

DOMINON 16 JULY 1973

Canterbury fights half-gale

Butting into the teeth of half-gale, the New Zealand frigate Canterbury sailed from Auckland on Saturday to relieve the frigate Otago inside Frances' 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 receiving minor structural damage in the forepeak from the battering.

A four-inch diameter support pillar beneath the bow decking, already buckled during heavy seas last year, has been twisted further by the impact of tons of sea water thudding on deck. Time and again over the last 30 hours the Canterbury's bow has dropped sickeningly from the crest of foaming 12-foot waves and crunched into deep green troughs, sending spray high into the air and water cascading in torrents across the deck.

The experienced 256-man crew has largely managed to keep its collective stomach in the right place but the pounding, combined with boisterous farewell parties in Auckland, sent crewmen queueing for anti-seasick pills. Thirty seamen "missed" the dinner of Cornish pasties last night and many off-duty seamen preferred their bunks and dimmed lighting to normal shipboard recreations. The two-year-old frigate, equipped with stabiliser, is punching through a narrow corridor between a depression and anti-cyclone and continuing heavy weather is expected for the next few days. The Canterbury steamed from Devonport without the fanfare and satellite television coverage which marked the 2400-ton Otago's departure and with only 350 relatives and friends to farewell the ship.

Ironically, the Canterbury sailed on Bastille Day, France's national commemoration of 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 Government's opt-out clause to the Mururoa voyage.

Three others were granted leave on compassionate grounds and three more were sent ashore to make room for passengers.

More servicemen opted out from the Otago but the 46-year-old commanding officer of the Canterbury, Captain Derek Cheney, explained to a quayside Press conference before the ship sailed that the Canterbury's crew had been together longer.

Canterbury was recalled from fleet work-up exercises off Hawaii to take over the Otago's role and Captain Cheney said "Having worked the ship up there is a strong team spirit".