

## The Gigs' Crews Visit to T.S.M.V. "Otaio."

BY CADETS BATTSON AND CUNNINGTON

AS a result of our hospitality to the N.Z.S. Co. Cadets at the Gig Race, they offered us, in return, a trip on their Cadet Ship, T.S.M.V. *Otaio*, round to Cardiff from Liverpool. Thus, on 13th March, the Friday following the gig race, ten of the people in the "Conway" crews and two Cadets going into the N.Z.S. Co., left Llanfair P.G. Station bound for James Street Station in Liverpool.

We arrived in James Street at approximately 1600 hours, where we were met by two Cadets from the *Otaio*, who directed us to three cars standing outside the station. We arrived on the quayside in Canada Dock and obtained our first view of the *Otaio*. We had previously been told that she was in a terrible mess, due to her being involved in a hurricane of Force 12 winds in mid-Atlantic. However, she did not seem any the worse for her experience from where we stood on the quayside, looking up at her. The only obvious damage was to her derricks surrounding Nos. 1 and 2 hatches. We proceeded up the gangway where we were directed to our cabins amidships. We left our kit in the cabins and then one of the Cadet Captains gave us a short talk on what we were expected to do, after which we were given tea in the Cadets' Messroom. We then signed on as A.B.'s, collected our blankets, sheets, towels and soap and returned to our cabins where we were shown how to make our bunks. We were each given a watch and "station." The call to stations was to be at 2000, so we had free time until then.

Most of us devoted this free time to finding our way about the ship for future use. I was one of a party who went up to Nos. 1 and 2 hatches to survey the damage. The deck around No. 1 hatch had sunk nine inches after being hit by a huge wave. All the derricks were laid out along the deck by No. 2 hatch, the derrick housing aft of No. 1 hatch had all its front battered in and the "reels" on top had been smashed in and ripped off their mountings, the ladder up the Samson post had been ripped off and was dangling at a crazy angle in mid-air. The thing that amazed me most was why the heavy lift derrick had not fallen, and I wondered what would have happened had it done so. Going aft we found little damage, but were informed that a companionway had been smashed and the dinghies carried on the poop had also been smashed to matchwood by a huge wave. We found out later that the after peak store had been filled with water, and as it stood immediately above the steering engine it was dangerous to the extent that, had the door leading into the steering engine space from this after peak store broken, the ship could not have been controlled by rudder and would undoubtedly have been lost.

By the time we had made these discoveries, it was also time for "stations," and we all met on the mess

deck, where we were each detailed to "shadow" one of the N.Z.S. Co's Cadets who was working on our station. Then we proceeded either to the fore-castle head or the poop, where we prepared to let go. Two tugs took up position on the bows and two on her stern and thus we manoeuvred into a position ready to proceed stern first into the half-tide basin. This we did and moored up alongside the *Parthia* of the Cunard Line. We then took turns on watch for half-hour spells, going below for half-an-hour for a cup of cocoa and some toast, then relieving the others on the fore-castle head. Thus we stayed, with the *Port Llanneston* moored alongside us, and various other ships around the half-tide basin, all waiting for full tide. At approximately 0030 hours the ships started to move and soon it was our turn to leave. Once again we let go and were towed stern first through the locks and into the Mersey. The tugs saluted us on their sirens and we returned it as we gathered headway. Then all hands turned in except those on the 12-4 watch.

The 4-8 watch turned out at 0330. We dressed up as warmly as we could regardless of uniform and met in the mess-deck. We looked a pretty piebald bunch as we brewed cocoa and made toast. We paired up with our N.Z.S. "shadow" companions and left for our different watch-keeping posts. My companions and I were on the fore-castle head first. We made our way forward and were greeted by a blast of cold air as we reached the deck. Bent forward we proceeded along the deck against the fierce head wind. As we climbed on to the fore-castle head, my companion started whistling to let the watch-keepers we were relieving know we were coming, and would not be surprised at our sudden presence. We exchanged greetings when we arrived and we reliefs were told the lights that could be seen ahead, and then we were left alone. I watched all the lights. I could see from ahead to the port beam, while my companion watched the starboard bow. The wind was very strong and felt as if it was tearing our hair out by the roots. We came on watch as the *Otaio* was passing Llandudno or thereabouts. I could see the Puffin Island light at the north end of the Menai Strait and thought of all those lucky "Conway" Cadets tucked up in their bunks at Plas Newydd. I could also see the lights of Amlwch and the Skerries Light. When either of us sighted a new light we were to ring the bell the correct number of strikes, and yell out what we could see. There were no new lights on my side, but my companion had to ring the bell several times.

When we had passed Amlwch one of the bridge watch keepers came down and told us to move up to the monkey island, the open platform above the wheel-house, as it was becoming rougher. Up there the wind seemed even stronger, but there was a windscreen to protect us. We finished our first hour here and when we were relieved were put on "stand by" watch, which

we spent in the warmth of the mess-deck, eating toast and drinking cocoa and then dozing.

Our third hour was on "wheel" watch. We went up to the bridge and reported to the chief officer, who was on watch. On relieving the quartermasters we were told the course being steered and how many degrees the ship was likely to swing off course. Indicating the true course to the quartermaster was a Sperry "iron man"—a gyro compass repeater. The quartermaster kept his eyes glued on this to watch for any swing away from the course. While my companion was at the wheel, I was allowed to look around the bridge and chart room. The "True Motion Radar" set I found most interesting. This is a comparatively new invention, and the *Otaio* is the first N.Z.S. ship to be fitted with it. Its speciality is that, on the screen, not only an approaching vessel can be depicted, but also its wake, thus showing its direction. Also, a line representing *Otaio's* course can be brought on to the screen, and as she moves along it, so the centre of the revolving beam moves along it.

The chartroom was situated just aft of the bridge. It was furnished with chart tables for the watch-keeping officers, and one for the watch-keeping cadets. Then I had a turn at the wheel and was surprised how hard it was to keep the ship on course. I also found it hard work to keep turning the wheel.

Breakfast was at 0800 and immediately afterwards we turned in, feeling fit to drop after only about two hours' sleep, only to be dragged out again at 0930 for Chief Officer's Sunday Rounds. When we got up we found the ship pitching much more. We made our bunks as instructed and squared off our cabins, leaving them very neat and tidy.

During "rounds" we were shown the steering flat, which had a heavy smell of paint about it, making some of us feel rather groggy inside. After that we were shown the engine-room, which was scrupulously clean—we noticed there was no critical working speed for the engines. After being shown the generators and dynamos, we went down the shaft tunnel and so on to deck, via the after peak.

At this time it was drizzling and *Otaio* had reduced speed and the siren was sounding the fog signals; the wind was very strong, blowing large rollers.

By the time we had finished our tour of the engine-room it was dinner-time, but I, for one, did not feel like having any, so I turned straight in.

When I was awakened at 1530 the ship was running quite smoothly, so I guessed we had reached the Bristol Channel. I was halfway through a delicious tea when I was called to help bring in the log as I was on "stand by" watch. The log was not streamed over the stern but alongside and a grapnel on a heaving line was used to secure the rotator end, which was brought on deck. When we had finished this I went and had another tea. My only other watch-keeping duty after this was to take cups of tea to the watch-keepers on the bridge.

It was late afternoon when the ship had slackened speed considerably, the wind had dropped and the Welsh coast slipped by our port side. We passed three light vessels, and while approaching Barry we took a pilot on board. *Otaio* could not dock straight away owing to the tide, so she hung about off Barry. We could see the islands, Flat Holme and Steep Holme, in the middle of the Bristol Channel, and as it grew darker the lights of Burnham and Weston on the Somerset shore.

When it was nearly dark we headed in for Cardiff. As we did so a shore station called us up by morse and asked us who we were. At about 2000 we went to our stations and made ready the mooring and towing hawsers. At about 2030 we were taken in tow by tugs and when we arrived in the lock we had to wait for an hour or so for it to fill to the level of the basin. *Otaio* left the lock at about 2130 and passed some Greek and Panamanian ships laid up in the basin. She moored at about 2230, and we were all glad to be able to scrub off the filthy, black grease the wire mooring hawsers had left on our hands and turn in for a night's sleep not so interrupted as that of the night before.

The following morning we were up at 0630. "Turn to" was at 0730 and we were called up on deck aft to help top up the derricks and set the guys in place. After this was done we were shown how to coil down the wire from the winches. It was difficult at first, but using "French turns" we soon learnt the correct method. Then we all went down below to scrub off the grease, which had formed a thick, sticky covering over our hands. It took us some time and a lot of hard scrubbing, but at last we were clean, and then we went to the mess-deck where we had a hearty breakfast. After this, we returned to our cabins and scrubbed out and stripped our bunks, taking the kit we had been issued with back to the storeroom. At 1020 we cleaned into reefers and made our final preparations for leaving *Otaio*. The Captain then asked us all to come up to his quarters after we had had our lunch. Here we were asked to sit and he talked to us for some time about our future life. He told us that down in the galley there was a crate of soft drinks and a packed tea for our train journey. We thanked him for his hospitality and wished him goodbye, and proceeded to the gangway where we collected our luggage and stayed talking with Collick, an "Old Conway" until the cars arrived to take us to the station. The first party left and the rest followed half-an-hour later. We arrived at the station where we obtained our tickets through vouchers issued by *Otaio*. The train left at 1240 and we were extremely sorry to leave the ship.

Looking back on it, we all agree that the finest tribute paid to us by the Cadets of the *Otaio* was the words: "We couldn't have done without you." But we also agree that a greater tribute is due to the N.Z.S. Co. for giving us the privilege of a coastal voyage.

(Editor: A party of Cadets visited the *Otaio* in Liverpool on the 12th March, where they had a most enjoyable and instructive day. We have received a very well written account of the visit from Cadet N. P. Angle, but lack of space prohibits us from reproducing it.)