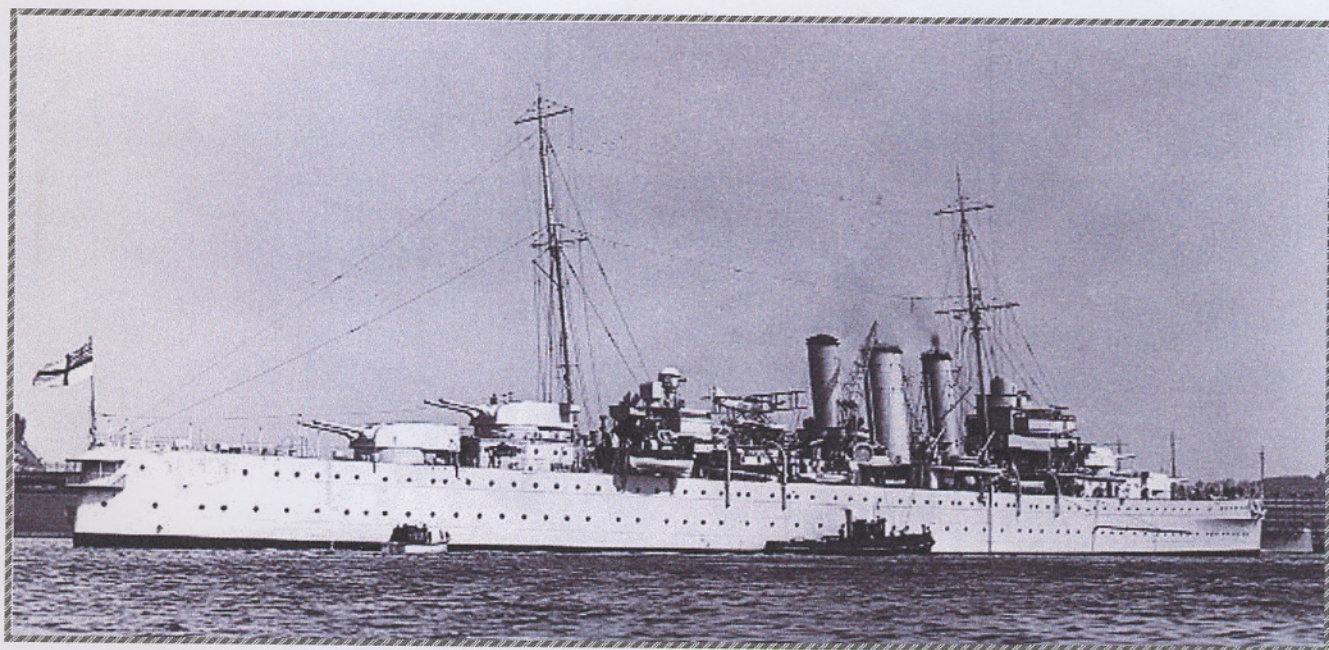


H.M.S. Dorsetshire

1930-1942



**A tribute to Chief Petty Officer John MacLeod
who served in H.M.S. Dorsetshire 1937-1940.**

Foreword.

By Ron Howell.

Chairman. H.M.S. Consort Association.

All of the following items were submitted by John MacLeod, one of our most senior and much respected Members, for inclusion in the twice yearly issues of the "Consort Times", the news magazine of the H.M.S. Consort Association. They consist of such a wealth of detail about the old Royal Navy that we have been loath to edit, condense or dilute them in any way. I have therefore been including them in instalments in the "Times" but have long felt that they deserve to be printed in total in such a way that John can give a copy to each of his children and grandchildren. Memories such as these should not be lost and with John's permission I would like to keep a complete copy for the H.M.S. Consort Association Archives and also forward a copy to the Imperial War Museum in London.

"The Long Commission" was first of several items which I received from John, they cover the time long before most of us were in the Service, in fact I believe that only Dougie Sayles, another of our Senior Members, could go back as far in time as John. I am of course open to correction so if you know any better, please let me know. I wish that I had the same memory for detail that both of these Members have shown in all their stories and I always look forward to their next instalments.. John is a very prolific writer and I always enjoy getting first look at his manuscripts. They remind me of my pre war days when I was a schoolboy living in Portsmouth and my father was serving in the Royal Navy, They are all hand written in a beautiful script which is rare today and are a pleasure to read in their original form.



John MacLeod, left, With John Brewer, Ron Howell and Dave Morgan

The Long Commission Chapter One.

By John MacLeod.

There were two islands leased to Britain by China, Hong Kong in the South and Wei Hai Wei in the North of that country. The latter island was barren and the Chinese/Mongolians obtained a living from the sea by fishing. The British Government authorised the building of a large canteen with the usual bars, billiard room etc, and a large gymnasium in which indoor sports could be held, i.e. boxing and athletics. Outdoors were sports fields for hockey and soccer and also a rifle range.

Every year the China Fleet assembled at Wei Hai Wei and took up strategic positions at anchor in the large bay between the islands and the Chinese mainland, the latter being occupied by Japanese forces. The Navy held it's Annual Regatta there plus other sports competitions, Soccer, Hockey, Boxing, Water Polo, and Small arms on the rifle range.

We also had a "High Speed Battle Target" which was towed by a Destroyer for main armament gun firing by the cruisers and destroyers. Aircraft from the Fleet Carriers towed drogues for the A.A. firings and in return Destroyers towed splash targets on which the F.A.A. could carry out bombing and gunfire runs.

It was four weeks of hectic activity within the Fleet and enjoyed by all because it was highly competitive which culminated in the top ship being awarded "The Cock of the Fleet", a large effigy of a cockerel. This was immediately hoisted to the mast head amid loud resounding cheers from the whole Fleet. Of course there was another more important award for that particular ship, a visit to an attractive port in another country. My ship, the County Class Cruiser, "Dorsetshire", won the Cock in 1938 and we were sent to Sydney in Australia to represent the Royal Navy at the Anzac Day celebrations, but that is another story.

When the Fleet was at Wei Hai Wei, Chinese/Mongolians men from ashore were allocated to each ship to be "Mess Boys". They would do all the mess chores including scrubbing out and polishing the mess tinned ware and bring Mess members back to the ship in their sampans and never expect payment.

Dorsetshire was the last ship to leave Wei Hai Wei when ~~the~~ it was handed back to China at the end of the lease in 1939. We had to be detailed to take the battle target in tow back to Hong Kong and as we slowly made steerage way, paying out the towing hawser astern, the Japanese army landed at the jetty where the mess boys had assembled to wave and cheer us on our way. The Japanese seized them and hung them by the neck on the arms of the lampposts at intervals along the jetty. On board the Dorsetshire the re-action of all my shipmates on the upper decks was such that I am unable to find words to describe it. It seemed that hundreds of normally placid Matelots had turned into a screeching mob with their faces contorted with abject rage, turned upwards towards the bridge and demanding that we go to action stations and with our main armament of four turrets of twin 8 inch guns, blast those Japanese off the Island. It didn't happen but that scene on board Dorsetshire has remained with me and others, I am sure, all of these 62 years. It was an introduction to the

bestiality of the Japanese forces which became known throughout the world following the infamous attack on Pearl Harbour.

Our passage southwards was uneventful until **3 minutes after midnight on 3rd. September 1939.** Royal Marine buglers sounded "Clear lower deck" followed by "All hands muster aft on the double". We all thought the tow had parted and in the dark the target had been lost but not so. The C.O., Captain (later Rear Admiral), Barry addressed us and told us that he had received a signal from Admiralty, repeated C in C Hong Kong, Admiral Sir Percy Noble K.G.B., informing us that Britain had declared war on Germany. As you can imagine there was a deathly silence only broken by the lapping of the sea against the ships side. The Captain continued and ordered the ship to be immediately changed from a peace time state to a full war state. He added "There will no return to our bunks or hammocks tonight. Officers report to the Wardroom"

Black hessian curtains were brought up from Naval stores and fitted around every upper deck and bridge structure screen door. Torpedomen fitted blue bulbs to all lamp fittings in gangways and compartments adjacent to doors. All portholes were closed and deadlights battened down. At 0500 all navigation lights were extinguished. Dorsetshire had, to all intents and purposes, ~~had~~ vanished at sea.

During the forenoon the torpedo dept. fitted warheads to all tin fish (torpedoes) with pistols armed with primers and detonators. All practice ammunition was removed from ready use lockers and live ammunition installed. Then pots of grey paint were issued to Parts of Ship and Gunners Party and all brightwork was painted over. Curiously enough no comment was made about the latter!!

In that state we arrived at Hong Kong, transferring the target to a tug before we sailed up harbour. During the four days in Hong Kong we took on fuel, water, extra stores and ammunition. Some of the base staff from H.M.S. Tamar were drafted aboard and became part of the ships company. Captain Barry was relieved by Captain (Pincher) Martin who, it was said, came from Captain of the P.T. School at Portsmouth. His belief~~fo~~ in physical fitness became very clear when he cleared lower deck and introduced himself to the ships company. He informed us of the "New Routine".

0600. All hands to muster in their part of ship and their presence checked by the Captain of the Top.

Dress Shorts and Gym Shoes.

No one excused.

Officers in similar rig on the QuarterDeck.

Royal Marine band would muster on X Gun Turret. They would play nautical music at a suitable pace for running. All men on the Starboard side would face aft and all men on the Port side would face forrard, both in a single file.

The Chief Gunners Mate would position himself on the Flag Deck facing aft and at the precise moment he would bring the Officers and Ships company to "Double mark Time" with the band ready to play. At the order "Forward" by the Chief the band would commence playing and everyone would double, in time to the music, ~~to the music round and~~ round the

upper deck *Three Times*. All this was fine in harbour but at sea in two watch and three watch systems it was not practicable. Of course weather conditions also played its part in the abandonment of the physical fitness programme as such, and life aboard returned to as normal conditions as possible in wartime.

Dorsetshire sailed from Hong Kong on the fifth and no one knew where we were bound for until the Captain opened his sealed orders when out of sight of land. Our orders were to proceed to Japan and patrol the southern entrance ~~to~~ of the Inland Sea. Apparently the German liner "Emden" was in Kobe and if she were to go to sea, our orders were to arrest and escort her to Hong Kong. After four days of utter boredom steaming and patrolling outside the three mile limit, our Captain, in discussion with his officers and heads of departments decided that our ship would enter the Inland Sea at night and confirm, or otherwise, that Emden was really in Kobe Harbour.

Captain Martin cleared lower deck and informed us of his plan and that he wanted the ship disguised as a merchant ship!! Well I won't give space here to all the raucous Naval remarks which were made after the Captain had left the assembly but I assure you there many and mostly unprintable. So the ship steamed well out of sight of land in preparation for the adventure that night. The centre funnel was blacked out by stretching black hessian between the forward and after ones. The 8 inch guns were elevated to staggered degrees and large blocks and tackles plus ropes lashed to the muzzles and draped along each barrel. We hoped that in the dark of night they would look like derricks as in merchant ships. All four twin A.A. mountings and multiple pom poms were covered completely with hessian and even the Walrus aircraft was blacked out in a similar fashion.

The Torpedomen placed groups of lights at strategic positions around the boat deck and upper deck to throw shadows to distort the outline of the ship. When the transformation was complete we all felt rather proud of our efforts but as we approached the entrance into the Inland Sea we were all uptight and being at action stations with lights blazing all over the ship and even a few portholes open, I think we all said a few prayers. However we sailed slowly into and around Kobe Bay with lookouts searching the area for the Emden but there was no sign of her. As we slowly turned around the bay small ships were passing on either side and we could see the faces looking up at us. Eventually we returned to the sea through the same way we had come in and finally passed the 3 mile limit. However the final act in this ploy was bit of a shock to all of us, a flotilla of Japanese destroyers sailed past us obviously heading onto into Kobe. They were so close we thought that they couldn't fail to see through our disguise. Our luck held out and we made it back to the open sea where we removed our make up and reverted to being H.M.S. Dorsetshire. I assume we sent a signal to C in C Hong Kong, breaking radio silence, but we were ordered back to Hong Kong the following day. This pleased all of us and we were looking forward to the China Fleet Club. We were to be disappointed on arrival though but that is another story.

To our surprise on arrival in Hong Kong we realised that we were the only cruiser left in the Far East and all Destroyers and Sloops had already been called back to the U.K. and into the war zone. So when we received our sailing orders four days after our return to Hong Kong, we were excited with the thought of, at last, returning home. We had been away for two and a half years, the usual duration of a commission on the Far East station. When Dorsetshire sailed for the last time from Hong Kong there was much sadness aboard because we

Matelots had learned to love that port more than any other over long periods of time. We were of course elated as we set sail for Singapore, for were we not on the first leg of our journey home?

There I end this first part of the story of a gallant ship, under the title of "The Long Commission, Chapter One".

The Long Commission. Chapter 2.

Continuing The Story of H.M.S. Dorsetshire.

When Dorsetshire was preparing for sea, even the "Side Party Girls" knew of our movements as they painted the Boot Topping around the ship and touched up rust marks elsewhere with Pusser's crabfat grey. They worked under the supervision of the Bosun's Party and I can remember the head girl, Ah Moy, telling us, "Yes, you go, you no come back. We no see you again". As she said goodbye to each member of the Bosun's Party, she had tears in her eyes as did her workmates, some of whom were her daughters.

The rumours were rife on the mess desks when Dorsetshire sailed for the last time from Hong Kong and they then became more confused as our speed was gradually increased when we were out of sight of land, eventually reaching 30 Knots. When the Captain had opened and read his sealed orders he cleared lower deck and told us that we were bound for Singapore at maximum speed where we would receive further orders.

Lookouts were doubled up and were warned to be extra vigilant, especially at night so that we could avoid being seen by altering course away on sighting another vessel. We were well aware of the native Junks fishing far out to sea and we hoped that they would show, at least, one bright light at night.

We covered the distance from Hong Kong to Singapore in just over two days, remaining there just long enough to fuel and water ship and take on fresh vegetables etc. When we sailed we kept a speed of 15 Knots through the straits of Malacca but once we cleared the north end of Sumatra we increased speed to 30 Knots. Fortunately we had enjoyed good weather all the way from Hong Kong with only a long swell to contend with and it seemed that this was going to continue on our voyage to Colombo in Ceylon. (Sri Lanka). However the vibration through the ship and the heat down below was uncomfortable to say the least.

The Torpedomen utilised all portable fans at the screen doors and internally at hatches leading down to the messdecks. The Seamen rigged up triatic stays between the foremast and the mainmast and hoist canvas wind chutes with their lower ends secured inside hatches above the boiler and engine rooms. The three funnels were so hot that the paint turned light brown in colour and flaked off eventually: and the steel deck around the base of the funnels could not be walked. Indeed hoses continually discharged water over the upper and boat decks in an effort to keep the temperature below under control.

We arrived at Colombo three days after leaving Singapore and again it was to take on fuel, water and provisions during our six hour stay. We sailed at night on a Westerly course but once clear of the Maldiv Islands, the course was altered to South West. Next morning the

Captain cleared lower deck and informed the ship's company that Dorsetshire was bound for Capetown and he dispelled all rumours about going home when he told us the reason for our epic voyage at high speed from Hong Kong.

His opening remarks were, "Dorsetshire is about to enter the War of the Atlantic". A German raider was creating havoc with allied shipping in the South Atlantic and had moved round the Cape of Good Hope into the Indian Ocean where they had sunk a British merchant ship off the East London, South Africa. In view of this we put into a port on the island of Mauritius and topped up with fuel and water and then continued to Capetown where we had our first meeting with the Lady in White who became a legend and was decorated by the Queen during the latter's visit to Capetown aboard the battleship "Vanguard" after the war had ended.

Dorsetshire had sailed nearly 8000 nautical miles in 13 days with only stops for fuel and water but the "Old Lady" was in a terrible shape on our arrival in Capetown. It was said that the ship had achieved 36 Knots, 4 Knots more than her laid down speed of 32 Knots but I cannot confirm this. There ^{WAS} no paint left on the three funnels and the paint on the bow and flare had all been washed off, so during the six hours in Capetown we repainted all areas as best we could in the limited time that we had.

On departure we set course of North West at 15 Knots, presumably to rendezvous with the cruisers Exeter, Achilles and Ajax. However that was not to be for when those stalwart ships engaged the enemy we were too far south to be of any assistance to them. The identity of the raider was revealed as the Pocket Battleship, Graf Spee. When the latter had received direct hits from Exeter, Achilles and Ajax, she turned to a South West course in an effort to break off the engagement. Dorsetshire was ordered by the Admiralty to turn on a westerly course to intercept the enemy, Graf Spee, but she reached Montevideo and temporary safety from the three cruisers pursuing her. On arrival off Montevideo, the Commodore ordered the Exeter to the Falkland Islands to "Lick her Wounds" which were horrific.

Dorsetshire eventually joined the other two cruisers and later the County Class cruiser, Cumberland joined also. We were steaming in line ahead at slow speed with all ships at action stations and all guns bearing on the target as the Graf Spee slowly put to sea next day. We watched the self destruction of that majestic ship in utter silence. There were no cheers from the four Royal Navy ships, the only sound was that of the sea birds as they soared around the ship.

The following day Cumberland departed to rejoin Force H from whence she had come earlier and Achilles and Ajax sailed into Montevideo, whilst Dorsetshire sailed up the River Plate to Buenos Aires where we berthed alongside. We were more than surprised to find that our berthing party were German sailors from the Graf Spee.

As our visit could be for only 24 hours in a neutral port, we sailed next day amid cheers from thousands of British Nationals on the jetty and rejoined Achilles and Ajax at sea. Shortly afterwards we were ^{ORDERED} to proceed to Port Stanley in the Falklands and assist the Exeter. However our orders were suddenly changed after approximately one and a half hours and we were ordered to turn 180 degrees and proceed at maximum speed to intercept a merchant ship leaving Rio De Janeiro. Next morning we launched our Walrus amphibious aircraft,

hopefully to spot this particular ship, the Gods must surely have been on our side for the Ldg Sea Air Gunner spotted the target some thirty miles ahead of us and reported back by radio. The pilot, Lt. "Crash" Parker decided to drop a couple of bombs ahead of the target to persuade the Captain to heave to. It succeeded, but it also encouraged the Captain to open the sea cocks and scuttle the ship, after lowering the boats, and abandoning the ship. They had hoped to get inside territorial waters where we would not have been able to pursue or capture them. However their efforts were in vain and Dorsetshire hove to between their boats and the 3 Mile Limit. A gangway was rigged and all personnel were brought on board under the watchful ^{eyes} of 6 armed Royal Marines.

The POWs were Germans and the name of their ship was "Wakama" which was a supply ship for the Graf Spee. Having made our report on this operation, we received again, orders to head for the Falklands and on our arrival at Port Stanley our Doctors and Sick Bay staff were transferred to the Exeter. They ~~then~~ found there was nothing for them to do aboard her since all her wounded had been transferred ashore. Those Falkland people had closed ranks and opened up their own homes as wards. Also our doctors had learned that three Argentine Navy doctors had been flown in to help take care of Exeter's wounded. The remains of the dead had been sewn up in canvas and taken out to sea aboard fishing vessels and buried at sea with full Naval Honours.

The Dorsetshire put working parties aboard to help clean up the ship and technical staff carried out repairs as best they could to the ships structure. "B" turret had received a direct hit by an eleven inch shell from Graf Spey and was blown apart. However, when Exeter sailed for the UK, no one would have guessed that "B" turret, looking as good as new, was no more than plywood panels, and two lower booms ~~as~~ masquerading as gun barrels.

Dorsetshire took on board the wounded from the "hospital wards" of Port Stanley and sailed as escort to Exeter until we met up with Force H, which consisted of H.M. Ships King George V, Ark Royal, and Cumberland, who took over as escorts for the passage to Devonport, the Exeter's Home Port. We manned our port side and cheered ourselves hoarse until she had taken up her station with her new escort group. We ^{then} altered course to the East and headed for Capetown.

After we had settled the German POWs into the Junior Rates recreation room under armed Royal Marine guards, three surprising and dramatic incidents occurred. The first one was when the German Captain was escorted to the bridge to meet our Captain, they discovered that they had met during the last months of the 1914/18 War. Apparently, our Captain was then a very young Midshipman serving on a ship which had captured a German Naval vessel the crew of which included the German Captain who was then the equivalent of a Sub. Lt.

The second incident occurred ~~happened~~ when the German Bosun requested to speak to our Commander and it was found that he spoke perfect English with a Scouse accent. He was married to an English woman who was at her home in Bootle with their three children

The third incident came to light when ~~there~~ a disturbance occurred in the POWs mess and a detachment of Royal Marines went in to quell it with trenching tool handles. When it was quiet once more, an investigation was carried out and this revealed that one POW had

suffered more injuries than the others and was found to be a member of the dreaded German Gestapo. He was removed and placed in a cell in the cable locker flat and there he remained until we reached Capetown, where he was handed over to the South African Military.

As we came alongside the docks in Capetown, "The Lady In White" standing on a bollard, was singing her heart out in a marvellous operatic voice – "Rule Britannia". It was the welcome to the Royal Navy to her country of South Africa.

Also on the dockside was a detachment of South Africa troops with three ton trucks waiting to take the German prisoners away to their camp. ^{THERE} ~~The~~ was also a fleet of ambulances for Exeter's wounded.

The German POWs disembarked first and formed up in two ranks under the command of the Scouse Bosun. As the German Captain was taking his leave of our Captain, the German Bosun brought his men to attention and then in a loud voice he addressed our Captain – "Sir, my men request the honour of carrying off the wounded from HMS Exeter". Captain Martin stepped onto the gangway and in a loud voice replied, "Granted Bosun". When the operation was completed the German crew assembled in two ranks, standing to attention then gave three rousing cheers led by their Bosun. Suddenly and spontaneously our ship's company returned the cheers as the POWs boarded their military transport. Even in the grim face of war, good shone through between sailors of different nations.

The following day, Dorsetshire sailed round to Simonstown Naval Dockyard and entered dry dock twenty four hours later for vital repairs to our engines, boilers, propellers and shafts. When the brow was in place the first to board was "Just Nuisance" who proved to be a wonderful Oppo to us all for the duration of our visit to South Africa.

After we had undocked, we put to sea and carried out speed trials which the Old Lady passed with flying colours. On completion we returned to Capetown for the last time. On the day of our departure it seemed that all the people of that great city had gathered in the dock area, prominent in front of them standing on a dais was "The Lady in White". As we let go the berthing wires she sang "Abide with Me" accompanied by the mass of people around her. It was very emotional and many of us matelots had tears in our eyes including myself. Finally as we slowly sailed out into the open sea she sang Gracie Fields own song, "Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye".

When the Captain opened his sealed orders he cleared lower deck and informed us that we were now on the last leg of our journey home. We docked in Devonport Naval Dockyard at Cold Store Wharf, the same berth from which we had departed in 1937. It was now 25th May 1940 and our "Long Commission" was complete.

John MacLeod.

Appendix to The Long Commission - H.M.S. Dorsetshire 1937 - 1940.

"Just Nuisance".

I have been asked to give an account of my experience and great pleasure when I met a dog, a very special dog, in Simonstown Naval Dockyard, South Africa.

When Dorsetshire arrived in Cape Town and completed the transfer to the South African Naval Authorities of the wounded from the Cruiser, H.M.S. Exeter and the P.O.W.s from the German supply ship, Wakama, she sailed round to Simonstown Naval Base where she was put into dry dock for much needed repairs to the engines, boilers and propeller shaft glands, following her voyage at high speed from Hong Kong to the Cape.

No sooner had the ship docked down than we were boarded ^{by a} dog, a Great Dane. The Royal Marine, Corporal of the Gangway and the Quartermaster valiantly tried to remove the dog from the ship but failed. The next person to cross the Brow was a Dockyard Ship Manager, who was responsible for the work to be carried out by the dockyard departments. On boarding the ship, he informed the Gangway Staff, "You won't get rid of that dog, his name is "Just Nuisance" and he boards every Naval ship which comes into this dry dock. He seems to be infatuated by Naval Personnel in uniform and loves to be in their company" All this information proved to be true and the only time that "Nuisance" was absent from the ship was at night but he returned by 0800 every morning in time for the Royal Marine Guard and Band to carry out the Colours Ceremony.

When Liberty Men were mustered at the Gangway by the Duty Petty Officer and were inspected by the Officer of the Day, "Nuisance" would sit down at the left of the two ranks of Liberty Men with his long tongue dangling from the side of his mouth, happy but alert to every order given by the Duty P.O. "Liberty Men, Left Turn, Quick March" was the signal for "Nuisance" to race over the Brow and on through the Dockyard gate and up the road leading to Simonstown Railway Station. He would wait on the platform until the Liberty Men arrived and were boarding the train. before racing up and down until he was called to a carriage where the door window had been lowered by the leather strap. "Nuisance" would race at high speed and bound through that window to the delight of both Sailors and Station Staff.

On arrival at Cape Town Station, the Sailors would disembark and move towards the Station Exit in their pairs or groups and "Nuisance" would excitedly run from group to group, hoping that one might accept his company.

The railway always put a train in a siding and that would be the first train out at 0500 next morning, bound for Simonstown. It was never known if "Nuisance" remained at Cape Town Station whilst the Sailors were elsewhere for some eight to ten hours, but when they eventually staggered back to the Station, "Nuisance" was there to meet them and even "guide" them back to the siding. It is known that on numerous occasions, he fastened his great jaws to the bell bottomed trouser leg of a straying Sailor and virtually dragged him to the train, to the raucous delight of less inebriated shipmates.

"Nuisance" eventually was accepted as a Member of the Ships Company and the fact was noted and recorded in the ship's Log. He was also rated Able Seaman by the Captain, but following his disgraceful behaviour in the Naval dockyard, (a fight with another dog), he was demoted to Ordinary Seaman. However he was soon re-instated to Able Seaman because of his exemplary behaviour over a short period.

Apparently "Nuisance" was based at the South African Naval Air Station a few miles from Simonstown and this is where he would spend his nights. In a dormitory of two tier bunks he had a billet in a bottom bunk in the Chief and Petty Officers accommodation. "Nuisance" was known to have a very special "oppo" at this base, a young Lieutenant Pilot, who when "the coast was clear", would take "Nuisance" up for a flight in a two seater plane, wearing the old type helmet and goggles. From a distance, when only the head could be seen, it seemed that there were two F.A.A. personnel aboard the Aircraft.

When on board ship, "A.B. Nuisance" knew that his place of duty was as a member of the Gangway Staff and therefore he was never known to "stray" around the ship and never, ever, went down below on the Messdecks. It goes without saying that he was well fed as the Gangway was close to the galley and the Cook on duty was his best "Oppo". "A.B. Nuisance" drafted himself on board and was accepted by many ships, (not all of them were Royal Naval ships), and his presence onboard was recorded in the their Log Books.

In the absence of ships, he would remain at his Shore base and when Libertymen were granted leave, they would travel to Cape Town by coach and "Nuisance" would accompany them. However on one occasion he jumped off the coach before it stopped completely, landed awkwardly and injured his spine. He later developed arthritis and being a large dog, walking was very painful until inevitably he could not stand up. Vets did everything possible but it was to no avail and it was a very, very sad day for us, his oppos, when we learned of his death.

The remainder of this story is a quotation from a book, written by a Chief Petty Officer at the F.A.A. Base in Cape Province on the life of "Able Seaman Just Nuisance" This book can be obtained from the Museum at Simonstown South Africa.

The Naval Funeral of Able Seaman Just Nuisance.

Naval Guard of Honour, Armed, Fired a Salute at Graveside.

In attendance there were over 300 Naval Officers and Other Ranks, all of whom filed past the open grave, covering "Nuisance" with a handful of soil, showing their love for him though he be only "A Dog".

One C.P.O was seen to remove a medal from his clasp of War Medals. It was his Distinguished Service Medal, (D.S.M), The C.P.O removed the ribbon from the medal and moving to "Nuisances" grave, he dropped the ribbon on top of his "Oppo". Later the C.P.O. was asked, "Why did you give up your D.S.M. ribbon to "Able Seaman Nuisance". His reply was - "'Nuisance had the ability, through his great love and friendship for the men in Blue Uniforms, to lift their morale after long periods in various war zones. He deserves a medal and recognition"



Statue Of Just Nuisance at Simonstown

Footnote by John MacLeod. In addition to the book on the life of "Nuisance", there is a bronze statue of him standing eight feet high on a plinth outside the main gate of the Naval Dockyard at Simonstown, South Africa. Also his life story is ~~also~~ recorded for posterity in Simonstown Museum. "**Able Seaman Just Nuisance, Dog**", did receive recognition.

S/M. John MacLeod. H.M.S. Consort Association.

My Life and Career In the Royal Navy.

By John MacLeod.

I was born in the Great Glen of Scotland through which the Caledonian Canal flows, in a small hamlet called Gairloch at the south end of Loch Lochy, which is one of three lochs that make up the canal.

At the age of four years part of my family moved to the Isle of Bute in the River Clyde estuary to a town named Rothesay. I was brought up there until I joined the Royal Navy at the age of fifteen and a half years and during those years I became a fairly good swimmer. During those years I worked for a boat hire firm as the boat keeper of twenty dinghies under oars. I learned how to handle an oar properly and later became coxswain of a local racing-eight crew. We won the Clyde Regatta held in Rothesay Bay two years in succession and I was presented with a silver oar. Swimming and oarsmanship were therefore an asset for me in my Naval training at St Vincent where during 1936 I qualified as a lifesaver and was given the Bronze Medal and I was also presented with the Bronze Medal for Style Oarsman.

My first ship was the Royal Sovereign, a battleship of the First Battle Squadron, Home Fleet, the flagship of which was the Royal Oak. The Boy's Messdeck was the 6" Gun Battery, Port side, a cold and damp area, especially when we ploughed our way through the Bay of Biscay at ten knots and a force 9 situation. We were detailed as lookouts on the foremast, four at a time for one hour, a hair-raising experience I can assure you, never to be forgotten. Two ships lost a seaboat each, torn away from the davit heads leaving the latter twisted and useless.

When we arrived at the Straits of Gibraltar the Squadron broke up and the Royal Sovereign steamed on to the island of Tenerife. I developed appendicitis and was put ashore into a small cottage hospital with only two wards, a General Ward and one for Infectious Diseases and for some reason I was bedded down in the latter. When the Consulting Surgeon arrived to examine me he was very displeased, resulting in a rapid draft into the General Ward after a bath in anti bug solution. My bed was right in the bay window of the ward from where I had a good view of the foreshore and the Royal Sovereign at anchor.

I had my operation that night and remained in hospital for three weeks, strict bed routine. Fortunately three of the nurses were from the U.K., two English and one Scot. However I was a bit concerned one morning to find that my ship had sailed. At the first opportunity I had words with the Consulting Surgeon, a Spaniard, and with the help of the nurse on duty, I was informed that a British ship Cargo/Passenger vessel, was calling at Tenerife the following week. Arrangements would be made for me to be transferred to that ship for passage to Gibraltar where it was hoped I could rejoin my ship.

I fully expected that I would be an up patient by then but it was not so. When my transport arrived, I was moved by stretcher and ambulance from the hospital, down to the jetty and placed across the thwarts of the ship's lifeboat. On arrival at the ship the boat was hoisted to a position level with the Upper deck and I was lifted on board and placed in a cabin in the bridge superstructure. Almost immediately a ships Officer and an orderly visited me and after asking many questions and an examination, a dossier was completed which I had to sign. I assumed that they were the ships medical staff but was informed by the ship's baker that they were the Radio Officer and the Captain's Steward.

The Bakehouse was close to my cabin and the aroma of freshly Baked Bread awakened me every morning. I was delighted when the Baker introduced the routine of, "One freshly baked roll, dripping with butter, and one large mug of sweet tea to my cabin every morning". I was well looked after, having my meals brought to be by the Captain's Steward. Every morning, after breakfast, the Radio Officer visited me and took my temperature and pulse. He, finally, checked my dressing on the operation wound, and renewed it when necessary.

There were twelve passengers onboard and all obviously aware that a young Naval person was onboard as a patient. When we sailed from Tenerife, we called at Las Palmas (Gran Canaria) and of course, the passengers were allowed ashore for a few hours. On their return to the ship, they brought me flowers and numerous types of fruit; much of which I gave to the Baker.

We visited Agadir and Casablanca on the west coast of Africa; before reaching Gibraltar, where, with much relief, I saw the Royal Sovereign alongside the South Mole. As the

Merchant Ship anchored in Algeciras Bay a Naval pinnacle came alongside. I was transferred to the Naval pinnacle and taken to the Royal Sovereign. There I was placed in the Sick Bay and remained there as an up patient for a further seven days. Eventually I was released to "Light Duties"

Now, I am sure that some of my readers will have raised their eyebrows and look a bit quizzical as they read this narrative; just as others have done when told this story. However I can assure you that, what is now a simple Appendectomy was; in 1937; considered an almost major operation. I have a scar in my right groin, eight inches long, to prove it. In later years; when I have had other operations in Service and Civilian hospitals, the Surgeons have asked me the same question – "What on earth is that scar"?

S/M. John MacLeod

The Greatest Naval Scene I Have ever Witnessed.

The Assembly of the following units of the Royal Navy in 1937.

The Home Fleet

The South African Squadron.

The Mediterranean Fleet.

The West Indies Fleet.

As we, the First Battle Squadron of the Home Fleet consisting of H.M. Ships Royal Oak, Ramillies, Resolution. Royal Sovereign and Revenge; sailed from Gibraltar and turned westward into the Straits; the Battle Squadron, of the Mediterranean Fleet, consisting of HM Ships, Hood, Repulse, and Renown; sailed passed us at high speed, like three destroyers.

During that day, we were joined by other units:- HM Ships Nelson. Rodney. Iron Duke Warspite, Barham and Queen Elizabeth. In addition, the Aircraft Carriers, Glorious, Courageous, Illustrious, Indomitable, Indefatigable, Theseus and Argus joined us; plus many more ships which I cannot bring to mind. Then came the Heavy Cruisers, Light Cruisers and Destroyers, Minesweepers, Sloops, Submarines, Depot Ships and Royal Fleet Auxiliaries, all sailing on a southerly course. Suddenly it seemed that all these ships were intent on creating "SHAPE" until finally it was achieved.

With excellent visibility and calm seas, we could see Destroyers all around the horizon at a range of approximately twenty miles. Inside that screen were four columns of Battleships and Battle Cruisers, and astern of them were four columns of Aircraft Carriers, followed by four columns of Heavy Cruisers. All of these vessels were encompassed by a screen of Light Cruisers, and well astern were the Submarine Depot Ships and RFAs, made up of Ammunition Ships, Store Ships and Oil Tankers.

The Fleet sailed on in this formation throughout the night and, as you can imagine; there was much to talk about on the mess-deck. One important point was raised; it seemed that no

A CONSORT IN NORWAY.



S/M John MacLeod, (The Buffer), has not been in the best of health in recent times, because of this, he has been forced to miss out on two consecutive Annual Reunions. That didn't go down at all well with John, especially as he is proud to be one of the 14 Founder members who gathered at the Devonport Fleet Club on that historic day in September 1992. We are delighted to report that things have improved during recent weeks, and John is very, very hopeful indeed of making it to Babbacombe for our 10th Anniversary Reunion. Prayers are plentiful and fingers crossed.

Last year he even managed a trip to Norway to visit his son and family, and a very eventful trip it proved to be. In order to avoid 'Airport Hassle' he travelled by train and ferry, and though the U.K. train journey was something of a nightmare, the Norwegian ferry from Newcastle to Kristiansand was likened to a luxury pleasure cruise, which partly compensated for what had gone before. As well as enjoying the superb comfort he equally enjoyed the experience of being at sea once again and, on top of that he even managed to bump into an old shipmate from the time he was aboard the minesweeper, HMS Clacton.

One of John's most treasured memories of his time in Norway, centres on the day his small Grandson Kevin arrived home from school, excitedly greeting his beloved Granddad, before launching himself into a long narrative in the language of his home country, that was

one on the lower deck had prior knowledge of this situation; and of course the question, "WHY"? was asked many times; but no answers were forthcoming.

However, we were all in for a big surprise next day when around 1000 hours; another large Fleet was sighted sailing towards us. It was comprised of a similar formation of ships and for the first time in my Naval career; I was aware of the 'terms' "Red and Blue Fleets."

"Daily Orders" had stipulated the "Dress of the Day" to be No2s, Blue serge suits, Blue collars and Lanyards; so we were ready when the order was broadcast; "MAN SHIP".

When both Fleets sailed through the others columns; it was awesome. I bet the Chief Quartermasters on board those massive ships were sweating buckets in their efforts to maintain "Station". No Bugle calls; no cheering; only the shrill sound of three Bosun's Mates positioned in each wing of the bridge as they piped the "Alert" and then the "Carry on" on their Bosun's Calls; and the splash of the bow-wave on the ship's side. If my memory serves me right, that majestic manoeuvre was completed in just two hours and the seamanship and conning was superb.

There were no photographs of the "Event", but Admiralty Artists completed an immense picture with every ship in their exact position and its name printed underneath. I believe that, photographed and scaled down copies; were placed in Maritime Museums in London and Naval Ports.

Within twentyfour hours all ships had dispersed; and the 1st Battle Squadron of the Home Fleet was on a northerly course; to eventually disperse to their Home Ports.

When the Royal Sovereign arrived at Plymouth; the Boys Division transferred to the Revenge. Within a week we were at sea again on a Spring Cruise around Scotland, which turned out to be quite an experience for me personally. But that is another story.

S/M. John MacLeod.