

Sailor's Luck (Annotated)

At Sea & Ashore in Peace & War

PART B: 1943 to 1960

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Chapter 9: Combined Operations, 1943-4..... | 2 |
| Chapter 10: My First Command, HMS Bigbury Bay, 1945-7 | 14 |
| Chapter 11: Lieutenant Commander, HMS Seagull, 1947-9 | 27 |
| Chapter 12: New Zealand, HMNZS Lachlan, 1949-51 | 31 |
| Chapter 12: Lieutenant Commander (& CO), HMS Franklin, 1952 and HMS Scott, 1953 | 39 |
| Chapter 13: Commander, Admiralty Hydrographic Department, Cricklewood, 1954-6..... | 46 |
| Chapter 14: Commander, HMS Owen (Indian Ocean Deployments), 1956-8 | 49 |
| Chapter 15: The Citadel, Admiralty, 1958-60 and HMS Owen (Atlantic Deployment), 1960-61 | 60 |

Chapter 9: Combined Operations, 1943-4

I listened with amazement to the tale that Lyne told me. The previous autumn, a month or two before the Allies invaded Vichy-held Algeria, he and a military colleague had been taken by submarine to a pre-arranged spot just off the Algerian coast. From here, under cover of darkness, they had paddled ashore in a collapsible canoe, their purpose being to reconnoitre and gather intelligence concerning the composition and gradients of the beaches, the exits from them, and details of their fortification. After completing their night's work, they were to return to a previously planned rendezvous with the submarine, which had meanwhile remained submerged on the sea-bed.

During the night a gale blew up and on their return passage they were blown too far off course to make the rendezvous. By daybreak the submarine had had to withdraw and their canoe had been swamped, leaving them drifting helpless and in danger of drowning. Picked up by a fishing trawler, they were taken to Algiers, where they were promptly arrested. They tried to pass themselves off as ditched aircrew, but though they had managed to discard all documents and incriminating evidence, the Vichy-French authorities remained suspicious. Possessing, as they did, detailed knowledge of the invasion plans, they were, of course, greatly at risk from intensive interrogation and possibly even of torture. Eventually they were freed from their cells by the Allied invasion force in the brilliant operation code-named 'Torch', which was the first amphibious assault of the War and forerunner of the Second Front. How easily the capture of our two young officers might have doomed it to failure!

'Well,' concluded Lyne, 'that's why I'm relieving you and returning to General Service. In a way we're doing a swap, because you're required to take my place in Combined Ops.' When I protested that I didn't want to be relieved, he reminded me that some time before, when I had been itching to become more directly involved in the war, I had responded to a call for 'Volunteers for Hazardous Service'. Though I had subsequently forgotten this, my then C.O. had evidently forwarded my application and this was the result!

Hoist with my own petard, and though sorry to give up a job in which I had been happy and had had some success, the only course open to me was to obey orders and report to Combined Operations Headquarters in London. Here I was to ask for a Lieutenant-Commander N.C. Wilmott, D.S.O., R.N., who would brief me on what lay in store.

Nigel Wilmott was a remarkable man. He had been Fleet Navigating Officer under Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean Fleet. At a time when tentative plans were under discussion for an assault on the Italian-held island of Rhodes, Wilmott had persuaded the C-in-C to allow him to swim ashore by night from a submarine and explore the gradients and composition of the beaches on which the attackers would have to land. The information he gained proved of crucial importance and the success of this venture led to a recognition of the obvious value of such reconnaissance operations. Drawing on his own experience, Wilmott obtained permission to train up other units to perform similar functions. This led to the creation of small, highly specialised, clandestine reconnaissance units known as COPPs. (The initials stood for Combined Operations Pilotage Parties, which reflected their secondary role. Their primary one was Beach Reconnaissance, but any reference to that in their abbreviated title would have compromised security).

Wilmott was appointed to set up and command a COPP Training Establishment at Sandy Point, Hayling Island, in Chichester Harbour. He had selected me to be trained as Senior Officer of one of the first COPPs to go through the course, telling me first to take three weeks' leave and then to report to his Base in the Yacht Club buildings at Sandy Point.

By the time we assembled at Hayling Island, Wilmott had got together a small staff of instructors, both naval and army officers, each of whom had had operational experience in the type of work we were to be trained for. He had also acquired an impressive array of special equipment, much of which he had developed himself: waterproof swim-suits, collapsible canoes (folbots) designed to go through the torpedo hatch of a submarine, infra-red homing devices, under-water writing tablets, pocket lead-lines, beach-measuring lines, waterproof watches, night-reading compasses, explosives, revolvers, stilettos and 'blood-chits'. The Yacht Club itself had been converted into a workmanlike school with classrooms, 2-berth cabins, store-rooms, galley, mess-rooms etc. Wilmott ran a pretty 'taut ship', with few formalities and just sufficient discipline for a highly motivated group of trainees.

Three new COPPs were to be formed, Nos. 5, 6 and 7, and I was to be Senior Officer (S/COPP) of No.7. Each COPP had a total strength of eight: the S/COPP or C.O., a naval officer as principal assistant (A/COPP), an army officer of the Royal Engineers (E/COPP), a naval officer for administration, store-keeping and maintenance (M/COPP), and a junior naval officer to help the M/COPP, (AM/COPP). Two naval ratings and one R.E. soldier were added for general duties, canoe-paddling etc.

My A/COPP was Lieutenant J.D.R. McLean R.N.VR. who, I noticed, was wearing the Croix de Guerre. From our first meeting we seemed to take to one another easily and naturally and after a time he suggested that we should use our Christian names. For reasons of good order and discipline I felt that this would amount to over-familiarity, and then discovered that his Christian name, though pronounced 'Rory', was spelt 'Ruari'. 'Good Lord!' I exclaimed, and left it at that. Nevertheless, Ruari was destined to have a profound influence on my life thereafter.

My E/COPP, Captain Bill Lucas, R.E., was an intense and dedicated young man with a slight stammer. An overt Christian, he was nevertheless fearless, resolute, filled with zeal in a righteous cause and endowed with a nice sense of humour.

[I think my father was impressed by Bill Lucas's strong Christian faith...]

Norman Jennings, my M/COPP, was very different. Rather older than the rest, he had been a Savile Row tailor in civilian life. He had a pleasant, easy-going personality, was conscientious and meticulous in his duties, and had no heroic ambitions whatever. His assistant (AM/COPP), Midshipman Peter Gimson, was a rotund, genial and rather cheeky youth, with bags of 'go'. All in all we made a promising team with a keen and willing spirit.

We were classed as Commandos and since much of our training was on Commando lines, and since we wore a modified form of the Commando uniform, we felt ourselves to be members of that prestigious Corps. We learnt the virtues of stealth and surprise, the skills of self-sufficiency and survival, the techniques of under-cover sabotage, and how to kill an enemy in silence - with our hands, with a piece of wire, or with a dagger.



Officers of COPP 7:

Left to right: Norman Jennings, Ruari McLea, the author and Bill Lucas, 1943.

Most of our training at Sandy Point, however, was in nocturnal canoe work, in the course of which, incidentally, we strengthened our arm muscles by much paddling. The canoes, made of canvas and wood, would normally be paddled by two men, the officer who was to swim ashore and an assistant paddler to take charge of the canoe during his absence. We would make prolonged trips both in harbour and out in the open sea, swimming to beaches, measuring their gradients and testing their varying compositions, and also practising the infra-red homing technique. We became fairly expert at drawing views of the land at night from the sea, as it would be seen by officers or coxswains of landing craft approaching the coast and needing guidance from landmarks to reach a particular beach.

In the course of our training we made two visits to Western Scotland, one for general 'toughening up', the other for training with a submarine. We practised the complete operation cycle we would have to use, bringing up the two canoes through the torpedo hatch, launching them with their occupants from the for'ard hydroplanes, submerging for several hours while they were away on their missions, re-surfacing with a low profile at the pre-arranged time, and homing the canoes back with an infra-red transmitter.

It was while we were in Scotland that Ruari McLean returned from a short spell of leave with the news that he had become engaged. He asked me to be his best man and after some initial hesitation I agreed, influenced in this, I must admit, by a photograph of the bride's sister, whom I considered far more attractive than the bride herself, and who was to be the chief bridesmaid.

In June I was informed that COPP 7 was to be used in the Mediterranean prior to the long-awaited 'Second Front', and plans were drawn up and arrangements made for our journey to North Africa. We were due to sail from Liverpool and, by coincidence, Mary Carlisle, the girl who was to be chief bridesmaid at the forthcoming wedding, was working there as a Wren. To Ruari's and my frustration, however, we were prevented, for security reasons, from seeing her and all I could do was to write to her about the wedding arrangements, leaving the letter to be posted ashore after our departure.

This was the time when the invasion of Sicily was imminent and we were actually sent to North Africa in the hope that we might play our part in this. However, on arrival in North Africa, we found that no one was expecting us or had any plans to use us. After reporting this to COPP Headquarters, I received a reply to my signal saying simply: 'Proceed to India'.

This was a surprise but at the same time an exciting challenge. I had to use my own initiative in planning what was a major transfer of personnel and equipment to a completely different theatre of war, and one in which no COPP party had operated before. However, with the help of the Staff Officer (Movements), we were able to 'hitch a lift' on the battleship H.M.S. Barham as far as Alexandria. The only event of significance on the voyage was a highly embarrassing episode in which one of my sailors accidentally shot one of Barham's senior ratings. He had been practising loading and unloading his revolver when it went off, striking a Chief Petty Officer in the buttocks. Barham's Commander was naturally furious -as were we -and there was a certain coolness until we had disembarked at Alexandria.

Our COPP party encamped on the outskirts of the city while Bill Lucas and myself went ahead to India by plane to arrange where we were to be based. After some initial difficulty, we made contact with Admiral Miles, the Senior Officer, 'Force C' in Old Delhi. 'He,' we were told, 'is responsible for fighting the Japanese.' Until we arrived, however, he had been confined to planning for our eventual invasion of Japanese-held territories. He had had no operational personnel at his disposal.

The idea of reconnoitring beaches in advance of an invasion had hitherto hardly occurred to Admiral Miles and his staff, but once they understood what we could do, they embraced us with enthusiasm, giving us all the encouragement and support that we could wish for. They invited me to select a suitable base from which to train and operate and allowed Bill Lucas and me to comb through the charts of India's east coast. Eventually we fixed upon a place called Coconada, about a hundred miles south-west of

Vizagapatam and some three hundred miles north of Madras. From the details on the chart we considered it promising and resolved to take a closer look at it. On arrival we found that the only two European residents were the Port Officer and the Bank Manager, but both proved eager to help. The port and harbour facilities were to our liking and we were offered the exclusive use of a large warehouse for our stores and equipment. The Bank Manager

then offered to let to us a large and quite palatial two-storey bungalow set in its own spacious grounds and with outbuildings. This was to be our residence and headquarters.

By about the end of August our whole party, together with a mountain of equipment, had joined us, and from then on we entered upon a period of intensive night exercises along the coast, simulating as far as possible the conditions we would be likely to encounter in real operations.

In October we were given our first real assignment and Bill and I were summoned to Delhi for briefing. The plan was for an amphibious assault on the island of Akyab and we were required to reconnoitre the beaches, their gradients, exits and defences, and then prepare view-sketches of their off-shore aspects. Several miles out, and guarding the seaward approaches to Akyab, was a small islet (with a disused lighthouse) called Oyster Island and it was vital to establish whether or not it was held by the Japanese. This, then, was to be our first objective.

We chose a moonless period for the operation and, since conditions off the Burmese coast were unsuitable for submarines, we secured the use of an M.L. as our 'carrier' in conjunction with one of our own L.C.Ps. The M.L. joined us at Coconada and proceeded to Calcutta to liaise with Force 136, a secret and somewhat eccentric organization, which nevertheless did all they could to help us and provided us with valuable information as to conditions on the Burma coast and enemy dispositions in the Akyab area. They also supplied us with a crate of carrier pigeons and, on our departure, pressed into our hands a bottle of pills inscribed: 'Instantaneous Death Tablets: To be Taken with Discretion'!

Next evening, as the light was fading, we pushed on southward, with the L.C.P. in tow, to Oyster Island. My plan was to carry out a 'reconnaissance-in-force' with half a dozen of our party creeping forward across the islet in extended line abreast. I impressed on each man the importance of moving forward together and preserving the line. It was a starlit night and we could just see the man next to us. We were to open fire without hesitation on any person encountered during the advance. I was in the centre of the line and controlling the pace of our sweep, which was slow and deliberate. We stopped at frequent intervals to accustom our eyes to the darkness and to take in the low grassy features ahead, any one of which might be concealing a Japanese defensive patrol.

At one stop, about half-way across, I was sure I saw a movement about ten yards ahead and to my left. I froze and stared hard in that direction. There was certainly something there. It looked like a man's head. Was it staring at me or was that my imagination? All was silent - and motionless. 'It must be a Jap soldier,' I thought. I cocked my revolver. I had never killed anyone in my life and my heart was thumping in my chest as slowly and silently I took aim. 'Better safe than sorry,' I thought to myself as my finger curled round the trigger. Then suddenly the dark shape turned and slowly faced me. It was a white face without a cap. 'My God!' I hissed, 'You bloody idiot!' Such was my fury and the sudden relief of pent-up tension within me that I was actually shaking. I had recognised my red-haired Leading Seaman, who had been positioned on my left. He had gone well ahead of our line abreast and had been within a split second of being shot. In a loud whisper I gave him the fiercest tongue-lashing of his life. Had I shot him, I dread to think what the consequences would have been for myself and for the entire operation.

We continued the sweep and found nothing. Oyster Island was unoccupied. Returning to our canoes, we paddled back to the M.L. Our first night's work had been a positive success - but oh how nearly it had ended in ghastly catastrophe!

[Once again, my father's Guardian Angel was at work...]

The following night we moved in upon the beaches of Akyab. We took the ship, completely darkened, to within about two miles of the shore and launched our two canoes. Ruari and I were in the first and our task was to do the beach-work. The second was manned by Bill Lucas and his R.E. paddler. He was to investigate the exits and defences. It was a calm night with only starlight to guide us, and as we came within a cable or so of the beach, Bill and I slithered into the water and started swimming steadily towards it, trailing clouds of blue-green shark repellent as we did so. Meanwhile Ruari and the sapper paddled their canoes out another cable or two and anchored them well outside visibility distance from the shore. There they settled down to wait for us.

We arrived on the beach without incident and checked our waterproof watches against one another before inching away on our separate reconnaissance tasks. Mine was to measure four gradient lines, spaced about 30 yards apart. I was equipped with two lines, a distance-line, with spike attached, to measure distances from land to sea and a lead-line to measure depths. I would drive the spike into the coarse sand of the beach and then crawl backwards into the surf unwinding the distance-line as I went. Then at a measured ten yards I would lower my lead-line and measure the depth of water, check the time from my illuminated wrist-watch, and write down my findings on the special white tablet strapped to my arm. Once through the surf, I would swim on my back, unreeling the line until I felt two knots marking the twenty-yard distance. Then I would take a further sounding with my lead-line, and so on. I would then swim back inshore, move the spike some 30 yards further along the beach, and repeat the whole process for my next gradient line.

Quite apart from the ever-present possibility of being discovered by Japs, throughout the whole time-consuming process I had to be constantly on the alert for sharks or possible landmines, and all the time I was being battered relentlessly by the surf. I had completed several lines and was taking a final sounding in deep water when I became aware that my lead-line had entangled itself both round my legs and round my distance-line, preventing me from swimming properly. As I kicked to keep my head above water, I became more and more entangled and found myself, despite all my efforts, gradually being dragged under. In desperation I switched on my water-proof torch and held it above my head, sweeping its blue light out to sea in the direction of the canoes. Finally I sank beneath the surface and lost consciousness. I was all but drowning.

The next thing I knew was that I was being hauled across the canvas fore-part of Ruari's canoe, coughing, retching and 'bellowing like a water-buffalo giving birth' (to use his description!), as I sought to expel gallons of salt water from my lungs. Ruari had seen my blue torch flash and paddled towards its last sighting. Finding no sign of me, he had noticed a bluish glow under water and had realised that it was my torch still attached to my belt and still shining beneath the surface. He had grabbed me by whatever he could lay hold of and hauled me out. It was a very close shave. Another minute and I would have 'had it'.

[I shudder to think what would have happened if my father had perished – he would not have been my father! So, would I have then never existed? Ephesians Chapter 1 states that ‘God chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him (God)’. This is a profound mystery, and I can only think that God must have ordained ‘before the foundation of the world’ that my father would survive, to become my earthly father, and thus to fulfil God’s purposes in choosing me to be blameless (in Christ) before Him. Difficult theology – but easier to say, once again, that my father’s Guardian Angel was once more at work, saving him from certain death...]

A further night's work was needed, so the following night we crept back to continue the operation, except that this time Ruari would be doing the swimming and gradient work while I did the paddling. Bill Lucas, as the only R.E. officer, would again have to work on the defences and exits. Apart from an R.A.F. air-raid on Akyab itself, all went as planned, though we were far from pleased to see enemy searchlights and flares, which seemed to light up the whole landscape and made us feel horribly exposed. Afterwards, with no sign of the M.L. at the RIV, we had to fall back on our own L.C.P. Heading north till daybreak, I then closed the land (risking enemy occupation) to make faster progress through sheltered channels along the coast. At full speed all day, we managed to reach base at Chittagong just before nightfall.

That autumn two more COPPs joined us at Coconada, so that by the end of the year we had become quite an establishment. About the end of December a long signal in cypher arrived which I asked Ruari to help me to de-cypher. It proved to be a eulogy on our recent operations and conduct and went on to congratulate Naval Party 735 'on the award of the Distinguished Service Cross to Lieutenant J.D.R. McLean, R.N.V.R. (delight and surprise on both our faces and more than a touch of envy on mine!) ... and to ... (we had to de-cypher each word separately) Lieutenant G.P.D. Hall, R.N (euphoria now on both sides) ... for courage and determination during clandestine operations in the Far East.' We could hardly believe it! It was fantastic, incredible, marvellous. That evening we had quite a celebration as the whole establishment rejoiced with us.

One aspect of our training which had been largely ignored, and about which we felt increasingly concerned after the Akyab episode, was that of Jungle Warfare: the ability to move, fight and survive in the tropical rain forests of South East Asia. Had we been marooned or stranded on one of those Burmese beaches, our chances of getting back would have been minimal. We therefore embarked on an intensive programme of exercises in the thickest Indian jungles we could find. On the first of these exercises we very nearly lost ourselves completely, only finding our way back to base by discarding compass-work and following topographical features such as valleys, rivers and streams.

On the second exercise we traveled in our own convoy of trucks and lorries to a spot somewhere in central India. We were armed to the teeth with rifles, sten-guns and explosives (with a view to bagging big game), but we had hardly commenced when I suddenly fell ill with what proved to be a severe bout of jaundice. I can just remember handing over command to Bill Lucas before being bundled into the back of a truck and removed from the scene.

By this time (early 1944) Lord Louis Mountbatten had been appointed Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia, and had established his H.Q. at New Delhi. From here he

moved his headquarters to Ceylon and as part of the general move, I received orders to transfer the whole of our establishment there and to select a suitable base for it as soon as practicable. It was agreed with the Staff at Delhi that I should look for a base that would be suitable not only for our own COPP establishment, but for a considerably larger force of Army and Royal Marine Commandos.

I had now an urgent need to get to Ceylon and for this I would need a Priority Air Movement Order from the Transport Authority. Anything less would have meant hanging around for days on end. We decided to 'pull a fast one' on the Transport people. We rang them up and told them that a Priority Movement Order was required for Captain Lucas and Lieutenant Hall, Royal Navy - 'and this is Captain Lucas speaking'. Captains, R.N. were pretty thin on the ground in India, and the response was predictable. 'Yes, sir - of course, sir. We'll have the papers round to you this evening.' The 'ploy' had worked and, true to their word, the Movement Order reached us at our hotel soon afterwards. We had been accorded the highest priority in the book! Next morning when we arrived at the airfield, we found that a Brigadier, no less, and his A.D.C. were having to wait for a later plane while we boarded one that was just departing. We had supplanted them and they looked livid. I must admit to feeling both smug and rather guilty!

We had already decided, from a close study of Admiralty charts, where we should concentrate our reconnaissance, and after a visit to the Staff of the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, we were granted all that we needed for our immediate purpose. We then departed for the Kayts Peninsula, the north-western tip of Ceylon, which we had already fixed upon as the most promising location.

The charts had shown a wide stretch of sheltered water, backed by an extensive area of flat, grassy, palm-studded land with an off-lying fort joined to it by a causeway. That is exactly what we found. Hammenhiel Fort had been built by the Portuguese in the 16th century, had later been taken over by the Dutch, and had subsequently been allowed to fall into a state of dilapidation. But it was a stronghold and it was empty. Apart from the low causeway, which could be guarded, it was accessible only by sea, and it seemed a perfect storehouse for all the high-security equipment, arms and explosives which an expanded Commando Training Base would require. Moreover the flat grassy acres fronting on to long white sandy beaches looked absolutely ideal for a large encampment - or for the construction of more permanent buildings. The off-lying islets and the expanses of sheltered water were just what we needed for training and exercises with canoes and swimmers. We had found what we wanted and had no need to look further.

We returned to Colombo to report and to start making arrangements for the Big Move. At this point, however, I was waylaid by the Flag Lieutenant. 'Ah, Hall,' he said, 'I missed you when you were down here before. The Admiral wants to see you and has told me to produce you dead or alive!' 'Good God!' I thought, 'What the hell have I done now?' 'It's about one of your Progress Reports, I think', continued 'Flags', 'You'd better wait here and I'll find out when he can see you.' I was told to return at 3 pm and spent a pretty apprehensive lunch hour.

At the appointed hour I was ushered into Admiral Sommervell's presence. He held open a file containing a Progress Report I had written the previous January, addressed to the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, from the Commanding Officer, Naval Party 735. In it I had deplored the lack of operational activity in recent months and the consequent

over-training and stagnation of the COPP parties, leading to a decline in morale. I had rounded off the report in these words: 'In my opinion the situation is far from satisfactory. This opinion is shared by all my officers.'

Admiral Sommervell looked at me and said: 'That is not the sort of thing a junior officer ought to say to his Commander-in-Chief ... However, I understand your sense of frustration - and I take note of your zeal. But think twice before you give vent to your feelings in official reports.' 'Yes, sir - I'm sorry, sir,' I replied, turning to leave. 'As a matter of fact,' continued the Admiral, 'I did exactly the same thing myself when I was a lieutenant - and got reprimanded for it. But it didn't do me any lasting harm.' He gave me a warm smile as I withdrew, greatly relieved.

I had first written to Mary Carlisle from the troop-ship in Liverpool, way back in June. She had replied warmly and light-heartedly and since then we had carried on a very pleasant correspondence.

By late March or April all our people had moved down from Coconada and set up the new camp at Hammenhiel. There we were joined by several more COPPS straight out from England, one of which was commanded by Denis Mackay. Each COPP was more or less autonomous and had its own little camp-precinct in the shade of the coconut and toddy palms and close to the beach. As the hot weather built up, we became increasingly informal in our dress, often being attired only in sandals and a native 'lungyi'. From time to time, however, formalities were imposed to prevent any slide from discipline.

We began a further stint of Jungle Warfare training, with an ambitious and protracted exercise in Eastern Ceylon along the banks of the Mahwheli Ganga River. I remember an occasion when three of us had bivouacked in the open air near the river bank, lying on a carpet of dead leaves. In the middle of the night I suddenly awoke from a dream in which a slow train was steadily bearing down on us ('chuff-chuff-chuff'). Raising myself on my elbow, I observed a great black shape lumbering towards me through the forest. I froze. It was a huge buffalo, head down and swinging from side to side as it shuffled its way towards the river. I lay immobile as the beast's right horn passed inches from me, and when dawn came, I measured the distance between me and its hoof tracks: just three feet!

On another occasion, while Bill Lucas and I were carrying out an evasion exercise on one of the long east-coast beaches at night, our canoe (which we'd hidden in the bushes) was discovered by some of the Tamil natives. They alerted the nearby village, and before long scores of natives, armed with sticks and accompanied by dogs, were sweeping along the foreshore, chanting, shouting and banging drums or tin cans -enough noise to awaken the dead. The din spread to other villages further along, and out came more bands of searchers, scouring the beach for tell-tale footprints. Bill and I lay up in a dense thicket some way behind the beach-head, fervently hoping to escape detection. In their present mood, there was no knowing what these marauding bands would do if they found us. Would they accept our 'bona fides', or jump to the conclusion that we were enemy agents in disguise? The exercise had become extremely realistic -in fact too realistic for comfort -and we were genuinely alarmed. Some of the searchers passed very close to us -fortunately without dogs -but gradually the hubbub faded into the distance and we breathed more easily. We lay up under those bushes all the following day and at nightfall, when all was quiet, we made our way stealthily back to where we'd hidden the canoe. It was still there, surrounded by

hundreds of footprints. Maybe they thought it was booby-trapped. It hadn't been touched. We got it back into the sea and paddled away into the night. It had been a really useful exercise.

It was about mid-summer that the Small Operations Group (S.O.G.) arrived at Hammenhiel under the command of Brigadier Tollemache. From then on everything changed. Gone were the COPPs' autonomous lifestyles, their informal attire and their camaraderie-based discipline. No longer did each Naval Party have its Commanding Officer (with direct access to the C-in-C). Instead the C.O.s were re-styled 'Officer-in-Charge', and reported to the Brigadier. Though this was obviously sensible, it nevertheless caused considerable resentment and not a little friction. I personally felt somewhat humiliated - having myself selected the base and built it up into a going concern - at having to revert to a relatively junior status and start paying homage to a 'parvenu pongo', however exalted. Nevertheless we settled down eventually, and fairly amicably.

Meanwhile the base had been considerably expanded. We now had units of the Special Boats Section (S.B.S), a clandestine military organisation specialising in under-cover sabotage, as well as a contingent of Royal Marine Commandos. Many more army tents had been erected, and the Brigadier now decided that a semi-permanent Officers' Mess should be constructed, complete with bar facilities. This turned out to be quite an asset in enabling the officers of the various different units and services to get to know one another.

It was during this time, and while listening to a favourite piece of classical music played on my gramophone, that I threw caution to the winds and sitting in my tent by the light of a hurricane-lantern, wrote a letter that was to change my life. I proposed to Mary Carlisle. It was some time later (on 'D' -Day, I think), while we were on a jungle exercise in central Ceylon, that I received a telegram - brought to us by a courier - which said one word: 'Yes'. I was engaged! I was in the seventh heaven, albeit in the middle of the jungle, and I don't think I took too much further interest in that exercise.

[How wonderful, and romantic! Geoffrey and Mary were now engaged, then later (on 1 April 1945 married), later to become my parents! Interesting too that the telegram said just one word, 'Yes' – reminding me of when Jonathan and Alexis got engaged on New Year's Even 2021, when Jonathan send us a text of just four words: "Yay, she said Yes!"]

With the opening of the long-awaited Second Front by the Allied invasion of Europe through Normandy, things began to start moving again in South East Asia. The planners in Kandy had conceived the idea of invading the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) with an amphibious assault on the northern tip of Sumatra. COPP7 was required to reconnoitre the landing beaches there. We were briefed in detail by the Staff, and ordered to join H.M. Submarine *Tudor* in Trincomalee. We took four canoes and the usual mountain of special equipment, and somehow managed to squeeze ourselves into the narrow confines of the already crowded submarine. *Tudor's* Captain was a Lieutenant-Commander 'Sam' Porter and her First Lieutenant was a delightful man called Gordon Tait (whose paths I was to cross in later life). *Tudor* had a dual mission on this three-week patrol. She was to attack enemy shipping, and she was to facilitate the operations of COPP7. The former task would require her to patrol submerged along the Malayan coast and sink any vessel encountered -on the assumption that she was trading on behalf of the Japanese. The latter task would require her to remain for several days and nights, during a moonless period, off northern Sumatra. It

took us about five days to cross the Bay of Bengal, running submerged by day and on the surface by night. When we got to the patrol area, there was very little traffic to be seen, though we spotted the occasional Japanese aircraft.

On one occasion, however, we observed a large motorized junk heading north along the coast. Sam Porter decided to sink her by gunfire. We surfaced, manned the gun on the fore casing, and closed the range. We opened fire on the junk, pumping shell after shell into her until she was ablaze, and then submerged. I then watched through the periscope as the junk slowly capsized and her crew (or what remained of them) threw themselves into the sea.

Sam Porter took a last long look at the sinking junk, ordered 'Down periscope', then turned to me and said: 'I feel like a bloody murderer.' I saw his point and sympathized. Every now and again we were forced to go deep due to sighting enemy aircraft, and on one occasion we became the object of an A/S search by a Japanese warship. We went down and sat on the bottom, switching off all machinery and fans to maintain complete silence. We stayed there for hours, waiting to be depth-charged, and in fact we could hear depth-charges exploding, but they were not very close.

The day came when we were to start the COPP operation. We approached the northern tip of Sumatra in daylight, running submerged at periscope depth. This gave me the opportunity to make a quick view-sketch of the land features as they would appear to an approaching invasion force. As we crept in towards the coast at slow speed, our 'asdic' started detecting contacts ahead -small ones, apparently, and Sam Porter ordered it to switch over to the Short Transmission Unit (S.T.U) and sweep down both sides. More small contacts were then detected, both ahead and abeam. A minefield! Sam looked anxious and ordered 'Stop both'. Then he looked at me and said: 'Are you married?' 'No', I replied. 'Well I f***ing well am', retorted Sam, 'Full astern together!'

After that little setback we waited till nightfall and then approached again on the surface. Conditions remained almost perfect. There was enough light from the stars to pick out the dark rising land to port, and the outline of the off-lying islands to starboard. *Tudor* stopped engines and slid silently into a mile or two from the Sumatran coast, while we man-handled the canoes up through the torpedo-hatch and on to the for'ard casing. We got away without (as sometimes happened) capsizing a canoe, and paddled our way stealthily into the white sandy beaches. The sea was calm and there was not much surf to worry about. We anchored the two canoes a safe distance outside the surf, and Alec Colson (an R.E. Captain from COPPs, standing in for Bill Lucas who was ill) and I swam in to carry out our well-rehearsed tasks. All went according to plan, and about three hours later, tired and soaked to the skin but pleased with ourselves, we paddled out towards the pre-arranged RIV position. We had now been equipped with a new horning-device, colloquially known as a 'bongle'. I dipped it into the water beside the canoe and started turning the handle (it was rather like an egg-whisk). This set up an under-water noise which could easily be detected by the submarine's 'asdic' as she lay waiting for us on the sea bed. Her 'asdic' would give her an accurate bearing of the 'bongle' transmissions, and she would then move up to periscope-depth and home in towards the canoes, surfacing as soon as she saw them.

All went entirely according to plan (as far as I remember, there were no hitches whatever) and the following night we repeated the whole process on another sector of the beach. This

time Ruari and I exchanged roles, while Alec again did a second stint behind the beach-head. Everything went so smoothly, and we acquired so much data, that these two nights' work, coupled with another day's periscope observations, actually completed the entire operation. We retired gratefully to our camp-beds in the submarine's passage-ways and slept the clock round. Though we hadn't sunk much in the way of enemy shipping, the COPP operation had been an unqualified success, and Tudor felt that her patrol had been eminently worthwhile. For our part in it, we were 'Mentioned-in-Despatches'.

Not long after the Sumatra operation, we had word from COPP 'HQ' at Hayling Island that our party, the first in the field in the Far East, was to be withdrawn by the end of the year. This was welcome news indeed. Mary had written to say that she was thinking of getting herself appointed to Ceylon, and I now had visions of us passing each other on the high seas, going in opposite directions. So I lost no time in giving her the news and asking her to stay where she was.

As COPP 7 was to be disbanded on return to UK., and we were all to revert to General Service, I wrote to the Naval Assistant to the 2nd. Sea Lord (N.A.2.S.L.) to raise the matter of my next appointment. After almost two years in Combined Ops., I felt distinctly rusty as a Navigating Officer, and I certainly didn't fancy another hydrographic appointment. In fact, I told N.A.2.S.L. that the only thing I really felt qualified for was a sea-going command! (I knew that several of my contemporaries were already commanding corvettes, frigates and destroyers, so I comforted myself with the thought that I was not really being as brazen and presumptuous as might appear). In due course N.A.2.S.L. replied to my letter, offering me command of a Fleet Minesweeper. This was not at all what I had in mind (having already served two stints in minesweepers), so I took my courage in both hands and wrote back to say so, adding that what I felt best suited for was a 'blue water' job. A corvette or frigate would do me nicely, I thought. I received no reply to that letter, which was hardly surprising, so there the matter rested for the time being.

Chapter 10: My First Command, HMS Bigbury Bay, 1945-7

After an uneventful voyage home (apart from a few U-Boat scares as we entered the Atlantic), we berthed in Liverpool and made arrangements to entrain for Havant. I rang up my fiancée, whom I had never met, and had a pleasant chat with her. She was now a Third Officer, WRNS, serving as a Staff Officer at Portland. We agreed to meet 'on neutral ground' at 'The Antelope' at Dorchester as soon as I had wound up my COPP duties at Hayling Island and had obtained some well-earned leave.

Arriving at the hotel about twenty minutes early, I was in the middle of a quick shave, and had just walked down to the reception desk in my shirt-sleeves to ask for a towel, when in walked Mary. We embraced and I apologized for my appearance. It was our first meeting and we had much to talk about. We got on rather well together and I was very happy. Mary had a few days' leave before returning to Portland, so the next week-end we met in London and travelled down to Louth. I had previously wired my parents to expect me - 'with my fiancée'. It had come as a complete surprise to them - they had had no idea that I was engaged, and asked for more information, which I at once gave them. Once at my family home at Legbourne, we got on famously. I knew that they would adore the girl and they did.

The next major event was Ruari McLean's wedding to Mary's sister Antonia, announced two years previously. I was best man and took the opportunity to make myself known to Mary's parents and formally to ask Dr. Carlisle for the hand of his daughter Mary, which, after quizzing me closely, he gracefully conceded.

Soon after these events, I went to see N.A.2.S.L. in Queen Anne's Mansions about my next appointment. I was in some trepidation, having heard nothing since the letter I had written him from Ceylon about two months previously. 'Aha! So you're the man who turned down command of a Fleet Minesweeper!' were the ominous words with which he greeted me. Then, to my astonishment, he said he understood I was thinking of getting married. 'So how would a building job suit you? We have one of the new

Bay-class A.A. frigates building up at Aberdeen - *Bigbury Bay*, not a very attractive name, I'm afraid, but we'll need the C.O. to stand by her from April onwards. Meanwhile you can fill in the next couple of months with a round of refresher courses, and you'd better 'make your number' on Commodore, Contract-built Ships in Newcastle, as you'll be borne on his books. How'll all that suit you?' Of course it suited me perfectly. I'd been hoping for command of a corvette -and a frigate, a brand new one at that, had hardly entered my dreams.

One of the courses I was doing was a gunnery course at Greenwich. While I was there, the V2 rockets from Peenemunde were falling intermittently around us as the gunnery course proceeded. Some fell quite close to us and we interrupted one session by going out to view the devastation caused by a 'near miss' on the Naval College.

Mary was still at Portland, and together we gradually worked out the arrangements for our own wedding. It was decided that it should take place on Easter Sunday, 1945 at Mary's home at Heswall. Bryan O'Neill was to be my best man and it was to be very much a naval wedding, with a naval Guard of Honour. The whole ceremony went off perfectly and that evening we set off on a brief honeymoon in the Lake District.

[Wonderful, romantic – there are some photographs of their wedding, somewhere – and I recall the happy couple emerging from St Peter's Heswall Church through an arch of swords held aloft by the Guard of Honour, and it was 'blowing a gale', so that Mary's veil almost blew away – reminding of somewhat similar windy conditions at our own wedding, on 6 October 1979.]

On our return I went to call on the Commodore, Contract-Built Ships at Newcastle to be briefed on my functions and duties in this unfamiliar appointment.

Soon after this I went up to Aberdeen, where I was to take up my appointment to H.M.S. Bigbury Bay, then being built in the docks. A few days later, Mary (still a serving Wren Officer) came up on leave from Portland and we found ourselves suitable 'digs' nearby. That first evening, we took a stroll round the docks to have a look at my new ship. We could hardly have missed her. Among the crowded fishing trawlers and drifters moored up to the walls, she towered above their masts like a veritable whale amongst the minnows. Even in her partially constructed and unpainted state, she was an impressive sight. As we gazed at her slightly awe-struck, Mary turned to me and said: 'Isn't she a bit big for you, darling?' (A remark I was never to forget!)

While the War in Europe was drawing to a swift conclusion, the Pacific War was still raging with great ferocity, as the Americans steadily closed in on the Japanese homeland, with mounting casualties on both sides. It was now largely an amphibious war, with Allied naval power permitting the land forces to occupy island after island in the face of intense opposition from enemy garrisons, and with the American and British Fleets subject to murderous attack by the Japanese 'kamikaze' aircraft.



Bigbury Bay – the author's first command, 1945.

The new 'Bay-Class' frigates (of which mine was one) had been designed specifically for the Pacific War, in which the British Pacific Fleet, under Admiral Fraser, was now participating alongside the American Fleet. The emphasis in these new frigates had been shifted from an anti-submarine role to an anti-aircraft role (with the 'kamikaze' threat particularly in mind). Though fully equipped with the usual A/S armament, they had a much more powerful array of close-and medium-range A.A. guns, and a more sophisticated Fire Control system, than the earlier 'Loch-Class' frigates.

While the construction and outfitting of Bigbury Bay slowly proceeded in Aberdeen during April, May and June 1945, I was joined by a gradual trickle of key officers and senior ratings, whose supervisory functions in their own developing departments of the ship became steadily more important. Meanwhile I was kept busy drawing up 'Captain's Standing Orders', 'Captain's Permanent and Temporary Memoranda' and other organizational directives, while at the same time deliberately delegating as much as possible to my new officers, to whom I assigned their special duties in the ship. A running organization slowly developed, as the ship herself approached completion. Meanwhile the War against Japan increased in ferocity and was edging slowly towards its climax. The overall aim was an amphibious invasion of Japan itself, and we secretly feared that we might be too late for it!

The day came for our first sea-trials. Handling the ship for the first time was a test for me - and also a test for most of the crew. It was blowing hard, and I made a hash of turning the ship round in the basin -without tugs - damaging the wharf in the process. We learnt a lot of lessons in this brief escapade: control and handling of the berthing-wires was far from efficient, but the lesson I took to heart was the need to take seamanlike precautions against my own over-confidence. I ought to have accepted tugs -at least to stand by. When we did get away, the ship handled beautifully and I was 'over the moon'. But during speed trials off-shore one propeller-shaft overheated and we had to close down that engine. I had sufficient confidence in myself, however, to steam the ship back into port on one engine despite the adverse weather, and having berthed her carefully and without assistance, I was able to put the earlier incident out of my mind, knowing that I had also restored the crew's confidence in their Captain.

We commissioned about the end of June -with all due ceremony. I had suffered agonies in preparing my address to the ship's company assembled en masse on the ship's quarterdeck, with the White Ensign now flying proudly behind them. I had a complement of about 160, including 10 officers, all of whom, except the Warrant Engineer Officer and myself, were reservists, and I felt that it was important to strike the right note at the outset. In the event my speech went down quite well and I was pleased with the way the whole ceremony had gone.

We were well into July by the time we finally left Aberdeen, with all tests and inspections satisfactorily completed and the ship, freshly painted, a going concern at last. We headed north through the treacherous Pentland Firth and round to the Minches. We were due to join the Commodore, Western Isles, for a fortnight's 'Work-up' at Tobermory, and I had arranged to arrive off the entrance to the loch at 0800 next morning. The Commodore, widely known as 'Monkey' Stephenson, was a retired Rear Admiral who had been called back for the specific purpose of putting newly commissioned small ships through their paces, sorting out their troubles, and working them up to an acceptable pitch of efficiency before letting them loose on the Fleet. His reputation was formidable.

We were called up by the Signal Station as soon as we hove in sight, and were ordered to berth at 'B' buoy inside the almost enclosed loch. There was a strong off-shore wind blowing as we prepared wires, cables and sea-boat for coming to a buoy, a manoeuvre we had not previously tried. As we entered the loch, we saw that it was crowded with other frigates and corvettes, all lying to their moorings head to wind, and leaving quite a narrow passage down to 'B' buoy, which was close to the far shore. There was practically no room to manoeuvre if we failed to pick up the buoy. We approached it at dead slow speed, towing the sea-boat with the 'buoy-jumper' from our starboard bow, and stopped a few yards from it. The worst happened. The 'buoy-jumper' failed to secure the picking-up strop through the buoy-ring, the ship's head started paying off to port in the strong head-wind, and there was nothing for it but to turn the ship on her engines, steam out of the loch, and start the whole manoeuvre again. We came in the second time, stopped dead alongside the buoy, but again they failed to pick it up. This time the ship's head started paying off to starboard, and the buoy disappeared under the ship!

Out we went once more, turned the ship in a wide circle, and crept back into the loch at dead slow speed, determined this time that nothing should go wrong. As I stared ahead, lining the ship up precisely on the approach course, I became aware of a small, scruffily dressed figure standing beside me on the bridge. 'Everything all right, Captain?' it asked -quite gently. I spared it a quick glance and realised, to my astonishment, that it was none other than the Commodore himself! He had apparently sneaked alongside in his pinnace as we entered the loch for the third time, and unobserved, had leapt over our guard-rail and walked straight up to the bridge. It was quite a habit of his, I was told later. Anyway, despite the fact that his presence at my elbow did nothing to improve my confidence or concentration, on this third occasion we were successful -thank God! -and when safely shackled on, and engines rung off, the little man, in his barely recognizable salt-stained uniform, took me aside and, in the nicest possible way, gave me some very helpful advice on ship-handling, which has stayed with me to this day.

'Monkey' Stephenson, the Commodore, Western Isles, was a curious mixture of steely ruthlessness and genial compassion. He could be a 'holy terror' one moment, and the soul of good humour and kindness the next. He and his highly competent staff went through every ship with a small-toothed comb, identifying weaknesses of organization, equipment, personnel, morale -and command. Several C.O.s, First Lieutenants and other key officers had been told to pack their bags and go -and, at times, the Commodore had incurred the wrath of Their Lordships when suddenly faced with his demand for immediate replacement of an officer when no such replacement was available .. The Commodore had become almost a law unto himself, and few cared to contest his will. But, my goodness, he certainly licked those ships into shape -and sent them out to do battle! It is no exaggeration to say that no single person contributed more to the successful outcome of the Battle of the Atlantic than did Commodore 'Monkey' Stephenson.

It was a nerve-wracking, frenetic and strenuous fortnight for us at Tobermory. Orders, counter-orders, directives, signal criticisms, 'blasts' and congratulations came thick and fast - at all hours of the day and night -and there was no rest for anyone from start to finish. Every conceivable 'alarm and excursion' was exercised -and repeated 'ad nauseam' till the Staff were satisfied with the efficacy of our response -and, as the ship's efficiency improved, so did our morale.

I remember one occasion when I was summoned to dine with the Commodore aboard the Western Isles. It happened to be an evening when I had arranged to take Mary out somewhere (we had found 'digs' for her in a cottage nearby), so I regretfully declined the invitation on those grounds. Apparently it was 'not done' to decline the Commodore's invitations -they were in the nature of a Royal Command -and I was immediately sent for. Full of apprehension that I was going to be reprimanded for having my wife in the port, I mounted his gangway and was 'piped aboard' with full ceremony, saluting smartly as I faced him. He took me by the arm and walked me along the deck saying: 'I had no idea your wife was in Tobermory. Why didn't you tell me? You must arrange to bring her to dine with me some time.' He then proceeded to give me a long lecture on a man's duties towards his wife!

It was a beautiful day in early August, and we were carrying out main armament gunnery practices among the off-shore islands near Staffa, steaming up and down the range in a flat calm, and having a good look at Fingal's Cave as we turned. We were in the middle of a rather crucial shoot, and I was conning the ship from the Compass Platform, when I was called up on the voice-pipe from the TS. down below: 'Captain, sir, news has just come through that we've dropped a new kind of bomb on a place called Hiroshima, and it's killed 50,000 people, and Japan is on the point of surrender. Are we to continue the shoot?' A great cheer went up as the news spread, and I found it hardly credible. How on earth could one bomb kill 50,000 people? Anyway, I replied, 'Carry on with the shoot', and we did. Bigbury Bay was ordered round to Portsmouth to adjust complement and grant leave prior to sailing for the Far East. It was while we were at Portsmouth that the War finally ended -and VJ-Day (marking victory over Japan) was officially announced. Mary and I were staying at the 'Keppel's Head' hotel on the Hard, and I remember feeling an appalling sense of anti-climax. We had been single-mindedly fighting the War for the past six years, and now, suddenly, we'd lost all sense of purpose. Adjustment to 'peace' was going to be a difficult process, and I doubt if I was the only one who felt unable to put my whole heart into the Victory Celebrations.

I still had another year or so to do as a Lieutenant, but in September their Lordships decided that officers in command of Bay-class frigates should hold the rank, and receive the pay, of Lieutenant-Commanders. It was a reasonable decision, as the ships were large enough to warrant the higher rank, and it placed their Captains a step above their own officers, many of whom were Lieutenants. Officers promoted under this scheme were known technically as Quasi-Acting Lieutenant-Commanders, but we made light of that and simply shipped our half-stripes.

I received orders to sail for the Far East in company with another Bay-class frigate, H.M.S. Whitesand Bay, which, as senior officer, I was to take under my wing for the passage to Colombo. Whitesand Bay was commanded by a man called Brian Longbottom. He was a pleasant chap and we got on quite well together. Leaving Portsmouth was a rather sad business for all of us, partly because we had little idea how long we were to be away (perhaps a full two years), and partly because, in my case, I was leaving behind my newly-wed wife.

We sailed via Gibraltar, Malta and the Suez Canal. Having a sister ship in company made a lot of difference. Apart from continuous station-keeping in different formations, we were able to practise all sorts of competitive manoeuvres and evolutions, as well as plenty of visual signalling. We also frequently compared notes on internal administrative problems. Being the

Senior Officer gave me very much the upper hand in all this, and on the whole I really enjoyed my first experience in command of a formation of H.M. ships at sea.

From Singapore we sailed on to Manila in the Philippines (or what was left of it after the Japanese occupation -which wasn't much). The Japs were still holding out on Corregidor when we passed it, apparently not having heard that the War was over.

At Manila I received orders to take two minesweepers under my wing and escort them to Hong Kong to join the British Pacific Fleet. Halfway across the South China Sea we ran into a typhoon and got separated. For several days we battled against enormous head seas, and due to low cloud and poor visibility, we were unable to get a fix of any sort. When within a hundred miles or so of Hong Kong, I asked the Wireless Station there to give me a D/F bearing, and eventually obtained one, though of low quality. Using that, we managed to make a landfall, and, considerably the worse for wear after weathering the typhoon, finally crept into the shelter of the main harbour. I had orders to place myself under the command of the Captain, Escort Forces, and immediately went over to call on him.

Captain Aubrey John St. Clair Ford was a delightful man and gave me a warm welcome. He and his staff could not have been more helpful, and they very soon made a thorough inspection of the ship and ironed out many of the problems that had developed during our long voyage. Among other things, they discovered that one of the main steel structural beams that ran through the engine-room deck-head had cracked due to the stresses generated by the typhoon. This was regarded as a very serious matter, and for some days the whole future of the ship was in doubt. However, Christmas was now upon us, the first peaceful Christmas for seven years, and action was deferred. It was a really joyous Christmas throughout the Fleet - and throughout the Colony -and it was really heartening to see the Royal Navy in strength amid the beautiful hills and islands of Hong Kong, once more a British possession. Moreover, despite the havoc and pillage wrought by the Japanese through their four-year occupation, the bustling colony still had many delights to offer the war-weary sailors of the B. P. F. -and we made the most of them.

Meanwhile Bigbury Bay was busily integrating herself into the Escort Forces organization, taking over local patrol duties and acting as 'Duty Destroyer', while playing her full part in the Fleet's activities in and around the colony. Early in the New Year, however, there was a great shaking of heads among the senior technical officers of the Fleet about what was to be done with us, and whether, in fact, the ship was worth repairing and refitting, or whether it would be better to pay her off and sell her for use as a ferry between Hong Kong and Macao. These rumblings caused us great distress and a noticeable lowering of morale. I felt strongly that the ship was basically sound, and I knew that I had an efficient and enthusiastic ship's company. I was not going to let all that we had done during the previous nine months come to nothing if I could help it.

I paraded the ship's company on the jetty alongside the ship (now freshly painted and looking her best) and told them what was in the wind and what I felt about it. I then asked them to indicate, by a show of hands, whether they supported me in resisting the termination of the commission. Almost all of them did so. I then sent a signal to the Commander-in-Chief (Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser) asking if I might call on him. I had already put a strong case in writing through 'the usual channels', and the C-in-C demurred. However, I was determined to see him, and I tried again. This time he agreed to see me and I went over to the flagship

(H.M.S. Duke of York) dressed in 'full fig', with sword and medals. He received me quite affably and said: 'You're a very persistent young man, aren't you?' I then stated my case with some vehemence, and told the Admiral that the whole ship's company was aghast at the prospect of pay{ng-off and that we had not come all this way out to join him in order to be broken up and dispersed before we had achieved anything. I finished by asking him to come over personally, with his staff, to inspect the ship and her company and judge for himself what a fine ship he had.

About a week later we received a full and thorough inspection by the Commander-in-Chief. We were fully prepared for it, the ship's company was smartly turned out, the officers cheerful and alert, and the ship herself 'spick and span' . It was a great success and Bruce Fraser was impressed. Aftetwards he and his Staff Officers came down to the Wardroom for drinks, and he was quite charming. I remember discussing with him the significance of the atomic bomb and the world-wide concern that was being voiced about the 'morality' of its use - and.even its existence. It was something I found difficult to understand. How could one distinguish the ethics of killing 50,000 people with one atomic bomb from the ethics of killing a similar number with high explosive bombs dropped from a thousand aircraft? 'Surely,' I said, 'it's just a bigger and better bang?' Sir Bruce thought for a moment and then replied, 'I rather think there's more to it than that.'

Anyway, my initiative in going 'straight to the top' paid off We were reprieved. It was arranged that Bigbury Bay should be taken in hand by the Taikoo Dockyard, to remedy the poor workmanship of Hall Russel's ship-building work-force, particularly in regard to the many welding defects that had come to light, and which reflected so badly on the Admiralty Ship Overseer at Aberdeen.

The Taikoo Dockyard, situated on the north-east side of Hong Kong Island, was unique in possessing enormous slipways which could accommodate sizeable ships. Instead of placing them in a dry-dock (as was normal practice), it employed huge winches and cables to haul them up the slipways on wheeled cradles. It was a most uncanny experience to stand on the ship's bridge, slowly tilting upwards, and watch the ship being steadily hauled out of the water and on to dry land.

By the middle of February all repair work had been completed and a period of sea-trials and exercises followed, with the Captain, Escort Force, embarked, and with Whitesand Bay once more in company. Having satisfied all the authorities that Bigbury Bay was once again fully operational, I received orders to proceed to Taku in North China to embark a large number of Allied internees who were awaiting repatriation from formerly Japanese-occupied territory. In the Formosa Strait we encountered a Chinese merchant-ship, crammed with passengers, that had broken down and was drifting. As she was apparently bound for Formosa (Taiwan), we took her in tow, and in the middle of the night, entering the port of Keelung unnoticed and unobserved, left her there. I reported the incident to the Senior Officer, Force 'S' (who was flying his flag in H.M.S. Swift.sure at Shanghai), and received, rather to my surprise, a congratulatory signal from him.

Shanghai was quite an eye-opener for us. The Whangpoo River was crammed with American warships, completely outnumbering the handful of

British warships which were also present. Whereas we had seen to it that the Americans took a back seat in Hong Kong (where all the central berths were reserved for our ships, while U.S. ships were moored well out of the way), the Americans were determined to assert their strength over ours in Shanghai, where their writ clearly ran. However, the two Navies maintained quite friendly relations, and there was plenty to be enjoyed ashore. I fell in with some very hospitable White Russians (there was a whole 'colony' of them in Shanghai), who taught me a thing or two about vodka and how it should be drunk.

Having been fully briefed by S.O. Force 'S' (under whose orders I was now operating), we sailed northward through the Yellow Sea, into the Gulf of Pohai, and across the bar off Taku, where we had to wait for the tide. Once over the bar, we headed for an American naval support ship which was lying at the wharf, and aboard which the 70 internees were assembled. As we drew alongside her, and the Americans were taking our lines, I overheard the following exchange between one of their young sailors and one of our 3-badge ABs:

American sailor (pointing at our man's chest): 'Say, what are all the hero-bars?'

British sailor (coiling up his heaving-line): 'I got those before you joined!' American: 'You Limeys - you're all alike - full of hot air!'

Briton: 'That's all right - it takes an Englishman to be a Limey. Any bastard can be a Yank!'

(Incidentally, was it not at Taku that an eminent person first remarked that blood is thicker than water?)

Most of our ex-internee passengers were women and children, though about twenty of them were male civilians. They had obviously had a pretty thin time under the Japs during the previous four years, and were clearly delighted to find themselves at last under the White Ensign. All our officers gave up their cabins to the women and children, and the Wardroom became theirs for the voyage. I moved up to my sea-cabin under the bridge. During the night, halfway down the Yellow Sea, we ran into fog. We could get no fix of any sort, 'Loran A' was not operating, our radar was 'on the blink', and even our echo-sounder was giving trouble. Moreover, our charts of the Yellow Sea (which had never been properly surveyed, though apparently pretty featureless) were far from informative. So I was reluctant to press on with our plan to make a dawn landfall on the islands fringing the approaches to Shanghai.

During the Middle Watch I stopped the ship every half-hour and took a sounding with the hand lead-and-line, and only when satisfied that this was vaguely compatible with the charted depths, was I willing to move on. We were therefore well astern of schedule when the fog lifted and we were able to discern the outline of the islands ahead. However, we got into Shanghai eventually by steaming flat out up the Whangpoo River (which rather upset the Americans), and disembarked our 70-odd passengers to await repatriation.

One evening in March, when the ship was on Escort Duty in the Yellow Sea, I was having dinner in my cabin when my trusted Coxswain (Leading Seaman Hoskins), who was serving the meal, came in and said: 'Congratulations, sir!' as he deposited a signal on my table. I picked it up and read: 'Virginia Anne born March 18. Mother and daughter both well.' What marvellous news that was! I was both relieved and delighted. I had suddenly become a father - a sobering thought indeed. There was not a great deal I could do about it at that distance, of course (apart from writing euphoric letters to my loved ones), but when we got

down to Sydney, I bought my little daughter a large stuffed Koala bear ('Billy Blue Gum'), which I sent home to her.

For the next month or so (March/ April) we were employed escorting merchant ships against piracy and mines up and down the coast. On one occasion, while escorting a ship up to Tientsin, our young Sub-Lieutenant suddenly fell ill. He was a robust young man, hale and hearty, and very popular - the ship's Sports Officer. Our Medical Officer, unable to diagnose the trouble, ordered him to turn in. Next morning he was worse, and the M.O. said he should enter hospital and that it was urgent. I ordered the second boiler to be connected and raised steam for full speed, heading into the Gulf of Pohai. I sent a Plain Language signal to the Russian authorities at Port Arthur (the nearest port) asking for permission to land an emergency hospital case, and reported the situation to S. O. Force 'S' , at the same time abandoning the merchant ship.

I got no reply from Port Arthur, but very soon received a signal from S. O. Force 'S' ordering me on no account to enter Port Arthur without further instructions from him. Meanwhile the M.O. asked me to come down and have a look at his patient, as he was extremely worried. I did so and, to my astonishment, realized that he was dead. I could hardly believe it - nor could anyone else - but there was no doubt at all. I slowed the ship down, reported what had happened, and proposed that the deceased, Sub-Lt. Williams, R.N.V.R., should be buried at sea. This was approved and we immediately started making preparations for the funeral ceremony. I dug out my Prayer Book for the funeral service. That same evening we cleared lower deck, lined up a Guard of Honour, placed the corpse in its weighted hammock, covered with a Union Jack on a hinged platform by the quarterdeck guard-rails, and performed the ceremony, committing our erstwhile shipmate to the deep. As the Salute was fired, very few of us were not in tears.

It was a traumatic experience, the first and only time in all the years I spent in command of H.M. ships, that I ever conducted a Burial at Sea. But that was the straightforward part. The aftermath was not. When something of that sort happens, affecting all of us quite deeply, commonsense tends to rule one's actions. My first thought was to break the news, as gently and sympathetically as I could, to the young man's parents. I spent a long time composing the letter. The First Lieutenant was concerned to muster and list the deceased's personal effects. The Medical Officer was concerned to fumigate the cabin and prevent an outbreak of an unknown disease. The Supply Officer was worried about the deceased's Permanent Loan list, and the recovery of valuable items. The Wardroom Mess Treasurer was concerned about outstanding Mess bills and wine bills. There was a host of minor - even trivial - administrative matters to put straight, and we put them straight.

One thing that did not cross our minds at the time was the need to refer to King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, or to the tomes of Admiralty Fleet Orders stacked away in the Ship's Office book-shelves. This was unfortunate, because, as we found out later, the actions and procedures decreed in the many chapters, articles, sections and sub-sections in these volumes, following a death at sea, have nothing whatever to do with commonsense. This omission earned me some very stuffy signals and letters from the Flagship.

We returned to Hong Kong and spent the month of May patrolling round the islands on anti-smuggling and anti-piracy duty, taking our turn at Emergency and Guard Duty, and

participating in the many local Fleet and Escort Force activities ashore and afloat. As summer approached and the weather warmed up, the Fleet began to disperse to other parts. Bigbury Bay had been in commission a full year, and it was decided that she needed a break in a 'white' country. To our delight, we were ordered to sail for Australia, to spend several weeks of relaxation, recreation and recuperation at Sydney.

We sailed in June and threaded our way south-eastward through the Philippine and Indonesian Islands and into the Coral Sea. Here, a couple of years earlier, had been fought one of the most decisive naval battles of all time, between the American and Japanese fleets. It was a sea/air battle of tremendous importance, in which the Japanese were defeated and their sea-power virtually destroyed, marking a turning-point in the Pacific war. To reach Sydney by the shortest route, we had to penetrate the Great Barrier Reef and navigate through the myriad intricate channels between the reef itself and the whole length of the Queensland coast. Normally a pilot would be embarked for this part of the passage, a compulsory requirement for all but H.M. ships, which were exempt and free to choose for themselves. The Admiralty charts, which I had carefully studied beforehand, were extremely good, and the Sailing Directions clear, so [decided that we would do without a pilot, navigate the ship ourselves, and then claim the Pilotage Fee (which eventually amounted to over £100).

[t was an unforgettable experience and a fascinating one. My Navigating Officer (Lieutenant Rowell, R.N.VR) and [remained on the bridge continuously, day and night, throughout the passage. The charts were on a fairly large scale, so that we moved from one to the next quite quickly, and it was essential to keep the ship's position continuously plotted on them, since the channels between the reefs were often intricate. My technique was to take frequent gyro-compass bearings, singing out each bearing to Rowell as I took it, while he plotted the fix, and to repeat the process as soon as I'd seen the fix on the chart. Thus [was able to con the ship accurately along the recommended track through the reefs (which were marked here and there by beacons, buoys and transit-marks) and into the relatively open waters inside the Barrier Reef itself.

Thus we continued our way south along the Queensland coast to Townsville, which we put into to re-fuel, grant leave and to give ourselves a bit of a rest. I slept like a log for about 12 hours and did not go ashore.

We reached Sydney early in July and were given a big welcome. I think we gave 10 days' leave to each watch, and plenty of hospitality was extended to us by the Australians, both privately and and by various organizations. Before granting leave, I cleared Lower Deck and addressed the ship's company on the Quarter Deck, giving them the scheduled sailing-date and outlining our further programme. Because there had always been a high rate of absenteeism (and even desertion) from H.M. ships in Australia, I was at pains to stress the penalties involved, and the fact that I would be in no mood to accept excuses from anyone who over-stayed his leave or missed the ship on sailing.

I decided to take leave myself towards the end of the period, and to go up to the Snowy Mountains for a winter sports holiday. I went to the Hotel Kosciusko, most of the way by train. I found some good skiing and plenty of congenial company, so I was soon enjoying myself.

I met two very nice New Zealanders, Bill and Jan Williams (cousins, apparently, of my old friend, Denis Mackay), who persuaded me that an even better time was to be had at 'The Chalet', some considerable distance higher up the mountain. A day or two later several of us set off to climb the track leading to the Chalet, complete with our skis and luggage, in an enclosed sled drawn by a caterpillar tractor. About halfway up the track we got caught in a blizzard which completely obscured the track and built up huge snowdrifts, in which the tractor became buried and stuck. We had to leave it there and complete the journey on skis.

Skiing from the Chalet was certainly better than from the Hotel, but the accommodation and fare were relatively austere and the social life rather less promising. In the sunny periods between heavy snowfalls and blizzards, however, we did get some excellent downhill runs, though I must say I found the stunted blue gums a very poor substitute for Alpine pine-trees.

I had arranged to get back to Sydney the evening before we were due to sail, but I had not bargained for the blizzard which struck us towards the end of our stay, and which raged for three days. All communication was cut off. We couldn't get to the hotel, and the bus couldn't run from the hotel to the railhead. Time was running out. We decided to make a dash for it - on skis. We had to leave our luggage behind, packed, locked and labelled.

In view of what I had told my ship's company about overstaying their leave, it was a matter of real urgency for me to get back to the ship next morning, as I had arranged to sail from Sydney at 0900. My companions were not so pressed, but they entered into the spirit of the thing and provided welcome encouragement. The railway station was fifteen miles away and we had to catch the evening train. Carrying what we could in rucksacks on our backs, we skied the whole distance through the snow, and though it was mostly downhill (and sometimes quite fast), it was an exhausting journey. I rang the ship from the railway station and told the First Lieutenant to have the ship's jeep at the Sydney terminal at 0830 next morning to meet my train. Fortunately it was on time, and we sped through the streets to the dockside, where the ship was singling up her wires in readiness to cast off. I climbed over the guard-rails at 0850, dashed up to my cabin, changed into uniform, and _reached the bridge with two minutes in hand. The jeep had been hoisted inboard and we sailed exactly on schedule. (Whew!)

We took the northern route round Australia, up the Queensland coast and through the tricky Torres Strait, then westward through the Indonesian archipelago to Singapore, arriving at the Naval Base in mid-August. We were due for a three-months refit. It was decided that we should de-store the ship and move the whole ship's company into shore accommodation, a sensible move but one which took time and led to a great deal of disruption. In the process we found that one of our Confidential Books was missing, which concerned me not a little. I happened to mention it to the Captain of a destroyer flotilla with whom I was playing squash one evening, and he jocularly advised me to report that the C.B. had been accidentally lost overboard. When I did report the loss (as I had to), a Board of Inquiry was ordered -and who should be appointed as its President but the Captain (D) himself! He was a delightful man, and I remember his embarrassment when the Board was convened. I can't remember the outcome, but it was assumed that the C.B. had inadvertently been included with others to be destroyed, and I think my C.B. officer was reprimanded.

We emerged from the refit at the end of November, and carried out various sea-trials among the islands in the Singapore Strait. While doing so, I was delighted to catch sight of the

R.F.A. Stores Ship from Australia as she headed into port, for on board her was the locked suitcase (containing, amongst other things, my best uniform) which I had left behind at the Kosciusko Chalet in the Snowy Mountains four months before. I was determined not to sail without it, and although it was apparently at the bottom of one of the ship's holds, I sent a boat over with an officer to wait alongside her berth with instructions not to return without the suitcase. This seemed to work, for after a few hours the boat reappeared with my coxswain proudly holding the long-awaited suitcase on high. Thereupon, without more ado, we set sail for Hong Kong, having a rough passage through the South China Sea, but reaching our destination safely early in December.

About a week after we arrived, Bigbury Bay was ordered up to Japan to join up with the U.S. Navy and operate under American command. We reached Tokyo in mid-December. The city was still in a shambles, but re-building was going ahead fast. In fact, despite the destruction, it was a hive of activity -and there was plenty of night-time entertainment. My chief interest was the Imperial Palace, which had not been touched, and I drove out there one day to take in the scene and to reflect on the extraordinary events over which the Emperor had presided, and which had had such cataclysmic effects on friend and foe alike.

At this time we were still operating under British command, as part of a task force comprising a cruiser, two sloops and two frigates. Sometimes we would work together and sometimes separately, exercising, patrolling and carrying out guard duties. One day, while Bigbury Bay was patrolling off the east coast of Honshu, a Japanese destroyer called us up with a signal lamp and flashed a message which read: 'Igotosasebo'. We asked for a repetition and got the same thing several times. Realizing that this meant little to us, she tried again and flashed: 'May I go to Sasebo?' There was no reason that I knew why she should ask my permission, so I replied: 'Yes, as far as I am concerned'. This clearly stumped the Jap, for she then flashed: 'As far as where, please?' By this time my signalman was almost in stitches, and I thought I'd better conclude the exchange by simply replying: 'Permission granted'.

In late January we were ordered south to Sasebo (in Kyushu) to join an American Task Group operating from Fukuoka. We got a big welcome from the Americans there and it was a novel and interesting experience to find ourselves integrated into a flotilla of their Escort Vessels. Their function was to maintain a continuous anti-smuggling patrol in the Straits of Tsushima, opposite Korea (the scene of the great Japanese naval victory over the Russian Fleet in 1904).

U.S.S. Mansfield, a Destroyer-Escort, was our flag-ship for these operations and we used to lie alongside her. Very friendly relations developed between the two ships, and the Americans introduced us to aspects of Japanese social life ashore, including the Tea Ceremony with Geisha girls.

In mid-February I received orders to proceed to Kure to embark 13 Japanese servicemen accused of war crimes (including a Vice-Admiral and a Lieutenant-Colonel) together with their Australian Army guard, and to take them down to Hong Kong to stand trial for their alleged atrocities. I reinforced the Australian guard with an equal number of my own men, and divided the prisoners into two groups (one army and one naval) to occupy the two messes opening on to the ship's quarterdeck. I appointed the Vice-Admiral (Imamura) as

'Leading Hand' of the naval mess and Lieutenant-Colonel (Fukumoto) in charge of the army one.

I had dossiers on all these prisoners, outlining the various charges that were to be brought against them. Vice-Admiral Imamura had been the Japanese Naval Commander-in-Chief at Singapore when the officers of the Japanese cruiser Tone had run amok after a Wardroom party at sea and murdered 60 prisoners of war on the quarterdeck. He had also presided over an incident in which Japanese naval ratings had beheaded a number of British naval telegraphists, the alleged culprits in both these atrocities being among my prisoners. Lieutenant-Colonel Fukumoto was accused of responsibility for the massacre of about 500 Chinese civilians at Singapore.

Although these men had not been tried (and must therefore be deemed 'innocent until proved guilty'), we had no doubt in our minds that they had committed the most appalling crimes (the description of the beheading scene on the cruiser's quarterdeck was enough to freeze the blood), yet I could not help feeling sorry for them, particularly the senior officers accused of 'responsibility'. So much so, in fact, that one evening while on passage south, I invited Vice-Admiral Imamura to dine with me. He spoke excellent English and we had a pleasant evening of small talk and reminiscences. He could not have been more courteous. I heard later that the whole lot of them were found guilty and that most of them were hanged.

No sooner had I disembarked the prisoners at Hong Kong, than word reached me that my relief had been appointed. After a few days of local manoeuvres and amphibious exercises, I brought Bigbury Bay into harbour for the last time, and a Lieutenant-Commander Hutchinson came aboard to take over from me. It was early in March that my first command came to an end, after two interesting and highly fulfilling years. I had been extremely fortunate to have had such a command at so early an age, and I had thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Most of all, I think, I had revelled in handling the ship, a process from which I derived immense personal satisfaction, particularly as my skill and self-confidence grew.

With the War over and the Navy rapidly contracting to its peacetime level, I knew that my next appointment (if I remained in General Service) would be mundane in comparison - perhaps as First Lieutenant in some Training Establishment - so I had applied to return to the Surveying Service, asking that, if possible, I might be appointed as Navigating Officer of a home-based Surveying Ship. To my relief, and somewhat to my surprise, the Hydrographer agreed to take me back - and even seemed to welcome my return.

I came home in the troopship S.S. Ranchi, leaving Hong Kong in mid-March. I had been appointed O.C. Naval Draft, which was a bit of a bore as I had been hoping for a thoroughly relaxed month at sea. However, there was a young Lieutenant (H) by the name of Hammick, and a competent Chief Petty Officer in the draft, and I was able to delegate most of the routine work to them, while- at the same time asserting my rights and privileges as O.C. Naval Draft (which included an upper-deck cabin to myself!). We came home by the usual route, via Singapore, Colombo, Aden and Suez, and reached Southampton on April 14th.

Chapter 11: Lieutenant Commander, HMS Seagull, 1947-9

When Ranchi came alongside, my ship wife was waiting for me on the jetty. An order went through the ship that was due to the impossibility of opening up the baggage holds so late in the day, no one would disembark until the morrow. I had other ideas, however. Having an upper-deck cabin to myself, I had taken the precaution of having all my gear with me in the cabin - and there was a lot of it. I saw no reason whatever to remain on board overnight - particularly with Mary standing there on the jetty. It was the work of a moment for four of my sailors to hump the stuff ashore and, wishing me the best of British luck, they waved me on my way.

We went to Legbourne for the start of my leave, and there I saw my daughter Virginia, 13 months old, for the first time. It was early May and I was anxious to take Mary away on holiday. Our long-awaited post-War gratuities had just been released, and I spent mine on a delightful and much needed holiday for both of us in Spain.

We spent a further idyllic two months awaiting my next appointment. By this time my ration-cards had expired and I urgently needed to apply for more. Only when I did so did the Admiralty wake up to the fact that I was still on leave. The Assistant Hydrographer (who was in charge of all officers' appointments) ruefully admitted that he had forgotten about me, and straightway appointed me as Navigator to H.M.S. Seagull, a home-based Survey Ship.

I joined Seagull on the west coast of Scotland in August. I had obtained permission beforehand from the Captain (Commander K. St.B. Collins) to keep a dog on board, and my mother had travelled down to King's Cross to hand over a six-months-old puppy to me, which she had bred herself from her two Cocker Spaniels, Jock and Sally. It was a black and white bitch called Jill. With Jill in tow, I caught the night sleeper from Euston to Glasgow and she slept alongside me throughout the journey. She was the first dog I had ever owned, and once aboard Seagull, she became a firm favourite of officers and sailors alike.

From our surveys off the west coast of Scotland we moved south to Milford Haven. Things had changed in the realms of navigation, and we now had electronic aids to work with - not only radar, but a system called 'QH' (known in the R.A.F. as 'Gee'). I soon got the hang of this and found it extremely useful. We had a very congenial lot in the Wardroom: Bobby Griffiths as No.1, 'Snooze' Berncastle, Richard Green, 'Pay' Goodall, 'Bo' O'Grady and others. Our main survey that autumn was in the Bristol Channel, off the south coast of Wales, after which we moved round to Dartmouth.

During the winter lie-up and refit of 1947-8 Commander 'Kitchif (Ketchil) Collins was relieved in command of Seagull by Commander 'Sid' Hennessey, and I relieved 'Bobby' Griffiths as First Lieutenant. We spent the first part of the season on surveys off the west coast of England and Wales, with occasional visits to Liverpool, Swansea and Portishead, but in the summer we moved round to the east coast and were based at Sheerness. Here I found reasonable 'digs' for the family on the sea-front and at week-ends we would link up with Bryan O'Neill (who was Assistant King's Harbour Master at Sheerness) and his wife, Alison. Collins and Hennessey were both delightful C.O.s and I found it easy to serve as the latter's 'No.1'. It was while doing so that I found myself 'rated up' (rather to my surprise) to Assistant

Surveyor 1st. Class. Having so much leeway to make up in the hydrographic field, I hardly felt qualified for this higher status and the responsibilities that went with it.

At the end of November Seagull returned again to Devonport for the winter 'lie-up' and refit, and the drawing of Fair Charts. Mary and I had taken a little bungalow, 'Natterne', between Yelverton and Horrobridge and during the working week I used to commute by car between there and Devonport.

As Seagull's refit and lie-up at Devonport were drawing to a close, we acquired a new Captain. He was Colin Lowry, a man who lived for surveying. It was he who, as a young Sub-Lieutenant in Challenger at Bermuda in 1936, had largely aroused my own interest in the Surveying Service, having shown us midshipmen over the ship and explained some of the mysteries of hydrography to us. Seagull was his first command. He sent for me and announced his wish to mess in the Wardroom. 'I like company,' he said, 'and I feel very lonely up here. Is that O.K.?' It was the very last thing I wanted, and I was sure the other officers would feel the same. So I said I would consult them and let him know.

It was extremely embarrassing. One did not wish to offend one's Captain, however insensitive he might be. But his presence in the Wardroom would utterly inhibit the atmosphere of frankness and relaxation which was essential for the happiness of the officers, and hence for the whole ship. We resolved on a compromise, which I could present to the Captain with tact.

When reporting 'Rounds' to him that very evening, I said: 'Sir, the Wardroom would be delighted if you would join them for drinks before dinner on weekdays, and if you would dine in the Mess on Guest Nights.' The Captain saw through this veiled rebuff, but accepted it with reasonably good grace.

Colin Lowry had spent many of his past years as Executive Officer (1st. Lieut.) of Survey Ships, and had developed his own methods of performing most of the standard seamanship operations (laying and weighing beacons and clan-buoys, wreck-sweeping and so on), which, though often complicated, were dealt with straightforwardly in the Admiralty Manuals of Seamanship and of Hydrographic Surveying - based on well-tried procedures that had stood the test of time. Not, myself, being any too familiar with these procedures, I was anxious to try them before attempting any improvements or short-cuts, but the Captain wanted me to move straight to his own pet methods. This (and one or two other disagreements) gave rise to a bit of an altercation between us in the 'Cuddy'.

It was early on in the season, and he said to me (quite good-naturedly): 'Number One, I've had a lot of experience as a First Lieutenant, and I just hope I'm not going to be a bloody nuisance to you.' It was all I could do to restrain myself from responding in similar vein: 'Well, sir, I've had quite a bit of experience myself as a Commanding Officer, and I hope I'm not going to be a jolly nuisance to you.'

Unlike 'Kitchie' Collins and 'Sid' Hennessey, his two predecessors, who were competent professionals with a sense of proportion and outside interests, Colin Lowry had no sense of proportion and no outside interests. For him surveying was not so much a profession as an obsession. It was his only topic of conversation and socially, he was a bore. Seagull being a 'West Country' ship, we spent the whole of the 1949 season surveying off the west coast, mainly, as far as I can remember, in the Bristol Channel. We encountered all sorts of

interesting problems, due to the great range of the tide and the strength of the tidal streams in the upper reaches of the Channel on both the English and Welsh sides. For much of our work we were based at Swansea, and I remember several pleasant weekends spent exploring the delights of the Gower Peninsula.

One afternoon, while we were ship-sounding off the south coast of Wales and I was working aft in the Chartroom, the telephone from the bridge rang and I answered it. It was the Captain. He said: 'Congratulations, Number One, you've got a son!' It was 17th August, and a signal had come through for me from Dr. and Mrs. Carlisle in Heswall to say that Mary had given birth to a baby boy and that both were well. As I was due for a spot of summer leave, I pushed off from Swansea that weekend.

It was about this time that the Hydrographer of the Navy called for volunteers from the ranks of Lieutenant-Commanders (1st Class) for a loan appointment to New Zealand. As the appointment was 'accompanied' (i.e. the New Zealand Government was prepared to pay travel expenses for the family) and as I was clearly eligible for it, I lost no time in volunteering. Apart from the fact that I had never been to New Zealand - and was rather intrigued by the thought of working there, I felt that a two-year overseas assignment would be nice for Mary, who, in all conscience, had so far derived little in the way of 'perks' from her naval marriage. It was therefore with some elation that later in the season I was told that the Hydrographer had selected me for the job.

Early in September, after more than two years in Seagull, I turned over my duties as First Lieutenant (to whom I can't remember), and pushed off on a fortnight's pre-embarkation leave.

It was still September when I sailed from Southampton in the Shaw Savill liner, M.S. Dominion Monarch. Among other passengers was a Captain Ruck-Keene, R.N., the new Senior Officer, New Zealand Squadron (an appointment carrying the rank of Commodore), who was on his way out to take up the post. I introduced myself and he immediately invited me to sit at his table for meals. I accepted the invitation gracefully and he replied: 'Good - otherwise I shall find myself sitting with a lot of Jews or Plymouth Brethren!' (A back-handed compliment, I felt, and I was later to find that Ruck-Keene prided himself on being the rudest man in the Navy!)

We set course for Las Palmas in the Canary Isles. At breakfast on the first day out Captain Ruck-Keene told me that the previous evening the Captain's steward had come to his cabin with an invitation saying that the Captain would be delighted if Ruck-Keene would join his table after Cape Town. I murmured 'How nice,' or words to that effect. 'And what do you think I replied?' asked Ruck-Keene. 'Well, sir,' I answered, 'I imagine you accepted with gratitude.' 'Certainly not,' replied Ruck-Keene, 'I told the steward to tell the Captain that nothing would give me less pleasure!' It was only after this that I realized that Ruck-Keene had been fuming from the moment he boarded the ship on finding that he, the Commodore-designate of His Majesty's Navy, had not been placed at the Captain's table (the reason being that the Captain, a Plymouth Brother, had filled his table with Plymouth Brethren).

We stopped only briefly at Las Palmas, and then resumed the voyage to Cape Town. Captain Ruck-Keene continued both to amuse and to astonish me with his outbursts of vituperation and his general cantankerousness, but he was certainly an entertaining

character. He seemed to take to me - presumably as the only other naval officer on board, and a relatively junior one at that. I was 'fair game' as a sounding board for his highly robust views on life. He had heard something of Sharpey (my old ship-mate of 1941), the officer who was to command the R.N.Z.N.'s Survey Ship, and wanted to know a good deal more, and I was able to enlighten him. At Cape Town he took me to lunch at the delightful Vineyard Hotel, some way outside the city. It was my first visit to South Africa, but we didn't stay long. We were soon on our way eastward across the Indian Ocean, and my main recollection of that voyage was the constant vibration caused by Dominion Monarch's diesel motors.

Chapter 12: New Zealand, HMNZS Lachlan, 1949-51

We reached Fremantle, Western Australia, in mid-October. I had orders to take temporary command of an Australian frigate which had been converted for surveying, and which had been loaned to the Royal New Zealand Navy for that purpose. H.M.A.S. *Lachlan* was basically a River-class A/S frigate, which had most of her guns and anti-submarine armament still in place, her conversion for survey work being pretty superficial. She was still painted grey. After my experience in command of Bigbury Bay, I had no qualms whatever about taking command of her and sailing her round to Sydney as instructed. *Lachlan's* crew was a mixture of Australians and New Zealanders, with the latter predominating. There were six officers, three R.A.N. and three R.N.Z.N. They were all Lieutenants: Reg Hardstaff, Ian Mackintosh and 'Sandy' Sanderson from Australia, and Bill Smith, Frank Doole and Brian Bary (our Oceanographer, who joined later) from New Zealand. Our Engineer Officer and Paymaster were also New Zealanders. I took over the command from Reg Hardstaff and reported the fact to the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board and to the New Zealand Naval Board.

There then ensued an exchange of elaborately 'flowery' signals between N.Z.B. and A.C.N.B. to mark the handing over of *Lachlan* from the R.A.N. to the R.N.Z.N., and I was instructed to hoist the New Zealand flag at the jackstaff, in place of the Australian flag, at 0800 next morning. Somewhat to my surprise, I also received instructions from the A.C.N.B. to carry out an extensive off-shore survey in the Rottnest Island area, westward of Fremantle, and an endorsement from N.Z.N.B. to the effect that it was thought entirely appropriate that, on transfer of *Lachlan* from Australia to New Zealand, her first survey should be for the Australians! (I never saw the logic of this).

More to the point, however, was the fact that the ship carried hardly any hydrographic stores, equipment or instruments. These, I understood, were to be embarked 'on loan' from the R.A.N. when we got round to Sydney. We were in something of a quandary, therefore, as to how we were to carry out this first survey off Western Australia. I decided to signal A.C.N.B. (repeated to N.Z.N.B.) that my proposals for implementing their Hydrographic Instruction would be signalled after due consideration. This evidently 'rang a bell' in the Sydney Hydrographic Office, for shortly afterwards I received a signal from the Australian Hydrographer which said, quite simply: 'Survey is to be based on D.R.'

'My God,' I thought, 'Is this the way they do things out here?' 'D.R.' means 'Dead Reckoning' - and this was the first time I'd ever heard of a hydrographic survey being controlled by so primitive and inaccurate a method. However, there it was and who was I to argue with the Hydrographer R.A.N.? So we settled down to do the job, and we did it 'flat out' at full speed, the whole survey being completed within a week. And, be it said, the result looked remarkably persuasive.

Well, with that behind us, we set off for Sydney. There was a south-westerly gale blowing, so I kept a prudent distance off-shore - which was just as well, because, while we were rounding Cape Leeuwin (the S.W. point of Australia), we had trouble with our boilers and had to stop engines. There we were, about five miles off a dead lee shore, and drifting steadily on to it, broadside on to a heavy sea. Seldom have I seen a more wicked-looking headland, dark and forbidding, studded with rocks, against which the full fury of the Southern

Ocean was hurling itself, sending up huge spouts of white spume and spray. Closer and closer we got to it - and still the engineers could not get the boilers functioning. I began to get seriously alarmed and told the 'Chief' that he had half an hour to put things right, after which it would be too late. Another ten minutes, and he came up sweating to report steam back on the engines, and we were off again. It was a pretty close thing, but after that there were no more 'alarms or excursions' and we made an uninterrupted passage eastward through the Bass Strait and round to Sydney.

I berthed the ship (quite expertly) at Garden Island, and there, on the jetty to meet us, was Sharpey, now a Commander. He lost no time in coming aboard, and within the hour I had turned over the command and assumed the role of First Lieutenant. It was to be a memorable experience! (In fact I could write a book about my two years as Sharpey's No.1 - but I won't!)

As soon as we reached Auckland, New Zealand (or rather, the naval dockyard at Devonport), Commander Sharpey got to work on the dockyard authorities, and the ship was taken in hand for 'essential modifications'. She was to be made into a proper Survey Ship as understood by the Royal Navy. No Australian half measures for us! Out went the guns and A/S weapons, a new C.O.'s cabin was constructed for'ard from the 'Hedgehog' compartment, and on to 'X' gun-deck went a magnificently spacious Surveying Chartroom, complete with all modern fittings ('Splendid for entertaining' said Commander Sharpey). The dockyard worked like beavers to make H.M.N.Z.S. *Lachlan* perhaps the most up-to-date Survey Ship anywhere.

All the time the pretence was being kept up that, in accordance with the Terms of Agreement covering the ship's loan to New Zealand, everything could be replaced and the ship returned to her original state within 48 hours!

When all was complete, and the ship had been painted white with buff funnel and masts in traditional style, we sailed for Wellington, the capital, which was to be our main base.

In the middle of Cook Strait (which separates N.Z.'s North Island from South Island) lies a dangerous rock (Cook's Rock?) whose position on the charts was at that time marked 'P.A.', i.e. 'Position Approximate'.

Our very first task in *Lachlan* was to find this rock, measure the least depth of water over it, and fix its position accurately. This was easier said than done, because, apart from the stormy weather frequently prevailing there even in November, a strong current flows through the Strait. Moreover, as the rock lies far out from the land, and the visibility is often low, it was often impossible to pick up the landmarks on either side of the Strait and measure the angles subtended by them with sextants, thereby plotting the rock's real position.

We spent the rest of the year surveying the Eastern approaches to the Cook Strait and the entrance channels to Wellington Harbour, as well as the huge, almost land-locked harbour itself, and came in to berth at Aotea Quay for most week-ends. We had arranged for our families to join us as soon as practicable, and before leaving U.K. had bought ourselves new cars on 'export licences' (thereby avoiding a heavy tax). During December I had arranged the two-year lease of a nice little one-storey house in Karori, one of the rural suburbs of the city up in the hills to the west. By this time our families had already sailed from U.K. and were steaming across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans to join us.

Meanwhile, by means of meetings, conferences and presentations, Commander Sharpey was tirelessly promoting his own 'image' and at the same time endeavouring - not without success - to keep *Lachlan* in the public eye and place her activities squarely 'on the map'. These efforts included an inordinate amount of work for the surveyors in the Chartroom, even preparing (in 1950) an elaborately 'glossy' ship's Christmas card (incorporating photo-reductions of each of our surveys to date.) Hundreds of these were sent to every important authority Commander Sharpey could think of in N.Z. and U.K. - including Lord Louis Mountbatten!

The great day came on 3rd January when S.S. Rangitiki arrived in Wellington from U.K., bringing out our families to join us. I was there on Aotea Quay to meet them, but must have presented a rather sorry sight because I was hobbling about on sticks with my right foot in plaster. (A few days earlier I had stumbled over a 4-cwt. beacon anchor on the fo'c'sle, which had 'tripped' on to my little toe and broken it!). As soon as Rangitiki had berthed, I boarded her and greeted my family (including a new 'nanny') with enthusiasm. Jill, our Cocker Spaniel, arrived separately soon afterwards.

Lachlan spent the next three months till Easter surveying both the Cook Strait and the waters off the east coast of South Island. For the former we paid periodic visits to the Marlborough Sounds - particularly Queen Charlotte Sound - on the north coast of South Island, and for the latter work we were based mainly at Dunedin.

In the course of this a traumatic incident occurred while we were surveying the stormy Foveaux Strait in March. For this part of the work *Lachlan* had based herself at Bluff, at the southern extremity of South Island, ideally placed on one side of the Strait which separates South Island from Stewart Island to the southward.



Lachlan, Queen Charlotte Sound, New Zealand, 1950.

We were recovering beacons - a tricky business at the best of times, but much more so in heavy seas. It calls for a high degree of skill on the part of the officer handling the ship (normally the Captain) and a certain deftness from the recovery party on the fo'c'sle. We had come up to a beacon, head to wind and sea at dead slow speed, and the ship was pitching heavily to the high swell driving in from the west, the ship's stem rising and falling 30 to 40 feet. I was in charge of operations on the fo'c'sle, standing more or less 'in the eyes' of the ship, and as close as I could get to the beacon, with its 30-ft. bamboo flagpole surmounted by a radar-reflector. One gets used to the rhythm of the ship's motion, but occasionally it falters and the ship suddenly plunges downwards or soars skywards quite unexpectedly. The trick is to snatch the spring-hook of the picking-up rope on to the loop of the beacon's wire recovery-strop at a moment when ship and beacon are relatively motionless - i.e. when both are in the trough or on the crest of the swell. The moment came - on the crest - and I grabbed the recovery-strop with my left hand to bring it to the spring-hook. Suddenly and unpredictably the beacon shot upwards, wrenching the wire strop from my hand and almost carrying me up with it as the ship's head dropped under my feet. My hand, mercifully, was unharmed, but the gold-crested signet ring had gone from my little finger and my wrist-watch had also vanished. I was fortunate indeed not to have had my arm wrenched out of its socket!

After Easter, Mary and I spent a week's leave exploring up-country. On my return to *Lachlan* we spent the next three months mainly on the Cook Strait Survey, coming in to Wellington for week-ends. Brian Bary had joined as our Oceanographer, with the rank of Lieutenant (Special), R.N.Z.N., and our bathymetric work was thenceforward punctuated with copious oceanographic observations, samples of every kind being catalogued, analysed and retained by scientists ashore.

In July, when well into the southern winter, *Lachlan* moved up to Auckland for her annual refit and lie-up in Devonport Dockyard. After the refit, we resumed surveying in the Cook Strait and along the east coast of South Island. Commander Sharpey's technique for the latter work was to ship-sound parallel to the shore and, as often as not, with one or more sounding-boats keeping station abeam of the ship. This had the great advantage (from Sharpey's point of view) of covering the ground much more rapidly than by the orthodox method of sounding at right-angles to the shore, but was open to much criticism from those of us who knew what we were about. (In fairness to Sharpey, however, it must be said that he was under considerable pressure from the Chamber of Shipping and other authorities to produce charts quickly).

After spending Christmas in Wellington in blissful summery weather, we embarked in the New Year, 1951 on a fresh round of surveys, concentrating once more on South Island waters - in the Foveaux Strait and along the east coast - and we were based at intervals at Bluff, Dunedin, Timaru and Port Chalmers. This coincided with a very kind offer from the parents of my old friend, Denis Mackay, to lend us their home at Tahunanui, near Nelson, for the summer. At this point, therefore, I took a spot of leave and spent a marvellous holiday there.

At one point Mary joined me for a while at Port Lyttleton, where I was based ashore, observing the tides and measuring the strength of the stream in the river-mouth. She took turns at reading the off-shore tide-pole and timing the passage of glass bottles as they flowed down-river to the sea.

At about this time a national 'waterfront' strike had broken out, involving all the ports in New Zealand, and since the country's coal-mines were located in South Island, this meant that the more industrially developed North Island was immediately deprived of its energy source. The Government therefore declared a State of Emergency, and directed the Army and Navy to work the inter-island ports. This measure so incensed the coal-mining unions that they too declared a national strike. The upshot of this, so far as we were concerned, was that *Lachlan* was ordered to suspend her survey work and proceed to Westport (on the west coast of South Island) to take over from another frigate which had been loading coal from trains into colliers, and not only to continue with this work, but to operate the coal-mines as well! In effect we were ordered to break the strike and see that North Island was supplied with the coal that it needed.

This was a challenge indeed - and a novel one at that - and *Lachlan's* complement of 150 men rose to it splendidly. Much of the coal was excavated from open-cast 'pits' cut into the mountainsides above Westport and Greymouth, and the problem facing us was less of a mining than a transportation one, though all kinds of mechanisms were involved. Most of our engine-room staff were deployed on operating steam and electric winches, some on driving railway engines, and all those with lorry-driving experience on operating bulldozers, mechanical excavators and huge articulated trucks. Many of the seamen were assigned to working complicated conveyor 'ropeways', tipping-trucks, cranes and hoppers, and in building improvised bridges and ramps from which the fleets of trucks could tip their loads, while the ship's electricians and stokers operated the all-important power stations. Practically the whole of the ship's company was deployed ashore every day on these and related tasks, and the ship herself became little more than a dormitory rest-home.

As Executive Officer, it was my job to allocate appropriate manpower on a daily basis to each of the dozen or more tasks with which the ship was contending, at Millerton, Stockton, Downer's, Ngakawau, the 'Burma Road', the three gravity-ropeway stations, the Westport waterfront, colliery loading, transport-driving etc., and also to provide hot evening meals from the galley and maintain essential communications. I would do this by promulgating, last thing at night, Daily Orders for the morrow. This meant keeping consistent tabs on progress as it developed, and because in these unfamiliar operations casualties were an inevitable - almost daily - occurrence, men had to be changed round and replaced as necessary. Some casualties were serious. One Petty Officer was crushed between coal trucks on the railway, and several were sent to hospital with broken limbs. The P.O. died from his injuries, and we had to lay on a full-scale ceremonial funeral, with firing party etc. On the whole, however, my policy was to keep every fit man 'in the field' and employ the 'walking wounded' on essential ship's duties. The result of this was that after a few weeks there was hardly a single quartermaster, diesel-watchkeeper, galley-hand or signalman on board who was not swathed in bandages or hobbling around on crutches!

As the organizational work fell to me late in the evenings, I was able to spend most days going round in my staff car to observe the different operations and judge the suitability or otherwise of the personnel I had assigned to them. I found this extremely interesting, and was amazed at the sailors' versatility in so quickly mastering so many unfamiliar and often complicated tasks.

I made several visits to the various coal-faces up in the mountains, and in some cases I was intrigued to see that the coal, instead of being cut from the earth, was simply being washed

out of it by high-pressure hoses, the resultant flood of coal and water then being sluiced down the mountain side through specially built channels and tunnels. But undoubtedly the most intriguing of all the different systems was the operation of the long Stockton-Ngakawau ropeway, whereby coal excavated by enormous mechanical shovels was transported in chains of tipper-trucks down miles of steep rail-tracks and through several tunnels, via intermediate changeover points (where they were manhandled), to discharge into huge articulated lorries and thence to the cranes and hoppers on the quayside.

We knew that the rank-and-file of the Miners' Union were far from being enthusiastic about the strike, and were suffering considerable hardship, so I spent one day touring through the mining villages in my staff-car (flying the white ensign), and knocking at the doors of houses telling the miners to go back to work. Most of them were delighted, and said it was the best news they'd had for months. Some asked me whether the Union had sanctioned a return to work, and I replied that my instruction could be interpreted as an Order from the Navy! That was good enough for them. Next day many of them flocked back to the mines. However, it was a short-lived reprieve because when the Union heard what had happened, they lost no time in re-asserting their authority and countermanding my 'Order'. Gradually, under firm Government action, the strike began to peter out and in July, after we'd been at it for three months, our work started to ease off.

It must have been later on in July, when *Lachlan* was back on her east coast surveys between Dunedin and Timaru, that the Commodore, New Zealand Squadron, finally lost patience with our Captain. There had already been disagreements and altercations between Ruck-Keene and Commander Sharpey on a number of issues. The Commodore was an iron disciplinarian, who administered his squadron with a pretty heavy hand, standing no nonsense from anyone. Commander Sharpey, on the other hand, was an improviser, with a certain disregard for orthodoxy and regulations. Discipline was maintained in *Lachlan* on a somewhat 'ad hoc' basis, punishments tending to be fairly light and fairly few. In fact, we had a reasonably happy ship's company, who worked well together and seldom 'kicked over the traces'. The result was that our Quarterly Punishment Report recorded fewer offences than any of the frigates, and lighter punishments than regulations required.

We were steaming along the coast on one of our closely-spaced sounding lines off Timaru one afternoon when we received a signal from C.N.Z.S. stating that our last Punishment Return was unsatisfactory, and ordering our Commanding Officer to present himself in No.1 Dress (sword and medals) on board the flagship with all dispatch! I really felt sorry for Commander Sharpey, and went up and told him that he had my full support, and that in my judgement discipline was a means to an end and not an end in itself. This, I suggested, was his obvious defence. He seemed quite moved. We agreed that nothing should be said about the signal to anyone else - but that the Officer of the Watch should simply discontinue sounding and fall out the survey-parties on reaching the northern end of the line we were on. Then we would set course for Auckland. We got there (to the surprise of the ship's company) early in the morning and Commander Sharpey duly presented himself to the Commodore, who (so he told me) 'tore him off a strip'. There was certainly no love lost between those two!

On another occasion we were lying at anchor off Nelson and Commander Sharpey was polishing up his image with the local authorities there, and generally 'doing his P.R.' He had invited the Mayor and five other civic dignitaries to dine with him on board, together with our Medical Officer. (I had been excused from attending due to pressure of work!). The dinner

party got under way about 8 p.m. and all seemed to be going well when, about 9.30, the M.O. emerged and asked me to get the motor-boat alongside. He said that one of the Captain's guests had been ordered off the ship! Apparently Commander Sharpey had taken exception to something this guest had said, a blazing row had ensued, and Commander Sharpey had stood up at the table and said: 'Sir, I must ask you to leave my ship immediately.' My recollection is that the other guests were so embarrassed that the whole lot decided to leave together - and did so. (So much for our P.R. at Nelson!)

In October, after her annual refit and lie-up, *Lachlan* was back on the survey grounds, and this time Commander Sharpey handed over command of the ship - temporarily - to me, to progress a survey off the west coast of North Island. Why he absented himself I cannot recall (perhaps he was taking some leave with his family?), but I certainly relished being my own man once more. However, it was while we were working off South Island again that we received a signal from U.K. that I was to be relieved at the end of my two years' Loan Service and was to return home. I was not at all happy about this as frankly I was rather enjoying life in N.Z. As a matter of fact I had seriously considered transferring permanently to the R.N.Z.N., a step which would almost certainly have resulted in my becoming, eventually, New Zealand's Hydrographer. But Mary had been against it. 'I'm thoroughly enjoying my time out here, as long as I know we're going home after two years,' she had said. But we had not yet been out there two years (though my actual appointment had certainly run that long), and to leave now would cause domestic problems (interruption of Virginia's school term, lease of our house and so on), and I asked for an extension.

However, the wheels had been set in motion. My relief (Sam Mercer) was already on his way out, a qualified navigator (David Watts?) had joined - and it transpired that I had been earmarked for a command in home waters. I was ordered to embark for U.K. with the family in November.

At last the great day came when we embarked in S.S. Monowai for the passage across the Tasman Sea to Sydney. In a way we were really quite sorry to leave New Zealand, but it was exciting too and we got a great send-off from our friends on the quayside. During the first afternoon, when we were clear of the land, the ship's motion began to tell on those who had yet to find their 'sea-legs', which included Mary (who decided to 'take a stretch off the land'). I took the two children up to the boat-deck, where I thought they could come to no harm, and settled down to read my book while they played about. I glanced up from time to time, to check that all was well, and suddenly sensed that Nick was absent. I then saw him across on the starboard side, squeezing himself through a gap between the guard-rail and a boat's davit, right at the ship's side. I flew across the deck, faster than I have ever moved in my life, and reached the child as he stood, right at the very edge of the deck, peering down at the waves some thirty feet below. Without a word I seized him by the collar and drew him back.

[Nick's Guardian Angel was surely looking after him!]

It was only then, when the danger had passed, that the full enormity of it swept over me, and I was shaking like a leaf as I led little Nicky to safety. The whole incident had been witnessed by the Officer of the Watch, who happened to be looking aft from the bridge at that moment. As a result, action was taken to have the guard-rails modified to close off these dangerous gaps. It had been a very close thing and a nasty shock, but apart from that the voyage was completed without incident, and on 20th November we duly arrived in Sydney. On 23rd

November we all embarked on the great white P & O liner, S.S. Stratheden to continue our homeward voyage.

A further episode marred the tranquillity of that voyage. I think it was in the Red Sea that tragedy struck. We had recently made the acquaintance of a pleasant middle-aged English couple, who seemed to have a nice sense of humour. The husband's name was Ramsay and he gave the impression of being something of a 'bon viveur' . We had bade them goodnight after dinner one evening and had ourselves turned in for the night when there was a frantic knocking at our cabin door and shouts of 'Come quickly, Geoffrey, something's happened to Ramsay!' I threw on a dressing-gown and rushed along the corridor to their cabin. On opening the door I saw Ramsay, his face almost black and his eyes staring, immobile. I knew at once that he was dead, and there was absolutely nothing that I could do. So I sped off in search of the ship's doctor and left the rest to him. They buried him at sea a day or two later. His widow was so distraught that she had to be restrained forcibly to prevent her from following him in. We did our best to comfort her during the rest of the voyage, and kept in touch with her for weeks after we got home.

As the year drew to its close, we duly arrived at Tilbury. Waiting to greet us was Mary's mother and also her brother Iain. Then on entering the hotel where we were to stay the night, who should be there to meet me but my mother! It was indeed a happy reunion, and a fitting end to perhaps the most memorable two years of our lives. After all, Mary and the children had sailed round the world (something which I never achieved!).

Chapter 12: Lieutenant Commander (& CO), HMS Franklin, 1952 and HMS Scott, 1953

I had been appointed to command H.M.S. *Franklin*, the first surveying ship I ever served in, as Sub-Lieutenant in 1938, when she was brand new. Now, in middle age, she was to be my first surveying command. I joined her at Chatham in February, as she approached the end of her refit and lie-up, taking over from Lt.-Cdr. 'Micky' Royds, who was to be my First Lieutenant.

We were to work out of Sheerness, a dismal place if ever there was one. Our main tasks lay among the shifting sands and important shipping channels of the Thames Estuary, which were in constant need of re-survey and re-charting, and I could see that this work would keep us busy for many months. That being the case, it seemed sensible to look for a home for the family not too far from our base. Eastward of Sheerness, the Isle of Sheppey was not unattractive - in its way, and I spent one or two week-ends exploring and house-hunting. Minster, with its ancient church up on the hill, had its points, and on the edge of the cliffs overlooking the sea stood an empty four-bedroomed house which was for sale.

After discussions with Mary, I borrowed the money and bought the house, which we re-named 'The Cliff House'. I think it was towards the end of March that we moved in, and it remained a pleasant family home for us for the next ten years.

[This was the house of my birth and early childhood...]

During the spring and early summer *Franklin* spent most of her time in the outer parts of the Thames Estuary, coming in to Sheerness for week-ends. Out in the Estuary, we often had to contend with a good deal of fog, and though we were able to complete the all-important large-scale re-survey of the Edinburgh Channels by visual-fixing methods, I decided that some of the smaller-scale surveys of other channels could be carried out by using the Decca-Navigator system (which was unaffected by fog). It was quite an eerie business, steaming back and forth in thick fog among the sandbanks, our fog-siren blaring away every two minutes, our echo-sounders continuously recording the depths, our radar displaying the movement of other shipping, and the Decca-dials constantly providing the co-ordinates for plotting our position.

This was progress indeed - a new experience for us to exploit advancing technology so as to press ahead with a hydrographical survey in totally 'blind' conditions - something which would have been quite unheard of a few years earlier. I was so impressed that I wrote a graphic report on it to the Commander-in-Chief entitled 'An Electronic Survey', on which he congratulated me!

In August I took the ship up to the west coast of Scotland, where we had been given several tasks, including a survey near the notorious whirlpool of Corrievrechan, and another demanding job measuring the tidal streams through the Corran Narrows, at the head of Loch Linnhe. I can no longer remember the particular reasons for these tasks, but they were interesting and taxed our ingenuity. At that time the Hydrographer of the Navy (Vice-Admiral Sir Archibald Day), was 'swanning' round the Outer and Inner Hebrides in another survey ship, H.M.S. *Cook*, commanded by Captain 'Buck' Baker, and he decreed that the two ships should meet one evening in a sheltered loch. *Cook* was already at anchor as I approached in

Franklin, and I was ordered to berth alongside her. The heels of our big davits projected well beyond the ship's side, and though both ships had plenty of fenders out, I was anxious to berth gently so as not to cause damage. Moreover, with the eyes of the mighty upon me, I was naturally keen to show off my ship-handling skills, and as *Cook* was slowly swinging to her anchor and *Franklin*, with her turbine propulsion, had very poor 'brakes', I came in at dead slow speed and made a near-perfect 'alongside'. All to no avail, however, as shortly afterwards the Hydrographer told me that he thought I had been much too cautious!



Franklin, Thames Estuary, 1952. (Seagull and Scott were similar.)

Next day we were back on our survey-ground, and the Hydrographer came to watch our tidal-stream operations from the shore. He complimented me on the thoroughness of our organization and announced that he would make a formal visit to my ship on the morrow. I decided that on such an occasion it would be appropriate to hoist a Vice-Admiral's flag at the fore-truck (though in those days it was irregular to do so, since the Hydrographer did not exercise direct command of his ships). Archie Day, as he was piped aboard, saw the flag - but turned a blind eye to it. He was the soul of charm and obviously enjoyed a good gossip - not least about Commander Sharpey (for whom he clearly had no time at all). I was able to reel off a few of the choicer anecdotes about him from my recent experience in New Zealand, and also from our wartime experience in Gambia. From this time onwards it began to dawn on me that 'Droggy' had quite a warm spot for me (which was to have its effects later on).

Our major task in the autumn was to carry out a clearance-sweep, using double-Oropesa, of the waters between Islay and the north coast of Ireland, i.e. the western approaches to the North Channel, to prove a safe depth of 12 fathoms for our submarines transiting submerged between the Atlantic and their bases in the Clyde. We were to be based at Londonderry, and

for that we now had available the splendid new chart of Lough Foyle and the River which we had made with so much toil and sweat 11 years before in *Challenger*.

This sweeping operation turned out to be about the most frustrating thing I've ever had to do in my life. The sea-bed in this area is extremely irregular, with numerous rocky outcrops, the tidal streams are swift, and at full flood and full ebb the sea breaks in over-falls where the outcrops occur, and the weather is notoriously fickle. Visibility was seldom adequate for fixing from shore-marks and, to control the sweep, we had to lay floating beacons - which, as often as not, would drag under and disappear in the strong streams. Added to that, with our sweeps set to 12 fathoms, the otters and kite - and sometimes the sweep-wire itself, would frequently snag the rocky bottom, necessitating quick work on the sweep-winch and immediate action on the bridge to stop engines. After a couple of weeks of this sort of thing, we had lost a lot of valuable gear, but we persisted for a full month and lost a lot more. Finally I had to report that the required passage could not be cleared to 12 fathoms (or even, in my view, to 10 fathoms), and to our intense relief, the whole operation was then called off.

We returned to Chatham for the winter. Being a Lincolnshire man, I was interested in the fact that during the War *Franklin* had been 'adopted' by the town of Spilsby, birthplace and home town of Sir John Franklin, the famous Arctic explorer, after whom the ship was named. It occurred to me to suggest to the Town Council of Spilsby that it might be appreciated if the ship's company of *Franklin* were to make an official visit to the town to thank the people of Spilsby for all the support they had given in the form of gift-parcels of winter knitwear etc. to the ship during the War, and that a suitable occasion for this might be Remembrance Day (which, in 1952, fell on November 8th).

Spilsby reacted with enthusiasm, and we set to, to make all the necessary arrangements. I appointed one of my more personable officers, Lieutenant Nicholas, as Liaison Officer, and sent him up to Spilsby to work out a mutually acceptable programme with the local authorities, having first obtained clearance from my own authorities to take the ship up to Boston (which was the nearest port) for the occasion.

Several buses were hired to take the ship's company from the dockside to Spilsby, where, in the market-place, they were formed up on parade in No.1 uniform, the officers with swords. Flanked by my officers, I then led the parade in column-of-threes up the street to the church, where rows of pews had been reserved for us. The church was packed, and the Remembrance Day service was conducted with impressive ceremony, I having to say the immortal words of remembrance: 'At the going down of the sun ... ' etc. Afterwards there was a wreath-laying ceremony at the War Memorial (or cenotaph, as they called it) at which I 'did the honours', and then, with band playing, we marched back into the town and took up formation round the statue of Sir John Franklin. There was a goodly crowd of onlookers, some of whom (including my mother and my Aunt Sylvia) had been in the church congregation, so I had quite an audience for the oration which I then delivered. My speech, as far as I can remember, was to explain the link between town and ship, extol the fame of Sir John, and thank the good people of Spilsby for their support and generosity to the ship during the War. It seemed to go down well, judging by the applause.

After handing the parade over to the First Lieutenant (who dismissed it so that the sailors could accept the hospitality of the townsfolk in the neighbouring pubs), I joined up with my 'folks' and we motored off to have lunch with friends. That was about the end of the episode

(a well worthwhile one, we all thought), and on the Monday morning we sailed back south to the Medway.

It was during that winter that we had to implement another of the perennial 'cuts' in naval manpower by paying-off one of the Survey Ships, and, despite fierce resistance from me, it was decreed that *Franklin* should be paid off. It would have been more sensible, in my view, to have paid off David Penfold's ship, *Sharpshooter*, which was a 'convert' to the Surveying Service, whereas *Franklin* was purpose-built. However, I had to take comfort from the Hydrographer's acceptance of my submission that *Sharpshooter* should be re-named *Shackleton*, and from the announcement that I was to be re-appointed to command *Franklin's* sister ship, H.M.S. *Scott*. It was nevertheless sad to see the last of H.M.S. *Franklin*.

I took over command of *Scott* early in the New Year from Lieutenant-Commander Charles Grattan. I had to admit that in some respects she was the better ship, her builders having gratuitously provided quite a number of 'luxury extras' which *Franklin* had lacked. Anyway, with the refit over, and all the previous season's Fair Charts and so on despatched into the Office, I was all set for another year's work in Home Waters, and quite happy with my lot.

Early the previous year Queen Elizabeth II had ascended the throne on the death of her father, King George VI. The Coronation took place in June, and on the 15th of that month the Navy celebrated the event with a Review of the Fleet by Her Majesty the Queen at Spithead. While the Coronation itself was proceeding, *Scott* took time off from her surveys to spruce herself up in the shelter of Dartmouth Harbour (every ship in the Fleet was doing much the same), and on June 11th she took up her allotted berth in the review lines at Spithead. Over the next few days these lines filled up with a most impressive array of aircraft-carriers, cruisers, destroyers, sloops, frigates, minesweepers and submarines, including many foreign warships, as well as a number of large liners and dozens of yachts of various sizes. It was a huge armada, though probably not so great as at the Coronation Review of 1937, and significantly smaller than at the Silver Jubilee Review of 1935. I think the only battleship present was H.M.S. *Vanguard*, Flagship of the C-in-C, Home Fleet.

There were three Survey Ships present: *Cook*, *Sharpshooter* and *Scott*, and each of these had been designated as vantage-points and entertainment centres for certain Admirals and their guests. They were to be, virtually, Admirals' yachts - a role for which, at least, their white hulls and buff upperworks appeared to suit them. *Cook*, the largest of the three, was assigned to the Hydrographer of the Navy, while *Scott* was appropriated to the Admiral Superintendent, Portsmouth. In addition to the Admiral's guests, the ship's officers were permitted a number of guests of their own. (I was refused permission to allow any of the Lower Deck to invite a guest). While the Admiral and his party were to occupy the Wardroom, Chartroom and quarterdeck, the officers and their guests would have the Captain's Cabin and the bridge. My personal guests were my wife, my mother, my father-in-law and my mother-in-law.

We had to embark the guests in Portsmouth dockyard and steam out to our berth several hours before the review. We were quite close to the Soviet Union's cruiser *Sverdlov*, which was an object lesson in smartness. The Review itself took the usual form, being followed by a Fly-Past by the Fleet Air Arm and, in the evening, illuminations and a firework display - all very spectacular. But before that the Queen held a Reception on board H.M.S. *Surprise*

(there being no Royal Yacht as such at that time) for the Commanding Officers of the assembled warships. She also gave a dinner party, in the Flagship Vanguard, for her Senior Officers, to which all Flag Officers and Captains were summoned.

The absence from their ships of so many Commanding Officers played havoc with the disembarkation of the thousands of other guests still aboard the ships of the Fleet, for a carefully timed programme of movements into the dockyard had been drawn up to off-load them. Some ships weighed anchor on time and were taken inshore by their Executive Officers, while others thought they should await the return of their Captains before moving. As each ship-movement was dependent on the previous one, the result was somewhat chaotic, and when *Scott* was scheduled to move, I found I had both the Hydrographer and Captain Baker on board (*Cook* having already weighed) but no Admiral Superintendent. The passage into Portsmouth Harbour at about one o'clock in the morning - with a myriad of confusing lights flashing and winking from every direction, and with pinnaces, launches and ferries criss-crossing the channel - was a veritable nightmare. We were all tired, including our guests, and I felt an enormous sense of responsibility, with so many distinguished passengers on board, to get them safely ashore. It was after two a.m. by the time we were secured alongside and they were all disembarked, and I was mighty thankful to be able to accompany my own guests to a hotel in Chichester for the rest of the night!

Our attention now turned to a new task. NATO had decided that a new base for destroyers was needed, and their eyes lighted upon a promising stretch of sheltered water in Northern Ireland: Strangford Lough. There were two possible snags: firstly, it had not been properly surveyed, and secondly, very strong tidal streams were known to run in and out of its narrow entrance, which might prohibit its use by destroyers. *Scott* was therefore required both to test the feasibility of navigating the Narrows and to carry out a comprehensive survey of the island-studded Lough. It was quite a challenge, and it appealed to me.

The name 'Strangford' derived from the Norse, and the Norsemen knew what they were about. The streams through the Narrows ran at up to 9 knots, causing a great deal of turbulence in the constricted channel between rocks on both sides. I decided that the best time to effect an entrance for the first time would be just after the start of the ebb-stream, so that the ship would be stemming the tide with plenty of water under her, and with a relatively weak stream to contend with.

In these circumstances there were no problems - it was all plain sailing. Similarly it was a simple matter to make an exit from the Lough shortly after low water, as the flood stream was just starting and most of the rocks were visible. But it was a different story when I took the ship in through the Narrows against a full ebb-stream: not only was the turbulence itself quite alarming, but the stream tended to split - and at one point, while creeping forward against the full strength of the current, the ship's head suddenly paid off to starboard while a counter-eddy caught the stern and carried it forward. We found ourselves almost beam-on to the channel, and heading rapidly for the rocks to starboard, the rudder ineffective and full speed astern the only remedy! I resolved not try that sort of thing again.

Once into the Lough, it was a scene of pleasant tranquillity, gently rippling waters bounded in the south by green wooded hills, opening northward into an expanse of clear blue lake studded with dozens of little green islands, the whole surrounded by gently sloping fields of pasture. It seemed an idyllic site for a hydrographic survey, and so it turned out. The task

was to take us right through the summer and into October. It was an interesting job but, as surveys go, a somewhat unorthodox one. We had been supplied by the Hydrographic Department with a plotting-sheet of the area which had been constructed for the purpose by irregular methods (photo-reductions of large-scale Ordnance Survey sheets came into it somewhere), and though this saved us a lot of triangulation, it had its shortcomings, as we were to discover.

Most of the sounding was carried out by the boats, the Lough being too restricted for ship-work, and there were usually at least six separate survey-parties out 'in the field' every day, the ship at anchor serving as a floating base for them. As the survey progressed, berth was shifted to keep pace. As so often in fjords, lochs and loughs, the holding ground in Strangford Lough was not good, and whenever a gale was threatened, I had to find a lee. One spot revealed by the survey was a relatively deep depression between several small islets, and on the assumption that the anchor would stay put at the bottom of it, we tended to anchor there in bad weather. It is now marked on the chart as 'Scott's Hole' .

I was very conscious that summer (and more than a little concerned) that my naval career was in the balance. I was approaching the end of my time in the 'promotion-zone' from the rank of Lieutenant-Commander. In fact if, by the end of June, I had not been picked for promotion to Commander, I could say 'goodbye' to my further prospects, and continue to serve (probably ashore) as a 'Passed-over Two-and-a-half' till I reached the age of 45 in eight years' time. It was a gloomy outlook, and as the deadline approached I was on tenterhooks.

I knew that Mary and my mother were counting on it, and the thought of letting them down was bad enough, but it would also be a bitter blow to my own pride if I failed to 'make the grade'. Mary had been particularly helpful and supportive in the critical years, and I felt that, if I were promoted, it would be due more to her than to any merit on my part. All I could do at this stage, however, was to offer up some silent prayers (a nearby church came in handy for that) and hope for the best.

[Silent prayers in a nearby church – and they were answered!]

I knew that on the last day of June the promotion lists would come through about 10.30 a.m. on the naval broadcast, and I was damned if I was going to hang about the ship, waiting for the fateful decision. I went off in the motor-skiff with a few sailors to do some useful surveying, and took my mind off the whole business for several hours. As we headed back to the ship for lunch, I noticed unusual activity on the quarterdeck and on approaching the gangway, I saw that the Officer of the Day was wreathed in smiles and carrying a cap whose peak had been covered in gold foil. I knew at once that all was well. 'Congratulations on your brass hat, sir,' said the O.O.D. as I came up the gangway, handing me the appalling-looking object as well as the signalled promotion list. 'Miracles will never cease' was all I could say, but my heart was leaping with joy, relief and excitement.

So - now I was a Commander! I had cleared the first (and worst) of the hurdles strewn across the career-path of all naval officers, and now I could afford to relax a little. I had much to be thankful for. On our next week-end jaunt to Liverpool I got my uniform suitably altered and acquired my 'brass hat' . I have no recollection of what we did during the last few weeks of the season after completing the Strangford Lough survey, but I received word at that time

that I was to be relieved of my command during the winter at Chatham, and appointed to a shore post in the Hydrographic Department early in the New Year.

Chapter 13: Commander, Admiralty Hydrographic Department, Cricklewood, 1954-6

My appointment was to H.M.S. *President*, the name-ship of the Admiralty, on whose 'books' were borne the names of all naval personnel serving in that establishment. I was appointed to the Hydrographic Department as 'Superintendent of the Oceanographical Branch' (short title: S.O.B.). Apart from nine months of courses as a Sub-Lieutenant and a few short courses later on, it was the first shore appointment I had ever had in almost twenty years at sea.

At that time the Hydrographic Department occupied three locations: Whitehall, Cricklewood and Taunton. 'Chart Branch', which embraced the chart-compilation processes, and included most of the 'brains' of the Department, was located at Cricklewood, in a relatively large and modern building. It was here that I had my office, just above the main entrance. The distance was too great for me to commute daily from home, and I had to settle for 'digs' in Dollis Hill and week-ends at home.

Up to 1952 the Oceanographical Branch (such as it was) had been run by a civilian scientist, Dr. J.N. Carruthers, whose interest was geared to basic research, the operational needs of the Fleet being largely neglected. This was not the proper function of the Department (whose role was to serve the needs of the mariner-at-large), and Admiral Day decided to rectify matters by replacing the civilian scientist with an active-service naval officer as Superintendent, thereby creating a new H.Q. post for a Commander (H). The change was facilitated by the recently formed National Institute of Oceanography at Wormley in Surrey.

The first incumbent of the new post was Commander G.S. Ritchie (who had commanded H.M.S. *Challenger* during her two-year round-the-world oceanographical cruise, 1950-52), and it was from him that I took over the job. My knowledge of oceanography was minimal, and I found it difficult to grasp the full purpose of my task. What I needed, I felt, was 'Terms of Reference' to guide the work of the Branch, and I said so - but there were none. (That comment, however, was to bear fruit in later years - so much so, in fact, that in due course Terms of Reference for every responsible post in the Department were drawn up, where none had existed before.)

The main subjects with which I had to deal were bathythermographs, ocean soundings, ocean bathymetry, ocean currents and magnetic variation, and the various offshoots and applications of these fields of study. Because, however, I was the only active-service Commander at Cricklewood, I became (in a sense) the right-hand man of the Assistant Hydrographer (1), who was a Captain (H) and Superintendent of Charts. One of his functions was to task the Surveying Fleet, a function which he tended increasingly to delegate to me. Thus, in addition to supervising the work of the Oceanographic Branch, I soon found myself virtually running all the Survey Ships as well! It was hard work but extremely interesting, and it gave me my first real insight into the workings of the Hydrographic Department.

Early in June, it was decided that our newest Survey Ship, H.M.S. *Vidal*, should pay an official visit to Washington, D.C., to liaise with the Hydrographer of the U.S. Navy, and that I and our Chief Civil Hydrographic Officer, Mr. Atherton, should take passage in her. She was commanded by Captain K. St. B. Collins, who was designated as the next Hydrographer of the Navy. We duly sailed up the Potomac River, and were given a great reception by the

Americans. When the junketings (and serious discussions) were over, *Vidal* resumed her outward passage to the West Indies, but I was left in the tender care of the U.S. Hydrographer (Rear Admiral Waters). He had decided to visit the Oceanographic Institute at Woods Hole (which included a Naval Laboratory), and the idea was that he should take me up there with him. That, in fact, was the ostensible reason for my whole trip.

We set off in the Admiral's official car and drove up to New London, Connecticut, where we stayed the night in the U.S. Navy's Submarine Base (which I had last seen as a midshipman 16 years before). Next day we motored through some beautiful New England coastal scenery and out on to the Cape Cod peninsula, on the southern tip of which is Woods Hole, looking across to Martha's Vineyard. The difference in climate between hot and humid Washington and cool, fresh Cape Cod was hardly believable. An Atlantic breeze blew over clear blue seas dotted with the white sails of yachts and fishing boats. It was an interesting visit and I was duly impressed.

I had arranged to return by sea in R.M.S. *Queen Mary* (on the grounds that my study of oceanography could be better served while travelling at sea-level rather than by air, 30,000 feet above the ocean.) However, I found myself seated at meals with a party of English fellow passengers, and in particular a delightful American girl travelling on her own. These proved so congenial that any thoughts of sea-level oceanographical studies became occluded by a light-hearted Anglo-American flirtation, leading to a lasting friendship and eventual god-motherhood on Barbara's part.

[That's the only reference to my birth in 1955 – ah well, GPDH no doubt had his reasons for such an oblique reference!]

As Superintendent of the Oceanographical Branch, I found myself an 'ex-officio' member of the British National Committee on the Nomenclature of Ocean Bottom Features (short title: N.O.B. Committee). This committee met at the British Museum of Natural History and was chaired by Professor John Wiseman, with whom I had had dealings in connection with seabed samples and deep soundings. An international conference on the nomenclature aspects had been arranged at Monte Carlo, and as Wiseman was to chair it, he felt it would be helpful to our cause if I were to attend. Never having visited the Riviera, I needed no persuasion, and, the Admiralty kindly agreeing to defray my expenses, in September I set off with Mary by train to Monte Carlo.

The conference took place in the International Hydrographic Bureau, alongside the picturesque spectacle of the yacht-filled harbour. From our hotel too, we had a glorious view of the harbour. The work of the conference was not very demanding, and it put us in touch with some interesting people. We were also able to try our hands at the roulette-tables in the fabulous Casino, an experience to be relished, though we never had any luck.

Basic oceanographic research at this time was being pursued by the N.I.O., using the Royal Research Ship *Discovery*, and it was thought expedient that I should obtain first-hand experience of the work being done by her. It was therefore arranged that I should join her at Thorshavn, in the Faeroe Islands (which I had always wanted to visit). So in April 1955 I set off across the North Sea in the Danish ferry *Kronprinsesse Ingrid* from Harwich to Esbjerg and thence by train to Copenhagen where I continued my journey on the *Dronning Alexandrine*, an aged steamer used for the weekly mail service between Denmark and the

Faeroes. It seemed a round-about way to get there, but there was no other, and it certainly suited me!

After joining *Discovery* at Thorshavn, I spent an interesting and instructive week in her, observing and participating in various scientific experiments and activities: measuring surface and sub-surface currents, obtaining water samples and temperatures from surface to sea-bed, measuring wave heights, trawling for plankton and dredging for marine life on the ocean floor of the North Atlantic. I was disembarked at Lerwick, in the Shetlands, and flew back to London from Sumburgh.

By the summer of 1956 I had done more than two years as Superintendent of the Oceanographical Branch at Cricklewood, and the time was approaching for me to take up another sea-appointment. I turned over my job to Commander J.S.N. Pryor in mid-summer, and so arranged things that I was able to take a full month's leave between appointments, spending a highly successful holiday with the family in Ireland, and visiting relatives there.

Chapter 14: Commander, HMS Owen (Indian Ocean Deployments), 1956-8

I had been appointed to the command of H.M.S. *Owen*, one of our larger, post-war Survey-Ships, and I took over from Cmdr. C.R.K. Roe at Chatham (where *Owen* was based) shortly after we got back from our holiday in Ireland. I had enjoyed my shore-appointment at Cricklewood, in particular my function in tasking our ships all over the world by drafting their Hydrographic Instructions, and, when unforeseen tasks arose, by switching them from one job to another by means of Supplementary H.I.s. Knowing that *Owen* was to be my next command, I had paid rather more attention than usual to her H.I.s and the effect that they would have on my first season's programme. *Owen* was one of the first ships to be fitted with the new Two-Range Decca radio-location system, and it was important that we should try it out on a survey in home waters before proceeding overseas. The Thames Estuary provided an ideal testing-ground, and after re-commissioning the ship, working her up and shaking down the ship's company, we set to in September to erect the two 100-ft. 'Slave' stations, one at Leysdown on the Isle of Sheppey and the other across the Estuary in Essex. These operations, involving a fair number of officers and men at each site, took the best part of a week to complete, and several more days were required to calibrate the system and construct the latticed plotting sheet which was to control the survey. From then on, it was virtually all 'plain sailing', and by mid-October the survey was completed.

The time came to say our farewells and set out for our overseas surveys. We were bound, ultimately, for the Indian Ocean, but as Colonel Nasser had just nationalized the Suez Canal and virtually closed it, we were to sail round the Cape. I had invited my old colleague, Dr. John Wiseman (from the British Museum of Natural History) to accompany me for the first part of the voyage, with a view to obtaining some deep-sea cores and to try out some of his equipment. We spent a few days at Gibraltar, and then headed south to Freetown in Sierra Leone. We came in primarily to fuel, but were nevertheless well entertained.

We had various tasks to perform off the Gold Coast (now Ghana), both at Takoradi, where a new harbour was to be built, and off Elmina and Cape Coast Castle. At Elmina was an old Portuguese-built fort, a castellated whitewashed structure standing just above the beach. In it lived the British Chief of Police, a lonely character whose only company was a pet monkey. He showed me over the fort, complete with portcullis and drawbridge and immaculately maintained, inside, and I rather fell for his chosen lifestyle!

Meanwhile the Shell Oil Company had begun prospecting off the coast of Nigeria, where the presence of an off-shore oilfield was suspected, and where the Admiralty charts were singularly lacking in up-to-date bathymetry. Shell had approached the Hydrographer of the Navy with a request that the charts be up-dated and an offer to assist in the geodetic control of a re-survey, together with helicopter lifts as required. *Owen* had been assigned to the task, so we put in to Lagos.

An old shipmate of mine, Lieut-Cdr. 'Bobby' Griffiths, was now running the Nigerian Navy (such as it was), and he had laid on a strenuous social programme to cover the few days of our initial visit. This included cocktail parties with Sir Ralph Grey, the Chief Secretary, entertainment by Shell and beach parties at Tarkwa, together with a good deal of private

hospitality at the hands of Griffiths himself. I agreed to embark a number of Nigerian Navy trainees for hydrographic experience during the course of the survey.

The suspected off-shore oilfield lay just within sight of the low-lying coast forming the Niger delta, between Akasa and Bonny, which was utterly devoid of landmarks of any description. We decided to lay a long line of floating beacons, about three miles apart and parallel to the shore, and get Shell to intersect at least one of them by theodolite observations from some of their geodetic stations inshore, over which they had built towers. The technique, then, was to fix the beacons in relation to one another by running Taut Wire Measuring Gear along the line in both directions, and observe the orientation of the line by taking sun-azimuths by sextant at the first and last beacon. When this was completed, we had established adequate control for ship-and boat-sounding to commence. We were also required to obtain a high density of sea-bed samples and a few cores.

This work - and a larger-scale survey of the Bonny River Estuary - occupied us for the whole of November. The latter task was to establish the exact extent and depth of the Bar which tankers had to cross in order to get in and out of Port Harcourt (up the Bonny River), where oil was being piped from the inshore oilfields of the Niger delta. I took the ship up to Port Harcourt after completing the survey, and we paid a final visit to Lagos before leaving the area. *Owen* continued her passage south to the Cape, 'crossing the line' with the usual ceremony on December 4th, and entering Simonstown Naval Dockyard about a week later. Towards the end of December we left Simonstown (having really fallen for the Cape) and headed eastward into the Indian Ocean. On our way up through the Mozambique Channel, running a line of ocean soundings, we suddenly encountered relatively shallow depths - which, after steadily rising, then eased off at around 250 fathoms, before gradually plunging back towards the ocean floor. This uncharted feature looked remarkably like what the Committee on the Nomenclature of the Ocean Bottom was pleased to term a 'sea mount' or 'table-mount', the remains of an antediluvian volcano. Its exact nature, however, could only be established by means of a regular survey, and this seemed a golden opportunity to do it.

We laid a floating beacon (with flag and radar-reflector) as close to the feature's summit as we could, and for the next 24 hours we ran lines of soundings radiating out from the beacon into deep water on all sides, fixing the ship's position at regular intervals by radar ranges and visual bearings. As the survey developed, the feature was clearly revealed as a classic example of a table-mount, and we had been fortunate enough to lay our beacon almost at the centre of its flat top. Having accurately fixed the position of the beacon by several sets of independently observed star-sights, and having recovered a sizeable chunk of the sea-bed on the beacon anchor, we drew out the results of the survey and I wrote up the report. I was gratified to note, several years later, that the feature had been incorporated in the latest editions of the Admiralty Chart, and was named 'Hall Table-mount'! (At least my name would go down to posterity somewhere - if only in the Mozambique Channel!)

We continued up to Mombasa to fuel and make contact with the local authorities before setting out to take in hand our main task of the season, a survey of Chake Chake Bay in Pemba (the Isle of Cloves), which belonged to the Sultan of Zanzibar.

It was early January by the time we reached Kenya and a few days later we anchored off Zanzibar. I had to 'make my number' with the Sultan before proceeding to Pemba. We gave him a 21-gun salute, and he received me with great courtesy in the Palace. He spoke perfect

English and while regaling me with soft drinks and sweetmeats, took enormous pride in showing me photographs, treasures and mementoes of his links with Queen Victoria. I had time before sailing to have a good look round Zanzibar itself, a city belonging to a past age, with a fascinating collection of beautiful old Arab buildings. Zanzibar was still a thoroughly feudal community.

One of the reasons for our survey of Chake Chake Bay was its possible suitability as a protected Fleet anchorage. It was an enormous stretch of calm water almost enclosed by coral reefs and low-lying, sparsely inhabited islets, but little was known about its depths and it was virtually uncharted. Quite what Fleet might use it for was not vouchsafed to us! Anyway, we had to start from scratch by measuring a base and setting up an all-embracing triangulation. This was a slow and painstaking, but extremely interesting, business. We were working practically on the Equator and there was seldom much of a breeze to cool us down. The ship lay idly at anchor and we were away all day in boats, marking, observing and extending the triangulation. Once a month I took the ship back to Mombasa to give everyone a bit of a break.

Communication between Mombasa and Pemba was infrequent and irregular, and *Owen* provided a supplementary service for mails etc. The day before we were due to return to Pemba, some of my officers informed me that there was a young English nurse who wished to return to the hospital at Wete where she worked, and would be glad of a lift. King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, however, prohibited the passage of women in H.M. Ships except with the approval of the Commander-in-Chief. As we were to make the passage in daylight, I thought it fair enough to explain the circumstances and signal the C-in-C East Indies for approval to take the nurse. Approval came through the next morning so I duly embarked her - in my quarters (to the chagrin of the Wardroom!) - and she was ferried across to Pemba. That, however, was not quite the end of the story. About a year later I met up with the Flagship, H.M.S. *Jamaica*, somewhere in the Indian Ocean and felt I should call on the C-in-C, whom I had never met. He met me at the top of the gangway as I was piped aboard and as we shook hands, he said: 'Ah, Hall! You're the man who gave passage in your ship to a woman, aren't you?' Although he had received copies of every one of my Reports of Proceedings for months on end, that, apparently, was the only thing he remembered about me or the ship!

After three months of arduous work at Pemba, the time came for us to start the long trek home again, and early in April, as the Suez Canal was still closed, we set course back to the Cape. While running south-westward off the coast of S.E. Africa, we suddenly hit enormous head-seas, which broke over the fo'c'sle and did considerable damage, sweeping our Land-Rover overboard. After calling at Simonstown, we went up to Saldanha Bay for a few days out of the limelight, to paint the ship in readiness for our forthcoming visit to Monaco in May.

Every five years the Hydrographers (and senior members of their staffs) of some fifty countries would converge on Monaco for a fortnight's Conference at the International Hydrographic Bureau. A great many professional, technical and general matters of mutual interest would be discussed, there would be a lot of social activity attended by delegates' wives, and the three officers to comprise the Directing Committee of the I.H.B. for the next five years would be elected by the whole Conference. A degree of international prestige was involved in this election, and there was always considerable competition and much lobbying beforehand for these important posts. *Owen's* presence was intended largely to enhance the

prospects of the British candidate, who on this occasion was none other than Captain C.S. Lowry, Royal Navy.

We made an impressive entry to Monte Carlo Harbour, with a tight turn to starboard to bring us portside-to immediately in front of the Bureau building, and there, waving to welcome us, was Mary (not to mention Rear Admiral Collins, Hydrographer of the Navy, and many other distinguished officers and wives).

It was marvellous to have Mary with me again after almost eight months' absence. She had been on holiday in Italy and had come on from there. We stayed at Monaco for a full week - the only Survey Ship present - and did our best to maintain the prestige of the British delegation by giving formal receptions and a lunch party for Captain Lowry, and taking most of the foreign delegates to sea to demonstrate our latest equipment and techniques.



Owen arriving in Monte Carlo, 1957.

When the time came to leave, we felt we had been a distinct asset to the Conference (though in fact Colin Lowry did not get elected to the Directing Committee).

To the best of my memory, *Owen* re-fitted that summer at Sheerness, which could hardly have been more convenient for me! It was a good summer and I was able to see a lot of the family.

Meanwhile in July I had re-commissioned *Owen* for another season in the Indian Ocean, but by this time the Suez Canal had been re-opened, so we would be going out through the Mediterranean, with various surveys en route. The first of these was a re-survey of Gibraltar Harbour, which would take us about a month. This presented a golden opportunity for Mary to come out with our small son Adrian for the duration of our stay there. As it happened, I

was able to arrange for them to take an 'Indulgence Passage' (at virtually no cost) in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary stores-ship Fort Dunvegan, and after we had taken the two elder children to their new schools and seen them safely settled in, Mary and Adrian duly embarked at Chatham in late September. Fort Dunvegan sailed a day or two before Owen, so they were waiting for me at the Rock Hotel when we reached Gibraltar early in October.

[Hooray! I actually get to make an appearance! Not that I can remember much, but it was my first overseas trip... My older brother Nick must have started at Packwood Haugh boarding school, as he would have just turned eight.]

We spent the whole of October on the re-survey of Gibraltar Harbour. It was a pretty straightforward job and I was able to spend most evenings with the family ashore. But our month there ended all too soon and, with the survey complete, Owen headed eastward to Malta. We didn't stay long there, because we had a survey to do off the north coast of Cyprus, after which we put into Limassol for a break. Passing through the Suez Canal, now under Egyptian ownership and control, we were interested to note that it seemed to be as efficiently run as it ever had been. (So much for all the arguments put forward on our behalf against its nationalization the previous year!)

Halfway down the Red Sea we had another survey to do in the vicinity of Jebel Zuqar, which took us a few days, and we then continued on to Aden to prepare for our next big task off the Hadhramaut coast. This had a dual purpose and was something of a joint effort. The south coast of Arabia had not been accurately tied-in geodetically with the over-all triangulation of the Middle East and its extension into Africa and Asia, and the Director of Military Surveys was anxious to establish a series of stations along the coast at which astronomical observations could be made to determine their geographical positions. Not only were these points virtually inaccessible from landward, but they lay in territory over which British jurisdiction was at best nominal (known, at that time, as the East Aden Protectorate). Our task, therefore, in addition to carrying out a much-needed hydrographic survey off the Mahra Coast, was to land and support small R.E. survey teams at the points in question.

It turned out to be a most interesting operation. Because the 'natives' were known to be unfriendly, we were provided with an armed contingent of the Hadhramaut Bedouin Legion under a British colonel, whose task was to protect the R.E. surveyors while ashore. We started off with a visit to Mukalla, some 200 miles east of Aden, early in December. The Sappers and their escorts were landed further along the coast in the evenings and picked up at dawn, while the ship sounded during the day. As we moved further eastward, a complication arose. I was informed that the Mahra Coast was part of the historic domain of the Sultan of Socotra, and that it would be necessary to obtain his consent before putting anyone ashore there. I was therefore to proceed to Socotra, some 200 miles to the southward, to call on the Sultan.

Socotra, a large island strategically placed off the Horn of Africa and guarding access to the Gulf of Aden, had been a British Protectorate for many years, though as far as I know, there was no British presence on the island, which was ruled, quite independently, by the Sultan himself. He resided at the island's capital, Hadibo, on the north coast, and we anchored there about a mile off-shore. I sent a boat in to find out if the Sultan would receive me, and was informed that he was very ill. I therefore sent our Medical Officer to offer assistance, and

he reported that the Sultan had a temperature of 104. Treatment was given, however, and the next day I was informed that he was much better and would be delighted to receive me.

[Providing medical assistance – acts of kindness and healing...]

I took with me the Arabic-speaking H.B.L. Colonel (Colonel Snell), both of us in 'full regalia' with swords and medals, and we were hospitably received at the rather pathetic little whitewashed 'Palace' in which we sat down to talk with the somewhat unprepossessing Sultan. He was traditionally attired in Arabic royal dress, with burnous, long curved scimitar and with a be-jewelled dagger in his belt, and though looking pretty frail, seemed quite spry. He was highly impressed by the medical attention he had received, so I offered him the Doctor's services for anyone in his entourage who might be in need of them. From then on the M.O. was kept extremely busy! The Colonel then explained the purpose of our visit, and after much discussion and innumerable cups of coffee, the Sultan gave his consent. It transpired that his claims to the Mahra Coast, on the Arabian mainland, were of an ancestral nature, and that there had been virtually no contact with its people for many years. Our mission, however, was an opportunity for the Sultan to re-assert his authority in a distant part of his ancestral domain. Not only would he give his consent to our landings, but he would provide us with two emissaries carrying copies of his 'Royal Edict', which would ensure safe-conduct for the Survey parties and their escorts. Well pleased with the outcome of our deliberations, I thanked the Sultan profusely and offered to fire a Royal gun-salute for him when we took our departure on the morrow.

With our two Socotran emissaries aboard, we weighed anchor, fired the promised gun-salute, and headed back across the Gulf to Ras Fartak on the Mahra Coast. As dusk fell, we moved close inshore towards the next observation point, lowered a motor-boat and whaler, disembarked the R.E. surveyors, their armed H.B.L. escort and the two emissaries, and cast them off. We watched the boats as they made their way inshore and saw the whaler run up on to the beach with the landing-party. As they made their way inland, they were soon accosted by a fairly large gathering of armed natives, and a protracted 'parley' ensued. This we were unable to observe from the ship, and could only await the return of the boats with growing impatience. Night had fallen when they eventually returned, apparently bringing with them, to our surprise, the whole landing-party - but not the emissaries!

The Colonel explained what had happened. The party had been surrounded and outnumbered. The two emissaries had stepped forward and, unrolling their scrolls, had proceeded to read out the Royal Edict calling upon the Mahra people, in the name of their Sultan, to provide safe-conduct - 'without let or hindrance' - to the landing-party. No sooner had the Edict been promulgated, with the announcement of the Sultan's name, than the two emissaries were promptly seized and captured! The ensuing protests from Colonel Snell and his Legionaries were then drowned by the natives, shouting that they were in no way vassals of the Sultan of Socotra and would have no truck with him whatsoever. In the circumstances, and to avoid what looked like being a bloody incident, the Colonel, reckoning that discretion was the better part of valour, ordered the whole party to withdraw.

For this operation I was reporting direct to H.E. The Governor of Aden (Sir William Luce), repeating my signals to C-in-C East Indies, Admiralty (for Hydrographer) and D.Mil. Survey. I was fairly sure that an immediate report of the evening's incident, involving the capture of the Sultan's emissaries, would cause the Governor to cancel the remainder of the operation,

since he had quite enough on his mind in Aden, without a potential flare-up in the Protectorate. As a cancellation at this stage was the last thing we wanted (there being only one or two more points to be observed at), I therefore decided to delay my report and to press on to complete the job by subterfuge.

We realized that the natives were now aware of our tactics and had organized themselves to congregate on the shore at the spot to which they could see the ship was heading in the evening, so we decided to turn this to our advantage with a game of bluff. With all lights blazing as usual, we steamed in towards a point on the coast some ten miles to the eastward of our next intended landing, drawing the watching natives along the beach in the desired direction. Then, as soon as it was really dark, all lights were suddenly extinguished, the ship was blacked-out, speed was increased and the ship turned abruptly to seaward. We then doubled back at high speed to the westward and approached the actual observation-point in complete silence and pitch darkness, veering the heavily-greased anchor-cable slowly to the bottom and lowering the whaler. The landing-party was then silently rowed in, with muffled oars, to the beach, which was deserted. All went well and the observations were completed shortly after midnight, the landing-party returning to the ship in triumph during the Middle Watch. Back we went to the survey-ground, to continue sounding during the day. We repeated the whole process the following night. The operation was now complete -and my report could be signalled in a less alarming context. (As John Roberts, my First Lieutenant, remarked at the time, this operation was certainly 'One for the Book'!)

We spent Christmas at Aden; with various other units of the Fleet and were quite glad when it was over and we could sail for our main task of the season on the vast Seychelles Bank in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

The only regular communication for passengers and freight between the British Crown Colony of the Seychelles and the outside world was the fortnightly mail service run (I think) by the B. & I. Line between Mombasa and Port Victoria, about 1,000 miles apart. Otherwise all communication was by Arab and Indian dhows sailing to and from East Africa, Mauritius, Arabia, the Persian Gulf, Pakistan and India. There was no air service whatever, because there was no airfield in the islands. The Seychelles consisted of a group of about half a dozen tropical islets standing in the middle of a huge, relatively shallow, coral bank, the edges of which tended to curve upwards like a saucer, and sometimes broke the surface to form outer islets. The largest of the Seychelles Islands was Mahe, beautiful and mountainous, on which stands the capital and only port, Port Victoria. To reach it from Mombasa, ships had to cross the shallow western edge of the bank, and then traverse about 150 miles of slightly deeper, but barely surveyed, water, in which a fair number of shoals had been charted, many of which were marked 'Position Approximate' or 'Position Doubtful', and some 'Existence Doubtful'. This passage was, therefore, something of a nightmare to the Masters of the B. & I. mail-ships, and a proper survey of the route had long been called for.

My plan was to concentrate initially on the outer two-thirds of the area, and to control the survey with Two-Range Decca. To provide the best possible angles of 'cut' throughout the survey-area, and to ensure that we were well within range at all times, I decided to place the Green 'Slave' on the western side of Silhouette Island and the Red 'Slave' as far up to the north as possible. Fortunately, on the northern rim of the bank there were two small islands: Bird Island and Denis Island. Bird Island was the more westerly of the two, and should provide an ideal site for the Red station. Having established the two 'Slaves', we then had to

locate them accurately and to 'connect' them geodetically - no mean task as they lay over 80 miles apart. While observing the geographical position of the Red station by star-sights with an astrolabe, we proceeded to use our recently acquired Tellurometer system to measure the exact distance between it and the Green station on Silhouette Island, as well as measuring, by theodolite, the True Bearing of Red from Green. It was a process fraught with difficulties, and it took us the best part of two weeks. The Tellurometer distance was, at that time, the longest that had ever been measured.

With the two 'Slaves' now established, with a crew of four men in camp at each site who were in radio communication with each other, and with the whole system calibrated and tested, I decided to run a single line of soundings out to the western end of the area, and then continue towards East Africa. There was still a great deal to be done to complete the Pemba survey which we had abandoned the year before, and I had decided that this could best be done by detaching a camp-party with the two Survey motor-boats and letting them get on with it while the ship progressed the Seychelles survey. We billeted the party (two officers and eight men) at a place called Mkoani, and after spending several days erecting marks and observing an extension of the triangulation for them, *Owen* refuelled at Mombasa and returned to the Seychelles.

We were now into February and for the next six weeks, in generally superb weather conditions, we systematically sounded out a ten-mile wide swathe covering the first hundred miles of the shipping-route across the Seychelles Bank, anchoring out on the survey-ground each night and inking in the day's work. We had to break off at intervals in order to visit one or other of the two 'Slave' camps, to replenish provisions and change round personnel, and occasionally I would take the ship into Port Victoria to give the men a well-earned 'run ashore' and spend a night or two myself at the lovely Beau Vallon Hotel.

I shall never forget the gloriously clear sea-water which enabled one to see every feature of the sea-bed in depths of 40 to 50 feet and the brilliantly white sand which contributed to this clarity. It was almost uncanny, sometimes, as the ship moved steadily through the water, with the echo-sounders showing seven or eight fathoms, and one looked down from the bridge to see stones and pebbles, boulders and seaweed harmlessly sliding beneath her. I remember one time, while I was turning the ship off Bird Island, when the transparency was such that there seemed to be no water under her at all -and I thought we were certain to go aground! The beautifully sandy beaches on all the islands, fringed by graceful palm-trees, were another unforgettable feature of the Seychelles.

[Amazingly vivid description, reminiscent of the fantasy lands portrayed by CS Lewis in the Chronicles of Narnia...]

It was while reconnoitering a site for the Green 'Slave' on Silhouette Island that I fell in with a quite extraordinary character, the almost legendary 'Uncrowned King of Silhouette'. Descended, as were almost all the white land-owners, from the original French colonists, his name was M. Dupont, and he owned the whole of this beautiful, mountainous and isolated island, which he ran as a benevolent aristocrat on an unashamedly feudal basis. He knew every member of his community by name and they all loved him.

M. Dupont was a most interesting man and a great story-teller, some of whose yarns were barely credible. In the early 1920s he had apparently represented Britain in the javelin-

throwing contest of the Olympic Games - and won it! His expertise, he said, had derived from youthful experience in spearing and harpooning sharks and whales in the waters surrounding his island. A few miles off-shore there was a dangerous rock marked on the chart 'E.D.' Dupont swore it existed, and said that he had once touched it with an oar. We made a thorough search for it, but never found it. (Could he have touched a whale or a shark?). His tales were legion, and one night, when we were anchored near Silhouette, I invited him off to dine with me. It was a thoroughly entertaining evening. I had apologized for the weakness of my 'chilli-wine' (of which I always added a few drops to the soup) and next morning, after the ship had got under way, a boat was observed vainly trying to overtake us, with six men at the oars and a solitary, be-hatted figure perched up in the stern-sheets holding something aloft. I stopped the ship and the boat drew alongside. A bottle was passed inboard and brought to me on the bridge with a message attached. 'To fortify your chilli-wine', it said. The bottle contained the most powerful lot of fresh chillis I have ever experienced, and they have lasted me to this day!

[What an extraordinary story! I do remember the bottle of chilli wine that proudly graced the dinner table at Legbourne, and later at Manby; however, I had never learned this full story until I read it in these memoirs...]

One Friday afternoon I took the ship in through the reefs to Port Victoria to give week-end leave. There were no alongside berths and very little swinging room, so I moored with two anchors and mooring-swivel, shut down the boilers and reverted to four hours' notice for steam. I shoved off across the island to spend an evening at the Beau Vallon Hotel. Half the ship's company also pushed off for the week-end. On my return, the ship's siren was blaring and our patrols were out on the streets. I was informed that an 'Operational-Immediate' signal had been received which the Paymaster and another officer were attempting to decipher. Meanwhile the First Lieutenant had taken steps to recall all liberty-men. The signal was from C-in-C East Indies and addressed to *Owen*. It was enciphered in a code which we apparently did not carry. Nevertheless, the Cypher Officers had somehow succeeded in unravelling the first bit of it - which read: 'Proceed forthwith to .. .' - but they could get no further. I told the Chief to start raising steam and we began the slow process of unmooring. Liberty-men began trickling back in twos and threes. Within an hour we were ready to move, but at least a dozen of the crew - including the Coxswain - were still ashore, and no further progress had been made in deciphering the signal.

I signalled the C-in-C to the effect that I was moving, that his signal was undecipherable (and possibly corrupt), and requested instructions in Plain Language as to whether, on leaving Port Victoria, I should turn east or west. We hauled out through the reefs and into the bay, and a boat with two more liberty-men caught us up. As we cleared the islands, a P /L signal came through ordering me to proceed at full speed to Male in the Maldiv Islands. (They lay a thousand miles to the north-eastward!)

From then on an absolute spate of signals flooded into the W /T Office - in a code that we did carry. *Owen* was to assume the role of a floating 'British Residency' for our High Commissioner in Ceylon at Male, capital of the Maldives (a dependency of Ceylon), during critical political negotiations with the new Sultan, who had apparently abrogated a Treaty of Defence under which Britain held the vital air-base at Gan. The ship was also to act as a W/T link with Whitehall, for which our small Communications Staff would be augmented by C-in-C. Meanwhile I was in communication with the Governor of the Seychelles regarding

the support of my stranded liberty-men and the crews of our 'Slave' stations on Silhouette and Bird Islands.

It was now mid-March, the weather was superb, the sea a deep blue, glassy calm with a low, lazy swell. The ship throbbed from stem to stern as she worked up to full power, and we forged ahead to this new venture feeling somewhat depleted but rather elated. I was concerned about the thirty or so men we had left behind in Pemba and the Seychelles, and sent off a stream of administrative signals to ensure their welfare and support in our absence, which might well be for a month or more. (The Governor of the Seychelles assured me he would make good use of the stranded liberty-men on Mahe, and would charter an island-schooner to replenish the camps on Silhouette and Bird Island.)

It took us about three days to reach Male at full speed, and on arrival we felt our way in to the lagoon, through reefs and with some caution, neither the charts nor the Sailing Directions being particularly helpful. We anchored about a mile off the capital, put down all the boats, spread our awnings, and set to, to chamfer up the ship. For a diplomatic assignment of this sort, I felt, we ought to be looking our best. Meanwhile, and while awaiting developments, we might as well carry out a local survey of the lagoon and the entrance-channel.

Signals now started coming in from Colombo. I was told to expect the arrival of the High Commissioner by air on the morrow. He would be coming in an R.A.F. Sunderland flying-boat, and (if I had no objection) would be bringing his lady secretary (!). On that point I at first demurred. It would cause complications and was against Regulations. The High Commissioner then appealed to the C-in-C, saying he couldn't perform without his secretary. The C-in-C approved and told me to make the best of a bad job (so to speak), so we prepared for a bit of an upheaval. I moved out to the Chart-house to make way for H.E., and the Doctor moved out of his cabin to the Sick Bay to make way for the lady secretary. We all wondered what she would be like.

As the flying-boat alighted on the lagoon in a smother of foam and spray, all eyes (and every pair of binoculars) were trained on it, and when the door opened and two figures emerged, an audible sigh wafted through the ship. 'She's a blonde' was the word whispered along the guard-rails as the launch approached. And up the ladder came first, a heavily-built, rather florid, paunchy gentleman, dark-haired and heavy-jowled (who reminded me immediately of the actor Robert Morley), and following him a sprightly short-haired damsel in a flowing summery dress, a blonde, to be sure, but hardly the 'glamour-puss' of the sailors' overheated imaginations! Certainly Nancy Elwood was no oil-painting - an efficient career girl, no doubt - but she was female and the object of all attention. It was astonishing really, and rather amusing, to witness the scene on the quarterdeck that evening: Nancy seated on a deck-chair 'holding court' in the centre of a circle of officers hanging on her every word ('like bees round a honey-pot', as someone remarked at the time).

We soon settled down to a comfortable routine. Each morning H.E. would be ferried in to the Sultan's palace for a round of long-drawn-out negotiations, and each evening he would return to dictate a long report to Nancy for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. When typed, these reports would be sent down for ciphering and transmission by radio to Whitehall, usually about midnight, so as to be ready on the Civil Service desks for action next morning. I was concerned at the inordinate length of these reports and the amount of work they entailed for the cypher and communications staffs, and got H.E. to agree to let me

vet them in draft form. Brevity is a vital attribute of naval signalling, and drastic condensation of H.E.'s meandering drafts seemed imperative. But the Royal Navy and the Diplomatic Corps are entirely different breeds, and in this matter we could find little common ground.

One example sticks in my memory. Four or five pages had been handed to me one night (which would take hours to encipher and transmit) and I did my best to condense it - in naval style. It was H.E.'s draft report on the day's negotiations with the Sultan, and one paragraph opened with the words: 'As I was lying in my bath this evening, it occurred to me that .. .'! I had become rather less than enchanted with 'Robert Morley' by this time. He tended to spread himself all over my cabin and behaved very much as if he owned the place. And this latest 'blurb' really added insult to injury - 'my bath' indeed!). So I struck the whole thing out and substituted the one word 'Consider' , which entirely preserved the sense of the paragraph and was, I felt, an object-lesson in the merits of conciseness. But H.E. would have none of it. 'No, no,' he said, 'The chap in Whitehall who's dealing with this business knows me quite well and those words will convey a subtle nuance to the contentious assertion which follows. I insist they remain in.' After that I rather gave up, and reflected that this, presumably, was what 'being a W / T link with Whitehall' was all about!

Apparently the young Sultan had quarrelled with his father (whom he had succeeded) and, having somewhat revolutionary and anti-imperialist ideas, had set the cat among the pigeons by tearing up most of his father's internal and external measures - including the Defence Treaty concerning Gan. However, by early April, H.E. had managed sufficient arm-twisting of one sort or another to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion and to fly back to Ceylon. *Owen* was thus released and lost no time in sailing back to the Seychelles.

But time was now getting short. We had to recover the two camps and all their equipment, re-embark the stranded liberty-men, call on the Governor - to thank him for all his help - and set off for Pemba to recover Jack Cooper's survey-party from there. Fortunately the Pemba survey was virtually complete, so, by the end of April, we were once more heading home towards the Suez Canal, though calling at Aden, where Maurice Heath was now the A.O. C. and well able to entertain me! It took us a month to get home, via Aden, Malta and Gibraltar, and we reached Chatham early in June. It was the end of my first overseas surveying Command, which, on the whole, I had thoroughly enjoyed. At the end of the summer I was due for another shore job.

Chapter 15: The Citadel, Admiralty, 1958-60 and HMS Owen (Atlantic Deployment), 1960-61

I think it was in September 1958 that I took up my next appointment - in Whitehall. My post was officially designated 'Officer in Charge of Staff Charts' (O.C.S.C.), but in fact that title in no way reflected the range of my duties and responsibilities. My office was underground, in the massive war-time 'Citadel' projecting from the north corner of the Admiralty into Horse Guards Parade. There were no windows and we worked entirely in artificial light, fresh air being blown through the office from ship-type ventilation trunks. Though responsible for the only completely up-to-date set of some 4,000 Admiralty Charts for use, as required, by the Naval Staff, I had a multitude of other duties barely connected with that, including Radio Navigational Warnings, NATO Standardization, War-time Light Lists and aspects of charting policy, Territorial Waters etc. I worked with a small staff of three naval officers and two civil servants.

Mary and I had decided that another two years of weekly or daily commuting from Sheppey to London was simply 'not on', so we let our house at Minster to another naval officer and found ourselves a 'Service Letting' at Farnborough in Kent, which was within easy travelling distance of Whitehall.

[I have a few memories of the semi-detached house at Farnborough – I think it was called 'Highlands'.]

By 1960 it had become clear to me that my time ashore was running out. I was to be appointed again to command H.M.S. *Owen* for another two years. I had long hankered for the old days, when our ships had pioneered the exploration of distant lands, particularly the polar regions, and on occasion I had been instrumental in arranging for them to co-operate in the transport and landing of University and other scientific expeditions to the Arctic. I felt that the Navy had a potential long-term interest in these areas, and in ice-navigation generally, and was concerned that over the years our experience in that type of work had dwindled to virtually nil. When a plea from the Governor of the Falkland Islands Dependencies reached us for urgent surveys to be undertaken in South Georgia on behalf of the whaling industry, I made strong representations to the Hydrographer that we should respond positively and that the task should all to *Owen*. After much discussion and argument this was agreed, and it fell to me to initiate the necessary planning. *Owen* had been re-fitting in Gibraltar, with Roy Benson, her First Lieutenant, in temporary command. She was due to complete in May, and it was decided that I should fly out there to take over from him and bring the ship back to UK.

Having drawn up an outline programme for our first 'season' (which included visits to many exotic and seldom-visited places), I thought it sensible to equip myself with a 16 mm colour cine-camera, so I bought one before setting out. That camera was to be the source of many hundreds of feet of colour-film that I was to send home from far-away places over the next two years, and which helped to keep us in touch with each other during long months of separation.

[Well I remember those films arriving from my father overseas, and mother showing the films on the projector that they had bought...]

When I got out to Gibraltar, I found *Owen* beginning to emerge from her re-fit, though there was still much to be done to make her ready for sea. It was brought to my notice that we had a suspected thief on board, several of the sailors having had money stolen from their lockers. A few days later, one of the seamen was caught red-handed with marked notes in his possession. He had a highly blemished Service Record and the case cried out for exemplary punishment. I proposed to the Flag Officer, Gibraltar, that the culprit should be dismissed from Her Majesty's Service. He agreed, and I read the Warrant to the assembled sailors on the quarterdeck that evening. It had the desired effect, because I had very little further trouble throughout the commission.

I commissioned the ship on May 17th 1960 and we sailed a fortnight later. Our first commitment was an official visit to the Spanish Hydrographer at Cadiz, and this was followed a few days later by a similar visit at Lisbon to the Portuguese Hydrographer. Both visits involved much protocol, gun-salutes, calls, demonstrations, receptions and entertainment, and both went extremely well, the ship, newly re-fitted and freshly painted, doing credit to the R.N. and making a very good impression on our Iberian hosts.

Our first port of call in U.K. was Dartmouth, where we had a survey to do for the rest of June. There was a good deal of liaison, of course, with the Royal Naval College - and with the Training Flotilla - most of the cadets visiting the ship in groups for their first introduction to the Surveying Service.

In July we moved up to Scotland and Northern Ireland to carry out a survey in the Western Approaches, using the new improved Two-Range Decca system known as Lambda (Low Ambiguity Decca). Using Londonderry as our base, we established one Slave on the Island of Tiree and the other at Saligo Bay on Islay. The area we were concerned with, embracing the Stanton Banks, lay towards the edge of the Continental Shelf. It was of vital importance to our submarines, and had never been surveyed. As an alternative to Londonderry, we sometimes used Oban as a base, but from a logistical point of view it was less satisfactory. Our Survey covered a thousand square miles, and weather conditions were consistently adverse, enabling us to acclimatize ourselves to what might be in store for us in Antarctic waters. At the end of August *Owen* returned to her home port, Devonport, to grant leave and prepare for her long Atlantic Cruise.

On 20th September, after an Inspection by the Hydrographer of the Navy (Rear Admiral E.G. Irving), the ship sailed for a protracted oceanographic cruise in the Atlantic, laden with special stores and equipment, and with three civilian scientists embarked. We were to carry out a programme of scientific research drawn up by the British Museum of Natural History and the Imperial College of Science and Technology, Dr. J.D. Wiseman of the B.M.N.H. and Dr. C. Evans of the I.C.S.T. directing the work. Our third 'scientist' had been rather 'wished' on us by the Hydrographer as a passenger. This was the redoubtable Mr. Duncan Carse (who, as a one-time Radio Personality playing 'Dick Barton - Special Agent', had been something of a household name). His mission was to be marooned on the most inaccessible part of South Georgia for two years in order to carry out what he described as 'An Experiment in Loneliness'. Our job was to land him and leave him.

By the time we reached the Azores, a week later, we had occupied nine oceanographical 'stations', at each of which we had sampled the water-column (from seabed to surface), measured its temperatures, trawled for plankton and other forms of marine life, and obtained

a core of sediment from the ocean floor, while taking continuous records of the depth along our track. We put in to Punta Delgada to fuel, and there, on the quay to meet us, was a presentable young lady called Venetia. She had come to collect Duncan Carse and they disappeared into the hills together.

We stayed three days in the Azores, and as we were about to continue the cruise, the Engineer Officer reported to me that our starboard engine was out of action. One of the E.R.A.s had somehow succeeded in jamming the propeller-shaft and the combined efforts of the engine-room staff had failed to free it. This was indeed a 'facer', as Dockyard assistance was clearly needed. I was very loath to return to Devonport, so proposed instead to make for Gibraltar on one engine. This was approved. It was a distinct setback for our plans, but handling the ship with only one engine was a challenge which I was ready to accept. Making good use of the wind on our starboard quarter, I took the ship out stern first and set off to the eastward.

We reached Gibraltar on 5th October, and as it was obvious that we'd be there for at least a fortnight, I wired to Mary to join me, which she did very quickly. Almost by magic we found a delightful house and excellent car within 24 hours of her arrival!

Gibraltar was a pleasant interlude, marred by the death of our Chief Stoker, whose family flew out to the Naval Funeral Ceremony and were greatly comforted and befriended by Mary. The Ice Patrol Ship, H.M.S. *Protector*, came in on her way down to the Antarctic, and I took the opportunity to transfer a survey detachment under Lieutenant Barry Dixon, with one of our Surveying Motor-boats, to take passage in her to South Georgia as an Advance Party, pending our own arrival.

Repairs to our starboard shaft were eventually completed, and we sailed again on 23rd October, a new Chief Stoker being brought out to us by helicopter from one of our aircraft-carriers off the Portuguese coast. After topping up with fuel once again at Punta Delgada, we continued the oceanographical cruise, paying particular attention to the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Early in November we investigated the Nares Deep and the Puerto Rico Trench, from which we obtained a sediment core from a depth of almost five miles! It was certainly the deepest core ever obtained by the Navy, and it took us about seven hours to get it.

[Amazing! Fascinating...]

From the Puerto Rico Trench, we continued the cruise southwards through the islands of the Antilles, calling briefly at Antigua and St. Lucia, making surveys of some of the inter-island passages, saluting the Diamond Rock, and bringing the score of oceanographical stations up to 25. At some of these 'stations' we lowered our under-water camera down to the ocean floor and obtained astonishing photographs of marine creatures in their pitch-dark oozy environment.

An important objective of our scientists was the tiny group of islets known as St. Paul's Rocks, an isolated peak of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge which breaks surface just north of the Equator. The rocks form an arc which shelters a bay from the effect of the easterly Trade Winds, and in the 1870s H.M.S. *Challenger* had moored in that bay, with hawsers out to the rocks on three sides. I was not prepared to do the same with *Owen* but I sent in a strong landing-party, including our scientists, in the ship's two whalers, and they spent a profitable and interesting day there, while the ship did a systematic survey all around the Rocks. A

major point of interest for geologists and geophysicists is the fact that these rocks have been exuded from the earth's core, and a determination of their age will give them the age of the Earth. Needless to say, samples of rock were brought back to the ship, and because the islets are hardly ever visited, we left behind a 'Time Capsule' (for the edification of posterity).

Having 'crossed the line' with the usual ceremony, we put in to the Brazilian port of Recife (Pernambuco), where two rather embarrassing incidents occurred. We were to berth alongside a promenade in the centre of the city, so I asked for floating fenders to keep the ship clear of the wall. They were not available. As the tide fell, our starboard bilge-keel caught a projecting 'step' on the wall, and the ship took a growing, and quite alarming, list to port (which was made much of by the local news media)! And, when the time came to leave, I swung the stern out into the stream and held on for'ard, and as the ship turned, her port anchor caught on the stone balustrade and knocked a section of it over. (It was many months before I heard the last of that episode, because the city lodged a claim for damage against the Admiralty!)

Our next objective was the island of Martin Vaz, terminal point of the Trinidad Seamount Chain, some 600 miles off the Brazilian coast. It was described in the Sailing Directions as 'inaccessible' and that posed an irresistible challenge. The island is claimed by Brazil, but we had obtained clearance to visit it (and had actually embarked a Brazilian naval officer for hydrographic experience and liaison duties), so on 4th December we anchored close under its precipitous shores and sent in a landing-party. One officer and a seaman scaled the cliffs to reach the summit, while the scientists investigated the island and a sketch-survey was made by the boats. I reported the landing by signal and it brought us some good publicity in the national press, while the Brazilian authorities found it hard to believe. Apparently it was the first recorded landing on Martin Vaz.

Rio de Janeiro was as beautiful and colourful as ever, but its intoxicating music and general zest for life seemed somehow to have evaporated over the quarter-century since my last visit. (Or could it simply have been that I had grown older?). Anyway, we were excellently cared for by the Brazilian Hydrographer over the four days that we were there, and it was indeed a memorable visit. We moved on from Rio to spend Christmas with our counterparts in Montevideo, where the Uruguayan Navy did all they could to entertain us.

This brought to an end the first phase of our oceanographical cruise, and our scientists packed their bags and flew home to join their loved ones. We had run a continuous line of oceanic soundings 10,000 miles in length, occupied 67 oceanographical 'stations' and obtained 50 deep-sea cores, as well as making many other types of scientific observation, including photographs of the ocean floor. As *Owen* was the first British Survey Ship to visit South America since Captain Fitzroy's voyage with Charles Darwin in H.M.S. *Beagle* 130 years before, the Argentine Navy sent a special aircraft down to Montevideo to collect me and three of my officers for a 24-hour visit to Buenos Aires. Both their Hydrographic and Antarctic Institutes were anxious to consult us as to our forthcoming surveys in South Georgia, and our projected visit to what they were pleased to call the 'Islas Malvinas'.

[The Falklands – remember the war in 1982?]

On 27th December *Owen* left Montevideo and headed east across the South Atlantic, on a Great Circle course to Tristan da Cunha. My original plan had been to go straight down to

South Georgia, but while in Rio, we had unfortunately developed trouble with one of the boilers - a severe case of something akin to 'condenseritis' - and its tubes had been badly damaged. Docking in South America had been considered, but the Admiralty had directed me to proceed to Simonstown instead. By this time, evidence had emerged which gave grounds for suspecting that negligence had contributed to the damage, so, after leaving Montevideo, I ordered a Board of Inquiry to be convened on board. Its Report showed conclusively that normal vigilance on the part of the Stoker Petty Officer of the Watch would have prevented the damage to the boiler tubes, and disciplinary action had to be taken against him. Meanwhile we continued steadily eastwards, sounding as before, and continuing with our oceanographical observations.