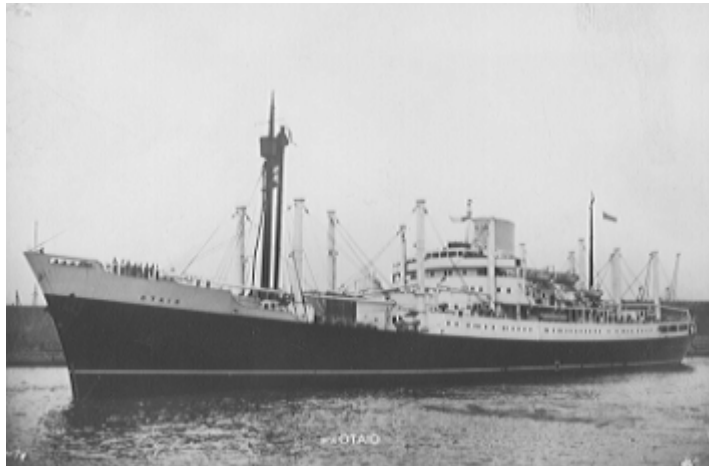


FIRST TRIP CADET BY PETER EDWARDS

A great loss to the Merchant Navy has been the disappearance of the Cadet Ship on which young men would serve some, or all, of their time in real life conditions on working cargo ships trading worldwide. Some of the best known are: B.I.'s 'Chindwara'; Elder Dempster's 'Fourah Bay' and 'Sulima'; Blue Funnel's 'Calchas' and 'Diomed'; as well as N.Z.S.Co.'s 'Rakaia', 'Durham,' and 'Otaio', the subject of this article.

These vessels provided first-rate training in navigation and engineering for aspiring officers and at the same time provided them with experiences, which they were never likely to forget.



Cadet Training Ship M.V. Otaio

I joined the New Zealand Shipping Company as an Engineer cadet in September 1965. There was one over-riding plus point to choosing this company (yes, there was choice in those days of full employment) - the first year of the cadet training programme, called the 'Alternative Entry Training Scheme for Marine Engineers,' was served on board the cadet training ship M.V. Otaio. This meant, as far as I was concerned, that there was no real decision to be made, and Ellermans, P.S.N.C., Shell Tankers, and Blue Funnel, whose cadets went to college, were all rejected for the adventure of going deep-sea immediately after 'O' levels.

Unfortunately, 'deep sea' turned out to be a hotel in Holborn, London, because the cadet ship was still returning from New Zealand. For 2 months, myself and 18 other engineer Cadets on that year's intake into the company, took the Tube each morning to Poplar Technical College, East London, for lessons in Marine Engineering while we waited to join ship. Eventually, we transferred to M.V. Rangitoto in the Royal Albert Dock, and lived in some

comfort on this big handsome NZSCo passenger-cargo ship before being sent home on interim leave as it was described. We eventually joined the cadet ship on 6th December, three days after she had berthed at the Albert Dock.

We were required to join ship wearing full uniform, i.e. blues with brass buttons and white-topped cap with Company badge. Travelling long distances like this was not always practical, and many cadets travelled in civvies and executed a quick change somewhere before presenting themselves at the ship.

M.V. Otaio was built on the Clyde in 1958. She was 529 feet long and had a beam of 73 feet. Her gross tonnage was 10,800, and she was a typical 'Big Pommie Meat Boat' of the era, except that she was designed to carry a complement of about 50 cadets, accommodated in the tween deck spaces of holds 3 and 4. Her machinery was two 6-cylinder Doxford opposed piston diesel engines with 3 scavenge pumps each, producing together 12,400-shaft horse power at 114 r.p.m. The engines had a stroke of 2320 mm and a bore of 670 mm, and used a common rail fuel system. Her service speed was a modest 16 knots. She was a good looking ship, but had a reputation as poor sea boat.

The long anticipated sight of the ship, photos and descriptions of which had been pored-over for months, was disappointing. With the ship working cargo, derricks swinging, forklifts and trolleys darting hither and thither, swarms of dockers and piles of debris on the dockside, it wasn't the classic view presented in the recruitment brochure.

After clambering up the alarmingly steep and bouncy aluminium gangplank with a very heavy suitcase full of 'seagoing gear for the ensuing voyage' as the joining letter had said, I was directed to my cabin by the duty deck cadet. We had a locker each, there was a primitive desk and a day bed, and in cruise ship parlance, all cabins were 'outside'. There was an impressive heavy brass porthole with a dead-light suspended horizontally by a chain for dropping and securing over the port in bad weather, this being the main deck. Directly above my top bunk was a cable tray carrying heavy duty electrical cable on the ship's ring main, which, I was to learn, creaked constantly at sea with the movement of the ship.

It was a relief, and there was a sense of excitement, about at last being on board the ship on which we were to travel to Australia. The ship adopted various angles of list and trim as cargo was worked each day – something quite alarming to a newcomer. Every morning and evening the duty watch would strike and lower the flags at bow and stern.



The 'little blue liar', as it was known

Board of Trade sports started before we sailed, with lifeboat drill. We even went to the extent of lowering boats into the water and rigging sails for an excursion around the Albert Dock. There were dire warnings about falling in the water, which would necessitate 'a month in quarantine' because of the pollution. The process of swinging out the lifeboats, launching and recovery was always hazardous in itself with a good chance of at least a bruising, especially for first-trippers who literally did not know the ropes.

Our first 'trip' was London to Liverpool, and therefore not a trip at all as such, and it was not until late January, having had the extreme luxury (as we were to learn later in our careers) of Christmas at home, that we sailed for Australia via Suez. Now this really was our first trip.

I can still remember from amongst all the departures I later made, the leaving of Liverpool for Australia on this first occasion. Suddenly to see the decks cleared as if by magic, hatch covers secured, derricks stowed, and more than anything, to see the dockside deserted when only a few hours earlier it had been the scene of a tremendous amount of activity. This seemed to emphasise our imminent separation from home, and produce a strange feeling of isolation even before we had cast off.



The pre-voyage photo.

Our outward cargo on this trip was mail and a variety of manufactured goods such as c.k.d.'s (cars knocked down), long steel (railway lines), cloth, bonded goods (whiskey, etc.), specials (unknown goods in secure numbered crates), and piano frames!

The tugs arrived, and soon we were moving out of the Mersey into the Irish Sea. We could feel the rising beat of the main engines and the steady roll of the ship as M.V. Otaio began her voyage, number 16, to Australia.

The aim seemed to be to run the Cadet Ship along naval lines, and certainly discipline was strict, sometimes unnecessarily so, we thought. The day at sea began with a call at 6.30, carried out by a gleefully malicious deck cadet who would burst through the cabin door and shout out '15 minutes, cadets!' at the top of his voice before crashing the door shut. This call was ignored by everyone, the return to sleep being instantaneous, until the duty cadet returned at 10 minutes to, and finally at 5 minutes to, followed by a call etched – I am sure – into the brains of all ex- NZSCo Cadets 'TURN TO NOW, CADETS!'. At this point there was no choice but to bale out of bunks, don working gear and assemble for pre-breakfast labour. If there was a bit of a sea running and you couldn't find your gear, and really wanted either to go back to bed or have breakfast, these were indeed miserable moments.

The work allocated could be of various types, but essentially we would be out on deck scrubbing and cleaning or below deck, scrubbing and cleaning. The one let-out was to be with the Bosun tying knots or checking the lifeboat stores, which had the added attraction of the possibility of a piece of barley

sugar, part of the survival rations. The duties were done on a rotation basis so cadets had the opportunity of experiencing all the activities. Perhaps the most loathed job was scrubbing out in the cadet accommodation. A group of 5 or 6 cadets would assemble bleary-eyed in the washroom, each to be issued by a senior cadet with a large steel bucket, a scrubbing brush and a large dirty cloth. The bucket would be filled with hot water and a dash of 'Teepol' detergent, and the unfortunate cadet would go on hands and knees at one end of Port or Starboard alleyways, which ran the full length of the accommodation, scrubbing and wiping until he reached the other end. It must have been purely by accident rather than design that the deck covering in the alleyways responded well to this treatment such that it was patently obvious if the job was not done properly, so there were no short cuts, which could be got away with.

The job was doubly difficult with the ship rolling. In port the alleyways were covered with paper and, thankfully, the scrubbing routine was suspended.

At 7.45 there was time to change into uniform - blues or whites depending on the ship's position - and go to the cadets' mess for breakfast at 8.00. Unfortunately, if you happened to be duty watch this meant you were 'pegging' i.e. waiting on the senior cadets. This was to some extent resented by the engineer cadets whose programme meant they only did two trips on the ship and therefore never became senior cadets to get 'pegged' themselves. After these duties there was little time to feed yourself, and at sea there was a limited quantity of fresh milk, issued to each table in a large plastic jug, and you would be very lucky to find some left.

So desperately tired were most cadets that, after breakfast, before the start of work at 9.00, recourse was had to the bunk or daybed for a quick nap of 10 minutes or less, but worth every minute.

'Otaio' carried about 50 cadets and a slightly reduced deck crew, which included a Bosun, Seamanship Instructor (Bosun's mate), Lamptrimmer, Physical Training Instructor (PTI) and a Carpenter - the senior Petty Officer because he had served his time. A full complement of engineers, down as far as a 10th engineer, and greasers, was still required. It was not possible to have engineer cadets doing much useful work in the E.R., since they were first year - and often first trip - while the deck cadets stayed longer on board, usually for 4 trips if they had remission because of attendance at Worcester, Conway or Pangbourne, 5 if they had attended a similar non-residential college, and 6 if they did not qualify for remission of any sort. Their duties were varied and included acting as chippy's mate, lamptrimmer's mate and hospital attendant. With over a hundred crew, it was regulatory to carry a ship's doctor, often a retired medic.

At 9.00 the engineer cadets would normally go to the classroom or workshop and study for the Diploma in Marine Engineering. Three engineering lecturers were carried on board and studies were exactly as cadets in other shipping companies were following ashore. The deck cadets had their own schoolroom and had a varied practical programme on deck and on the bridge.

The day passed as a normal college day, except for pegging at lunchtime and at evening meal, and the occasional welcome distraction afforded, for instance, by the sight of the Rock of Gibraltar in the distance and, later, the faint smudge on the horizon, which we were assured was Cyprus!

Ten days after sailing from Liverpool, we were at Port Said and experiencing the dubious pleasures provided by the bumboats coming alongside and selling flip-flops, rugs, binoculars and watches and some very interesting books and photographs. A shock it was to 17 and 18 year olds from innocent backgrounds to be confronted by Arabs trading their wares and making some very strange offers. To avoid theft, cabin doors and ports were closed and the traders kept on deck. No one got ashore here for obvious reasons!



Approaching Port Said, Suez Canal

Transit of the Suez Canal passed quickly but left images in our minds of sitting in the cadet classroom learning mechanics with the sight of camels and Arabs in flowing robes through the portholes. It was difficult to maintain concentration with this interest passing by outside, and there was a certain amount of sympathy from tutors who gave some time through extra breaks for us to take in the sights. Soon we were in Aden for bunkers, and again receiving the inevitable traders on board. My particular memory on this occasion was of a cadet buying a wonderful looking watch with a lot of knobs and dials, called a 'Rambo De-Luxe', which promptly failed within a day of leaving Aden, never to give the time again, to everyone's great amusement.

As engineer cadets, we carried out stints in the engine room. After these experiences, as such they were, especially to begin with, our vocations were severely tested. On 'Otaio' the control platforms were situated one at each forward end of each engine, not enclosed, and therefore exposed to the full heat and noise of the engine-room, meaning there was no escape from the conditions into an air-conditioned sound insulated control-room, as is now universal. Typically we would be cutting gaskets, packing glands or cleaning and scraping, or doing routine maintenance on a diesel generator or pump. It was difficult in these early days, and at 17/18 years old, to imagine spending 4 hours in such conditions on a 4-8 routine for weeks on end!

Domestically, the routine was breakfast (after an hours work) at 8, lunch at 12.30 and evening meal at 5.30. Between 4 and 5 in the afternoon there would be P.T., useful if you had spent most of the day in the schoolroom, but on other occasions superfluous against the hard physical labour you may have been performing. Morning and afternoon 'smokos' were taken, with tea and tabnabs in the afternoon. At all times in the cadets' mess we were required to wear full uniform, so we spent a lot of time changing. Duties like 'pegging', and rotas for pre-breakfast work and other duties were arranged by dividing cadets into watches - port and starboard - and calling up duty watches. This call-up could also apply to non-routine duties whenever extra labour was required. Being rigidly applied, it was pure luck how you fared. If some extra cleaning needed doing urgently or if heavy weather was expected and the outer deadlights needed fitting on the bridge front cabins on the main deck, it was the duty watch, which was called out. There was a Port and a Starboard Watch Captain, and each watch was numbered, e.g. Port 2, Port numbers being even and Starboard numbers odd after the convention for numbering the lifeboats. In port, the duty watch could be found baling the hatch cover tents and checking the mooring lines, and, for deck cadets, there was full uniform gangway watch, following on from their sea routine of helm, foc'sle lookout and standby. When entering or leaving port there were stations forward and aft for the appropriate cadet watch.

Evenings at sea do not stand out in my memory, being spent on dhobying, ironing, study and with, as I recall, very little indulgence in pastimes or leisure activities, except for the occasional game of deck tennis, hockey or cricket. However, on a Saturday evening there would sometimes be a film show using a large screen and a 35mm projector. In the tropics, the show was set up on deck with varying degrees of success depending mainly on wind strength. Sleeping on deck was attempted by some cadets in extremely hot weather when conditions in the Cadet accommodation were all but unbearable. There was of course no air-conditioning on ships of that period, and aiming the air louver at oneself in an effort to keep cool during the night would often result in illness, which I discovered to my cost. Salt tablets were issued, but the effects were debatable.

A bar was not thought a suitable facility for cadets, but we could draw two stubby bottles of Tuborg Lager each day from the Chief Steward, which could be accumulated, against the rules, for that special occasion. Also on offer from the Chief Steward were tins of chocolates, cans of coke, and packs of 200 cigarettes for 10 shillings, but few of us smoked. Individual expenditure was recorded and at the end of each leg of the trip each cadet received his 'shock sheet' and paid his dues.

We began the long haul from Aden through the Indian Ocean towards Fremantle, our first port in Australia, and settled back into the routine disturbed by our passage through the Canal and the Red Sea to Aden. A sense of adventure prevailed, being a long way from home now. The sea was calm and a brilliant blue and there was the prospect of soon sighting the great Australian continent for the first time and having a run ashore. With this in mind, we were called to the traditional talk by the Ship's Doctor one evening

and given dire warnings about the perils of VD, or rather, the toe-curling details of the treatment!



South through the Indian Ocean

In the engine room, the two enormous Doxford opposed piston engines would beat out their rhythm day in, day out without a murmur, and without the screech of turbochargers, which are used on all main and auxiliary engines today. Occasionally there would be a stop at sea for a repair to be carried out, a common one on Dofxords being the cooling water arm sealing to the top piston. Another one was the scavenge fire, where the air inlet spaces inside the engine around the piston, being caked eventually with oily deposits, would catch fire. The remedy for this was to slow down and let the fire burn itself out while increasing cylinder lubrication (over-supply of which may have caused the oily build-up in the first place). Signs of this in the engine room are increase in cylinder exhaust temperature, loss of power and paint peeling off the side of the engine. Fortunately, major problems with bearings (because of the opposed piston design, the Doxford had many!) were rare.

Saturday mornings at sea meant 'rounds' when all cadets would set-to and thoroughly clean cabins, toilets, schoolrooms and workshops. This was a straight translation from Royal Navy practice, with the enthusiasm for it demonstrated by 'Otaio' senior officers enhanced, I am sure, by their determination to do it at least as well. Standing to attention in our cabins, we would await the arrival of the members of the inspection party, themselves decked out immaculately in full uniform. Their presence created a tremendous nervousness and apprehension, especially to green first trippers. White-gloved fingers would be dragged over ledges and tables, drawers were pulled out and contents inspected, and brass work scrutinized. If you got off without a criticism you were doing well. Usually, something immensely trivial – the way a sweater was folded in your locker, for instance – would be pointed out in friendly or not so friendly fashion. More significant faults, say dirty shoes or cart (bed) not properly made up, would incur the punishment of overtime, as would incorrect dress or bad timekeeping. This was not to be taken lightly; Saturday and Sunday afternoons were the only real time off we

had (assuming you were not duty watch, in which case you could be occupied even in these periods), and were precious for catching up on sleep and becoming a human being again. The system meant that only on one morning in two weeks, a Sunday morning, would you have the benefit of lying in bed until breakfast time. This of course felt like the greatest luxury in the world!

Later on Sunday mornings at sea, Divine Service would be held in the cadets' anteroom with compulsory attendance, preceded by Divisions - lining up and inspection of cadets on the aft deck. On Sunday afternoons, for those with any energy left, deck cricket, tennis and hockey could be played.

In addition to the weekly rounds, a shorter inspection was carried out each evening by the duty officer. One of the most amusing parts of the disciplinary routine was overtime parade on the boat deck. We were required to line up in full uniform and stand to attention while the Mate, walking up and down the line, would call us everything under the sun in the most profane language he could muster, which after a few years at sea was impressive, and we would be trying extremely hard to suppress our laughter. This doesn't mean we took it lightly, quite the opposite - at the end of his ravings we would be sentenced to overtime, often contrived to produce more man hours for work on deck, where there were never enough hands.

A distraction on the long haul through the Indian Ocean was the construction of the swimming pool, which was in fact a small (20' x 5' by 6' deep) arrangement of supports, wooden planking and canvas erected on No. 6 hold. Herculean efforts were required by a large number of cadets to construct the pool, a process, which would take several hours. It would then be filled through a hose off the fire main on deck. It was a pleasure to cool off in as temperatures soared, but the effort involved was considerable, and before too long it was necessary to dismantle the pool again so that the ship was clear to work cargo - this was not the 'Sun Princess'!

Eventually we neared Fremantle, and were able to watch the approach of the pilot boat from the country we had heard so much about and which had taken us 4 weeks to reach. We were tied up by early evening and our desire to go ashore for the first time since Liverpool, and for most of us for the first time in a foreign country, was extremely strong. To our youthful minds this was what being in the Merchant Navy was really all about, certainly one of the incentives to joining - how quickly time brings you to reality!

In order to go ashore, it was necessary to have applied on a special form to the Duty Officer - there was no doubt that on this occasion we had all done so - and then to assemble for inspection on the boat deck before being given the all clear.

A further great anticipatory excitement was drawing subs, i.e. money, from the Chief Steward in the local currency. The amount would later appear on our 'shock sheets'.

First foot ashore in a foreign country, and after so long at sea, was indeed a special moment, and I would guess that all seamen remember the first time they did this. With great anticipation and a backward glance at the ship we had last seen from the quayside in the Huskisson Dock, Liverpool, we made our way into Fremantle, in full uniform.

Fremantle - being a small town - was soon explored to the extent we were interested. It was dark by the time we managed to get off the ship, and, with the eagerness of young first-trippers, we rushed round the streets and visited the bars. What a tremendous feeling of achievement we felt at having at last arrived in Australia, and how pleasant it was to be off the ship and in different surroundings, seeing different faces. All cadets wrote home from this first foreign port, and received mail for the first time since leaving the UK.

Our stay in Fremantle was brief. Before sailing we were enrolled into the working party for loading not only engine-room spares, which we felt was justified, but also for loading fresh supplies of food for the Chief Steward's department, which we felt was somebody else's job. However, at breakfast the next morning we had the immense treat of melon, which was the first time most of us had eaten it.

Our next port was Adelaide, and we were more than a little disappointed, having relaxed a little from sea routine, to find that we were back into it, this leg being several days, giving plenty of time to scrub more decks before breakfast!

The Great Australian Bight lived up to its reputation for heavy seas, and we rigged lifelines and screwed down deadlights, and executed a reputed 45° roll, causing a few minor injuries.

Our stay in Adelaide was brief but there was time to sample the South Australian wine and have another run ashore before proceeding to our next port – the much anticipated Melbourne.



Rolling in the Australian Bight

Port Melbourne is at the top end of Port Phillip Bay, entered through the relatively narrow heads. Going ashore usually meant a taxi journey, but the attractions of Melbourne were worth the expense.

For first trip cadets especially, one of the highlights of being on the Aussie coast were the cadet parties, or 'Jags' as they were called. The dictionary definition of 'Jag' is 'a period of heavy drinking or uncontrolled activity', which overstates the situation in this case, but gives the general idea. There were two types of Jag, one being the official company Jag at which we were required to wear No. 9's including the ridiculous black wrap-round cummerbund, and short battledress with dicky-bow. The other type was those organised by the cadets themselves and was more relaxed in terms of dress. The girls were 'supplied' through arrangements made by N.Z.S.Co. in the case of the Company Jags, and by senior cadets who knew the ropes and had the contacts in the second case. They often came from the local nursing or teaching college. With 40/50 cadets in the age range 17-23 and the inherent advantages of being sailors on a ship from the UK, there was never a shortage of these visitors. The event was held in the cadets' anteroom. A great deal of drinking, some dancing, and a lot of chatting-up took place. The latter always involved taking a girl around the ship, which, with very few exceptions did not include your cabin. As far as sexual activity was concerned, snogging was usually as far as it went, but the next day, nursing hangovers, great exaggerations were made – and tolerated. The girls often came - and left - on a special coach, having had I'm sure, a very good time!

A further occasional pleasure was to visit the bar on a British ship from a different line. In those days you would always find a Blue Star, Port Line, Shaw Savill or Bank Line ship tied up at the quayside not far away, and there was a curious comfort to be had from speaking to fellow countrymen sharing the same rigours as yourself on a different ship. It wasn't unusual, too, to find an NZS/Federal ship in port, the fleet in the 60's numbering about 25, and after a few years at sea you would almost certainly find someone on board you had sailed with before.

Ashore, the usual pastime was, of course, visiting the bars. In Melbourne everyone felt compelled to visit the one opposite Flinders Street Station, whose name I do not recall, where there was (is?) a large painting of reclining nude. Buying ice-cold beer in a jug and pouring into glasses at the table was a novelty in those days, and, as we soon discovered, a deceptive way of shifting a large volume of Fosters (or Victoria Bitter, or Swan Lager) in an amazingly short space of time. There were other attractions such as the cinema, the milk bars and the general hustle and bustle of a busy city, but above all was the pleasure gained simply from getting off the ship and escaping the routine, the noise and commotion, and, in common parlance 'getting your life back!'

Most cadets purchased the inevitable furry Koala Bears, as well as flags, pennants and other tourist bric-a-brac.



Departure Melbourne, cargo landed

Continuing the traditional Aussie coast tour, we finally reached Sydney, less than 2 days sailing from Melbourne, after dark. We passed under the Harbour Bridge and berthed at the Pyrmont Wharf by the power station, and feeling now like experienced hands, we were in no rush to get ashore, even had it been possible at that hour, and were content to wait until the next evening before crossing the Bridge over Darling Harbour to reach the main part of the city. Our stay in Sydney was about a week, so there was time to visit most parts of the city, and of course to organize yet another 'Jag'.

The cadet routine for these long stays in port was maintained as far as possible, but flexibility was introduced as and when possible, especially if there was work to do in the engine-room, or on deck as well, in which we could assist. The engineers themselves were up to their necks in maintenance work, and, as always, working against the tightest schedules to get the job ready for sea. Many were the occasions when the apparent disarray in the engine room only an hour or so before sailing time, with large parts of the main engine lying on the top plates, would suggest a major delay was on the cards. But, more often than not the job would be boxed up and ready in time, a scene of chaos and confusion changed to one of calmness and order just in time, leaving a greaser to wipe down as stand-by was rung on the engine-room telegraph. Being a marine engineer in those days on ships of that type was a big job, and produced many unsung heroes!

A major problem for shipowners and operators and the Deck department was the volatility of the Australian wharfies, who seemed to be on strike a great many times, and who, apparently, would not work in the rain. On several occasions on this trip, we were not able to work cargo because there were no wharfies, and we were obliged to suffer the great frustration of lying alongside with nothing happening. The contrasting and highly satisfactory picture was to see purposeful activity as the derricks swung energetically over the quayside, discharging general goods from the UK and loading return cargo for discharge in London. The cadet accommodation was no place to be during these times, at least not during working hours. Being constructed in the

tween decks of holds 3 & 4, the steel sides would often be struck by the cargo or pallets as it was being lowered into the hold, and heaven help you if you were in close proximity!

After Sydney we headed north to the more leisurely city of Brisbane, for a relatively short stay of only two days. There was some time to go ashore, but the main activity here was lowering the whaler and spending the day rowing up the Brisbane River in the intense heat, and suffering very much the same evening with sunburn and blistered hands. 'Otaio' carried two 18' clinker built whalers and two 12' clinker built dinghies which could be rowed or sailed. Because of the short stay, the main engines were not shut down and no major work was embarked upon. The cadet classes were maintained and our stay here was soon over.



' Otaio' Deck Cadets

We were now on the homeward leg, and called to load once more at Sydney and crossed to Beauty Point in Tasmania for apples and pears before docking again in Melbourne. It was common for NZS ships to cross to New Zealand and return via Panama, but on this voyage the schedule was to return to UK after Melbourne. We now had a full cargo of frozen beef in cartons, apples, Conference pears, cheese, pickled hides in barrels (in number 6 hold because of the atrocious smell) and bales of wool, and I remember on the night of our sailing from Melbourne watching the remaining bales being literally squeezed into the top of the hold. The ship was fully laden and sitting deep in the water, the decks were cleared, the quayside became transformed into its customary deserted quiet, and we were ready to leave Australian shores for home. For a first tripper, there was something very satisfying about this. To make the tide, sailing was in the early hours of the morning, and since we were on daywork, we slept thorough the departure, but woke to the familiar rolling of the ship and the cry of 'turn to now, Cadets', and the buckets and mops, and knew we were back in routine and on the long leg home. By this time we were anxious to get there after nearly 4 months away already, and it was a little

disconcerting to be still off the Australian coast 8 days after sailing from Melbourne for Suez !

Once again we laboured to construct the swimming pool and to take it down again, once again we prepared for Divisions, duty watch, inspections, and the round of classes, peggying, dhobying and all the other duties.

The form is titled 'ACCOUNT OF WAGES (See 131, J.R.E.A. 1946)'. It contains the following sections and data:

- NAME OF SEAMAN:** R. W. FISHER
- Dis. A No.:** 12 52229
- Income Tax Code:** 11PP41711647
- Rating:** 1242
- Ref. No. in Appointment:** 1242
- Rate of Appointment:** 1242
- Commitment:** 14.1.66
- Period of Employment:** 17.1.66 - 8 JUN 1966
- Months:** 14
- Days:** 23
- Amount:** 172.0
- Date last Payment:** 16.2.66
- Entered:** 17
- A. EARNINGS:**
 - Wages including benefits: 175.16
 - Increment in Wages (Monthly): 12.0
 - Food Allowance: 22.0
 - Travel Allowance: 11.0
 - Special Compensation: 10.0
- B. DEDUCTIONS:**
 - Advances on Salary: 1.0
 - Advances on Wages: 1.0
 - Home: 3.25
 - Port Expenses: 1.0
 - Club (including Portage, Kettle & Charred Money): 11.5
 - Tobacco: 1.16
 - Wines: 1.16
 - Shops: 1.0
 - Customs: 10.0
 - N.Z.S. Co. Pension Fund: 1.0
 - Gratuity Pension: 1.0
 - Medical Expenses: 1.0
 - S.O.S. Contribution: 1.0
 - Income Tax: 11.5
- Total Deductions:** 72.14.3
- SEE OVER**

The end of trip 'shock sheet'

And so eventually we arrived at Aden once more for bunkers, continued up the atrociously hot Red Sea with the air scoops fitted in every cabin porthole, and through the Suez Canal. The notice 'blues today' was chalked on the blackboard in the cadets' mess soon after we left the Med and headed northwards, and it was gratifying to feel closer to home and to be in the relative cold of the Atlantic again. The tugs met us in the London River, and soon we were nosing onto the Albert Dock and tying up at the NZSCo berth. A night aboard and then we were lined up in full uniform the next morning for owner's inspection. After that, it was dismissal and at last we were free to finish packing our bags and go home.

As a first trip, it has been something always to remember, but what we did not realise at the time was that we were experiencing a form of seafaring soon to disappear. Our time on the Aussie coast was 4 weeks in total – compare that with the turnaround now for a container ship. Procedures and discipline on board reflected the best traditions of the Merchant Navy. As Cadets we were treated firmly but fairly, and it goes without saying that the training was exemplary, not only in engineering, seamanship and navigation, but in conduct and service. There were times when we would quite cheerfully have jumped ship but nobody did. The change to containerisation gathered pace in the 70's and before long the Royal Docks had gone (unimaginable in the mid 60's), and the British Fleet began to shrink. In retrospect, we were extremely

fortunate to have had these experiences, and what a shame it is that there is not a single UK cadet training ship in existence.

After a blissful period of leave, we joined 'Otaio' again at dry-dock in Falmouth from where we sailed light ship for New Zealand via Panama.

Note: MV Otaio continued as a Cadet Ship until 1977 when she was sold to the Gulf Group and became the Eastern Academy. Sadly, she went to Gadani Beach in 1981, her like never to be seen again.

Snowbow Productions have a video, which includes some excellent footage of MV Otaio.

Acknowledgments: Dr. Tom Carnduff, Master Mariner, for his help in writing this article.

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