

c/o. P.O. Box [REDACTED]
HOKITIKA
Westland

11th February, 1975.

Naval Staff
Departmental Building
Stout Street 1
P.O. Box 292
Wellington

Dear Sir,

Junior Seaman Mark Spanswick Y 21136
Aged 17 years 7 months

I am writing to seek your help in the following matter.

My son, Mark, was at school in Masterton at Wairarapa College and we were living in Suva, Fiji at that time. Apparently a recruiting Officer for the Navy visited the school to give the boys a talk on the Navy as a career. From then on Mark gave us no peace until his father signed a consent form for him to join the Navy. This he did in September 1973 at the age of 16 years 2 months. He proceeded to Auckland and joined HMNZS TAMAKI, then progressed to PHILOMEL and the last we heard of him he was on the WAIKATO. He was perfectly happy with the Navy until November 5th 1974 when he apparently deserted and we have not heard from him since or even have any idea what has become of him.

The facts are as follow.

Mark had spent one leave with us in Suva after joining the Navy. The leave period was April/May 1974. Unfortunately his behaviour while in Suva on leave left much to be desired. He then wrote to us in August 1974 and said he intended to come to Suva for his next leave and would be arriving on 18th December.

In view of his previous behaviour when he was on leave in Suva my husband and I were of the opinion that it would be unwise for him to spend his December leave with us and suggested that he spend it in New Zealand. Mark would not accept this and persisted in attempting to persuade us into allowing him to come to Suva. I approached the Naval Liaison Officer in Suva, Captain Stan Brown and explained the position to him and he wrote to Commodore Auckland pointing out that Suva was not a suitable place for a boy of Mark's age to be roaming around for three weeks. After some considerable delay Captain Brown phoned me and said he had received a letter from Commodore Auckland saying that Mark could not be made to stay in New Zealand for his leave but attempts would be made to persuade him to do so. However, the attempts apparently were not successful because Mark still wrote and said he wanted to come to Suva.

Finally, in desperation, my husband, with my full agreement, wrote to the Commanding Officer of PHILOMEL seeking his help in this matter. No reply was received to this letter dated 9.9.74. (copy attached). My husband then wrote to the Commanding Officer of the WAIKATO explaining fully our reasons for not wanting Mark to spend his leave in Suva. No reply was received to this letter which was dated 6.10.74. (copy attached). However we received a letter from Mark dated 15th October which indicated that he thought we had played "a dirty trick" on him by "writing that letter to the Captain". From Mark's letter it appears that the Commanding Officer instead of interviewing Mark himself had passed the job on to a First Lieut. who, rather tactlessly I think, gave Mark my husband's letter dated 6.10.74. to read. Mark's letter continued on to say that he had decided that he wanted to get a discharge by purchase and wanted to come to Suva to discuss the matter with us. My husband then wrote to Mark and asked him why he wanted his discharge and to find out the proper procedure for applying for it. However, we have not heard from Mark since then as the next communication was a cable from the Commanding

Encl.No.1

Encl.No.2

2.

Officer of the WAIKATO saying that Mark was missing from the ship on departure for a training exercise and asking if we had any knowledge of his whereabouts.

From Suva I phoned Devonport Dockyard twice, each time the Commanding Officer of the WAIKATO was said to be at sea. I contacted Captain Brown in Suva again and he sent three telex messages to Devonport and did not receive a reply to one of them. Finally I wrote to the Commanding Officer of the WAIKATO a letter dated 12.11.74. (copy attached) and received a reply dated 21.11.74. (copy attached) to which I replied on 27.11.74. (copy attached).

Encl.No.3

Encl.No.4

Encl.No.5

On 9th December, 1974 we arrived in New Zealand to take up residence and naturally went to Devonport to try and discover if anything had been done to find our son. Commodore Auckland was not there, neither was Commanding Officer WAIKATO, or the padre. Eventually we were directed to Warrant Officer Rowntree who is a naval policeman and while he had a file on Mark he didn't know much about the case. However we ascertained that the Navy were meant to be looking for him and the police also had a warrant out for his arrest. As we had to date had very little help from the Navy we decided to try the police next and they informed us that they had a warrant for his arrest. I asked what they were doing about it and they rather brightly said that it had been filed and would probably not be taken out again. As I see it the Navy is waiting for the police to locate the boy and the police are waiting for the Navy to do likewise. This, as you can imagine, is of very little consolation to his father and I who are very interested (it may surprise the Navy to know) in getting our seventeen year old son returned to us in good condition. He has now been missing for over three months. We fully understand that if he is apprehended he must be returned to you to take whatever punishment is meted out and we are in complete agreement with this, but to sum the matter up in six words may I say "You lost him - you find him".

As we do not seem to be getting anywhere with Devonport Dockyard or the police I am now asking you to take some action in the matter as his father and I have no intention whatsoever of letting things rest at this stage. As I see it the First Lieut. who interviewed Mark handled the matter badly (and surely by now they should be used to handling boys of that age) and according to the newsletters that I have in my possession, received from the Navy, the Navy gives the impression that it is concerned about the welfare of young entrants and I would appreciate some of that concern now being shown by a reply to this letter and some advice as to what action (if any) has been taken to date or is likely to be taken.

Yours faithfully,

P.L. Spanswick

(P.L. Spanswick - Mrs.)
Mother.

Enclosures (5).