

BREADCRUMBS

By Bill Young

After about four months on the Kiwi Coast, I doubt that anyone was sorry we were about to sail deep-sea for home. We were on the last leg of a Double-Header, and believe me, we had really done some serious damage to our brain cells! The bottom of everybody's clothes locker was full of dhobi waiting to be done, and for at least the previous couple of weeks, we had been sifting through it to find the clothes that stank the least! The Suevic was berthed at Queens Wharf Auckland, and on the other side of the finger wharf was the Southern Cross, or perhaps it was the Northern Star? Shore leave was due to finish at 2100 hrs, so the entire crew went over to the Southern Cross, to meet old friends, make new ones, and get thoroughly pissed in the Pig and Whistle! Everybody knew that we wouldn't sail until at least a couple of hours after the end of shore leave, so we reckoned we had heaps of time to get rid of the last of our Kiwi money, and to work on tomorrow's hang-over! We were having a great time when we heard the first blast of the Suevic's whistle . . . time for another round. Who knew how much time elapsed before the second whistle was heard? We all bought our last round! Some time later, we heard three whistles indicating that the ship was reversing! Blimey, it was time to head back, and sharpish! There was a mass exodus of Suevic crew from the Pig and Whistle, and we half ran, half stumbled across the other side of the finger wharf to get on board. We all knew it would be terribly bad form to miss the ship, not to mention inconvenient! The two deck Officer Cadets were at the top of the gangway taking names and numbers. Some of the crew climbed over the rail of the foreward well deck, but I realised that it was already known who wasn't aboard so there really was no point in wasting our energy. Vic and I climbed the gangway, gave the required information to the two Cadets, and went into the mess-room to make a sarnie.

A few minutes later we were joined by one of the AB's who should have been forward at his 'station' to let go the ropes. Peter was just a tad under the weather and had decided that as he would be logged anyway, there wasn't much point in turning to. A few minutes later, the 2nd Mate arrived looking for Peter Payne to get him to 'turn to'. The 2nd was a mongrel, and was about as popular as syphilis with all who had the misfortune to know him. I myself had frequently served him his main meal after first having dug it out of the pantry Rosie! "There you are Payne, you know you are required on deck, get turned to". "Piss off", said Pete, swaying slightly as he attempted to cut a slice of bread from a fresh loaf. "Payne, this is a direct order, if you refuse to obey there will be serious consequences", retorted the 2nd. "If you don't piss off and leave me alone", said Pete, "I'll bloody job you. I've already said, I'm too pissed to turn to". Now, I realised that there was some deeply hidden animosity between these two, but at the time wasn't aware of what it was. Be that as it may, I also realised that Pete wasn't doing himself any favours right at this minute, though I was keen to see how it panned out! The 2nd Mate continued to harass Pete who steadfastly stood his ground, if somewhat shakily, and it was obvious even to me that Pete really wasn't in a fit condition to turn to safely anyway. The 2nd should have left it at that and dealt with it the following day. Our 2nd wasn't about to let it go though. He had another attempt at getting Pete to turn to, whereupon Pete picked up the new loaf of bread and shouted, "I bloody told you, I'm not f*****g turning to, now get the f**k outa my face". And with that, he proceeded to batter the hapless 2nd Mate severely about the head and shoulders with the loaf! Pieces of bread were falling off the loaf, and crumbs all over the shop. The 2nd was running around the mess-room with his hands above his head, trying to protect himself, Pete following as

best he could, waving the remains of the loaf like a blindfolded man trying to hit a piñata with a stick, and I was rolling around the deck, laughing so hard, I thought I'd lose a lung! The following morning, practically the entire crew were taking tea and tabnabs with the Captain, I think I was one of the last to receive my one day's pay fine, and one day's loss of pay. "Thank you Sir" said I. Peter Payne wasn't quite so fortunate. When I finally caught up with him in the mess-room he told me that he had been paid off, and was travelling home as DBS. He was also to pay something like a pound per day food and board while on the voyage home! It took us about six weeks to get back to London and as we entered the locks, the Metropolitan Police came aboard and arrested Pete, who had been charged with Assault and Battery! I never saw Pete again and assumed that his sea going career had ended there and then, but just a few months ago I was looking through the Auckland Branch list of members and saw a name I recognised. Dennis Ivil had been another AB that trip and as he isn't on the internet I wrote him a letter, and reminded him about several blokes from that trip, Peter Payne being but one. A couple of weeks later, Dennis wrote back informing me that not only did he know the whereabouts of another character from that trip, "Murph the Surf" one of the greasers, but he also knew the whereabouts of Peter Payne. It seems when Peter was arrested in London he went to court, receiving just a fine. The Seaman's Union went to bat on Pete's behalf, (the only time I ever heard of our union doing anything for a seaman) and won the case. It was, it seemed, illegal to be paid off while at sea, so not only was Pete accepted back onto the pool, he had his VNC and DBS discharges negated, and also received the six weeks pay he SHOULD have earned as well as being refunded the pound per day he had been forced to pay out for his travel home! Peter is still working on the ferries in Kiwi!

- Bill Young