevertheless, the cadets did not have much time to spend with their families. Despite Christmas and summer breaks, the cadets were in training for most of the year.

In his autobiography, Anderson wrote in some detail about his holidays, giving insights into the relationships between the colonials and their family or family friends in Great Britain, even after years of separation.

For example, he either spent his holidays in Edinburgh, where his parents were born, or with friends of the family, who once took him to Belgium.²⁵ After graduating, he joined the fleet, but in a relatively short time he transferred to the newly commissioned battlecruiser H.M.S. *New Zealand*. In this new position, he participated in a circumnavigation and a tour through the Empire, his hometown Christchurch included: 'It was strange to be back again after six years, which at that time seemed to be a very long interval, strange to sit on the big veranda and see our ship riding at anchor.'²⁶ Again, this indicates how long it took for some cadets to return.



Another possibility for staying connected with the family was an official posting to the Station closest to home. Crace, for instance, took over command of the Australian Squadron in 1939, where he was received with great enthusiasm by the Australian public. This was the third posting back to Australia, having made his first return from 1908 until 1910 in the cruiser H.M.S. *Powerful*, and again from 1913 to 1914 in the newly commissioned flagship of the young Royal Australian Navy, H.M.A.S. *Australia*.²⁷

Back in Australia he regularly visited his family, in Gungahleen and Sydney. During his time in the *Australia* and later as commander of the Australian Squadron he was accompanied by his British-born wife which enabled him to introduce her to his family and bring both metropole and periphery together. However, Crace, as well as Anderson, are rather exceptional examples. Due to limitations in available postings, not every colonial got the chance to return home.

The successful examination of a candidate for a naval cadetship was something special for both sides, the respective colony as well as Great Britain. *The Times*, London, usually reported the names of candidates who passed the examination, sometimes distinguishing between regular entries and colonials. For example, in the Wednesday issue on 10 August 1898, Charles Harold Jones was listed as a successful applicant for a colonial cadetship.²⁸ According to his service records, in which the term 'Colonial Candidate' was specifically highlighted, he was born in Cape Town, South Africa. He joined the RN in September 1898 and actively served until 1922.²⁹

On the other side, mother colonies equally expressed great interest in their offsprings' careers. As already noted, the colonial newspapers reported on the entry regulations for naval cadetships as well as successful candidates. Whether intentional or not, this likely served as a recruitment advertisement for the career of naval officer. In addition, such announcements probably promoted trans-imperial mobility even further.

Newspapers also published articles on the successful graduation of a cadet from *Britannia*,³⁰ and of course in the cases of those who returned for a posting on a ship of the local RN Station. For instance, newspapers celebrated the appointments of Rear Admiral Dumaesq as



Commodore commanding the Australian Fleet in 1919 and Rear Admiral Robin Campsie DalGLISH (1880–1934) as Rear Admiral Commanding the Australian Squadron in 1932. Both were born in Australia but grew up in Britain and were nominated there. In 1921, *Smith's Weekly* declared Dumaresq to be its Man of the Week, praising him and comparing him to General Sir John Monash: 'In remembering that Australia has produced a Monash, it is well also to remember that Australia has produced also a Dumaresq. It is well and comforting, for our destiny surely lies as much upon sea as upon land.'³¹

Years later, *The Sun* published an article on Admiral DalGLISH under the headline: 'Dreamed of the Sea – Dubbo Boy now an Admiral'.³² It is likely that such headlines and analogies were used by the press to improve the officers' public image in Australia and thereby foster the identification of the colonials with these flag officers. This improvement in public opinion was central, because the two mentioned officers did not have much in common with most of the people they were supposed to command in the Australian Fleet, given that they were raised in Great Britain.

Generally, newspaper articles were an important medium to build a connection between the admirals and the people and thereby popularise the future leadership of the Royal Australian Navy.

Conclusion

Despite Lord Tweedmouth's complaints about the number of colonial candidates who failed the examination, the British Admiralty already routinely incorporated colonials into their recruitment before 1902. From 1859, the Admiralty had formally encouraged colonials to join the service as naval cadets. This paper has only been able to discuss a small number of examples of colonial-born cadets and officers. But even such a limited and undoubtedly select segment indicates that colonials did play a vital role in the RN and that the colonies' commitment to the maritime defence of the Empire dates further back than commonly assumed. The examples of Admiral Crace, Rear Admiral Dumaresq and Rear Admiral



Graham demonstrate that colonial cadets reached the top end of the rank system and contributed to the Royal Navy's success in both major conflicts of the 20th century.

Furthermore, the colonial cadets are an exceptionally good example of mobility within the Empire. They left their respective mother colonies and commenced training as naval cadets on the training ship H.M.S. *Britannia*. When they arrived in Great Britain, they were met by their relatives and family friends. This provided them with a network they could rely on. At the same time, letters and overseas postings offered the chance to stay connected with their families in the colonies. This illustrates vividly that mobility within the British Empire was anything but a one-way street.

The examples of Crace and Dumaresq, who married into British families, reflect the ultimate consequence of such imperial careers, the effective fusion of colonials with British society. Of the cadets mentioned in this paper, Hugh B. Anderson was the only one who returned home to New Zealand after retiring from the RN.³³

Finally, we have seen that metropole and periphery alike displayed great interest in their cadets' lives. With that in mind, newspapers were an important means for communicating naval news, marketing naval careers and influencing public opinion. Compared to British-born candidates, the RN officers born in the colonies may have seemed somewhat flamboyant. However, one could also argue that it is their origins, careers and constant mobility that made them into true imperial figures.

Endnotes

¹ National Archives Kew, CAB 18/11A: Colonial Conference 1907, Minutes of Proceedings of the Colonial Conference, 1907, p. 471.

² National Archives Kew, CAB 18/11A, p. 472.

³ National Archives Kew, CAB 18/11A, p. 471.

⁴ National Archives Kew, CAB 18/11A, p. 471.

⁵ Jones, Peter, *Australia's Argonauts: The Remarkable Story of the First Class to Enter the Royal Australian Naval College* (West Geelong: Echo Books, 2016).



- ⁶ Beattie, John, *The Churchill Scheme: The Royal Navy Special Entry Cadet Scheme* (privately published, 2010).
- ⁷ Jones, Mary, *The Making of the Royal Naval Officer Corps, 1860–1914*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 1999.
- ⁸ Dickson, Harold William, *Educational Provision for Officers of the Royal Navy 1857 – 1877*, PhD thesis, University of London, 1994, p. 25.
- ⁹ Dickson, p. 76.
- ¹⁰ Dickson, p. 76.
- ¹¹ Dickson, p. 87.
- ¹² Dickson, p. 85.
- ¹³ *The Navy List, corrected to the 20th March 1861* (London: John Murray, 1861), p. 251.
- ¹⁴ 'The News of the Day', *The Age* (Melbourne), 28 March 1863, p. 5.
- ¹⁵ 'Naval Cadetship', *South Australian Register*, Monday 27 July 1868, p. 2.
- ¹⁶ *The Navy List, corrected to the 20th June 1884* (London: John Murray, 1884), p. 503 and in the *Queensland Times* (Ipswich), 'Naval Cadets', Tuesday 13 April 1897, p. 4.
- ¹⁷ 'Naval Cadetship', *South Australian Register*, Monday 27 July 1868, p. 2.
- ¹⁸ Anderson, H. B., *The Day's Run* (Christchurch: Caxton Press, 1977), p. 73.
- ¹⁹ Laidlaw, Zoë, *Colonial Connections 1815–45: Patronage, The Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 19.
- ²⁰ Coulthard-Clark, C., *Action Stations Coral Sea: The Australian Commander's Story* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), p. 5.
- ²¹ Lambert, David and Lester, Alan, *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Career in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 1.
- ²² Graham-Smith, Mick, 'Admirable Ancestors', *Naval Historical Review*, 2009: <https://www.navyhistory.org.au/admirable-ancestors/2/> (last access: 5 January 2021); Australian War Memorial 124, 1/8: Australian naval cadets – Royal Navy – 1899–1909.
- ²³ Firkins, Peter, 'Dumaresq, John Saumarez (1873–1922)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dumaresq-john-saumarez-6037> (last access: 5 January 2021,); Gray, Nancy, 'Dumaresq, William John (1793–1868)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dumaresq-william-john-2239> (last access: 5 January 2021).
- ²⁴ Mackay, Peter (ed.), *Wartime Correspondence, From Peter Russel Hay Allen to His Mother during the Early Years of WWII* (Auckland: Livadia Publishers, 2007).
- ²⁵ Anderson, H. B., *The Day's Run*, p. 77.
- ²⁶ Anderson, H. B., *The Day's Run*, p. 143.
- ²⁷ Coulthard-Clark, C., *Action Stations Coral Sea*, p. 9 ff.
- ²⁸ 'Cadetships in the Royal Navy', in Naval & Military Intelligence, *The Times* (London), Wednesday 10 August 1898, p. 6.
- ²⁹ National Archives Kew, ADM 196/49/42: Jones, Charles Harold.
- ³⁰ 'General News', *Express and Telegraph* (Adelaide), Monday 26 September 1870, p. 2.
- ³¹ 'Men of the Week', *Smith's Weekly* (Sydney), Saturday 16 July 1921, p. 2.
- ³² 'Dreamed of the Sea', *The Sun* (Sydney), Sunday 7 February 1932, p. 6.

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY

SEA POWER

SOUNDINGS



Issue 22, 2021

³³ Anderson, H. B., *The Day's Run*, p. 218.