

Waikanae-born chef Brock West becomes Navy's newest Commanding Officer



SUPPLIED

Lieutenant Brock West, left, accepts the Symbol of Command of HMNZS Taupo from the outgoing commanding officer John McQueen, right, with maritime component commander commodore Jim Gilmour.

A sailor who started his career as a chef has just become the Royal New Zealand Navy's newest Commanding Officer.

This month, Lieutenant Brock West, who grew up in Waikanae, took command of HMNZS Taupo, one of the navy's four inshore patrol vessels.

West, 28, joined the Navy in 2006 when he was 17, straight out of Paraparumu College.



SUPPLIED

Brock West with his daughter Aria on HMNZS Taupo.

He said he had always loved the sea and thought it would be a good career.

"I had done a bit of sailing, diving, swimming, and I had always wanted to be a chef.



SUPPLIED

A Navy Seasprite helicopter circles the MV Rena, stuck to Astrolabe Reef.

"A Navy recruiter came to visit our school when I was in fifth form, and I applied then."

While he was told he could join at the start of his sixth form year, he held off until he had finished the year, just in case.

"I haven't looked back," he said.

In 2011 he was named Sailor of the Year, for his work during the evacuation of the MV Rena that ran aground in the Bay of Plenty.

He was part of the team from inshore patrol vessel HMNZS Rotoiti that helped evacuate 21 crew members from the Rena.

"[It was] an amazing sight," he said.

"A lot of wind and a reasonable swell. The containers were creaking, we were so small below them."

A Rena crew member fell five metres while climbing down the ladder to the Navy rigid-hulled inflatable boats, landing on and injuring the bowman on the RHIB next to West.

West, who had medical training, took charge, jumping to the other boat to provide first aid and taking over as bowman.

The following year he began officer training, and graduated in 2013.

He spent two years on frigate HMNZS Te Kaha as a seaman officer, with courses in between, and finished a command course in February.

He then got a phone call asking if I would like to take command of Taupo.

"No hesitation. I'm really excited," he said.

If he was back at Paraparaumu College, he said he would tell students to think seriously about a career in the New Zealand Defence Force.

"If you're thinking about it, just give it a go, for a short time or a long time. There's so much to offer, so many jobs."

As for his previous role of chef, he misses it, but gets his fix by doing most of the cooking at home, he said.

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