

MURUROA TRIP 1973

Chapter 1: The Transit

Saturday 14 July 1973

Butting into the teeth of a half-gale, the NZ Frigate Canterbury sailed from Auckland on Saturday to relieve the HMNZS Otago inside the French claimed 72 mile security zone round Mururoa Atoll.

The 2860-ton Canterbury ran into vicious seas and head winds peaking at more than 30 knots shortly after clearing Devonport Naval base and has suffered minor structural damage in the forepeak from the battering. A 4" diameter support pillar beneath the bow decking, already buckled during heavy seas last year has been twisted further by the impact of tons of seawater thudding on her deck. Time and again over the last 30 hours the Canterbury's bow has dropped sickeningly from the crest of foaming 12 ft waves and dropped into deep green troughs, sending spray high into the air and water cascading in torrents across the deck.



The experienced 256 man crew aboard the Canterbury has largely managed to keep their stomachs in the right place but the pounding, combined with boisterous farewell parties in Auckland, sent crewmen queuing for anti sea sick pills. 30 seamen missed their dinner of Cornish Pasties last night and many off duty sailors preferred their bunks and dimmed lighting to normal seaboard recreation.

The 2 year old frigate equipped with stabilisers is punching through a narrow corridor between a depression and an anti-cyclone and continuing heavy weather is expected for the next few days. HMNZS Canterbury steamed from Devonport without the fanfare and satellite coverage which marked the 2400 ton Otago's departure, and with only 350 relatives and friends to farewell the ship. Ironically it sailed on Bastille Day, France's national commemoration of a protest by the French people who stormed the Bastille fortress/prison in Paris and began a war against oppression.

Only one of the Canterbury's crew chose to accept the Governments opt-out escape clause to the Mururoa voyage. Three others were granted leave on compassionate grounds and three more were sent ashore to make room for passengers. Six crewmen opted out from HMNZS Otago's trip but the 46 year old Commanding Officer of Canterbury, Captain Derek Cheney explained to a quayside press conference before the ship sailed that the Canterbury's crew had been together longer. The Canterbury was recalled from fleet work-up exercises off Hawaii to take over the Otago's role and Captain Cheney said that having worked the ship up together, there was a strong team spirit amongst the crew.

Mrs Fraser Coleman, wife of the 48 year old Cabinet Minister aboard the Otago has sent a cable to the ships company of the Canterbury wishing them a successful trip. Mr Fraser, the Minister of Immigration and Mines will transfer to the Canterbury when the two warships rendezvous at the 72 mile nuclear test zone around Mururoa Atoll. "I am very grateful you will be continuing the great job the Otago has done in looking after my husband and wish you all a safe and speedy return" said Mrs Coleman.

Chapter 2: The Voyage

Sunday 15 July 1973

The Canterbury is making slow progress against moderating head winds and heavy seas on it's 2660 mile voyage to Mururoa with only 435 miles clocked up at 0900 this morning, The Canterbury planned to sail at its best economic speed of 14 knots after steaming from Devonport on Saturday morning and but for the half-gale during the first 30 hours would by now have covered 616 miles.

During the storm the frigate was reduced to between 8 – 10 knots but the strong head wind eased overnight to about 20 knots and the warship has picked up speed to just over 11 knots. The Canterbury is scheduled to rendezvous with the Australian navy oiler HMAS Supply, well outside the French 72 mile security zone round its nuclear site at Mururoa, in five days for refueling. No date has yet been set for the Canterbury to relieve Otago inside the test zone but it is expected the changeover will come shortly after refueling. The Otago's passengers including Minister Fraser Coleman and National Laboratory scientist James McCahon, will transfer to the Canterbury before the Otago returns to Auckland. Meanwhile on board the Canterbury the 256 man crew is going through the unusual, but welcome experience of two Sundays in a row, due to crossing the International Date Line. For off-duty crew this means that after cleaning up, the day is theirs from 1000, with no further ships duties.

Seamen aboard the Canterbury today hosed down salt-crusted upper decks for the first time since the warship left Auckland in the teeth of a half-gale on Saturday to relieve the Otago at Mururoa. Crew also shored up a 4" diameter staunchon in the foredeck, already buckled in heavy seas last year and under further strain over the last two days as the bow punched through heavy seas. The Canterbury faced the half-gale for the first 30 hours of its 2660 mile voyage but overnight the strong headwinds eased by 10 knots to 20 knots and seas moderated. With occasional seas still

punching over the frigate bow it has picked up speed from between 8 – 10 knots to twelve knots and by 1600 was about 540 miles from Auckland. The warship is due to rendezvous with the Supply in 5 days to refuel and hand over 700lbs of NZ made chocolate which the Australians apparently have a sweet tooth for.

Apart from fresh fruit from Rarotonga the Supply will not be providing the Canterbury with general stores and to compensate for this the Canterbury is crammed with extra provisions. For example, underneath the decking supporting the port side Seacat (sea-air) missiles are 2000lbs of Potatoes and 200lbs of onions. In the emergency conning position there are 3490lbs of fresh vegetables and 280lbs of bananas. Every available cubby hole is packed with stores and for the crew it is a case of tread carefully. On board the voyage has taken on a familiar routine with the current highlight being a moustache growing competition for all Officers and men.

Monday 16 July 1973

Action Stations sounded aboard the Frigate this morning and the ship was put through anti radiation close-down drill as it sailed towards Mururoa. Carrying anti-gas respirators the crew raced to action stations closing all watertight doors and hatches and sealing off all air intakes, except for two special heavily filtered intakes. These are used to boost the air pressure inside the hull to prevent fallout seeping into the cocooned ship and once closed down the ship is capable of sailing safely through radioactive fallout for an indefinite period. Inside the hulls radiation proof citadel, permanently installed sensors feed information on fallout levels to a master sensor monitored constantly by a specialised crew in the main control centre. There are 16 sensors installed inside the ship at various positions of which 7 are linked directly to the master sensor.

Above decks, 15 sensors pick up radiation fallout in the air itself and two man crews stand by to immunise contamination in vital areas including armament positions and the flight deck. During wartime conditions personnel in exposed conditions are allowed a maximum dose of 60 units of radiation before being relieved and sent below inside the citadel. Exposed personnel could sustain a casualty dose of 150 units without any serious harm. Crew with casualty doses would be sent to the nuclear sick bay and would recover within a day. The master sensor is currently registering 30 millirads, the normal background sea level dose monitored by the bridge roof sensor. Inside the citadel the rads reading is nil.

This morning the frigate heeled over in a tight circle and alerted its helicopter which was airborne as a man overboard alarm sounded. The short emergency turned out to be a false alarm. The alarm came from the inadvertent tripping of a man overboard warning button on the flight deck. The incident came as the frigate was closing down for anti radiation drills and the crew was at action stations. Officers on the bridge cross checked reports after the alarm sounded, ordered the helicopter on a search and double checked that all personnel onboard were accounted for before calling off the search.

Meanwhile the frigate is about a third of the way to Mururoa. At 1400 it was 805 miles from Auckland. The weather has moderated considerably and the frigate is steaming at just over 12 knots.

Tuesday 17 July 1973

The rendezvous with the Supply has been moved forward 24 hours and will take place 800 miles west of Mururoa. Meanwhile the HMNZS Canterbury has increased speed to 15 knots and altered course to make the rendezvous on time. As yet no date has been set for the Canterbury to relieve the Otago. The Canterbury is due to cross the half-way mark tomorrow at 1700 and today was 1185 miles from Auckland. Due to the moderation in the weather the frigate has been able to increase speed to meet the Supply earlier than originally planned.

Wednesday 18 July 1973

As the Canterbury approached the half-way mark the crew once again went to action stations this morning and closed down for anti-radiation drills. During this morning's drills the First Lieutenant gave the crew a full briefing over the main broadcast system, on the action taken during atmospheric nuclear testing by the French. He disclosed that the French tend to favour testing between 0800 – 1000. For the first time today the engine room crew donned special ventilated suits, which keep the crew cool, as engine room temperatures rise. Also during the last few days the Canterbury has been in direct radio communications with the Otago and because of her more powerful and sophisticated equipment, has acted as a relay ship for Otago to Defense Headquarters in Wellington. The rendezvous tomorrow with the Supply will be the first contact with another vessel since sailing from Auckland, although she passed within 4 miles of a Korean fishing vessel without sighting it during the previous night.

The Canterbury passed the half-way mark at 1600 today and was 1527 miles from Auckland. All on board is normal for the crew although the nuclear drills are tightening up and the 95 moustaches and 16 beards are growing longer.

Chapter 3: The Waiting Period

Thursday 19 July 1973

This morning the Canterbury's helicopter took off for a normal training flight and spotted the Australian Oiler some 40 miles from the Canterbury. The frigate picked the Supply up on radar at 1100, and is due to rendezvous with her at 1300. The two ships coupled up the fuel line at 1400 and the Supply pumped across 300 tons of FFO into the nearly empty tanks of the Canterbury. Also passed across was fresh fruit from Rarotonga and mail from home. In return the Canterbury gave the Supply 700lbs of NZ Chocolate and home bound mail. Hoisted at the yardarm during the entire



operation was a home made flag showing two geese locked in mid-flight meaning "fly united", a white flag bearing a big black mushroom, and the slogan "Norms Mystery Tour" and a DB Flag. The fuelling was done by a means called probe fuelling which is a device which couples the into the Canterbury's upper deck fuelling point automatically as it arrives on board by way of a wire attached between the two ships. As soon as the fuelling was completed the Canterbury broke away from the Supply and increased speed to 20 knots and headed for the rendezvous with the Otago inside the 72 mile nuclear testing zone declared around Mururoa by the French.

During the whole day the weather has been perfect and it is expected that the French will explode their nuclear device at any time. Two wind finding balloons were launched today to record the winds at various heights up to a height of between 30,000 and 60,000 feet. The balloons are nitrogen filled and are covered in a delicate wire mesh, which acts as a better radar reflector for tracking purposes. These balloons will be launched each day during the entire French nuclear tests to help record the direction of the fallout.

Friday 20 July 1973

The Prime Minister today sent his best wishes to the crew of the Canterbury as it steamed at 20 knots towards Mururoa to relieve the Otago. The frigate passed within 15 miles of the French administered Pacific Island paradise of Raivavae this morning as it approached within 520 miles of Mururoa. The Crew again went to action stations this morning to test out their anti-radiation drills as it passed the 1434 foot island which has a population of 1000 and produces Coffee, Taro and Tropical fruit. French maritime aircraft are expected to start surveillance of the Canterbury soon, the same as they did with Otago.

At 0530 trouble struck the ship. The engines were shut down after an alarm indicator registered salt contamination in the pure water of the starboard boiler, as the ship wallowed idly at sea 300 miles from Mururoa. The ships engineers went below to try and find the trouble. There is nothing stopping the Canterbury sailing under power from the port boiler but because the water reticulation system through the boilers is linked the uncontaminated boiler was shut down as well on the off chance that salt had reached it. By 2000 engineers were flushing the contaminated boiler and repairing a slight leak in the condenser which is causing the trouble. Once the boiler is cleaned out and refilled with fresh water, the Canterbury will set sail again.

Saturday 21 July 1973

Stopped for almost 17 hours by engine trouble, the Canterbury fed power to its two steam turbine engines again this morning and steamed on, initially at reduced speed, to relieve the Otago. Engine room staff worked around the clock to locate the salt water leak into the fresh water but despite all possible intensive checks, no leaks had been discovered by the time the frigate got under way again. The main factor involved in the lengthy stoppage was the six hours necessary to allow the machinery to cool down, and that the fresh water recirculating system had to be stripped down and cleaned with fresh water. Because of this the crew had a water shortage and had to cut down on showers and doing their washing. During the night the Australian Oiler Supply caught up with the Canterbury and offered assistance which was not required, but she stayed within 5 miles of the frigate until the engines were back to normal.

The rendezvous with the Otago is now expected tomorrow, a day after the first of the current series of nuclear tests. By 1600 today the Canterbury was 190 miles from the edge of the 120 mile declared danger zone.

Sunday 22 July 1973

The Canterbury reached the edge of the 120 mile zone early this morning and shortly after the Australian Oiler Supply and the frigate HMNZS Otago reached the rendezvous position. The weather was so bad that the ships could only see each other when they got within 1000 yards. The Otago came out from Mururoa this morning only after they were certain that the French were not going to explode another nuclear device.

During the morning the frigates Wasp helicopter transferred the Canterbury's Commanding Officer to the Otago for consultation with the Otago's captain. After consultations between the two captains had been completed the Otago then refuelled from the Supply. Meanwhile the Canterbury is still waiting final orders from Wellington as to when she will take over from the Otago, as the Governments silent accusing witness role. These orders could reasonably have been expected by now but it is possible that two factors have delayed a final decision. France has already exploded the first trigger device in its current series of atmospheric testing above Mururoa and the Government must now consider how much more political mileage, in terms of world headlines, can be gained from keeping the million dollar Canterbury in the test zone. The second factor concerns the reliability of the Canterbury's engines following an untraced dose of

salt-water contamination in the main feed supply of fresh water through part of the boiler system two days ago. However, since the Canterbury fed power to its steam turbines at 1012 yesterday the engines had performed faultlessly and there has been no further contamination. So with the engines back to normal the Canterbury is in all respects ready to take over the protest mission. The final decision is expected to be made by the Prime Minister - Norman Kirk, before or after the morning session of the weekly cabinet meeting today. At 1745 news was received that the Otago was going back into the test zone to continue its lonely vigil and as it turned away from the Canterbury at high speed the Canterbury continued its role waiting outside the 120-mile zone with the Supply. The move is a strong indication that the Government intends maintaining its silent accusing witness role in the French test zone in the immediate future. It also suggests that the Canterbury will eventually relieve the Otago. For the crew of the Canterbury the decision not to immediately relieve Otago is a disappointment, but they are confident now that their chance to show the NZ flag in the security zone will come. In the meantime the Canterbury's engineers are making final checks of the boilers to make sure everything is okay and that there is no more contamination.

Monday 23 July 1973

France made no attempt this morning to detonate a second atmospheric nuclear device over Mururoa, so the Otago has now come back out to the 120 mile zone to meet with Canterbury and the Supply. The Canterbury still has not got final clearance from Wellington to take over from the Otago and will now transfer its News Media representatives to the Otago. The two frigates joined together for the first time at midday and for the Otago's crew it was the first friendly face they had seen for 30 days.

To the tune of "I Wanna Go Home", played at full blast over the Otago's loudspeaker to two frigates transferred the News representatives to the Otago as well as some much need supplies. After parting company the Otago proceeded to top up its tanks from the Supply before heading back into the 12 mile zone. Before the midday meeting between the two frigates the Canterbury had refuelled at the Supply and was in all respects ready to go and take over from the Otago. At the same time as the Otago topped up with fuel, her news media representatives and mail were transferred to the Supply which was returning to Rarotonga to collect more supplies for the two frigates.

Meanwhile- the Canterbury - with a crew that is raring to go into the test zone, has resumed its patrol outside the 120 mile security zone. The weather which was very bad yesterday, partly cleared to 3 miles visibility during the day.

Tuesday 24 July 1973

The Frigate HMNZS Canterbury was today ordered into the test zone to relieve the frigate HMNZS Otago after it had been given the green light this morning from Wellington.

France, once again, put off its second atmospheric nuclear test in its current series but with the likelihood of improving weather the blast still remains imminent. The frigate Otago is still on patrol outside the 12 miles limit but will move out to the 72 mile zone during the night to rendezvous with the Canterbury first thing tomorrow morning. Meanwhile the Canterbury has been ordered in to the 72 mile zone from the 120 mile zone. Mr Fraser Coleman, James McCahon and 3 Navy personnel will transfer from Otago to Canterbury. HMNZS Otago will then sail for Auckland, meeting up with Supply to replenish its fuel tanks and fresh provisions as well as mail.

On board the Canterbury, gear was laid out in preparation for the transfer and the crew continued about their daily tasks. During the day several French aircraft have buzzed the ship but none have come too close.

Chapter 4: The Mururoa Beat

Wednesday 25 July 1973

The frigate HMNZS Otago finally handed over the New Zealand Governments Protest to Nuclear Testing in the Pacific to the frigate HMNZS Canterbury this morning after spending 30 days at sea. The final clearance came as the Otago maintained a watching brief outside the 120 mile zone to double check that there was no possibility of a nuclear test today.

The two frigates linked up at 0900 by jackstay to transfer personnel, but at the last minute, due to bad weather, the transfer was called off and the helicopter was used instead. During the transfer the two ships were buzzed by a French Neptune reconnaissance plane which made several low passes over the ships to take



photographs. The Wasp helicopter transferred 7 personnel and 1200lbs of special radiation monitoring equipment and stores aboard the Canterbury.

Today's changeover came 5 days after it was originally scheduled due to the still unexplained salt-water contamination of its pure water feed supply to the boiler system. Streaming a massive battle ensign, the Canterbury broke away from the Otago and headed into the 12 mile zone to take over the "Mururoa Beat". Meanwhile the rust stained Otago with its very weary 245 man crew headed for a rendezvous with Supply and back on to New Zealand.



Thursday 26 July 1973

The frigate Canterbury arrived off the French test site off Mururoa Atoll early this morning, and started patrolling, 20 miles from the Atoll. The first thing they noticed was the French technicians on the atoll had inflated a giant yellow balloon used in atmospheric nuclear testing, and with an improvement in the weather forecast there could be another bomb blast in the next two days. The balloon was visible above the horizon from the Canterbury this morning as it patrolled the "Mururoa Beat".

With the upper atmospheric winds blowing in the right direction and surface winds were still too strong and the overhead cloud too much for the French to carry out another detonation of the nuclear device. The surface wind is expected to ease and swing round to a north westerly by tomorrow and the sky is expected to clear. Meanwhile the Canterbury is rolling heavily at 5 knots in steep seas while it steams backwards and forwards over its patrol area upwind of Mururoa Atoll. Since dawn an unidentified ship has been within 5 - 10 miles of the Canterbury but no attempt has been made to communicate with each other. Only five personnel will be allowed on the Bridge when the French detonate their bomb. They are: the Captain, the Navigating Officer, the Chief Yeoman, and the two press representatives. They will all be wearing dark glasses to protect their eyes against the intense flash of a nuclear explosion. Once the French countdown begins the bridge will be cleared of all personnel except the selected 5 and the ship closed down against the possibility of radiation contamination. There are also reported to be American, Russian and British ships in the area watching the test series.

Friday 27 July 1973

French air activity at Mururoa showed an increase this morning and with an improvement in the weather there is a chance that the French could explode their bomb tomorrow. Meanwhile the Canterbury is still steaming at 5 knots on its lonely patrol about 20 miles off Mururoa. The big yellow barrage balloon was still visible this morning and there was still no sign of the French Naval Forces at present inside the lagoon.

On board the Canterbury Mr Fraser Coleman, the Cabinet Minister, has begun what could be another round of radio telephone interviews from news media around the world. For the last two days he has had it fairly easy and has been able to catch up on some of the backlog of cabinet work. Last night he faced an interview over the Canterbury's closed circuit television system and agreed publicity on the NZ protest voyage was dwindling but thought interest would revive again with France's 2nd nuclear test. He said he still had no indication from the Prime Minister whether the Canterbury would be kept at Mururoa for the duration of the French test series or not. During the day the still unidentified ship has spent most of its time within 10 miles of the Canterbury.

Saturday 28 July 1973

France today produced a virtual anti-climax over Mururoa by detonating a nuclear device so small that the best it could develop was a fluffy white powder puff, fragmented within minutes by the wind. The mini explosion came four hours after originally scheduled and the only drama surrounding the atmospheric test was how long it would take the French technicians to solve the apparent fault in the firing system.

The crew of the Canterbury went to action stations at 0800 this morning and the ship was closed down and sealed against possible radiation. The selected 5 were left on the bridge and later joined by Mr Fraser Coleman who triggered the special camera used to record the explosion. French technicians failed to detonate their nuclear device, apparently another in the series to perfect the small trigger for France's armaments, on time. From shortly after 0900 onwards there was a continuing flurry of helicopters from a French ship offshore, to the atoll and back, which strongly suggested the firing system, was faulty.

The Canterbury's crew were alerted every hour, in the expectation that the blast would come on the hour as this was when the helicopters cleared the test site. However they kept returning to the balloon at the test site until the final countdown began.

For the Canterbury's crew the test was disillusioning because it had been expected that anything up to a one mega-ton bomb would be detonated. Allowed on deck shortly after the explosion, crewmen with cameras found very little to photograph and gave up in disgust. Within an hour of the test the crew were sunbathing, playing volleyball, deck hockey or shooting clay pigeons.

The final countdown began at noon and the bomb was finally exploded at 1300.

Sunday 29 July 1973

The Canterbury was today steaming idly along at 5 knots away from Mururoa towards the support area as the crew relaxed for the first time since leaving Auckland, in broad sunshine and calm seas. For dinner we had a Barbecue on the flight deck and during the afternoon we relaxed playing volleyball, deck hockey, sunbathing, or swimming in a pool that some of the crew rigged up. But for some the work went on. During the morning the ship's sensitive monitoring equipment and special equipment brought on board by Mr McCahon, was checked to discover whether the ship had been contaminated by radioactive fallout from yesterday's mini explosion. The results were positive but so minute that there was no possible danger to the crew or passengers. A total dose of fallout of .10 of a millirad over the 21 hours following the test was recorded. This recording follows what could have been a miscalculation in wind direction by the French.

The fallout could also have reached the Society Islands, including Tahiti and the Taumotu group. It has emerged since the bomb blast that the nuclear device was of very low yield and that the radioactive cloud which rose above the fireball from 1500ft above the atoll did not entirely reach the upper atmosphere. Once in the upper atmosphere the fallout would have been picked up by the prevailing winds and dissipated over empty ocean. The French apparently expected any remaining fallout to be carried by lower level winds to the north east where there is little but ocean. But because of lower wind turbulence this fallout in fact swung to the North West, towards Tahiti and other predominantly French administered island. The Canterbury which steamed away from Mururoa to the south west of the 120 miles zone overnight caught the fringe of this fallout. The fallout came less than one month after the Prime Minister, Norman Kirk, told parliament "We are entitled to be suspicious of claims minimising any possible dangers from tests".

Monday 30 July 1973

Radioactive fallout has tailed off late today after the ship received another dose during the night. The 2nd dose came with a wind change overnight which swung in the direction of the Canterbury as it idled slowly at 5 knots about 100 miles south west of Mururoa.

Mr McCahon said the total dose was still only .1 of a millirad. No attempt has been made to take the Canterbury away from the south western edge of the danger zone because the fallout appeared to have spread by low level winds. Work on board the ship was back to normal today for the crew as the ship steamed about under cloudy skies awaiting orders from Wellington.

Tuesday 31 July 1973

The Canterbury today met up with the Supply once again to take on fuel and much needed food and to get its first mail in 3 weeks. The rendezvous came after the Canterbury had been waiting around for three days for orders from Wellington. The Supply, rust stained after 37 days at sea supporting the NZ frigates has not registered any radioactive fall out from the latest French tests. The Supply captain said that the Supply was 900 miles from Mururoa when the mini blast happened on its way back from Rarotonga. During the hour long rendezvous the Supply transferred 200 tons of fuel to the Canterbury plus 5 tons of stores and 7 bags of mail.

At 1900 tonight speculation onboard the Canterbury about its future role ended as it received orders to proceed into the Mururoa patrol Area. Picking up speed to 20 knots the Canterbury sped away from the Supply with the crew in no doubt as to where they would be for the next few days.

Wednesday 1 August 1973

The Canterbury arrived once again off Mururoa early this morning to take up its box seat station for the French Nuclear tests. As it started on its patrol a French frigate closed the Canterbury, apparently to check its identity visually before steering away and disappearing over the horizon. The frigate was visually identified by the Canterbury as the "Commandate Riviere", an eleven year old frigate of the French Naval force in the Pacific. No attempt was made by the

French to challenge the Canterbury and after closing to a range of 8.6 miles the French frigate swung away and headed towards Mururoa. Apart from steady air traffic to and from the Atoll there appeared to be no early indications of an early resumption of atmospheric testing by France.

There is also no sign above the atoll of a barrage balloon for lifting the nuclear device into the atmosphere and activity by French warships in the French Naval force based at Mururoa has been minimal. Meanwhile the Otago has just returned to Auckland after 34 days at sea and received a Government reception at Princess Wharf.

Thursday 2 August 1973

With no surface contacts this morning and little air activity the Canterbury had the sea to itself in the French security zone around Mururoa. Air activity by the French was mainly confined to the atoll but so far there is no indication that a third atmospheric nuclear test in this year's series is remotely imminent. Meanwhile the Canterbury is still maintaining its loitering speed of 5 knots on its "Mururoa Beat". The crew of the Canterbury has been dubbed "professionals" by a commodore in the United States Navy. This came after the Canterbury had completed its previous assignment of fleet training exercises in Hawaii before being diverted to Mururoa. The Canterbury topped the training fleet with more than 95 points out of 100 and Captain T E Groves of the US Navy Fleet Training group has written to the ship saying "We are certain it will be a long time before the grades you achieved while in training are surpassed".

Friday 3 August 1973

The Canterbury today received its orders to proceed home and the jubilant crew greeted the announcement with loud cheers. After spending 23 days at sea the "Mururoa Beat" has become increasingly routine with no immediate prospect of another French nuclear test over the atoll. The Canterbury is due back in Auckland for a Government reception at Princes Wharf on August 13 by which stage the warship will have spent 30 days at sea, its longest period at sea without call at another port.

The Canterbury will sail towards Auckland in company with the Australian Oiler "Supply" which has acted as its mother ship during the the whole Mururoa operation. The Canterbury Captain said the ships crew had performed its job as it always did to the very best of its ability and any stresses and strains have been more imposed on the wives, girlfriends and families back home. Meanwhile the Canterbury still remains on its beat and this morning picked up a German registered merchant ship which steamed into the lagoon. It was identified as the "Martin Shroder", bound for Mururoa from the Panama, but would not specify what its cargo was.

Saturday 4 August 1973

The Canterbury this morning left its "Mururoa Beat" and headed out to the 120-miles zone to refuel from the Supply. Last night the Canterbury had visually sighted the protest ketch FRI as it sailed away from Mururoa after being released by the French. Early this morning it also spotted the ketch, Spirit of Peace, as it headed for a rendezvous with the FRI. The Canterbury met the Supply at 0800 and refuelled with 135 tons of fuel before the Supply headed back to Rarotonga. The Canterbury then headed for a rendezvous with the two ketches, one of which had a crew member who had been badly burnt during a fire onboard. At 1430 the Canterbury met up with the two ketches and took onboard a seriously injured crewman from the 105 ft FRI, 57 miles west of Mururoa Atoll. Mr Hugh Munroe, the 65-year-old engineer of the FRI was injured in an engine room explosion and fire shortly after it was released by the French from Mururoa yesterday. The mercy mission began when the FRI told the Canterbury this morning that Mr Munroe needed medical attention to 1st and 2nd degree burns to his left leg and face. The frigate on its way back to its "Mururoa Beat". steamed at 16 knots to reach the FRI and the 42 ft ketch Spirit of Peace which were within sight of each other. This was the first time the NZ frigate had come in right close to a protest vessel since the Government assumed the protest role against French nuclear testing. This was because both frigates had instructions to steer clear of a privately sponsored vessel, apparently in case the frigates became involved in an accident. But the instructions also specified that a frigate could render emergency assistance, including urgent needed medical aid, and it was on this basis the the Canterbury's Captain made his decision.



As all three vessels lay hove to within 100 yards of each other, an outboard powered Zodiac boat, crewed by two navy divers, darted across the gap and after several unsuccessful attempts to come alongside the heavily rolling ketch, Mr Munroe was lowered over the side to the floor of the boat. The Zodiac returned to the Canterbury where the boat and its occupants were hoisted aboard. Mr Munroe was immediately taken the sick bay where he was treated by a Navy doctor, Lieutenant Commander Allan Moffat and Medical Petty Officer Ian Christison. The Canterbury left the two ketches at 1530 and headed back to its "Mururoa Beat" where it will remain until tomorrow before heading back on its 2660 mile voyage to Auckland. The two ketches look sea-battered and both were carrying reduced sail in 20-knot winds as they dodged the Canterbury's path during the transfer operation. The eight remaining crewmen of the FRI, including two women, and the four crewmen of the Spirit of Peace turned out to wave greetings to the crew of the Canterbury as

they lined the upper deck to take photo's. The sails of the sturdy FRI were stained and its rigging badly worn and the white paint on the hull of the Spirit of Peace had almost gone, exposing the dark grey of its concrete hull.

During the rendezvous the Spirit of Peace flew the Peace media organisations flag from its mast head and the red ensign from its halyards, while across the side rails were long boards bearing the vessels name. The FRI carried no flags but in white paint across its dark hull it bore the words Peace Media and the Peace Media insignia. The FRI's skipper Mr David Moodie told the Canterbury that she was very smart looking and in his opinion she looked nicer than other ships he had seen. Onboard the Canterbury ships doctor praised the crew of the FRI on the excellent job they had done on Mr Munroe's burns but added that he thought that Mr Munroe would be better off on the Canterbury as it had better facilities than the FRI.

Chapter 5: The Return Home

Sunday 5 August 1973

New Zealand's official peaceful protest against French atmospheric nuclear testing in the Pacific ended today with the departure of the frigate HMNZS Canterbury from Mururoa Atoll. The Canterbury, which has spent 23 exacting days at sea, left the 20 mile zone and headed at 17 knots for Auckland. It crossed the 120 mile French declared zone at 1400. There was no sense of occasion as the frigate slipped out of the French test zone and cheers from the crew were reserved exclusively for the Sunday afternoon race meeting on the flight deck. Featured on the card were the Mururoa Stakes and the Mururoa Mile, with the casting of the dice determining which of the six wooden horses would reach the finishing post first. The Canterbury is scheduled to reach Auckland at about midday on August 13 with a Government reception awaiting them. However the NZ protest flag will still be flying off Mururoa as the Spirit of Peace takes over from the FRI which has decided to return to Auckland via Rarotonga and Suva. The Spirit of Peace could soon be joined by Greenpeace III which is due to arrive shortly. The frigate Canterbury will rendezvous once more with the Supply to top up its tanks on the way home.

Monday 6 August 1973

As the Canterbury steamed at 17 knots towards home under cloudy skies and choppy seas it became clear that in terms of world publicity, Maritime Law and Foreign policy the unprecedented naval action has turned up trumps. Starting as clear underdogs in its long struggle to stop France resuming atmospheric nuclear testing over Mururoa this year, New Zealand lost the battle but may in fact win the war.

France, which must be embarrassed by the persistent NZ thorn in its side, could accelerate its plans to switch to underground testing, although Eiao Island in the Marquesas group 1000 miles north-west of mururoa, has reportedly been found unsuitable. On the credit side for New Zealand, two navy frigates involved in close quarters patrolling off Mururoa have emerged unscathed from a situation which some critics said could have led to direct confrontation with the French navy.

France's attempt to close off international waters around Mururoa to shipping, against Maritime Law, failed with its decision not to attempt the removal of the NZ frigates which at times steamed close to the 12 mile territorial limit. Would publicity generated by the frigates activities inside the French claimed 72 mile security zone and reports from the warships on the two bomb tests, one of them an apparent failure, must have made some impact on the French thinking.

New Zealand's hand in Foreign policy has been strengthened through the determination of it's anti-bomb protest action, including taking France to the International Court of Justice, and may well have increased respect for NZ's voice. Nobody could suggest NZ has played Jack to France's' beanstalk and cut the beanstalk down but it seems probable a lot of foliage has been stripped off. France pledged for instance it would not detonate a nuclear weapon if there was any possibility of endangering the peoples of the Pacific yet monitoring on board the frigate after the second test proved conclusively there had been radioactive fallout, however insignificant. More important was the discovery that the fallout was blown directly towards Pacific Islands including Tahiti, The Cook Island, Western Samoa, Fiji and Tonga, although it is by no means certain it reached them all. From all observations it appears that the French took a chance with marginal weather conditions for its second test instead of waiting for clear weather and the return of the prevailing easterly winds. The fallout problem was made worse in fact when, after three false starts to explode the device there was an apparent imperfect detonation which left radioactive dirt in the atmosphere.

For the NZ Navy the protest operation has been unique, smacking of old fashioned gunboat diplomacy in an age when warships keep their claws firmly sheathed to prevent misunderstandings. Both NZ frigates were virtually straitjacketed so far as their operational orders were concerned with particular emphasis on avoiding confrontation with the French Navy. On the one hand the frigates had orders to patrol inside the 72 mile zone and on the other Admiral Christain Jean-Marie Claverie, Commander of France's Naval force in the Pacific was empowered to remove foreign ships.

It was the first time in eight years of testing at Mururoa that the French Government took measures for the expulsion of ships and aircraft from the zone although it was almost certain from the start that France would use the greatest restraint. France seems to have decided in the case of the frigates, because their hulls could be sealed against fallout, that they could be left to their own devices. Admiral Claverie ordered a different action however for the 105 ft NZ Protest ketch FRI which was boarded before the first bomb test, towed to Mururoa and impounded while the crew of 13 and four French passengers were flown to safety on Hao Island, 100 miles north. The FRI has since been released, a possible indicator that either there will be a long delay in resuming nuclear testing or even that the series for this year is over. There remains now a debit side to NZ's successful protest operation, the possible alienation of French goodwill towards continued NZ access to the common market for its dairy exports. The Mushroom cloud over Mururoa could now hang over New Zealand like a question mark.

Tuesday 7 August 1973

Today dawned a rather cloudy day as the Canterbury headed towards her rendezvous with the Supply at 17 knots. With a stern sea and a tail wind she at times surfed along at an extra 2 knots. For the crew it was work as usual, getting the upper deck primed to look spotless for the planned Government welcome. Rust stains and faded paintwork from 26 days sea-time were rapidly disappearing under the first sunlight for a week.

Wednesday 8 August 1973

The frigate Canterbury met the Supply at 1100 today about 200 miles south of Rarotonga. In rough seas the first attempt to pass the fuel hose was abandoned as both vessels plunged and rolled heavily and took seas over their bows. The two Captains decided to break off, turn about and run with 22 knot winds and breaking swells. This method of refuelling, is not normally used because vessels are more difficult to control, worked perfectly and the Canterbury spent an hour withing 100 yards of the Supply taking on 218 tons of black oil. It was the last rendezvous between the two ships before they both headed home, the 26,000 ton Supply to Sydney and the Canterbury to Auckland. The Supply with its oil tanks half empty refuelled Otago eight times with a total of 1113 tons and the Canterbury, five times with 1098 tons of oil. The Supply also jackstayed, across to the frigates, more than 23,000 lbs of provisions, stores and equipment, during the 45 days at sea. With a parting gift of a framed aerial photograph of the ships transferring fuel last Sunday, taken from Canterbury's helicopter and three cheers from the frigates crew, the two ships parted and headed for their respective home ports.

EPILOGUE

Almost the entire crew of the HMNZS Canterbury has decided to donate its Special Mururoa allowance to an obscure children's home in Christchurch. Cholmondeley Memorial Children's Home at Governors Bay will receive more than \$500, the net total of the 11 cents a day hard living allowance earned by 220 of the ship's 255-man crew from its months duty as a protest ship in the French Nuclear test zone.

The crew have now turned in their personal radiation detectors, dubbed Mururoa medals, and tests on the the first 100 showed zero readings. The blue plastic badge officially called Thermo-luminescent disc meters were issued on the warship around the test zone and most crewmen wore them around their necks.

The Auckland Harbour Board has asked the Canterbury to guarantee it is free from radioactive contamination before it steams into Auckland Harbour. This is a similar demand that was made to Otago before she reached Auckland. Mr McCahon has complied with the AHB request.