NAVAL INTERLUDE

An Account based on a Diary
of a Midshipman R.N.V.R.
during the last year of the First World War

by

W.B. ADAM

W B Adam

Chipping Campden

Glos.

MR W. B. ADAM

Mr W. B. Adam, Director of the Campden Food and Drink Research Association from 1957 to 1965, died on September 1, at the age of 88.

Adam joined the Campden Research Station, as it then was, in 1927, beginning a long period of service to the developing food and drink industry in the United Kingdom.

As Deputy Director from 1933 to 1957, he saw the Campden organization make the transition from an outpost of Bristol University, to a government funded research institute to a fully fledged industrial research asociation, funded by the industry, in 1952.

Among other things Adam supervised the research and advisory service which provided the sound scientific basis on which the British canning industry was built, and he published well over a hundred papers in scientific and technical journals.

He enjoyed the talent, not so common among applied scientists, of combining scientific accuracy with colourful literary prose. It was typical of him that after three weeks in Kenya to determine the cause of an occasionally occurring undesirable flavour in a particular item of produce he wrote two reports, one scientific, and the other a highly readable account of the country, its politics and the people he met there.

His literary gifts also found scope in another, and comepletely different, sphere. Born in Dublin and educated in Edinburgh at Fettes College, he served in the Royal Navy in minelayers, during the last year of the First World War.

Although this was a brief period in his life, its memory never faded and he wrote an account of his time at sea, "Naval Interlude", in his eighties. Thus, a fresh and original account of the conditions of service of a mere "Snotty" (Midshipman), was accepted by the Naval Archives of Cambridge University.

After the First World War, Adam elected for a career as a scientist, and took both parts of the Natural Sciences Tripos at Cambridge, before going into industry with J. S. Fry and Sons, at Bristol. This experience stood him in good stead when he joined the Campden Research Station.

His wife predeceased him. There were no children

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FOREWORD

This account of the experiences of a schoolboy turned sailor in the final year of the First World War was started in 1934 in an attempt to recapture an old enthusiasm and provide a relief from the restrictions imposed in the writing of scientific and technical papers. The task, which proved to be too difficult to accomplish at the time, was set aside on the advent of the Second World War and was not completed until 1952.

It is easy to contrast the naval sides of the two wars and to see in the first a slower tempo, with the normal hazards of the sea more nicely balanced against the misfortunes of war. But to those who serve, all major wars must be Great Wars, and that of 1914-18 fully deserved the name by which it was long called.

The main events described in these pages cover little more than a year's break between school and university, the shortness of the interval suggesting the title, Naval Interlude. The chief source is a diary kept at the time - a naive document full of strange rumours, unwarranted deductions, and unfulfilled longings for a fleet action - which was written partly in port and partly at sea, and generally under a yellow-shaded lamp in the cabin of a destroyer. In this diary one sees, through the eyes of a temporary midshipman, some of the activities in a specialized field of naval operations towards the end of the

First world war, and all that this account attempts to do is to fill in the details of the picture and give an indication of the background against which these effects appeared at the time.

I

There is something to be said for having been born a Victorian, even by as little as fifteen months, and there is to have had the first of the arches of one's years embedded in an historic age. My first conscious memory, however, starts in the earliest years of the 20th century – an enviable period in which to catch one's first glimpses of what appeared to be a settled world, well-pleased with its material progress and fully confident of the future. There were, to be sure, losses to be set against the quickening stream of mechanical devices which inventive minds offered as substitutes for the beautiful objects designed and made by skilled craftsmen for a more leisured age. Amongst these saddest of these losses was the rapid disappearance of the great fleets of sailing ships. The clippers with their graceful lines and tall masts were now rarely to be seen, the full-rigged ships crowned with their great spread of sails were no longer a common sight on the oceans, and the multitudinous other sailing craft, each with its own distinctive pattern and rig, were swiftly vanishing from the seas. Only in some of the smaller ports along the coast was it still possible to see fleets of brown-sailed fishing boats which lent colour and character to the scene.

I was fortunate in being born near the sea and in using it as a highway between home and school, but the journey from Dublin Bay to the Firth of Clyde did not intersect, during daylight hours, any of the few shipping routes still used by sailing craft, and it was only on rare occasions that I had the unforgettable experience of seeing a great ship under full sail. This was a sight, unknown to a later generation, which aroused emotions quite different from those stirred by the passage of even the earliest and most graceful of steamships,

~~boldest and most graceful of steamships~~, emotions which have been perfectly expressed by Robert Bridges in his poem "A Passer By":

"Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West,
That fearest nor sea rising nor sky clouding,
Whither away, fair rover, and what thy quest?
Ah! soon, when winter has all our vales opprest,
When skies are cold and misty, and hail is hurling,
Wilt thou glide on the blue Pacific, or rest
In a Summer haven, thy white sails furling?"

But, pleasant as it might be to sail away in thought and "glide on the blue Pacific" to me the chief appeal of the sea lay in polar expeditions and, particularly, in the splendid and tragic epic of Scott's last voyage, which had ended the great period of British antarctic exploration. Voyages in polar seas have an atmosphere entirely their own, with their sense of isolation and of intrusion into a world not made for man. Early prints of ships engaged in the search for the North West Passage show them as lone and lovely ghosts cast out to wander interminably, surrounded by tall green pillars of ice in a grey and lifeless sea. My first glimpse of this fantastic realm, however, was through the eyes of the Ancient Mariner in a scene well known to every schoolboy:

"At length there came both mist and snows,
And it grew wondrous cold.
And ice mast-high came floating by
As green as emerald"

And, as the ship penetrated deeper into the fringe of the antarctic:

"We were the first, that ever burst
Into that silent sea"

Poised as I was, at the turn of the century, with one foot in the raw and adventurous past and the other in the unknown and mechanized future I realized, however, that a wide gulf lay between the world of imagination and that of reality, and had no great desire to connect dreams into action until I had learnt more of the ways of ships on the sea and the type of life to be lived there.

* * * * *

I have no idea at what age I made my first journey by sea, but it may have been when I was about two years old. One of my earliest recollections is of a rough passage from Dublin to Glasgow in an old paddle steamer of the long-since defunct Duke Line, during the course of which I was sick; and of how the seas were so high and the ship's motion so terrifying that some of the passengers

believed that last hour had come, or perhaps just hoped so. It is quite possible, however, that this is not a true memory of the incident but rather the recollection of a description of it recounted a few years later by someone who was present at the time. Another early memory, unconnected with the sea, is of beating a drum in the garden of our home in Temple Road in celebration of the end of the Boer war, and of tossing a cabbage over the wall at a cow whose patient stare had proved distasteful to me. On the same occasion my brother Alfred fell into a bonfire — an action which must have been surprising to us all, as well as disconcerting to himself. I was then less than three years old.

The sea trip from Dublin to Glasgow was well known to Alfred and myself as, from a tender age, we had been allowed to make it unaccompanied by an escort of grown-ups. After a journey to the North Wall by cab we were left in the care of Captain Bogan or Captain Montgomery of the "Hazel" or "Olive" or "Rowan", small ships of some 500 tons burden, though large in our eyes. We were supposed to retire at once to our cabin for the night, but there was a lot to be seen before the ship sailed about eight o'clock. Cattle had been driven to be driven on board and hatches secured before the sudden and half-dreaded blast of the siren announced that we were about to cast off. Then there was the journey down the Liffey past Ringsend

and the Pigeon House. Over to port there was the Bull
Wall (which I had long confused with the Boer War) and
ahead the revolving beam of the Bailey light on the northern
arm of Dublin Bay. We had generally turned in by
now so as to be up betimes in the morning, and so
missed the sight of Lambay, Ireland's Eye and the
Skerries as we cleared Howth Head and set a northerly
course. And we missed too, except on a glimpse through
the porthole on a summer's night, the long line on the
horizon traced out by the Mountains of Mourne.

The real excitement of the trip started when we
rose at an early hour and watched the sailors hosing
down the decks. We would then be approaching Ailsa Craig
and could see the thousands of sea birds nesting on its
cliffs. Ahead lay the Firth of Clyde and, by the time we
had reached the Cumbraes and the Cloch Lighthouse,
with the high-piled mountains of Arran and Argyllshire
in the background, we had recognized many of the
Clyde paddle steamers — the yellow funnels and black
hulls of the "Caly" and the red funnels and grey hulls
of the Glasgow South-Western. And so to Greenock or
Gourock, or Inverkip Bay, where we would be met by
relations and escorted to Glasgow. There were also
occasions when we stayed on board till we reached the
Broomielaw, making the passage up the narrowing channel
of the river through the lines of skeleton ships and surrounded
by the deafening rattle of riveters at work. At one time

the huge hulk of the Lusitania lay above us; ten years later she was torpedoed and sunk. Another time, on the same slips it was the Aquitania and, in later years HMS Barham and HMS Hood.

This was my introduction to Ships and Shipping. My first sight and contact with the Royal Navy was when some ships of the Home Fleet put into Dublin Bay and were open to inspection by the public. Amongst these was HMS Exmouth, a first-class battleship, and the memory of my visit to her includes descents of steep ladders to the lower decks, some of the more perilous passages being made on the shoulders of a stalwart sailor. Several years later, at the age of thirteen, I was one of a party of boy scouts who visited the cruiser HMS Dublin as she lay off the entrance to Kingstown Harbour. Having remembered to salute the quarterdeck as we came aboard we made a tour of the ship and were awarded at our departure with a large slice of bread peel from the ship's bakery.

For some weeks afterwards I was disturbed by a vague desire for a life at sea, prompted perhaps by a roving tendency amongst my ancestors, but this soon passed. It was only under the stress of war, and with the sight of the great stir of naval craft which I saw at Spithead in my holidays, that the urge to join the navy reasserted itself and by the time

I was appointed a temporary midshipman RNVR I was already a modest student of naval affairs as well as immoderate enthusiast for the service which I was about to join.

II

Living in Dublin during the greater part of the year we used to take our summer holidays either in Scotland or at Greystones, a quiet little seaside resort on the Wicklow coast about twenty miles from home. When we went to Scotland the centre of operations was our grandmother's house at Newlands, on the borders of Glasgow. The city itself was no more attractive then than it is now, and was remarkable for its tall narrow canyons of stone-built houses, grimy with the dirt of factory furnaces and blocked by long lines of tramcars. On the pavements there jostled a vast crowd of friendly citizens intent, for the most part, in going about their business and attending to their careers, and in eating cream cookies with their morning coffee

Our Scottish holidays were generally spent in the region of the Clyde, and in 1908 we visited Brodick, a tiny town of a few hundred inhabitants on the island of Arran. The long, shallow arm of the bay had a pier at one end, where a pleasant assortment of paddle steamers used to call, with the tall peak of Goatfell overtopping it to a height of close on three thousand feet. In the evenings we rowed out into the bay and fished with lines or trawls returning to our cottage under an archway of fuchsia and honeysuckle. The sight of fuchsia still

reminds me of Arran. Occasionally we went by motor boat round the headland to Lamlash or Whiting Bay or tried unsuccessfully to anchor in the deep water off the Holy Isle where ships of the navy used to shelter.

In 1906 we were at Oban living in a little house in the porch of which was a large model of a full-rigged ship in a glass case. It was at the old pier that I nearly fell fatally into the water owing to a misjudgment of the strength of my belt by an uncle who was swinging me by it. Here again there was a constant movement of ships, mainly coastal steamers bound to and from the western isles or Fort William, and my chief recollections are of these, and of the sunsets over Dunolly Castle with the purple hills of Mull in the background, and of the sound of the pipes over the waters.

Then there was a tour of the Perthshire Highlands in 1910 when we took the car over to Crieff and made many adventurous journies by road to Killin, Lochearnhead, Blair Atholl and Tarbet on Loch Lomond, and, most daring of all, the 50-mile trip to St Andrews and back, where Helen was at school. We stopped at the "Hydro" at Crieff and two rituals observed there stand out in the memory. They were the saying of grace by a parson before we had our meals, and the early morning bath. The latter was a serious,

and often rather frightening ordeal, for there was no saying which tap the bath attendant might choose to turn, and one at least used to release a solid jet of cold water with what appeared to be the force of a fire hose and this, catching one unexpectedly in the small of the back, had an unpleasant and unstabilizing effect. The Hydro had its compensations, however, and one of these was a network of underground passages in the cellars which was discovered and explored by another small boy and myself, and in the grounds there were a number of trees which we climbed with varying success.

This holiday, like all the rest of the biennial trips to Scotland ended with the last sight of the revolving beam of the Clock Lighthouse, the first view of the Pigeon House at the entrance to the Liffey, and the clop-clop of the cab which took us home from the North Wall

* * * *

By way of contrast to the bustle of Glasgow was the carefree somnolence of Dublin. The motor car was practically unknown in its streets until 1905 and the chief means of transport, apart from the four-wheeler cab and the jaunting car, was the tramway system with its many-coloured geometric signs

to distinguish its various routes. The traffic was seldom heavy, but the congestion in some thoroughfares, such as Grafton Street, was often considerable, owing to the sociable habit of the citizens who tended to congregate in the carriageway to the disturbance and inconvenience of wheeled traffic. In the evenings the papers were hawked by bare-legged and bare-footed urchins in ragged trousers well sprinkled with holes while at street corners women in shawls kept up a ceaseless patter of "Penny the bunch of violets, penny the bunch". Dirty, gracious and beautiful, with its Georgian air of elegance and the grim horror of its slums, the city presented a fine outward show in the magnificence of Sackville Street, carrying its six lines of tramways and wide dual carriageways, and the splendid buildings of the Customs House and Four Courts adorning the riverside.

Through the centre of the city there ambled the pleasant and unpretentious Liffey. Fed from the Dublin Mountains it flowed through the green meadows of the countryside till, accompanied by the Lucan steam trams along its north bank, it skirted Phoenix Park and entered the city. Here it was joined on its surface by the red-funnelled lighters of Guinness's Brewery and made the rest of its journey to the sea past modern quays and wharfs, entering the Bay without entirely losing the feeling of its origin in mountain

and gentle stream.

Our home was about two miles out of the city on the South side, within a hop-step-and-jump of the Dublin Mountains. Immediately in front of the house stood Palmerston Park, and beyond that the steep hill down to Milltown and the Dodder, whose weed-strewn banks gave the river a rather melancholy air of resignation. Then over the bridge to a country lane where blackberries were plentiful in season and on to Dundrum, Tickenock and the Hell Fire Club. Within easy cycle ride were Bellstridge and Monkstown on the southern arm of Dublin Bay, but better still was a journey on the top of the tram through Monkstown to Kingstown, Dalkey and Killiney Head. Another favorite trip was to the Zoo in Phoenix Park, famous for its breeding of lions, where, if we were lucky, we might be allowed to nurse the cubs from the most recent litter. Our lives in those days were bounded within a narrow circuit of which the outer limits were those of the tramway routes to Howth or Dalkey, or those imposed by physical endurance in walking or cycling. A radius of eight or ten miles contained our known world, apart from the summer journeys to Greystones or the sea trips to Scotland.

We had to make most of our own entertainments and were only mildly interested in the arrival at the

Rotunda in 1910 of a peculiar demonstration entitled the New Living Pictures. Before long the same type of show appeared as a regular turn in the variety theatres under the title of the Royal Bioscope, and thereafter sprang up in the city a number of haunts of rather doubtful respectability, known as Picture Houses. In these small and crowded halls an intense and often noisy audience would watch a flickering screen on which were recorded endless stories of cowboy adventures, to a frenzied accompanyment on the piano of the overture from William Tell (or other stirring tune). There was also in the city about this time a strange little hall of the size and shape of a railway carriage mounted on wheels where one could see, as it were from the observation car on an American railroad, scenes from foreign lands cast upon a screen. An attendent, by turning a hidden lever, could impart a vibratory motion to the vehicle which was intended to add verisimilitude; and all this for threepence a time, patrons being requested to leave at the end of the performance but no risks being taken by the attendent who searched beneath the seats for stowaways when the more honest passengers had alighted.

At our children's parties we were entertained with a magic latern showing "limelight views" and pictures from nursery rhymes, but the greatest of all parties were at Halloween when there was a special

kind of currant loaf for the occasion, known as "barmbrack", in which were hidden the ring and thimble and threepenny bit associated in England with the Christmas cake. There was roasting of chestnuts and a mysterious game in which walnut shells containing tiny candles were floated in a large bowl, but the event of the evening was ducking for apples in a basin of water — a performance which involved almost complete immersion of the head and much drying of the hair later on.

Growing up as we did amongst the middle-class Anglo-Irish protestants we were quite unaware of the thoughts and feelings of the main mass of the population who were native Irish catholics. Now and then our faithful cook Annie might have something violent to say about the behaviour of "your Strongbow" or "your Henry VIII" or "your Cromwell" (all a little irrelevant when directed to Scots) but for the most part the embittered feeling towards the British rule had not yet been fully exploited. The resurgence of Irish nationalism appeared in the mildest of forms with the substitution of plates bearing the names of the streets in Irish as well as English. Still more unassuming was a small office in Harcourt Street on the "meat-safe" windows of which were written the incomprehensible words "Sinn Fein".

Of the staff at home – Annie, the cook; Margaret, the housemaid; Hopkins, the gardener; and an occasional chauffeur and extra housemaid – Hopkins was perhaps the most interesting. He was of a friendly nature and very loyal to the family, even at the risk of being dubbed 'British' by his neighbours when national tension grew; and all this for a weekly wage of a guinea on which he supported a wife and eight children. At an earlier stage in his career he had played a many-coiled instrument (probably a euphonium) in a brass band and was an authority on Wagner and Chopin (pronounced phonetically) Unfortunately his front teeth had not been able to withstand the strain and had vanished irretrievably into the mechanism, a single stroke of fate thus depriving him of a set of natural incisors and a well-loved art. At times he would display a kind of unconscious philosophic humour. as on the sunny summer morning when he was clipping the hedge along the road-front watched by my fox terrier Gyp and myself. Two Germans passed by deep in conversation in their own tongue and for a time Hopkins stared after them in astonishment, finally remarking "Sure, ain't it wonderful how them fellahs can understand each other, talking kick that"

Gyp, our rough-haired fox terrier, was one of my most intimate companions from the time when Alfred and I bought him Annie for 15/- in 1910 till we had to

guide him to friends in Dublin when we left in 1918. Full of pedigree and distinction he made his first journey home in Alfred's coat pocket. Gay and ~~like~~ intelligent, with curly white hair on his back, he looked rather like a little woolly lamb when he had had his bath. Having accompanied me on most of my adventures during the holidays he used to mope bitterly on seeing me pack my school trunks, but the first sound of my step on returning was the occasion for a wild welcome home.

Looking back on those pre-war years in Dublin I can remember the two-mile journey to school, and how more that half that distance could be made by tramcar for the cost of one penny, but how I sometimes preferred to walk and so save the penny to buy sweets on the way. The school, originally founded by a Dr Strangways and owned during my time by a Dr Chetwode Crawley, overlooked the pleasant gardens known as St Stephens Green. Amongst the people I used to see on the way to school the most interesting was a lively and harmless eccentric known to all ~~the~~ Dublin as Endymion. He was generally smartly dressed in a grey or light brown suit with spats, and wore a grey bowler hat often adorned with tram tickets round the ~~band~~ band. His gait had a vaguely military air, emphasized by a habit of halting and saluting

when he reached a street corner, and also by the occasional substitution of a sword or small bundle of swords for the walking stick which he used normally to carry under his arm. The next figure I remember is that of a navvy who was engaged for some weeks in digging a trench along the route to school who liked to stop and examine me on my spelling. "Can ye spell 'philosopher' he said one day, bobbing up unexpectedly out of his trench. And talking of philosophers there was the case of the strange seedy looking man who sat opposite me one day on the top of the tram and who, after staring intently at me for some time, leant forward and said "Do ye think long". Even at that tender age I felt a little embarassed at the suggestion that I might be a philosopher.

Of the pre-war events in Dublin one of the earliest I remember was the Exhibition of 1907 which proved to be an enjoyable entertainment, though financially unsuccessful for its sponsors. I soon discovered that if the right time were chosen and the correct tactics observed it was possible to collect a gratifyingly large number of free samples at the stands — a chocolate neapolitan or tiny tin of cocoa when passing Cadbury's, a miniature cake of soap at another, and a wrapped toffee at a third. By making a quick turn beyond each stand and joining the same procession in the rear I often found it possible to ~~collect~~ secure several of these

trophies before being detected. In the Exhibition ground at Ballsbridge the chief form of amusement was the Helter-skelter, if one excepts the first drive of a boatload of directors on the waterchute when, owing to some fault of design, the boat continued its course to the bottom of the ~~basin~~ pond. It was reported that Endymion was the hero of the occasion when, scenting a possible ~~investigation~~ catastrophe, he flung aside his bowler hat and swords and dived into the ~~basin~~ pond to effect a rescue. It was during the period of the Exhibition that I had my first experience of a ride in a motor car — a journey of a few hundred yards from Lansdowne Road to Ballsbridge, fare one Shilling. I was a little disappointed at the trip which proved quite uneventful.

The common mode of road transport beyond the limits of the tramway service at that time was by wagonette or brake, passengers alighting at the foot of a steep hill to ease the burden on the horses. We ourselves had a pony with two kinds of trap — an "inside car" and an "outside car", which I think the English would have called a "governess car" and a "dog cart". In 1904 we lived for a few weeks a motor car which turned out to be an ugly piece of ironmongery, only occasionally self-propelled, and later in the same year we got rid of our pony and traps and acquired an Ariel motor car — Father being

then a director of Components Ltd, the makers. This car had a most exquisite body of French grey with a thin band of basket work over a red background at window level and an elegant interior complete with flower vases and cigar lighter. Unfortunately it seldom got out of sight of home without a breakdown and was soon replaced by a more reliable vehicle. In those days the ownership of a car brought with it a kind of freemasonry which entitled one to address any other motorist about the merits of his car and made it an act of discourtesy to pass a stranded car at the roadside without stopping to enquire whether help was needed.

The summer of 1911 provided not only brilliant weather but also the magnificent pageantry of a state visit to Dublin by King George and Queen Mary. By a stroke of good fortune I was given a "lift" down to Kingstown and a pass into the Pavilion from the top of which I saw the arrival of the royal party. It was a clear hot summer's evening when the royal yacht "Victoria and Albert" steamed slowly down the lines of ships of the Home Fleet anchored in Dublin Bay, her yellow funnels reflecting the bright rays of slanting sunlight while, against a background of blue sky, there appeared white puff-balls from ship after ship as the 40-gun salute reverberated around the Bay.

The following day, from the window in Jury's Hotel in Dame Street we saw the royal procession from the time it rounded the corner by Trinity College until it passed through the gates of the Castle. It was on a similar but earlier occasion from the same viewpoint, when King Edward and Queen Alexandra were making a State visit, that Alfred, with the inquisitive eyes of extreme youth, discovered the mechanism whereby the Queen bowed her gracious acknowledgement to the acclamations of the people. This consisted of a small wheel, operated by an impassive footman perched at the back of the carriage which caused the back of the royal seat to sway to and fro in a slow and stately fashion. On the last day of King George's visit we went to see an impressive military display in the fifty-acre field at Phoenix Park. After the more formal marching and countermarching the day ended with a charge of the Royal Horse Artillery with their guns and equipment, followed in the cloud of dust set up in their wake by a charge of the Royal Dragoons with drawn Sabres. It formed a fitting salute to a mode of warfare which was to vanish for ever in the fields of France a very few years later.

The King and Queen had resided during their stay in Dublin at the Viceregal Lodge where they were the guests of their deputies the Earl and Countess of Aberdeen.

P 20



Escorting SS. Huntscraft



Looking for'ard



Escorting S.S. Huntscraft

SANDFLY.



Ferret



Lay Mines : W.P. Operation



Mine Gone!

Lord and Lady Aberdeen took the duties of their office seriously, doing much to try and reduce the squalor and insanitary conditions of the city, and it was in connexion with the work of improved hygiene that Mother used to come in contact with Her Excellency. The vice-regal party went about the city on state occasions with some degree of pomp and ceremony and with an escort of outriders, but on less formal missions they would drive unaccompanied in carriage and pair. There were occasions before and after the outbreak of war that Lady Aberdeen visited us at Holywood House to attend an afternoon meeting or charity concert.

I had little to do on such visits except to remember to make my bow, the more delicate courtesies being left to other members of the household to perform. There was, for instance, the occasion early in the war when Her Excellency came to see a complete array of bedding, garments and bandages for a hospital which were displayed in various rooms in the house. One of the choicest exhibits was staged in the billiard room, the door of which was prudently kept shut until her arrival, but this precaution proved to have its drawbacks when Gyp, woolly-white from a recent bath and bored from his accidental imprisonment, sprang from among the blankets of one of the beds to give an

enthusiastic welcome to the viceregal visitor.

One of the more intriguing features of our house was its flat roof, reached by a narrow staircase the entrance of which, covered by a curtain, lay immediately adjacent to the door of my bedroom. Once on the roof one coved see, towards the north, the full stretch of the city; towards the east the sweep of Dublin Bay with Howth Head at its northern tip. from which the revolving beam of the Bailey Lighthouse flashed at night; and towards the south the Dublin Mountains with the sharp cone of the Sugar Loaf showing through a gap in the line of hills. Though the flat roof provided an endless source of interest and a peculiar stimulus to boyish imagination. it also held its hidden fears. On nights when the grown-ups were out there was the long trek to be made from the warm comfort and security of the rooms on the ground floor to the remote bedroom two stories up. With that sinister curtain to pass, not a hand's stretch from the bedroom door. What grim silent figure stood in the dark stairway behind that curtain I was never to discover as I failed to pluck up courage to look. but I cautiously watched to see if a fold of the curtain moved as I passed.

In the last few years of peace I found my eyes straying more frequently up into the heavens.

There were two reasons for this, one being an increasing interest in astronomy (I had seen Halley's Comet as a fuzzy star from the roof one cold night in 1910) and the other a mild curiosity about that latest of inventions, the aeroplane. Of the two there was no doubt that astronomy provided the greater interest, and this was stimulated by a visit to the Royal Observatory at Dunsink. The Astronomer Royal of Ireland was absent on this occasion but his deputy did the honours, and in a later conversation with Father stated that it was a long time since he had heard such an interesting lecture on astronomy!

As regards the aeroplane the first introduction of the people of Dublin to this new form of travel was in 1911 when a demonstration flight from Leopardstown Racecourse was announced ~~to take place~~, but the weather proved unkind or the plane unresponsive, and so we were deprived of our show. A year later we expected some of the competitors in a flight round Britain to call at Dublin, and I went to Howth Head with a friend to get a view of the planes as they passed. Unfortunately the nearest was forced to land some miles from Dublin and although I twice created a diversion on the way home by pointing excitedly to the sky — whereat the tram stopped and the passengers poured out crying Where, where? — the day

proved uneventful.

And so the quiet years moved on. [My elder brother Jim came home in April 1914 from his civil engineering job in Egypt, prior to taking a post with the P.W.D. in Ceylon, and the whole five of the family were together for the last time for many years. The blossom appeared, and so did my new tuckbox and trunk, and with a frisk, bustle of preparation Alfred and I set off in our cab for the North Wall en route for School.

III

It was on a bright May morning that we leaned over the rail of our ship and watched the familiar sights on the Firth of Clyde; the high peaks of Argyll, the islands and inlets of the coastline, and the busy paddle steamers carrying their morning load of business men to work in the city. We ourselves had a leisurely programme before us, for coming from such a distance was regarded as sufficient excuse for arriving late at school, and so we did not need to hurry our visit to Grandmother's, but felt it time enough to leave for Edinburgh after tea. At the end of the brief railway journey we hailed a four-wheeled cab, helped to pile our grub-boxes and trunks on top, and drove out into the wide expanse of Prince's Street. Pausing for a few moments at Vallencia's sweet shop to lay in a store of contraband we left behind us the worst of the din and screech of the cable cars and made our way over the high span of the Dean Bridge and down the steep slope of Comely Bank.

It is from here that the traveller first catches sight of Fettes, standing on the crest of an adjacent hill, with its turrets and spires outlined against the horizon, and can form a first impression ~~of~~ rather of its exuberant architecture. Designed in 1864

~~[illegible]~~ it is a peculiar mixture of neo-gothic, Scottish baronial, and the more fanciful motifs of French chateaux, but for me looking at it (though not for the first time) that evening, with the afterglow behind it and the line of lighted windows in its upper stories, it seemed dignified, solid and impressive. Fettes was then less that fifty years old, but had already gained considerable renown at the universities and in the professions and public services. It was by far the most outstanding school in Scotland or England for the production of rugby football players and had a record number of rugger blues at Cambridge, most of whom were also able classical scholars.

Breasting the gentle slope from Stockbridge our cab turned into the Glencorse drive and deposited us and our luggage at the deserted entrance to the house. We were more than an hour late, so that the corridors and Studies and dormitories were crowded with a mass of boys greeting one another after the holidays and only too willing to cast a quizzical eye on a newcomer. On arrival Alfred joined the select group of prefects and 'dooks' in the Study Area while I found my way to the housemaster's study where I was greeted by two otter rather shy and bewildered "new men".

Our housemaster, K. P. Wilson — Commonly

called K.P. — was a man of outstanding character, a fine classical scholar, an enthusiastic cricketer, and the possessor of a wonderful knack of handling and understanding boys. Much of the School's success at the universities was due to the habit of hard work learnt in his form, and it was not unusual for the more timid to transfer to the Modern Side rather than face the rigours of the upper fifth. ~~Although~~ In some respects a slave-driver K.P. had a kindly way with boys, though his methods had none of the subtlety of the modern psychological school of thought. Many years later I was to meet a lady who had been in charge of the women students in an English University; some of her flock had refused to eat enough and, on meeting K.P. and hearing of his success with boys, she had asked him what he would do in a like situation. His reply was that he would take a plate of porridge in one hand and a cane in the other and say - Choose!

With his immense enthusiasm for the classics and cricket it must have been depressing for K.P. to have to welcome yet another member of our family who was incapable of mastering the dead languages and who found cricket a dull game. In he came, however, with his two big mongrel dogs looking, as he generally did, as if he had just arrived from a rotting expedition, and his greeting seemed cheerful as well as hopeful.

Soon the lock-up bell sounded and, when nine o'clock came round, we went to the Prep. Room for prayers. Most of the room was filled with benches, the front rows being occupied by the young fry and the backs by the 'dooks'. When all were seated K.P. came in with the prefects and announced the hymn "Abide with Me"; then came the prayers in versions based on the English Prayer Book which I was to hear each day for the whole of my time at the School. It was a warm evening and, through the open windows, we could hear the swish of the trees in the Green Walk. The prayers ended, call-over was taken, and then K.P. stood at the door and shook hands with each boy as he passed. He gave us this same greeting every night, pausing now and again to encourage or congratulate a boy on some special effort or achievement. After prayers there was a rush for the dormitories — mine was known as the "Little Up" — followed by a lot of dashing to and fro fetching hot water. Then came "Lights Out" and talking, which was strictly forbidden, but this flickered out and soon there was silence and sleep.

The next morning we were roused about eight o'clock by a noisy hand bell (after the first day it was rung at seven o'clock) and as we dressed or lay abed (according to the strength of our nerve or reputation) heard the voice of the boy nearest the

clock "calling time" at intervals of five minutes. About twenty past I made my first journey up to College, looked at the lists in the main corridor, and found my place in Chapel and in Hall, in both of which the Houses united to become the School.

In Chapel on that spring morning the sunlight slanted down from the windows and lit up the faces of some two hundred boys, all strangers to me as yet. I saw also for the first time the Head, the housemasters, and some of the other assistant masters. There was D.W. Tanqueray, the prim and decorous housemaster of Moreton and form master of the Mods; Harry Pyatt, the brilliant but rather absentminded scholar who ruled over Lassington and the Lower Fifth; J.S. Edwards, a joint housemaster of College who was to guide me in the realms of mathematics; A.H. Ascroft, ex rugger international and form master of the Lower Sixth who, five years later, was to be elected Head; and several others including, of course, KP, with his white hair, his white moustache, his fresh complexion, and his keen and roving eye. This was the Society with which I vowed I was to live for the next four years or so, watching the changing scene as one moved from the benches occupied by the new men in front to the more exalted rows behind. The short morning service ended and we made our way to Hall where, having heard Grace said, we settled down to our rolls and butter and our sausages or eggs.

At 9.45 the work of the day began and I found myself in the Lower Fourth, that historic chamber where the art of "fagging" had attained a highly specialized and unique form. The unexpected

The form master was the Rev. G. H Lennox-Conyngham. who had come to Fettes as a boy in 1872 and - for some obscure reason was known to subsequent generations as Flob. /

Insert IV

~~The formmaster known to all generations as 'Flab'.~~ He was the kindliest of souls whose vulnerable points were the direct outcome of his finest qualities — an old-world courtesy and a parsonical fatherliness. Far from being a benevolent fool, he was torn between the duties of a disciplinarian and an inborn dislike of attributing unworthy motives to the actions of any boy in his form. As a natural outcome it was not unusual to see some boy who had been mildly rebuked rise solemnly to his feet, grasp the lapels of his jacket in the manner of his formmaster, and reply in a soft echo of stilted verbiage and a strain suggestive of virtue wounded by unjust insinuations.

Flab's arrival was generally accompanied by a storm of welcome as he walked up to the dais with his large mark-book and a bundle of pencils and pens dangling at the full stretch of his arm. It was quite unjustly rumoured that the mark-book was merely a "blind" and that he settled his weekly form-order by drawing the names from a Hat, even then assisting the gods of Chance by peeping in to see that his particular favourites were not dealt with too harshly. There was no doubt, however, that it was on pages torn from his mark-book that he wrote the excellent sermons which he preached in Chapel.

On arrival at the dais he would smilingly request that the storm should become a calm, but the gale

would merely abate its force to rise and fall in intensity throughout the hour. Occasionally he would suggest that there was rather too much "Rising and clapping", or "booing and banging of books", but somehow he managed to impart a not insignificant ~~amount~~ knowledge of English subjects and the classics to his lively flock. There was, at least no sleeping in his form — things were much too actively and amusing. Now and then, however, there was a Grand Remonstrance as when the lockers burst into flame, or when a delayed explosion partially wrecked the fireplace, or on the occasion when there was an apparently accidental release of fireworks. As nobody would accept responsibility for the crimes Flabs suspicions would be aroused and he would then see us as devils with cherub's wings. # he would be "reds, bullies, sneaks and liars" and would (according to later reconstructions of his speech) be threatened with the alternatives of "200 lines" every day till the end of the term, a fine of threepence each, or a general "report" to the Headmaster as a result of which we would "praably" (his own particular pronounciation of "probably") be "all be expelled".

The usual method of closing such an incident

was for a small boy, with an expression of bewitching innocence to approach the dais at the end of the hour and, while not actually implicating himself by 'confessing all', at least offering to take on himself the burden of the punishment. The sentence would then be a light one and might, if the job had been done artistically, include an invitation to breakfast when the noise of the conflict had died away.

How many times Flab. escaped sudden death at the hands of his form is unrecorded. Leaning over his desk on a winter's evening he might be seen grasping one lapel and passing a question rapidly round the form with a sweep of his ~~spectacles~~ glasses which he held in one hand, when a loud crack overhead warned him of danger. A moment later the broken globe of a gas fitting would descend with a crash on his note book and this would be hailed by mingled cries in which congratulations on his escape and protests at the clumsiness of the college porters could be distinguished. Actually the gas had been lit and the globe screwed up so as to allow of no expansion immediately before Flab, had entered the room.

Probably the classic of all incidents recorded

in the history of this remarkable form occurred on an early Spring morning in the term before I arrived. In the soft warmth of the day the sound of the gardeners mowing the Green broke floated through the windows and one, Cram, sitting on a back bench, felt impelled to give vent to his feelings by whistling. Flab looked round the form in mild surprise and said "Cram, you're whistling". Cram stopped at once and replied with equal courtesy "I think you are mistaken, Sir, You must have heard a wheelbarrow go by which was squeaking." Flab looked slightly doubtful of ~~was passed back~~ this explanation but, as we are all open to error, passed on, though a little reluctantly. Five minutes later Cram was overcome again with the blissful freshness of the day and, stretching himself happily, whistled a few bars again. Flab jumped to his feet. "Cram, you are whistling"; but Cram, with an air of one anxious to solve a mystery said promptly "No Sir, I distinctly heard it myself this time; that must have been the wheelbarrow going back again".

Generally, once each term, Flab would ask his form to tea at his house where, if it were high Summer, we would feast on strawberries and cream and be surrounded by his family, whose ~~gyrations~~ gyrations round the table usually ended in Flab's jumping heavily on their father's knee. ~~He was extremely~~ ~~of his form's affection and respect for him. But he abhorred~~

Ed. apposite

At the end of my second ~~term~~ year, when I was placed second in his form, it was my lot to assist in presenting him with a gift from his form on the occasion of his leaving the school to become the father of a beautiful country parish in England. So all these years passed into tradition, and, though we missed the merriment in his form-room, we felt also that a kindly creature had gone from our midst. Frequent rumours in later terms said that he was returning to preach in Chapel, but there was no truth in them and the next time I saw him was one day when looking out of my rooms in college at Cambridge. There he was in the middle of the court, a volume (surely not the mark-book!) hanging at the full stretch of his arm, looking for my rooms. He came up and had tea with me. When he died ~~a year or two ago~~ about 15 years later the Times reported that his funeral was an occasion for the deepest emotion on the part of the ~~whole village~~ lovely boys of Lavenham over which he held his clergy as rural dean, and to us who had been in his form at Fettes, this feeling can well be understood.

Cricket, in contrast to rugger, was hardly a natural sport in the school. Some boys really enjoyed it and were moderately proficient, but to others it meant a monotonous clicking of bats on a field which

was often windy and cold even in June. House leagues were played on half. holidays and "nets" on whole-school days. K.P. strove valiantly to encourage those who showed some ability to hit out with a straight bat and at other times gave birth to cynically humourous names for the house teams which he had selected. Boys of his house then gathered round the noticeboard to see whether they had been chosen to play for the "Hopelessly Incompetent" or for the "Wilfully Idiotic". There was a team of extreme juniors, known as "K.P.'s Lambs", who used to play matches against prep. schools, and I remember in my first term going with the team to Cargilfield, not - I must hasten to add - to play, as I could not even rise to that standard, but to score. Possibly this onerous duty was entrusted to me on account of my reputation as a mathematician..

Of language and customs there was not a great deal for the newman to learn. Prefects were addressed as "Sir" by the younger fry and it was not done for those below the rank of "dook" to walk arm-in-arm on their way up to College or to carry an umbrella. Grey flannel trousers preferred to as "schoolie boys.") were a distinction reserved for the school

prefects and the first XV, while rugger jerseys must not be tucked inside the "cuts" unless one was a member of Big or Little Side (the first four XVs), or the collar of one's blazer turned up unless one had received a third XV cap.

But the everyday courtesies of the rank and file were the strongest of these unwritten codes: one must not butt into a conversation without first apologizing for "picking up fag-ends"; nor must one join up with a pair on their way up to College or on a "run" without asking permission to "hang-on"; while one's company on runs, on journeys up-town to Church, or in lying out in the garden on Sundays in the summer, was always arranged with some slight formality beforehand.

In the pre-war years there were three entertainments in the summer term – the School Concert, the Poorhouse Concert, and Founder's Day. The last of these was the great day of the year. In the morning the choir dashed off to the nurseries on Orchard Brae and purchased small rosebuds which they wore in the buttonholes of their "Etons" or "Tails". Mother and Father were at the Founders Day in June 1914 and the usual programme took place in the Gym, starting with "Praise my Soul, the King of Heaven"

and ending with the "Vive-la". The choir were arranged decoratively in tiers round the platform and sang with gusto — so much so that a shrill treble voice at one occasion overran the baton, the owner (H.C Reid) being instantly self-condemned by his flaming cheeks. Then there were strawberries and cream in the marquee (and speeches as well, worse luck), a brief pause to watch the cricket match against OFs, and a journey up-town further to regale ourselves with scones and "cookies" at Mackie's or MacVittie's in Princes Street. All passed off in an atmosphere of tradition and security and in a flicker of colour, with everyone decked out in their best. Even K.P. wore a respectable gown.

The term rolled on with the usual round of work and games. On Sunday evenings after Chapel the "Prep. Room" (those who had not yet the privacy of a 'study' of their own) went to K.P.'s dining room. Here he would read from some books, generally humourous, — whilst his mongrel dogs Tim and Bobs (the latter of elephantine size) stretched themselves on the floor or scratched. We were presented with glasses of milk and currant cake, and some of us, like myself, suffered under a constant strain of trying to find some way of disposing of the milk

without drinking it – the animals made such a beastly noise lapping it up if the tumbler were pushed under a chair.

We read "Three Men in a Boat" and K.P. was so overcome with mirth that he frequently could not get on with the adventures of Montmorency or the dry remarks of George. Every time he raised the book he would have another fit of laughing and would have to lay it down and wipe his glasses; till his audience were infected with his own complaint and slipped off their chairs to roll in helpless gusts of merriment on the floor. Occasionally K.P. would pause to brush aside Timmy, his sixteen year old cat, which had stuck its head in the milk jug, and, in trying to reach further down into the contents, had been seized with a fit of sneezing.

But during the last week of term the serenity of its passage was disturbed by the touch of a cold shadow. On the Sunday night, when leaving K.P.'s room the boy immediately in front of me – the youngest in the house and son of the naturalized German consul at Sunderland – paused in saying good-night and K.P. remarked that it looked as if he would be at war with Germany by in a few days

Within a fortnight Ahlers' father had been arrested for "communicating with the enemy" and had been condemned to be shot. Later he was reprieved, but his family suffered great privations.

On the last day there was the ceremony known as "Lists" in the Gym., when, starting from the bottom, the school order was read and prizes presented. On reaching the Middle School Maths. Sets I found myself haled to the platform to receive my one and only prize. The Cloud gathering on the European horizon did not cast its shadow over the end-of-term festivities, and that night there was the "House Pop" in the tea room at Glencorse, with several O.F.s down to join us, a good "grouse" (i.e. feast) and a sing-song.

But after the Cloud came the Storm. Within a week War had been declared and the Old Order had vanished ~~with the period~~. Of those present that night, who were subsequently old enough to see active service, one-fifth had been killed before the signing of the Armistice. The school generation immediately before that of my first term suffered still worse with a toll as high as one-third. Gone were thoughts of careers in the professions, in the civil services, in business, or in the management of family estates; to those leaving school there was now only one sequel - War, on the land, on the sea, or in the air.

IV

It would be a mistake to imagine that the declaration of war meant an immediate reversal of the order of nature as far as the average schoolboy was concerned. It was some months before military affairs became the concern of the individual citizen rather than of the government and the regular fighting services, but most of us must at least have been stimulated by the unusual bustle and excitement. I spent part of the holidays in my boy scout's kit as "despatch-rider" at a Dublin barracks where I cycled 20 to 30 miles each day carrying messages from one point to another, or in being bandaged by would-be nurses at V.A.D. classes.

Returning to school we found that there were several gaps caused by boys leaving to join up. who otherwise would have stopped on for a term or two longer. Alf was a pref.. and by half-term was second to the Head of the House.

The parades and exercises of the O.T.C, previously items of secondary importance, were now regarded as being of sufficient consequence to interfere on occasions with the almost religious ritual of rugger games. and. in the latter part of the term the Corps had a long

route march which ended in a night attack launched on a small section which had been left to defend College. This meant the deadly job of 'doubling' across ploughed fields in the dusk; but the attack was successfully carried out except where one platoon was caught while crossing the crest of a hill by the sudden switching on of the behind them of the searchlights of Rosyth naval base.

A daily stir of activity on the Forth could now be seen in the movement of ships and seaplanes and in the sweep of searchlights at night. One morning early in December our first hours work after breakfast was in Jimmy Rhodes' German set. Coming into the room he walked straight to the board and wrote the words - SCHARNHORST, GNEISENAU, NURENBERG, LEIPZIG. News of the sinking of Admiral von Spee's squadron at the battle off the Falkland Islands had just come in.

By the middle of the term some of the younger masters had joined up and those who were less fit or of more mature years were starting to turn out on parade with the Corps. One or two casualties were reported amongst O.F.s who had been in the regular army and had fought at Mons or Marne, but to everyone the flame of the war appeared likely to blow itself out in a month or two at the latest. At the end of the winter term Ry left;

On arrival next term I found myself promoted to the Upper Fourth Mods – a form which only existed for a short time – and also moved from the Prep. Room to a double study which I shared with a gawky youth, the young laird of the island of Canna. Now, in the pitch darkness of the dormitories on cold winter mornings the sound of the Housemaid's bell would rouse unwilling forms to tumble out of bed and kick their way through a layer of ice on the slip-baths; then there would be dressing in the flickering light of open gas burners, a cup of thick hot cocoa (unless five minutes extra in bed were considered preferable) and the journey up to College with the stars still overhead.

From the Mods' formroom during Early School we could see the sky paling to the dawn, the blue smoke of breakfast fires rising over the city, and then the red rim of the sun mounting behind the Castle Rock. These were crisp, clear, frosty days when life was good as long as we kept moving.

Sometimes the ground was too hard for rugger and then we would have runs. On half-holidays it would be the 'Third Miler' – a circuit of about five miles along the Queensferry Road to Davidson's Mains and back along a bleak exposed stretch of the Ferry Road. On days when an east wind carried sleet and

hail up the Forth that journey from the third milestone to Crew Toll required an arctic endurance, for legs would become so numbed that all feeling even of extreme cold would finally vanish. The runs on whole~~s~~school days were shorter and were known as the Quarry Circle and the Sea Circle. In most weather the former was relatively uninteresting, but on snowy days there were traps where effective ambushes might be sprung by one House on another. The Sea Circle route, skirting close by the edge of the Forth, passed the tall stone gateposts and gaunt carriage drive of an old and dilapidated house. Those of us who knew "Kidnapped" believed it to be ~~was designated as~~ the 'House of Shaws' – the home of that terrified old miser Uncle Ebenezer.

It was about the middle of my third term that I first came in contact ~~the~~ with the might of the law, or perhaps more correctly, the law came in contact with me. Admittedly the court was not a high one, being merely the "unpaid magistracy" of Rowse prefecture, but what it lacked in power it made up in the dignity of its procedure. Having provided the material, in the form of a ghost story, for a riot of noise in the dormitory after 'lights out' I had been sentenced to be "prefs. tanned".

The crime of which I was charged and the verdict of the court having been explained I was formally notified by the Head of the House that I had the right to appeal to K.P., but I naturally did not take advantage of it. Two chairs were placed conveniently back to back, one to kneel on, the backs to bend tightly over, and the other to grip a hold of. Then came the stroke by the Head of the House and the cane was handed to the second pref. and so on to the third and fourth. Not a very deadly procedure, as it happened, and "lightly laid on" as the offence was not a serious one.

In the latter part of the Easter term, when the long spring evenings brought a sense of restlessness to the interval between tea and "prep.", K.P. turned this rising flood of energy into an unusual but typical channel. Immediately after tea the whole House dashed to the changing room and donned shorts, rugger jerseys and gym-shoes, then off we went to our only soccer pitch and, with maybe a couple of dozen on each side and as few Rempering rules as possible, played "Gym-shoe Soccer" at high speed. In these games K.P. generally took part and kept us going till there was just time to rush back to the House and change back into ordinary clothes before prep.

The informal and happy-go-lucky atmosphere of a game of gym.-shoe soccer played in the pale clarity of the end of a spring day gave it a quality of its own which was quite unforgetable.

So the summer came round again, but with it no School Concert, no Poorhouse Concert, no Foundation Day, no Lists and no prize giving. By this time I was approaching the top of the senior maths Set, on the Mods, but, alas, was near the bottom in my form in most other subjects.

Our only outings, apart from runs, were the Sunday morning visits to St Stephen's Church in Edinburgh and our Sundays "up-town", the latter falling due every three weeks. In St Stephen's the poetic eloquence of Dr Leckie Hardie-Watt, our Highland minister, gave the service an added interest, and few sermons closed without some excursion into verse - generally of his own composition. His large frame, smiling face and characteristic sing-song rather high-pitched nasal voice were missed when, gathering up his bagpipes, he left to join a Highland division at the Front. So for many months the noise of the "rushing mighty torrents r-o-lling down the mountain side" was, for him, swallowed up in the clash of arms.

But St Stephen's had its lighter side as well. The church was octagonal and the gallery ~~covered~~ covered the five sides opposite the pulpit. One of the occupants of a remote corner in the 'dress circle' as it were, was a fiercely bearded eccentric, generally referred to by us as "the Madman". At one time he had been a soldier and the sound of the pre-service voluntary on the organ encouraged him to march heavily with martial tread round the gallery. When he reached his own pew he halted, and then shuffled smartly sideways (in the manner of "right dress") along to his seat. Here he would survey the titles of the hymn books and bibles held at arms length and then might settle himself down, perhaps whiling away the time by tearing sheets from the books, rolling them up, and flicking the pellets over the ledge into the mass of the congregation seated below.

~~There was the minister whom he disliked strongly and to whom he attributed his sense of [illegible] the [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

[illegible] would never have seen a pistol to the head of his age and a moment later have it again. [illegible] would have if the shot had found its mark. But the Head's assassins of politeness as well as of [illegible] [illegible] the collection bag & he moved then over to his feet and Read it [illegible] [illegible] boot to the lady in the next seat. Despite, or perhaps on account of, his eccentricities Masters [illegible] [illegible], and it appeared that he was quite [illegible].

Perhaps the greatest break in the routine of the life at School was the Sunday 'up-town'. After early chapel I used to go in 'Etons' (or later, in 'Tails'), top hat, umbrella and gloves up the gentle slope of Orchard Brae and then down the steep path to the Dean Village. This evil-smelling cluster of houses, close by the tumbling waters of Leith, might have been a hamlet of the eighteenth century, but the effect of its odours outweighed any desire to linger and investigate it further, and before long I was up in the clear air again at Douglas Crescent. Old Mrs Waldie, her bearded and humorous-tongued son and her granddaughters then entertained me splendidly for the day. An excellent assortment of dishes on the sideboard for breakfast, then a wide

choice of papers to read and a walk in the gardens opposite or a drive in the car. Later a good dinner, an idle afternoon or a visit to the Zoo or elsewhere, an early tea and a cake packed up for me to take back to school. That rush to get back by 4.30 was the one disagreeable feature of the day.

The Sunday evening service in chapel was one of the few times in which the majority of the school saw the Head. He had an impressive presence and, owing to an affection of the lungs, a deep voice that was almost a growl. His literary and classical scholarship were too highly developed to be understood or fully appreciated by other than those of his form - the Upper Sixth - but nevertheless he knew every boy in the school by name and, to some extent also, by reputation. On official documents his name appeared as Dr. William Augustus Heard, but the unofficial voice of the school referred to him as "The Gussy", or more commonly, "The Bulge". The feeling of aloofness, natural to his position, did not prevent his strong sense of humour showing up on occasions; even when in the middle of rather a dull sermon, which he was preaching in chapel he saw in the schools' nodding air of somnolence the target for a shaft of wit coming to a suitable passage he chose his moment and,

raising his voice, shouted "Awake, from that sleepest" and passed on, with a strong effort to control a smile at the effect produced on the School.

The next winter found us without fires in the studies and during prep. the shutters were drawn as a safeguard against air-raids.

As far as our family was concerned, Alfred received a commission in the artillery on his eighteenth birthday in July and was in training at Portsmouth; Jean was nursing at a Hospital in Cairo; Helen was attached to the "Croix Rouge" and was running a canteen within a few miles of the Western Front; and Jim was in Ceylon on government service and unable to get home. Consequently Mother and Father went to Southsea for Christmas to be near Alfred, and I joined them, passing through the darkened streets of London on my way South.

Here, at last, one could see the continual movement of ships on escort, transport and other mysterious duties. Most of the important Harbours had by now been provided with "boom defences" — i.e. hanging nets floated on buoys, which stretched from one coast of the river or channel to the other, with a gap consisting of a "gate" which was controlled by two

permanent guardships. These, and the great variety of naval ships, and the gunnery practice of the forts, and the mystery of the dockyards, all made life interesting. But soon there came the journey of over 500 miles back to Edinburgh and the cold of Easter term.

It was shortly before the holidays – on the night of April the second, to be exact – that Edinburgh first came into the field of warfare. About ~~eleven~~ twelve o'clock that night we were roused with the warning that Zeppelins were reported as having crossed the coast. Looking out we could see searchlights from Rosyth and from mobile units in Edinburgh wheeling and crossing in the sky. We were called down to K.P.'s room where there was still a fire and soon could hear the rattle of naval antiaircraft guns. The airships passed over Leith, where bombs were dropped, crossed almost overhead, and finally reached Edinburgh, where they distributed three bombs in a triangle round the Castle. Little material damage was done, but about eight people were killed. Next, heading towards Rosyth, but finding the reception too hot, the airships made off as quickly as possible for home.

So the holidays came round again, and this

time I went back to Dublin. But there was to be even less of peace here, for a fortnight later, on Easter Monday, began the first Sinn Fein ~~rebellion~~ rising.

In my diary written at the time the entry for Monday, the 24th April 1916 reads, "Put felt on potting-shed roof" and then, apparently as an afterthought, "Riots began". Such was the momentary impression. for the association of Irishmen and riots was sufficiently natural to call for little comment. There was, however, a greater air of tension on the following morning and Father announced that he would take a stroll into town. No doubt he felt that it was his duty as a County magistrate to restore law and order, but in actual fact both he and I were consumed with curiosity to see for ourselves what was afoot, so in we went. The streets were quieter than usual as we entered the city and the general atmosphere was that of a bank Holiday. Nothing out of the ordinary happened until we reached College Green and were passing in front of Trinity College when a burst of rifle fire broke out from the roof. the bullets zinging over our heads. The few people in the streets bolted for cover, but there appeared to be little

danger unless the "enemy" decided to reply from the houses in Dame Street in which they had barricaded themselves. Further on towards the centre of the city the fighting appeared to be more continuous. The main area of hostilities being the western side of Sackville Street. After watching the scene for awhile I decided to go back home for lunch, but Father stopped in town till the afternoon and at one time helped to carry off a few of the wounded.

From out at Holywood next day we could hear the sounds of rifle fire in the city rising and falling. The battle was now pitched in dead earnest, for here was no pate-breaking riot, but Armed Rebellion stalking abroad or entrenched behind barricades in the streets or in captured buildings. Troops hastily despatched from England were arriving that day at Kingstown and, cycling down by a circuitous route, I saw some of the companies landed. One of the regiments suffered severe casualties by being ambushed in a road of tall houses on their way in to the main centre of hostilities.

During the next two days the noise of battle increased and by Friday night the tide had reached its highest. From the flat roof of our house we could,

in the daylight, see the whole of Dublin, and now, with night turned into day, the scene was so brilliantly illuminated that all landmarkes were clearly visible and the outline of the city was silhouetted against a red glare. For the whole of one side of Sackville Street was burning furiously, with the flames reaching far above the tallest buildings. Great bursts of light, crowning the ripple of fires like soler prominences, would indicate the collapse of roofs and stories, while the silence of the night was obliterated by the almost continuous rattle of rifle fire and the staccato stutter of machine guns.

Normal communications were naturally interrupted and by the end of the week there was a shortage of certain food supplies. I have visions of cycling out into the country and returning with a precious cargo of a dozen eggs somewhat precariously conveyed in a paper bag. By the Sunday we had become sufficiently accustomed to the idea of rebellion to give our minds to the reception and propagation of rumours, and of these there were many. Perhaps there was some truth in the belief that several of the larger houses in the neighbourhood were marked down

for occupation by the rebels. It was certainly the case that a few days previously we had had a ~~stranger~~ queer visitor at the door "feeling faint" and asking for water, who took the opportunity of exploring the hall, the lounge and the smoking room when left for a moment to himself. Later our gate was found to be marked with a strange sign which was repeated on the house at the end of the road – a position which commanded one of the main entries from our district to the city. (This house also received an unconventional caller about the same time).

Naturally these mysterious happenings added to the general excitement and they led, on my part, to the rediscovery of a trap door in the pantry floor which would have been a wonderful place to stow away the family jewels if only we had had any and the house had actually been besieged. I had also a vague idea of placing a Union Jack on a flagstaff on the roof but, as a gesture, this appeared on second thoughts to be merely asking for trouble.

By the beginning of the second week the back of the rebellion was broken. The city was now hemmed in by a ring of sentries and only those whose lawful business warranted it were allowed to pass in or out of

the Pale. Father, as a magistrate, made a few visits to the town and on Thursday I went with him. The tall buildings in Sackville Street were in ruins and still smouldering with an occasional glow of flame visible, while turning any corner, one might pass a squad of troops with the bedraggled figures of prisoners marching in the centre. Father again remained in town and it was not until I reached the ring of sentries that I realized the tactical error of breaking away on my own, for I had no 'pass' to allow me out of the city. It was only by extreme guile that I dodged the first four sentries and by the appearance of extreme ~~youth~~ innocence that I satisfied the fifth and was allowed to pass on my way.

The next few days were spent in wangling 'passes' - the first to allow ~~me~~ free movement in the city area and the second to enable me to leave the country.

Eventually I arrived back at school for the Summer term four days late. But the sensation of excitement had evidently evaporated rapidly for, turning again to my diary at the entry for that date, I find no more indication of anything unusual

Raving Happened than in the entry for the Monday a fortnight before ; it merely says: "Arrived Edinburgh 11.25 - went room with Reid and Bairnsfather".

But I was not the only absentee from the school when the term started, for there were two fire-eating brothers still left in Belfast. At the sound of the first shot in the South they had girded up their loins for the battle and had since been so busy joining local volunteers, shouting defiance in the direction of Dublin, and being demobilised again that they had not been able to keep the usual appointment at the beginning of the term.

Memories of this summer include a sodden game of cricket on a wet afternoon at the beginning of June when the even more damping and depressing first news of the Battle of Jutland was received. It was some weeks later that I contravened a clause of the School Rules - a code of laws sometimes quoted but never visible to mortal eye. The crime was merely the exhibition of an excess of energy at the wrong moment, for I played a game of 'squish' (squash rackets) before dinner on a Saturday during a time when apparently it was my duty either to do nothing or to watch a School Match. The arrest in this case followed the customary procedure and took place outside Hall

as we left after dinner. The usual solemn conclave was followed by four strokes—lightly laid on again, but this time from the Supervisor, the School Prefects.

During this term a change of attitude towards the war gradually became noticeable in the school. Parades of the O.T.C. and training in the use of rifles and bayonets had merely accustomed us to the handling of arms, but another aspect of warfare became evident after the first week in July. The beginning of this month saw the first large-scale offensive conducted by the civilian army at the Battle of the Somme, and by now many boys at the school had brothers serving at the Front. (Alfred had left for France by this time). In the first few days of this battle nine recent members of the school were killed, and from now onwards, as a matter of course, the morning papers were opened first at the page showing the casualty lists.

Conscription had not yet been introduced, but every member of the school joined up on leaving without apparently giving the matter much thought. It was not till many years later that I discovered that this was not the unusual outlook throughout the country.

Although many traditional customs had vanished for the period of the War or for good, there was still the 'Loretto Match night' as a link with the past. Events in the house were dated in relation to this occasion. If one were set to acquire the art of doing a "circle" on the horizontal bar in the dormitory or to perform some other athletic achievement the period of grace would extend "till Loretto Match night". Actually the unusual and agreeable feature of this occasion was that we got off "prep." and had two hours in the evening to amuse ourselves as we liked.

K.P., of course, found something distinctive for his House to do, this time the game being 'Broomers' - a kind of "tip-and-run" played with wooden sticks which were not quite broom-sticks and not quite Indian clubs. The ball was thrown from one end of a cricket pitch and, if not hit, was immediately gathered and thrown to the striker at the other end. In the business of striking it closely resembled baseball. It was sometimes played on the First XI Turf (imagine the cries of 'Sacrilege' if this had been done at an English school!) with about twenty or thirty on each side and all fielding. A good swipe at the ball, such

as I saw J.A. Ross once make, might carry it over the trees by the Jordan. As far as I know there were no fixed rules, which naturally added to the enjoyment.

The winter term came round and rugger games started once more. House Belows (junior House Matches) were played with the usual ferocity and, though possessing neither weight nor speed, I found them enjoyable, playing anywhere from "forward" to "inside-three". Rugger was sometimes made unpleasant by the presence of choking fumes of nitrogen peroxide let loose by a munition factory in Craigleith and one's attention was at often times diverted from the game by the antics of aeroplanes from Turnhouse Aerodrome practising the "falling-leaf" or the "spinning nose-dive".

After I got back from Christmas holiday, spent again at Southsea, it was quite evident that the naval fever, long dormant, had got me in its grip. Since the Battle of Jutland I had been the Reading Room's expert in naval affairs and had rather incautiously announced that I intended to be present at the next fleet action. It turned out later that, but for the final meeting of the German navy, this boast would probably have been fulfilled.

Field-days with the Corps came round with the usual regularity, and with the usual general air of confusion on the part of the combatants and officiousness on the part of the officials. But one can be remembered with pleasure — a visit to the Braid Hills on a clear frosty morning with the snow still lining the ledges. Though we lay for several hours on the ice-hard ground in our Kilts and bareknees most of us enjoyed the outing thoroughly, even if the military ~~strategy~~ tactics were an impenetrable mystery.

Probably the best field day we had was in the following term, when we ranged over the sandy hills at Gullane on a hot summers' day. We ended at the shores of the Forth, where most of us waded out in our trousers kilts or, discarding them altogether, went for a swim. Lying on the bank we let the sun dry us off as we drowsily watched the blue waters of the Forth. Two destroyers were visible in the faint band of mist lining the horizon. The tall white plumes of their bow-waves showing that they were making for the open sea at high speed.

The Easter Holidays started with the long trip to London in the Flying Scotsman and then the journey to Southsea, the latter part of which was made difficult by the fact that the local railway had been removed

and transported to France. We now had a house almost on the seafront close to the point, and from here one could watch the stream of sea-borne traffic. The German submarine campaign was at its height and, at all times of the day and night escorts and patrols, destroyers and motor launches passed along the channel between Portsmouth Harbour and the gate of the boom defence. We had got to know a bunch of Canadians, most of whom were in the R.N.V.R., and it was with one of them, Eustace Brockett, that I first passed the sentries guarding the entrance to Portsmouth Dockyard and saw over his M.L. (an eightyfoot motor launch armed with a gun and depth-charges). "Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut" had been the preliminary caution, and my eyes opened wide at the sight of such a multitude and variety of craft.

From the window of our house with a pair of powerful glasses (though it was a crime for a civilian to be so curious) I watched the ships go by, sketching each roughly, noting the flags and pennants she was flying and the numbers and letters painted on her bow. Soon it was obvious that each was flying her own index number and this gave me a good knowledge of the alphabet of naval flags. One morning I was

advised to be at the end of the seafront close to the mouth of the Harbour at eight o'clock on the following morning. And here the greatest thrill awaited me, for a few minutes past the hour the long forcible and 15-inch gun-turrets of the new Heavy cruiser Courageous appeared.

I slept in a room on the first floor, facing the sea, with a window reaching to the floor. Getting up at night I saw ships pass by like ghosts in the moonlight, the only sound breaking the stillness being the monotonous deep note of the bell-buoy in Spithead channel. As the days moved through April other night visitors appeared in the stretch of water between Bembridge and Southampton. In a single night I saw as many as four white ships, lit down their whole length with a double row of green lights punctuated by brilliant red crosses near the bows and stern or else amidships. These were the hospital ships bearing the wounded home from the Battle of Arras.

Other nights there was merely the tolling of the bell. There was always that; rising and falling, as the wind carried the sound towards the land or out to sea. And, when the holidays came to an end, that was the last I was to hear of it until,

passing down that same channel on the bridge of a 'P-boat' in the summer of the following year. I recognized the voice of an old acquaintance close at hand.

The summer term came round and passed without incident, winding up with "Cab Sunday" (when our times of departure were noted) and "Journey-Money Sunday" (when an even more important need was enquired into). It was a strange perversity of nature that made some of us tear ourselves out of bed at six o'clock and be off in our cabs by seven. This seemed to be a particular habit of those who had only a few miles to go or who had a wide selection of trains to choose from. Those of us who 'cabbed' later than most took a stroll in K.P.'s garden, practically all - from the ages of eighteen down to twelve - showing their independence by indulging in a cigarette. With the reputation of an individualist - eccentric would be too strong a word, though this aspect was always present as an inheritance of Alfred's Mad Irishman' tradition - it was only natural that I should be different from the rest and prefer not to smoke.

The summer holidays differed from the usual rest, for most of the older members of the school went to the military camp at Barry in Forfarshire. The other school OTC's were also there - Rorelio, Merchiston, Glenalmond and Edinburgh Academy. Tactical exercises

were less confused than on ordinary field days and after strenuous days we turned in to the distant sound of pipes playing "Hey, Johnnie Cope, are ye wauken' yet?"

The next journey was back to Edinburgh, passing over the Tay Bridge and then the Forth Bridge with a view of the Battle Cruiser Force lying off Rosyth. After breakfast in Hall about two dozen of us left for an energetic but ideal Holiday on Loch Lomond, where we were to fell trees for trench props.

We arrived in the midst of a heat wave one evening when the whole dome of the sky above the loch was a speckled blaze of scarlet in the sunset. We camped on the edge of a sandy bay on that enchanting island Inch Caillach and later explored its wooded slopes and its the tiny ruin of a seventh century chapel at the top of the main hill. Though most of the oaks on the island were small and were consequently suitable for our purpose others were full-grown and had been planted during the Peninsular War to serve as timber for future ships of the Navy. In the heat of the day we felled trees close to the lakside and when the spirit so moved us kicked off our shorts and had a swim. Though the last three weeks were wet this did not damp our enjoyment and the

usual programme was carried through — the early morning bathe, the days felling, and a row across the loch to Luss or to the other islands in the evenings or weekends. One Sunday we were all invited to Buchanan Castle where we dined with the Duke of Montrose and saw the relics of the Great Marquis. With only about four weeks of holiday left we donned our O.T.C. uniform, struck camp, and made for home.

Striding along the streets in kilt and military tunic we were soldiers for the nonce, but our most gratifying thought was that we could travel half fare on the Glasgow trams. We soon realized, however, that to ride with delicacy on the top of a tram while wearing a kilt presented problems wholly unknown in the rough and tumble of school life, where the act of throwing ourselves on the ground while attacking in open order across the playing fields on a windy day meant the exposure of a row of bare bottoms to the indifferent gaze of the few onlookers.

On boarding the steamer at Greenock I noticed that the ship's boats were now swung outboard so as to lessen the delay in the event of her being torpedoed — it seemed a sensible action to take. As I stood at the rail of the ship that summer evening and looked down on the little group lining the edge of the quay I could not help feeling the fascination of a ship's sailing in the dusk, and of the varied emotions presented in that row of upturned faces. In some there was the sadness of parting, in others a hearty bonhomie, and in all the strain occasioned by finding subjects of conversation to tide over those last few minutes. Crossing to the other side I watched with interest the twilit scene; how the lights from the opposite shore shone wetly through the rivers

mist, how the buoys marking the channel blinked rapidly six points of red or white, and how the grey shadow of a cargo steamer slid by on the evening tide, lit only by her masthead lights and by the red glow of her port navigation light. How a belated seagull perched for a moment on a cage-buoy nearby and eyed with distaste a loaf which floated by on the dark waters of the stream as a reminder of the Biblical promise "Cast thy bread upon the waters and thou shalt find it after many days".

But soon the siren sounded and a faint cheer rose from the quayside. The ship got under way, the shore receded, and darkness closed in as we joined the nightly exodus towards the open sea. Down in my cabin I turned in without a thought to the lifebelt stowed beneath the bunk and listened in the darkness to the throb of the engines and to the faint strains and creaks as the ship talked to herself. In the early hours of the morning I was on deck in time to see Howth Head on our starboard bow, and by eight o'clock we had secured alongside the North Wall, where porters were shouting and cabbies waving their whips. As I bowled along the streets of Dublin perched on a jaunting car I reflected that the kilt was no more suited for that mode of travel that for the top of a Glasgow tram.

There was not much holiday left, and I spent part of my time in the central depot in Dublin where Mother controlled and organized the ordering and distribution of material for women's working parties for the whole of Ireland. And so the winter term came round quickly.

By now I had reached sixth place on the Modern Side and, by discarding my pursuit of the Classics and German, had reach a stage where I gave nearly half my time to one subject – mathematics. For at least two or three hours a day I amused myself with Conic Sections or Solid analytical geometry or the Calculus. In the House I was on easy terms of friendship with all from the Head to the inhabitants of the Prep. Room. Classical scholars made themselves useful in the democratic assembly known as the Reading Room – plainly a misnomer, as no one could hope to read in the turmoil which generally reigned there – by "giving a sport" of Latin translation at the last moment before morning School, and even a mere mathematician, like myself, found himself called upon, now and again, to solve a problem in trigonometry or the Calculus.

Inhabiting a single study I had adorned the walls with silhouettes of naval craft and curves showing the losses to merchant Shipping in the Submarine Campaign. At this period of the War it was customary for boys to remain at School till they reached the age of 18½, provided

they were destined to proceed later to an Officers' Cadet Battalion, but it was necessary first to attest. Consequently, a week before my eighteenth birthday I went through the ceremony in a recruiting office near St Giles' Cathedral, where I swore allegiance to "the King, his heirs and successors" and was given half-a-crown for "serving one day with the Colours". Six months later the official machinery came into action and I was "called up", but the Senior Service had, by then, charge of my person and the Army had to get on as best it could without me.

On my eighteenth birthday I wrote to the Marquis of Graham, Commanding Officer of the Clyde Division of the RNVR, offering my services to the Navy, and about a fortnight later had an interview with the Marquis at Govan and also a medical examination. Others were being interviewed at the same time and there was little privacy in the proceedings which were conducted in stentorian tones, the Marquis being very deaf. It was another three weeks before I received a non-committal note from the Admiralty stating that I had been "provisionally selected as an approved Candidate for Temporary Midshipman RNVR"

About this time I was involved in a strange incident, long afterwards recorded in the House. The whole of the House had taken part in the ragging of a temporary master who had for some time been a counter to the unwritten code and, as a natural

results, we had had to withstand the fury of an onslaught by K.P. the next day. He let us know that any repetition would render the culprit liable to the "most mortal flogging he ever had in his life" (and that would be pretty grim as K.P. was the best shot with a cane in the school). Next week a young lad of the name of Adams perpetrated a peculiarly silly outrage in barking the same masters knuckles and was duly reported — but unfortunately, in the flurry of the moment, without the finial s to his name. Events then became rather complicated and I had to take the punishment, but the incident made me a close freind of K.P.'s for the rest of the term.

It happened that Adams and I both left in December and K.P. took the opportunity of apologizing in his speech to the House, saying that at least there would be no further chance of his repeating the "appalling mistake" he had made earlier in the term.

Towards the end of October I was elected a "Sook" and joined that unofficial hierarchy which had powers only just below those of the "prefs". Playing rugger in Little Side I could tuck my jersey inside my shorts at last, and had also greater liberty in regard to the games I chose to attend.

The War had brought slight inconveniences such as "meatless days" and fireless studies, but it was also responsible for the introduction of several rather peculiar masters. One of these, who might be described as a messy eater, found himself on his first visit to Hall alone at the masters' table. Unfortunately for him the hubbub of voices ceased, as if by a magic ~~[illegible]~~, just as he supped his first mouthful of soup, and the only audible sound in that deathly silence was the soft gurgling of soup from the High Table ~~[illegible]~~. The result, on master and school alike, can only be described as 'electric'. ~~[illegible]~~

~~a [illegible] with the [illegible] he decided to take a [illegible] "If you've [illegible] your [illegible] he [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] if you're not don't bother" said [illegible] completing the sentence.~~

Coming towards the end of my school career I naturally sought the usual means of perpetuating my memory. The more crude forms of this art included writing one's name in inaccessible places or carving it on study walls or tables. In this connexion I had made a discovery in my cubicle in the previous spring; pushing the mirror aside slightly I had base initials and a date ~~which~~ was exactly ten years previous

-J.M.A. April 1907- There was no doubt who that was; for Jim was the only J.M.A. of that period.

But a more refined method was to build one's own sepulchre. Such excavations were known as "graves" and were carved carefully out of the woodwork of study-walls or furniture. Coiled up inside the tomb was a paper giving the name of the commemorated and the date of his occupation of the study. The grave was closed with its original covering when completed. In my last weeks I dug a grave effectively (and I think, artistically) in my study table and was also dragged with great gusto by a small boy of thirteen to see his handiwork in my old study, where he had carved my name deep in the table at which I had sat for nearly three years.

So the end of the term came along and I said good-bye to the masters, and finally to the Head at the Lodge. Although this was the first time I had actually spoken to the Gurney he knew the facts of my school career and ~~the fact~~ that I was now bound for the Navy. Here was a different man from the aloof figure head in chapel or from the austere humourist who, in a harangue to the school, could drag in such peculiar diminutives as "tackety boots and lollipops". No more was I to hear his deep growl pronounce Grace in

Hall - "May the Lord remember the wants of others and give us thankful hearts" ; no more listen to the historic "gigraphy lectures" of my formmaster D.W. Tangueray, or watch the writhing of some unfortunate under the sarcastic mathematical pleasantries of J.S. Edwards. There was only K.P. left, and his "Hock, laddie" would soon be a thing of the past.

On the final night there was an auction in my study (about 9 ft by 7 ft) with thirty people crowding in ; then the last night speeches, with my proposal of "Three cheers for those coming back", and finally the good-byes all round, and the cabbing.

So that was the end. With a cheery fatalism we all took it as a matter of course that the war would last indefinitely and that, at any rate, before long we would be killed. It did not depress us in the least, and to those who looked forward to their career in the Service as keenly as I did, the separation from so many freinds and from such a pleasant life had its compensations in the outlook for the future.

Besides, I had that promised appointment to keep with the German fleet.

V

There can be few things more tiring than doing nothing, and the two months that lay between leaving school and entering the Navy appeared the more interminable in view of the possibility of the war ending before I could see service afloat. One morning in the middle of February, however, there was an official envelope on the breakfast table, the contents of which stated that I had been appointed to H.M.S. Victory VI as a Temporary Midshipman R.N.V.R. as from March the Second, and was to report at the Royal Naval Depôt, Crystal Palace, on Sunday March the Third. The latter date rather appealed to the imagination, as it brought back to mind a remark I had made in the Reading Room at Glencorse the previous summer. The casualty list was the subject of discussion and I had mentioned, quite confidently, that the date on which I would be knocked out would be March the Third, and that if they had tears, [illegible] they could prepare to shed them then. Apparently the only slip was that the date referred to my entry and not my exit from the Service!

For the next week there was the grand potter of getting my uniform at a military tailors in Dublin, where I was evidently the first midshipman they had fitted out. But that was soon over, and I set out from Kingstown on March the Second in the mail steamer bound for Holyhead.

Fortunately, in the Mackays, I had close family friends within a short distance of the Crystal Palace, and with them I spent my week-end leaves. Ronald Mackay, one year my junior, and a midshipman R.N., was already serving in H.M.S. Indomitable with the Battle Cruiser Force, while Kenneth was in the training ship "Conway" from which, if the war lasted long enough, he would emerge as a midshipman R.N.R. The other two - Alan and Graham - were just "kids". (Both later went to Pattes)

At four o'clock on the Sunday afternoon I passed through the entrance gates of the Crystal Palace, slightly self-conscious and momentarily taken aback by a rather ostentatious salute from the sentry outside. I knew that the custom in the Navy was to remove one's cap on entering an officer's cabin or wardroom, and so I presented myself bareheaded before the Officer of the Day, who promptly tucked my cap into its correct position under the left arm with the peak to the front. In a short time there were about a dozen newly-appointed snotties standing rather sheepishly to attention in the office, receiving a first instruction in the correct manner of giving and taking a salute. The naval salute, with the palm downwards, is much neater than the army salute, and is given by ratings to all officers holding the King's commission warrant or appointment - in fact, to all who bear the broad laurel leaves surrounding the crown and anchor on their cap-badge.

As we trooped off to see our quarters we passed into the main body of the Crystal Palace – that vast and draughty conservatory which was used as a forcing house for young officers and ratings of the R.N.V.R., and for ratings of the R.N.A.S.. there, stranded on top of Sydenham Hill, lay H.M.S. Victory VI, built uniquely of steel and glass, and lying in a berth conveniently immune from submarine attack. The area immediately outside the central part of the building was no longer a mere terrace – it was the quarter-deck, with its flagstaff carrying a white ensign on a yard-arm and a commodore's pennant at the peak. There was no mistaking that this was one of His Majesty's ships. for 'libertymen' paraded each evening for leave ashore, and the whole place hummed with nautical phraseology. It was a queer game. Fun playing at sailors, but it served its purpose of taking the chill off the plunge into one of the permanent naval establishments which had to be made before appointment to a sea-going ship.

There were about eight or ten 'Subs', and roughly fifty Snotties in training at the depot at one time. Only a few of these were - like myself - out of a public school, and some had had a certain amount of previous experience at sea. The remainder ~~were mainly quite good fellows~~ seemed to me to be a good lot, with only here and there anything resembling a bright spark amongst them.

For some reason, best known to the Authorities, we penned our leisure hours in a room known as the Junior

Officers' Club, while the officers on the staff occupied an adjoining room called the Senior Officers Club. We joined forces at mealtimes.

Our sleeping quarters consisted of three wooden huts in which rails about five feet high ran the full length of one side and part of the way down the other. Hammocks were slung from these rails and stretched chest-high at intervals of four or five feet, while below them, and along the adjacent wall, were stowed our "tin trunks" (which stood in place of sea chests). To the new entry on his first night the two rows of hammocks looked innocent enough; it only when he tried to enter his own did he realize that a thousand devils lay there to torment him. At first it would merely capsize and let him down gently on the side from which he had made the attack; but the monotony of this action soon bred recklessness, and then action became more violent. Sudden upheavals of the hammock caused the attacker to take part in a series of involuntary gyratory movements which eventually landed him on the deck on the opposite side from that on which he started — a bewildering and undignified ~~movement~~ exhibition of gymnastics which was both exhausting and painful. Then suddenly, and for no known reason, the resistance would cease and the hammock permit ~~[illegible]~~ him to enter with disconcerting ease. Later on, in the early hours, it would take on a list and let his blankets slide overboard.

Raids from other huts brought risks of a "let-down" in the dark, but we soon learnt how to secure our hammock ropes so as to foil the efforts of the raiders. Soon the hammock-devils had no new tricks to play and just lay quiet to await the next newcomer.

In point of fact the boxing instruction was very enjoyable though the exercise was quite new to me. The P.T. instructor who took it was a barrel-chested petty officer with a cherublike smile. He taught us to step-in, step-out, lunge and hook and guard our point, until one evening he cleared the ring and asked for a volunteer to do a little sparring with him. I had put my foot over the ropes before realizing what a chump I was. "Let me have a go, Sir" I said "and" "Are ye sure, Sir?" and I saw over my shoulder that round cheerful face with its innocent cherublike smile

We were called at 6 or 6.30 in the morning, had a cold shower if we liked it, donned white flannel trousers and sweaters, with monkey-jackets, white scarves and brown leggings, and were then paraded for an hour's physical drill. Then breakfast at eight, and "divisions" at nine (when no speck of dust or fluff might sully our uniforms), followed by the instruction for the day. The first fortnight was devoted to Squad drill under the care of an ex-Serg-Major of the Marines, promoted Captain — a rather nerve-racking experience, and one in which I had to be prepared to answer smartly to the name of Hadams. We were taught the handling of arms (naval fashion) and revolver practice in the mornings, with boxing instruction in the evenings and a visit to the baths later for those who cared to go. But here the mass of naked bodies was so thick that there was seldom much room to swim.

Gunnery was our next course, but there was little serious attempt at practical instruction on the guns themselves - this was left to our final training in a gunnery school. Still, the tompions and breech blocks and ratchets and all the gadgets were sufficiently in evidence to delight the hearts of the mechanically-minded. They weighed like lead on mine. At the end of this course, nearly a month had gone by, and the two examinations did not bring me in any great credit. If I was to do anything worth while it had got to be done now, — either in seamanship, or signals, or navigation

Insert see opposite page

and pilotage.

The first of these was good fun – boxing the compass (a few minutes' job to learn); the rule of the road at sea (with its jingle of rhymes as an aid to memory) including the use of models for practice; knots and splices, bends and hitches; upper-deck work with anchor models; some instruction in how to heave the lead (and how to avoid it dropping on your head), and finally boat-pulling on the lake, where we could climb down into the boats from a "lower-boom".

I found signals even more interesting, but here I started with some previous knowledge both of morse and semaphore and also of the naval code flags; the last I had picked up during my holidays at Southsea. It was the signal hoists I liked best, and these furnished the topic of an argument which I frequently had with other snotties – namely, that an Officer of the Watch should be able to read a signal, and should not have to rely on his signalman always being on the spot. I took my own argument to heart and during the time I was at sea could read most hoists as quickly as any of the signal ratings on board.

Our last course of instruction was in navigation and pilotage, with the accent mainly on the latter. The time allowed for the course was too short, and the average mathematical ability of the snotties probably not strong enough, to enable us to go anything like fully into the theoretical calculations connected with the taking of sights on sun or stars, but we

we were given a good working knowledge of how to take bearings, of how to recognize the various types of buoys, and of how to plot a course by dead reckoning. Some of us attended further navigation lectures later on when we joined our flotillas and there learnt how to take sights and work them out. I had previously been specially keen on signals, but if it had ever come about that I had taken my skipper's advice and had switched over to the R.N. I would probably have specialized later in navigation.

In these weeks of hurried preparation the War had crept nearer on two occasions. Twice we were roused at night by the firing of maroons - the warning of air raids - and the various patties under instruction were thereupon paraded and marched down to an unused underground railway station, where some protection from bombs could be had. The Crystal Palace, with its thousands of would-be sailors under training, was a target of considerable military importance, but it was never struck. From the air on a clear night it must have lain like a glistening pool in the starlight, ~~and in those brief moments it must have borne an aspect~~ that ~~which was almost romantic.~~ We had the chance (those of us who watched the progress of the raids from the mouth of the railway tunnel) of noting the flashes accompanying the detonation of the bombs, and on one occasion saw a bright flicker of light in the sky which

we hailed with cheers believing it to be an enemy plane in flames. To me the lasting impression of the second raid was not one of bombs and antiaircraft barrages, but of a superb meteorological display which occurred that night. The whole northern sky was aflame with the light of the aurora which rose and fell in bright streamers of a deep transparent red.

During the short time of our training the fortunes of the Allies on sea and land had rocked to and fro. The retreat of the Fifth Army had started on March the 21st and had continued for several weeks (Alf had been in the middle of it, at the spot where the enemy advanced 40 miles near St. Quintin), but against this apparent set-back there was the great event of St. George's Day, when a force under the command of ~~Commodore~~ Rear-Admiral Roger Keyes stormed the mole at Zeebrugge and sank three blockships in the Bruges Canal – a feat since regarded as the finest naval raid in history. The German army had struck and failed to break through completely; it looked as if the next move might lie with the Her High Seas Fleet. So we marched round the parade grounds, tied our knots and splices, bent on our signal hoists, and manoeuvred our ships in miniature, hoping that when the final fleet action was fought we would be ~~there~~ in it.

By the time we had finished our courses and the examinations had come and gone I had retrieved

a reputation which, up to then, had existed only in my own imagination. In seamanship I had been awarded 98.9 per cent., in navigation and pilotage 97.5 per cent., and in Signals 96.8 per cent. — each ~~constituting~~ Send to confirm a "record" for R.N.V.R. officers under instruction up till then.

The time had come for us to start our gunnery course at one of the regular naval gunnery schools, so we said our good-byes and lined up to receive our "flimsies". On mine the commanding officer of the depot had overlooked the relatively poor start I had made and had judged me on the way I had finished. Using a typically naval phrase he gave his opinion that I would turn out to be "a zealous and efficient officer".

On Sunday May the 26th (the day Alf was badly gassed in France) I set out for Whale Island in company with nine other Snotties and Subs.

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VII

I was glad to feel that our draft was bound for Portsmouth and not for Devonport or Chatham. "Pompey" was already well-known to me through the several holidays I had spent at Southsea, and had been the fount and source of such practical knowledge as I possessed regarding the movement and habits of ships. Besides I held the view that Whale Island was the best gunnery school in the world; and, quite possibly, I was right.

On leaving Portsmouth station we had a journey by taxi, which finally took us over the long arm of the Causeway ~~roadway~~ separating the 'Island' from the mainland. Sentries lined the route, and, in acknowledging their salutes, we were elevated in our own estimation for one brief moment to the rank of royalty! Having alighted at the officers' quarters of H.M.S. "Excellent" and signed the register, the draft was despatched to the Pier Head where a picket-boat was waiting to take us over to H.M.S. "Argonaut". This cruiser - which was of about 11,000 tons displacement and built in the latter part of the 90's - lay close in to the Island in company with a strange assortment of other ships. These included one of the Royal Yachts, the Admiralty Yacht "Enchantress", and

Several antiquated ships of the Royal Navy, with strange types of gun-mountings — ships which had, no doubt, been viewed with pride in far-off days, but now lay peacefully inert, looking a little self-conscious in their dismantled helplessness, as if wondering at their own drab greyness and how long it would be before their bearded crews were piped on deck!

But HMS Argonaut was to be our home for some weeks, and within a few minutes of leaving the Pier Head we were aboard. Apart from our own draft of two Subs, and eight Snotties, all R.N.V.R., there was a batch of R.N.R. Snotties of about twice our number occupying the same quarters and now in the middle of their gunnery course. These Snotties, whose ages ranged from about sixteen to nineteen, were all fairly well acquainted in theory or practice with the art of seamanship, and made the most of their knowledge in front of such land-lubbers as ourselves. But, on the whole, we got on fairly well together. We jointly occupied the ship's wardroom and slung our Hammocks in a space which was probably once part of the cabin flat, while our own draft of R.N.V.R. Snotties used one of the port gun-casements as a changing-room.

We had an R.N.R. lieutenant in charge of our party on board — a man whose face was his chief misfortune, his mouth stretching out rather wildly to the north-east and south-west when he spoke. At times he endeavoured to

to instruct us in signals and physical drill, but his efforts were crowned with no striking success as his knowledge of these subjects was very limited. Nevertheless he showed his kindly disposition in an address given to us RNVR snotties on our first night; he pointed out then that he would make things as easy as possible for us as we would be at sea in a few weeks and, for all he knew, be killed before the month was out.

He was the only officer with which we had much to do during the course. We rarely saw any of the staff at Whale Island except at church parade on Sundays, though we were officially under the care of an RNR commander who had his office on the Island. The main gunnery courses were attended chiefly by R.N. lieutenants, though the parade ground was seldom clear of parties of naval ratings moving at the double. But there were other N.O.s there now and again — ones who were here today but tomorrow might be pushing off in a boat from a submarine to land a short time later at a quiet spot on the German coast. So we snotties were of little consequence.

On board the Argonaut each morning we were called at seven o'clock by the "duty-snotty" who reported us "turned out" to the lieutenant. Then followed a bath under a cold tap (for if one felt so disposed) then breakfast, in which the concoction known as kedgeree generally figured rather too prominently; and the parade on deck preparatory to leaving for the Island by picket boat. On arrival at the Pier Head the party was moved

at the double to the parade ground, where the separate sections were despatched to the appropriate battleships for instruction.

Our gunnery instructor — a Petty Officer, gunlayer, first class — was a splendid chap. No trouble was too great if it helped his party of sailors to learn their job, and to those who were as mechanically deficient as myself his evening hours of voluntary instruction made easier the task of stripping and assembling breechblocks and identifying the multifarious cams and ratchets and springs with which the guns were provided in such embarrassing superfluity. Even in examinations he felt bound in loyalty to support each one of us, and when we hesitated came to our rescue with subdued unintelligible murmurs. At the first Battery we had our main training in gun-stripping, untangling ourselves in the entrails of the 6-pdrs, the 12-pdrs, the 4-inch and the 6-inch breech loaders, the 4-inch B.L. Howitzer (the chief gun mounted in destroyers) and the Lewis and Vickers guns. Later we passed to the North Battery for instruction in fire control, spotting, and director-firing. This included night firing and 'runs' worked in miniature, each sailor occupying in turn the forebridge, the transmitting station, the post at the sight dials, and so on. Over an imitation sea German ships would be lit up in silhouette by a 'searchlight' consisting of a carbide cycle lamp, all firing directions would be given, the guns laid and trained, and the shots fired — with .22 bullets!

This was where I was well content to be. for the manipulation of "spotting corrections" and "blind ladder" and "creeping barrage" was infinitely to be preferred to an incessant tampering with the distressing mechanical intimacies of the guns themselves. After four weeks of intensive training came the examinations. and I passed out as Senior Snotty with 81 per cent.; gun-stripping pulling me down below the 85 per cent. which I had coveted.

After tea each day we were granted shore leave and could return by the 7.20 or 10.30 picket boat. On most evenings a happy-go-lucky bunch of snotties in their best monkey-jackets and white caps landed at Asia Pontoon (most exotic of names!) and passed through the dockyard, "pushing off" in twos or threes to Southsea or paying a visit to Gieves, the naval outfitters on the Hard, where Lot hatters could be had. The first picket boat brought us back in time for dinner, and the rest of the evening was spent as we pleased. In the wardroom the less easily daunted tried to read or write, but the noise of talking and ragging often made this impossible. It was less rowdy up top and most of us sooner or later left for the quieter atmosphere of the quarter-deck. One by one snotties would appear at the head of the admirals' hatch, turn right to salute the Flag, and then join their own group to idle away the time in less heated debates than those going on below.

In the main Harbour, and rather further off the Island, lay the dismasted hulk H.M.S. Vernon, with her row of white gunports — the torpedo and mining school for the navy. Over in the Tidal Basin, P-boats and motor launches and destroyers could be seen alongside the jetties, with the dockyards behind, and the tall masts of H.M.S. Victory outlined against the horizon where she lay near the Harbour mouth.

In the long evenings of early summer the shadows of our strange little group of ships lay across the water, lengthening and slowly fading out in the ripples as the sun sank. It was a peaceful scene, in spite of its warlike setting; + voices drifting across the harbour on the still air, someone laughing over by the Eastern Jetty, and the cry of a distant seagull. Then, suddenly, three rising notes on a bugle — the 'Still' — followed by the long rather slow melody of the 'Sunset Call', while all officers, at the salute, faced aft and the ensign was gradually lowered. For those few moments movement ceased on the ships' decks, except for the slow flutter of the ensigns, while the notes of the bugles echoed across the Harbour from ship to ship. The ensigns touched the decks and the call ended; then, with the two shrill blasts of the 'Carry On', voices and limbs relaxed and figures paced up and down once more.

For the last week of our course we shifted our quarters to the Admiralty Yacht 'Enchantress', where the wardroom was more palatial but the hammock space more cramped. And, finally, there came our first day at sea — a trip out in H.M. Sloop 'Vestal' for firing practice. The weather was rather rough, and some of the less fortunate snotties lost all interest in fire control and the laying, training and firing of guns before the day was out.

When our four weeks came to an end the great day arrived and we were notified of the number of the P-boat to which each of us had been temporarily appointed. Great was my disappointment when I learnt that my ship — HMS. P20. — had put out to sea some hours previously, but I found a 16-year old R.N.R. snotty in like plight and we amused ourselves rowing a skiff about the harbour.

Two days later, on June the 27th, word arrived that 'P20' was entering the harbour. So, losing no time, I bundled my gear into a boat and was rowed across to the Tidal Basin where my ship lay alongside the jetty. At eleven o'clock I scrambled up the ship's side and, finding the Sub. on deck, reported myself on board my first sea-going ship.

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VII

Rather more than a hundred years ago earlier the convoys of merchant ships making and clearing our southern ports were escorted by frigates. Now, in these days of submarine warfare, the work was done by destroyers, torpedo-boats and patrol-boats. The last of these – generally known as P-boats – were lightly constructed craft of about 570 tons displacement and of shallow draft – drawing roughly 6 feet forward and 8 feet aft. Their low freeboard and strangely constructed superworks — with the broad funnel scarcely detectable, owing to the way in which it fitted into the curve of the bridge and captain's cabin — made them look more like submarines than surface craft when seen through mist. This similarity was a little awkward at times (for merchant skippers were easily alarmed), but fortunately there were no casualties sustained as a result of it, though slightly misunderstandings were not unknown.

P-boats were essentially fair-weather ships and were wet and lively in a moderately heavy sea, but their duties often kept them out when conditions were far from pleasant. A 4-inch gun, mounted on the low forecastle, and a 2 pdr. Pom-pom amidships, were their main armament, but, more important from an offensive standpoint were the long chutes aft which held about 20 to 30 depth charges. These

steel cylinders, with their settings to control the depth at which they were to detonate, could be released from the bridge and slid over the low stern into the sea. In addition there were two depth-charges mounted aft on throwers, one on either side. These could be fired in a manner similar to a trench-mortar so as to drop the depth charge some little distance either side of the ship's track.

With the Channel crowded with merchant shipping, the P. boats based at Portsmouth had little rest, and spent the greater part of their time on patrol duties, or escorting ships from Spithead to Havre, or from the Needles to Cherbourg. For traffic passing up or down channel the Portsmouth joined Escort linked up with the Dover Patrol in the east and the Devonport Escort in the west. The P-boats had normally only two commissioned officers aboard - the Captain (usually a young lieutenant of about four years seniority) and a sublieutenant, who acted as 'No.1'. The Subs, and coxswain generally took watch-and-watch at sea, though they were relieved from time to time on the bridge by the captain.

Many a time, from the sea-front at Southsea during my latin holidays I had seen the P-boats passing to and fro along the Spithead channel and had wondered what they did when they vanished over the horizon or round the point at St Helens. Now I was to find out for myself.

It was just as well that I had hurried to join my new ship, for she remained in harbour for less than two hours and, shortly after midday, was once again on her way out to sea. My gear had been dumped in a locker and I had been told that I could have some blankets on the wardroom settee to sleep on when off duty. In the meantime I joined the captain on the bridge. H.M.S. "Victory" lay at anchor a short distance inside the harbour mouth and, as we passed her, a party of our seamen were brought to attention on the foc'sle and our ensign dipped, "Victory's" ensign returning the salute. Passing down the Spithead channel we were soon through the gate of the boom defence and had sighted our objective - the transatlantic liner "Olympic" - which we had to escort down the Channel till she was clear of the land and could be picked up by the outer patrols.

A clear sunny morning had been replaced by a dull afternoon, and the wind had risen sufficiently to cap the lopping seas out in the Channel with patches of white. The "short uneasy motion" of the ship, and the grey skies, and the sea's slow heave in a swell robbed the scene of any glamour which it might have had for one to whom this was the prelude to active service at sea. But we did not continue long in company with the "Olympic", for her own high speed was her greatest safeguard against torpedo attack, and by the late evening were back again off Spithead.

The daylight was now almost gone and round the entrance to the boom defence lay four or five P. boats. One of these closed us and a line was heaved on to our deck with a message attached giving the type of zig-zag to be employed by the outcoming convoy during its night passage to Havre. The forms of these zig-zags depended on the weather, visibility and likelihood of submarine attack. By this time five troopships had passed through the gates and the escort was moving up into position. The ships were crowded with American soldiers, many of whom were sitting on the upper deck with their legs hanging down over the ships' sides. Shouts were raised by the Yankees, and. from the stokehold hatches of the British escort, replies were hurled back over the waters in accents appropriately nasal. Soon after we had taken station on the starboard beam of the convoy the full blackness of a starless night descended, and the troopships with their escort groped their way cautiously across the Channel to the French coast.

Watch-keeping when steaming without lights and with the ships almost continually under helm on a zig-zag course was rather a severe strain on the nerves, with the twin risks of collision or of losing contact. Through the unrelieved blackness of the horizon a still darker shape would appear momentarily, and helm orders would be given to sheer off; or sometimes the first sign of a ship's

presence would be the sight of the phosphorescent patches set up by the bow-wave or by the ship's wake. The intensity of the watching and the inky blackness of the surrounding night caused the hours to drag by heavy-footed, and by the early morning some effort was required to keep the eyes open and chase away sleep. In the cold light of dawn, having seen our convoy safely make the port of Havre, we altered course and were soon heading northward on our way home. It was shortly after breakfast time that we entered Portsmouth harbour, but we were required almost at once to take a convoy of five ships over the same route to the French coast by daylight. Waiting for us on the other side was the Union Castle liner "Carisbrooke Castle" and, with night coming on, we turned north again and escorted this ship back to Spithead, where we arrived when the blue reek of the first kitchen fires was capping the Rouses along Southsea front.

My third day at sea was occupied in much the same manner as the previous two, for we again escorted a convoy to Havre during the night, but I was now given my first opportunity of taking charge of the ship. It was for the last half of the middle watch, and the captain and Jeb, were both on the bridge at the time; but the experience was useful and prepared me for the job of taking a watch by myself, which I was to be given very shortly.

when the Sub, and I went on the bridge again for the forenoon watch we were nearing the English coast on our homeward journey; the blue line of the Isle of Wight lay fine on our port bow and [illegible] short time later I was able to take a fix on the lighthouse at St. Catherine's Point. By "doubling the angle on the bow" I had soon found our position and had plotted it on the chart. The steep cliffs of Ventnor lay almost dead ahead and in a little while we altered course a couple of points to the north and passed close in to the land. We were almost off Culver when a strange thing occurred: the ship was steaming through a smooth sea at 16 to 18 knots when suddenly she 'bumped' lightly over some submerged obstruction. Next moment the helm was put hard-a-port and we swung round to investigate. There was no sign of oil or air-bubbles on the surface, but a flock of noisy and inquisitive sea gulls hovered round and settled on the sea in the line of our wake; it looked as if we had touched an uncharted wreck which must have had little depth of water over it at low tide (for we were of shallow draft), so we took cross bearings on two landmarks and reported it as such. A few moments after fouling the wreckage we had nasty shock when an M.L hove in sight flying the 'submarine escort' flag, showing that one of our submarines was operating in the vicinity. But swift relief came almost at once when we saw the 'feather' of a periscope some little distance away, and well clear of

our track.

The rest of the day was spent in Ramsgate and I called on our old Canadian friends the Brookes and also saw another Dublin-Scot, Norman Hume, who was now a Flight Cadet in the Royal Naval Air Service. But there was some uneasiness at the base owing to rumours of activity of enemy submarines along our stretch of coast, so the next morning we were despatched to patrol between Dover's lightship and Dungeness. We had on board a new type of submarine 'search-gear' which consisted of an electro-magnetic device towed astern. It detected the presence of any large steel object lying on the sea-bottom, and thus supplemented the use of hydrophones which were only effective when the submarine was under way.

We had now entered a spell of hot still summer weather and the sea lay pale blue under a cloudless sky, and unruffled save where the surface was disturbed by the faint ripples raised by light airs or by the movement of shoals of fish. All day long we steamed up and down, with the blue line of the coast just visible in a heat haze and with no other ship's masts breaking the horizon. The feather set up by a periscope could have been seen for many miles, but no enemy submarine ventured to display its warning pennant in a sea as still as this. The only

major disturbance of the day was when we dropped a depth-charge in connexion with the tests on the search-gear, but we were recalled from our beat as the evening closed in and anchored in St Helen's Bay. By now the sea had taken on the colours of the sunset and was cut in two by the long diverging ~~colourless~~ wakes set up by a small coastal motor-boat which passed by at about 40 knots in a cloud of spray. The bow-wave and spray rose so high that they completely hid the hull of the boat, and only the V-flag (distinguishing flag of C.M.B.s) and her number pennants could be seen above a wild sweep of white foam. Tiny as the boat was, the waves set up in her wake caused us to rock gently as we lay at anchor.

As the darkness came on a troopship passed out through the gate and we joined the escort which saw her safely to the port of Havre. We then missed patrolling our stretch of coastline during the night, and our tempers were not improved by a rumour current next morning that an enemy submarine had been seen travelling await along our patrol beat during the early hours of the morning. It was on the way home that I reached the heights of my earliest ambition and was allowed to take the latter part of the morning watch by myself. Pacing the bridge alone for the first time, with binoculars

slung round one's neck, and the immediate responsibility of a ship on one's hands, seemed a strangely rapid stride in advance for a schoolboy-turned-snotty with but five days' experience at sea. But such things were done in wartime, and no serious accidents seemed to occur.

This time we did not return to Portsmouth Harbour but continued the patrol duty of the day before. Here and there isolated ships - mainly tankers and merchantmen - were proceeding unescorted to local coastal ports, but otherwise there was little traffic moving in this area. In the early afternoon we dropped another depth-charge for experimental purposes, but this time we waited until we were close to a shoal of fish. The force of the explosion killed a large number and we lowered one of the ship's boats and picked up over a hundred. Just after hoisting the boat inboard an SOS came through from a ship which had been torpedoed.

She was just visible on the horizon and proved to be a tanker of about 2,500 tons - the 'Royal Sceptre'. Few types of ships can be more difficult to sink than an empty oil tanker, and our first duty on arrival at the scene was to persuade her lascar crew, who were already in the boats, to return to their ship. By this time other P. boats had appeared, and, our captain being the senior officer present, we ordered the torpedoed ship to proceed under escort

to Portsmouth where she arrived without further mishap.

But the day's havoc was not complete, for another SOS came through at five o'clock from a merchant ship which had been torpedoed at a spot six or eight miles away. Here there was a sadder story to tell, for the torpedo had done its work properly and the "Shirala" of Glasgow – a ship of 3400 tons – lay motionless with her back broken. When we arrived the officers and crew were going about their duties quite calmly and had swung the boats outboard to be ready for the time when it would be necessary to abandon ship. There seemed little doubt that the submarine had made her escape at once, but we towed our search-gear for three hours up and down in the hope that we might trace her on the sea-bottom. At one time the galvanometer on the bridge showed a deflection and we dropped a flag-buoy to mark the spot, but no confirmation could be obtained when we crossed over the place again. Nevertheless we decided to drop a depth-charge for luck. Some shipping was still visible not far away so we flew the warning signal XD and fired a Very's light; a few moments later, passing at high speed over the spot, we dropped a depth-charge. A column of water mounted mast-high in our wake and some dark streaks of oil spread out over the sea's surface; but the official report merely contained the words – "doubtful results".

Before we had finished our little turn the torpedoed

ship had sunk. The seas first covering her upper deck amidships, leaving the bow and stern clear and tip tilted slightly towards each other; but as time went on these too settled down and finally slid slowly out of sight. It was now eight o'clock and the "incident" was ended; one more unescorted ship had gone to the bottom. The Sub, and I took over the first watch, and, turning the ship's head westward, we resumed our patrolling of the coast.

So the night passed, and I took the latter half of the morning watch by myself. The weather still held good, though the sea had now a slight toppling movement which was not unpleasant. Later in the day the captain suggested I should take the dog watches in place of the Sub, and it was while I was on duty that I had to apply the rule concerning ships crossing, for the first time. A faint mist lay on the horizon and the Red Dungeness abeam shortly after I took over. Altering course sixteen points to starboard we swung on to our western beat and could soon see a convoy out from Newhaven heading across our bows. As the ships were approaching from our starboard bow it was our business to keep clear, and, no doubt, the correct procedure would have been to call the captain; but I decided it was best to hold our course and increase speed slightly, an action which brought us clear of the head of the convoy by a safe margin

The rest of the day passed quite uneventfully, but shortly after dawn, when a light haze still lay over the surface of the sea, we had a brief moment of excitement. The captain was on the bridge at the time and a large merchant ship had just passed by, appearing in a ghostly manner one moment, and vanishing the next; but the mist then cleared for an instant and showed the outlines of a large submarine following a few cables astern with her conning tower awash. On our bridge the captain pressed a brass nob and the alarm gongs called the crew to Action Stations. There was a clatter of feet on the steel deck and, within a minute, the two guns-crews were closed up and hands were standing-by the depth-charges. The guns were trained on the submarine, but even before the challenge was given the white letters L5 could be seen on the conning-tower, and further identification was unnecessary — she was British! Later in the day another false alarm brought us to Action Stations. A white streak on the surface, looking like the feather of a periscope, caused us to haul suddenly off our course; but on nearing the spot we could see that it was caused by a water-logged ship's boat rocking to and fro with her white gunwale awash.

Our period of patrol duty ended later that morning, and by the early afternoon we were at our

berth in Portsmouth Harbour.

Next day was spent in target practice, our target being towed by an M.L. Our later shooting was good, and an improvement on that of the early morning: no one can have felt more relieved about this than the crew of the motor launch, for one of our first shots had missed them by a narrow margin. In the evening we escorted the liner "La France" over to Havre and it was on the way home that we had another reminder of the effects of submarine warfare.

Early next morning I was awakened by being thrown off the wardroom settee, the cause being the dropping of a depth-charge. When a small ship travelling at less than 20 knots drops a depth charge set to explode at a depth of 50 feet the results can be pretty severe, the stern being jolted some feet upwards. As we, on this occasion, dropped nine in succession it was a few moments before I regained my balance and made my way as speedily as possible to the bridge in the pale slanting light of the sun.

An empty merchantman, S.S. Huntscraft, lay ahead of us. She had been hit by a torpedo while making the Channel crossing unescorted, and had sent out an S.O.S. which we had picked up. In order to discourage the submarine from further activity we had dropped the line of depth-charges which had so rudely awakened me, and now approached her to give what help we could.

The torpedo had not done any vital damage and the ship lay with only a slight list, her long splashes of dazzle-painting in pale green and pink and black and dirty white giving her a slightly lurious look in the yellow light of the Sun.

Closing her to within hailing distance we could see the officers on the bridge, who seemed but little disturbed, and also one passenger on her upper deck — an Old Bill, leaning against the rail in his trench kit with a rifle slung on his shoulder and a pipe in his mouth. As we passed him, within biscuit-toss, he removed his pipe from his mouth and spat into the sea. There was no one else about. Evidently the crew were not particularly interested either.

As we were some distance from the coast (about 10-12 miles S.S.E. of St Catherine's Point) and several hours must elapse before we could expect tugs to arrive to tow her in to port we decided to do the job ourselves. P-boats were only allowed to tow merchant ships in cases of special emergency, but our captain decided that we ought to do so, and we soon had a line out and were making slowly for Spithead with two other P-boats as escort. The extent of the flooding caused by the torpedo was not severe and her bulkheads were holding. When casting off to hand over to the tugs an hour or two later we passed close in to her stern and saw that she had had an earlier name, now painted over; she was the ex-German ship 'Sudmark', captured in the Mediterranean early in the war. It was a

strange fate that had sent us to her rescue now, as it had been our captain who had commanded the prize crew placed aboard her after her capture in August 1914. Having seen her safely through the gate of the boom defence we proceeded to our usual berth in the harbour.

Towards evening we set out westward down the Solent. A brilliant sunset lit up the houses and fields along the coastline by Cowes and Osborne, and in a short time we saw the two ships which we had to escort to Cherbourg. I noticed something vaguely familiar about them — their two white funnels with black tops, their hulls more like steam yachts than cross-channel ships, and their notice-boards aft which warned row-boats to "Keep Clear of the Propellors". Then I recognized them; they were the Clyde pleasure steamers King Edward and Queen Alexandra.

We passed through the gate of the western boom defence close to a sunken ship whose masts were two long fingers pointing to the sky. In a queer fit of cussedness she had sunk plumb in the middle of the entrance some months earlier, and the 'gate' had had to be shifted. Soon we were making good speed across channel — for the two ships were fast — and in the dusk could see the distant outline of Dark and later the long line of seawall at the entrance to the harbour of Cherbourg.

On our return we were ordered to lie off Calvert and act as "ready-boat". It was a fine day, and the Sub, and I rowed ashore in a dinghy, but the evening saw us again on escort duty. This time we took a convoy eastward, handing it over to the care of the Dover Patrol when we reached Dungeness. In the morning we made for Rome and, on arrival at Portsmouth, a delayed signal was handed to me. It was to inform me that I was to report at Whale Island and receive my appointment to a destroyer. Prelude to Adventure was ended, and it had been good fun; but the real work lay ahead. It now remained for me to learn to what flotilla I had been appointed, and the type of duties my new ship was likely to be engaged in.

+++



A P-boat



Venturous - before fitting as a minelayer

VIII

It seemed hard to realize that only a fortnight had gone by since our gunnery course had ended. Now a new batch of knottes inhabited the wardroom of the Enchantress and collected in the evening on deck just as we had done. The topics of conversation were much the same; all the old heated discussions cropped up and all the old arguments were paraded and dismissed. Here and there a smaller group would discuss the prospects of being appointed to this flotilla or that. A few wished to serve with the Grand Fleet where there was the possibility of being in a fleet action, but against this there was the monotony of the life; the long days in harbour at Scapa Flow, or the dreary sweeps southwards in company with the battle squadrons. It seemed an endless job. this screening of big ships in all weathers. Under blue skies, or when heavy seas ran through the Pentland Firth. the G.F. destroyer flotillas had to be there; and in the winter, when the northerly gales beat against Cape Wrath and Rattray Head, spray froze and hung down in long icicles from the mastheads. Not, the G.F. flotillas did not appeal to me.

A better proposition altogether was the 13th Flotilla which had its base at Rosyth. This was the overgrown destroyer escort of the Battle Cruiser Fleet, and, working as

it did as an advanced striking force of the G.F., it came in for most heavy-weight excitement that was going. More varied still was the Harwich Force under Tyrwhitt, consisting of destroyers with C-class light cruisers as divisional leaders; these ships guarded the Thames estuary and protected the South-eastern coastline. They knew the shallow waters off the Belgian coast and the shipping routes between the English and Dutch ports. Things were always lively hereabouts.

Then there was the Dover Patrol, under the command of Roger Keyes. They had to their credit the gallant night action of the flotilla leaders Swift and Broke, and it was from this base that the raid on Zeebrugge had been carried out only a few weeks ago since.

As for the other flotillas, the Devonport Escort looked after the merchant convoys at the western entrance to the Channel, while the Buncrana Escort did similar work off the northern coast of Ireland. To me both seemed filled with dullness and discomforture. Decidedly there were only three flotillas worth joining – the 'Thirteenth' at Rosyth, the Harwich Force, and the Dover Patrol. These monopolized all the honours and all the excitement that was going; life in any other flotilla would be a misery of boredom.

* * * *

"I hereby appoint you ..... to 'Wallington' for 'Vehement' ..... at Birmingham" ..... !

I was standing outside the Commander's office, utterly baffled and depressed by the news. Where was Immingham, and what sort of ship was Vehement? Was I being appointed to a destroyer so antique that its very name was unknown to me, and was I to be stationed in some backwater on a dull and dismal mission? An R.N. lieutenant, standing nearby, told me that Immingham was a small port on the Humber not far from Grimsby, but he had not heard of my ship. It seemed to me that the only thing to do was to pack my gear and go there, so I pushed off to London in the afternoon.

Sitting opposite me in the railway carriage was an Engineer Lieut-Commander who told me that he was also bound for Immingham and that Vehement was one of the latest V-class destroyers. I was lucky, he said, to be joining the 20th Flotilla, which was evidently the apple of the First Lord's eye at the moment, as he had referred to it recently in a rather flamboyant speech as one of the "corps d'elite" of the Navy. The ships of the flotilla were minelaying destroyers who knew the Heligoland Bight about as well as our own coastal waters. So the cloud which had descended on me in the Commander's office rolled by and I watched with keenness our passage through the emmit cornfields of Hampshire.

On reaching London we found that the last train for Grimsby had gone, so the engineer and I spent the night

in
a Hotel and left after an early breakfast. The train arrived at Grimsby about 2.30, and an electric railway took us on to Immingham where we parted company.

On leaving the electric car I saw on the right the flat sandy bank of the Humber with two jetties opening out in the shape of a bell-mouth from the spot where lock-gates connected the deep-water docks of Immingham with the river. Round the docks rose tall sheds with railway lines and electric cranes separating them by a short distance from the quayside. Beyond the lock-gates could be seen a group of offices and a flagstaff from which flew the flag of the Vice-Admiral Commanding East Coast. It was in one of these offices that I had to report my arrival, and a few minutes after having done so I found myself on the way to No 1 Quay to join my new ship.

On the way from the train to the depot offices I had noticed a line of masts over the top of a long stretch of sheds; now I could see the ships themselves — about ten or a dozen destroyers lying alongside one another with their sterns touching the wall of the quay. The first ships I came to seemed rather small, but mainly because they were overshadowed by the tall superworks and superimposed guns of four V-class destroyers at the far end of the quay, and

by the long four-funnelled leader still further down the line.

After crossing the gangway over the inner lockgates I reached the end of the quay and could soon read the names of the ships — Ariel... / Ferret ... Sandfly ... Rifle ... Legion ... Tarpon ... Telemachus ... (ah! here we were) ... VEHEMENT!

I asked a quartermaster on the dock to take me down to the Officer-of the-Day, and in the wardroom I found one of the Subs. He was soon joined by the other Sub, the engineer, the gunner, the snotty and the surgeon-probationer. The first lieutenant was at Whale Island on a special gunnery course and the captain was ashore. I was given the use of 'No1's cabin until he returned and it was arranged that I should share the double cabin with the 'doc' when again the snotty had gone.

The flotilla had come in from a "stunt" that morning and would not be leaving the harbour for a day to two. A concert had been arranged for that evening and, about eight o'clock, we all went across to one of the largest huts where it was to be held. It was then that I first saw our Captain (D). Captain Berwick Curtis had a short reddish beard, an unconventional manner, and a liking for a dangerous jol. "The Mob", as he called his flotilla,

would have cheerfully followed him through the Kiel Canal if he had expressed a wish to go there, and, such was the feeling amongst the matlos, that parties of seamen had been known to raise a cheer as he passed along the quayside. And this in an unemotional age!

Tonight he pushed his way quietly in and sat down in the front row, but he was recognized at once and a ripple of sound suspiciously like a cheer came from the seats behind. Wherever a thousand or so sailors are gathered together there is almost sure to be some talent in the concert line, be it real or imagined. On this occasion we had all the usual items, including the inevitable soulful rendering of "Come to me, Thora" by a sentimental matlo with a lock of fair hair hanging over an eyebrow. Towards the end some of the officers in the front row shouted for a song from Captain (D), and, the feeling of the house being vociferously unanimous on this point, he jumped on the platform and started a ditty about a ship, with a cheery refrain consisting entirely of the words "She's sure to burst her boilers". This much-applauded effort was followed by "The King", and with that the second concert of the Twentieth Flotilla came to an end.

In the hum of conversation that arose after the concert was over one topic seemed to the causing some

amusement – it was the recent speech of the First Lord of the Admiralty. His exuberant reference to the flotilla had evidently been variously translated, but the general opinion appeared to be that it sounded more dignified in the original tongue. So, for some weeks to come, the "Corps d'élite of the Navy" was known to its constituent parts as the "corpse delighty".

* * * *

But what of the flotilla and its work? Its formation in the latter part of February 1918 constituted the real beginning of organized minelaying in enemy waters. The activity of the enemy's ships was to be restricted inside their own waters as well as outside; they were to be hemmed into their own bases, and the passage of their submarines to and from their home ports was to be made more dangerous. Only light craft of shallow draft and high speed could hope to carry out such work successfully, and so destroyers were chosen to act as minelayers. The risks were considerable and the Admiralty fully expected that heavy losses would be incurred, for the Germans kept the Heligoland Bight well sown with protective minefields and we could hardly expect that they would let the flotilla go about its destructive work unhampered. It would obviously only be a matter of time before we encountered a

superior force of enemy ships or else ran foul of one of their minefields.

Our minelaying operations also made it more difficult and dangerous for the High Seas Fleet to put to sea; a passage would have to be swept, and this channel kept clear to enable the fleet to return without delay or undue risk. In the event of a fleet action it would be our duty to pass round the rear of the enemy's fleet and close the passage again with a minefield. In this work we would act as a flotilla attached to the Grand Fleet, but the likelihood of our being able to extricate ourselves after completing our job seemed rather slight.

Our leader, HMS Abdiel, had laid mines during the night of the Battle of Jutland and had caused a good deal of damage and inconvenience to the German fleet before they reached their base. At that time HMS Abdiel was the only destroyer engaged on such work, but less than two years later she was joined by ten other destroyers fitted as minelayers, and the 20th Flotilla came into being at Immingham. The first minelaying operation of the new flotilla was carried out early in March of 1918.

It consisted of rather a strange assortment of ships. The Abdiel was the only flotilla leader until

the Gabriel arrived in the autumn to lead the second division. Four V-class destroyers made up our greatest defensive strength; they were the Vanoc, Vanquisher, Venturous and Vehement, and had all been in commission only a few months. Next came the Telemachus and the Tarpon, two "Admiralty R. Class" ships, the fastest destroyers in the flotilla, but not so heavily armed as the Vs. Then one L-Class ship, the Legion; and finally three small "Improved Acorn-class" destroyers, the Ariel, Sandfly and Ferret.

The ships ranged in displacement from about 2000 tons down to 780 tons, in speed from 36 knots to 27 knots, and in length from 320 feet to 240 feet. The V-class ships were the most heavily armed, having three 4-inch guns and one 3 inch antiaircraft gun, while the smallest ships had each only one 4 inch gun of an older pattern and two 12-pdrs. The Gabriel carried 72 mines, the Vs 46 each, and the remainder 40 each, while all ships had several depth charges. Five each carried either one or two torpedo-tubes.

The mines were carried in two lines, one on either side, and stretched from a point just forward of the after torpedo-tube to the stern. Their position, and the extra weight they gave to the ships, necessitated the removal of the after gun (deck level) and the after

torpedo-tubes. In order to minimize the risk of the ships being recognized as minelayers screens were fitted outboard of the rows of funnels with the normal superstructure, guns, and tubes painted on them. This type of camouflage was quite effective when viewed from a short distance away. The removal of part of the armament had one disadvantage, however; it made us correspondingly weaker in the event of an attack.

Besides Captain(D), who had distinguished himself at Jutland, we had several officers in the flotilla who had made their names known. Commander Bryan F. Adams, who joined the flotilla as captain of the Legion some weeks after I arrived, had led a storming party on the Mole at Zeebrugge. Lieut. Peppé of the Sandfly had been a Sub. in the Broke on the occasion of her famous action, and the gunner of the Tarpon had fired the successful torpedo from the Broke on the same occasion. The Sub. of the Sandfly, D'Arcy Evans, had been specially promoted for his action in saving many men from drowning after the sinking of the armed merchant cruiser Alcantara. Lastly, the captain of the Telemachus was the well known naval writer "Taffrail".

Two days had passed since I joined the Vehement. Her RNR snotty was a small round-faced youth of about twenty years old who seemed to find it difficult to convince other people (who were not already in the know) of his age and experience. On the first morning he had shown me round the ship, pointing out the main armaments and the numerous gadgets with which the ship was fitted. An air of indifference, almost bordering on boredom, was evidently intended to convey the impression that the manipulation of all these contraptions hardly offered full scope for his abilities.

It might be worth while to take a quick look round with him. On climbing the ladder outside the wardroom we reached a deckhouse which formed the superstructure on which the superimposed after gun was built. Hatchways led down to the cabinflat as well as to the wardroom, and a galley was contained in a space further aft. The cabinflat consisted of a gangway with two cabins on each side and the captain's cabin in front. The latter stretched athwartships and was divided by a curtain into a sleeping cabin and an office.

A doorway in the deckhouse led almost directly on to the starboard row of mines, with very little room

to squeeze by. Further forward, on the upper deck, was the hatchway leading to the double cabin, then the empty after torpedo-race, the searchlight, the forward twin torpedo tubes, the antiaircraft gun, the after funnel, the engineroom hatch, and the foremost funnel. Ladders led on either side to the fo'c'stle and, in the bridge superstructure on this level, were the transmitting station, the wireless cabin, the sickbay, and a cabin for one of the Lords. Another pair of ladders, on either side, led to the signal platforms, which were extensions on either side of the wheelhouse. Abaft the latter were the charthouse and captain's sea cabin. A third pair of ladders connected the signal platforms with the open navigating bridge. Here the eye level was about 40 feet above the sea, and even in rough weather nothing more solid than spray reached this height.

At the foremost end of the bridge a raised platform extended round the Compass binnacle, on the port side there was a covered-in chart table, and in the after part a small director tower for central control of the guns. For the rest there were the usual sets of voicepipes and navyphones, electric indicators for conveying range-laying instructions aft, a torpedo director, a Dumaresq table (for calculating the rate of change of range and deflection for the guns), depth-charge releases, and so on. The Snotty had certainly

a fine chance of airing his knowledge here though I found little that was really new to me. It was when we returned to the mines that he had the pull over me, and I strongly disliked the way in which he emphasized the points in his story by striking the covered horns smart blows with his fist. I had not yet got accustomed to living with particoloured monstrosities!

In actual fact the mines were almost harmless during the period we were in Harbour – they were no more dangerous than shells, and the bending of a horn did not bring about detonation for a variety of reasons. They were metallic spheres with a buoyancy of about 100 lb. and had five horns on the top side and two 'submarine' horns beneath. They were attached to large square sinkers which contained a drum inside, round which the mooring wire was coiled. A plummet outside the sinker was also connected to the drum by a length of chain equal to the depth at which the mine was to be moored below the surface. On sliding the mine overboard it detatched itself from the sinker, but was unable to rise to the surface on account of the drum being locked. A moment later, however, the plummet had fallen to the full length of its chain and thus unlocked the mechanism. The mines thus released bobbed up to the surface in the ship's wake and remainded there

(the mooring wire uncoiling from the drum all the while) until the plummet struck the bottom when the brake was again applied to the drum and the mine drawn down to a depth beneath the surface equal to the length of the plummet chain.

Small wheels were fitted to the sinkers and these rested on mine rails. The line of mines was drawn aft by a "hauling-aft" machine which was situated close to the stern, but the individual mines were finally coaxed overboard by hands stationed outboard and inboard. A "soluble plug" in the detonator circuit prevented the mines becoming 'live' until they had been immersed for about twenty minutes. This minimized the risk of an accident to any of our own ships during laying operations.

On some occasions when we were visiting a more than usually dangerous area we used sinkers which carried the mines to the bottom and then allowed "crops" to rise at intervals of say, one, two, three and four weeks. Then there were the M-mines — but we had better leave those till later.

* * * * *

On the morning following my tour of the ship I was awake early listening to the sound of footsteps on the steel deck above my head.

Suddenly a knock came at the door and a voice announced "Seven o'clock, sir". We were due to leave the Basin very shortly so I got up and went on deck.

At the entrance to the wardroom hatch the captain was standing talking to [redacted] the senior Sub. She turned to a quartermaster as I passed and said "Pipe - fore-part for'ard". A few moments later the shrill note of a pipe sounded, followed by a cry of "fore-part for'ard; after-part aft; special duty men to their stations" The captain then left for the bridge while I went up on the forecastle (fo'c'sle) with Wilson (the Sub.). By this time the five outer ships had "penned" out of the Basin and the Telemachus was already moving out from alongside us. As her stern swung clear of our bow a voice from our own bridge gave the order "Let-go midships 3 spring", and then "Let-go for'ard". Our bow drifted out slightly from that of the Venturous, which had the berth inside ours. "Let-go aft" came from the bridge, and then "Slow ahead both - Port ten". Our stern slid past the bow of the Venturous and next moment the helm was put hard over; and the starboard engine [stopped], and then put slow astern. A few minutes later we were alongside the Telemachus at the outer end of the 'pen'.

The Venturous, and then the Vanquisher followed in

astern of us and the gates were closed. When we passed out into the river the earlier batch of ships had already proceeded down the Humber and had anchored in Grimsby Roads. We did the same, and waited until the Abdiel and the Vanoc arrived.

By 9.30 the full flotilla had "slipped" and proceeded down river, the Velement being fifth ship in the line. We had soon passed the long curved sandspit of Spurn Point at the entrance to the Humber and were crossing the East Coast War Channel. The latter was a buoyed passage for north and south bound merchant shipping and was regularly swept to keep it clear of mines.

There was a fresh breeze blowing from the north-east and the speed of the flotilla was increased to 22 knots as we drew clear of the land. I found the after gun-platform a good place from which to get a view and I watched the flat line of the coast as it gradually vanished over the horizon. Our white wake, which had been so prominent in the shallow waters of the Humber, had fallen away appreciably, but two steep plumes now rose from where the bow of the Telemachus cut through the sea three hundred feet astern of us. The ensign was standing out almost straight from our aft mainmast and its flutter could be heard from the gun-platform below. Further forward the only sounds were the faint note of the turbines rising from the engineroom hatch,

the hum of the fans conveying a forced draught to the boilers, and the whistle of the wind through the mast-stays and signal halliards.

Suddenly a small narrow triangular pennant divided vertically into white and red sections appeared over the edge of our signal platform and was hauled "close up" on our foremast ; it was the "Answering Pennant" denoting that a signal had been seen and read. Looking up the line I could see the signal flying from the Abdiel's foremast — first a square blue and white 'St. George's Cross', then a gap, then a square blue and white chequered flag. then the blue 'stationing' flag, and finally another blue and white chequered flag. The signal read "'Two' flag (tack line) Z - Stationing - Z" and meant "Divisions — take station on my starboard and port quarters".

A moment later the signal was hauled down, and simultaneously the answering pennants at the mastheads of the rest of the flotilla were lowered. The 'executive' had been given and the Vanoc could be seen hauling out of the line to starboard with the first division following astern, while the Legion hauled out to port and increased speed with the second division astern of her. It was not long before the flotilla had assumed its new formation with the Vanoc five cables distant on the Abdiel's starboard quarter and the

first division astern of her, and the Legion with the second division in a corresponding position on the Abdiel's port quarter.

Shortly before twelve the senior Sub, and I had lunch, and at noon we went on to the bridge to take the afternoon watch. The junior Sub, (he was the brother of a 17½ year old V.C. Shotty) was on watch, and gave us the course and the "speed of the fleet" before going below to the chart house to write up the log from the navigation notebook. The formation of the flotilla had been altered again and we were now proceeding in "Submarine Screen". The leaders of the two divisions had moved up until they were four cables distant on either bow of the Abdiel, and the divisions themselves were spread out in quarterline. It was like a spearhead with the tip of the head turned in. The Telemachus and the Tarpon had taken station independently on the starboard and port quarters of the Abdiel.

It was a clear day with a blue sky dotted with white puffs of drifting cumulus; our compass course was N 53° E and the speed of the flotilla was so adjusted to enable us to reach the north-eastern end of the Dogger Bank late in the evening. The outer ends of this bank were marked by two Dutch lightvessels - the North Dogger Bank and the South Dogger Bank - both of

which proved to be useful to us for fixing our position accurately before laying our course into enemy waters. The final course was often tortuous as we had to wind our way between minefields, and any navigational check was a great help in misty weather when reliance had otherwise to be placed on dead reckoning. From these lightships we generally turned inwards towards the Heligoland Bight — a stretch of sea bounded by these lights to the west, Horns Reef to the east, and the mouth of the Elbe (with the island of Heligoland itself) to the South. The "Bight" was an unhealthy spot for British small craft, — a kind of spider's web into which entry was easy but safe exit much more difficult. We were there sometimes twice, sometimes three times, in a week.

But there were other parts of the North Sea where our destroyers never felt quite at home — the north coast of Jutland was one of these. Small ships operating in the region of the Skagerrak were open to attack by enemy cruisers which could pass through the narrow channel from the Baltic and carry out a "smash and grab raid". The area below Horns Reef, close to the Danish-German frontier, was also a danger-spot, and it was in this direction that we were to be bound on ~~this occasion~~ my first stint.

The horizon was sharp and clear with no other ship in sight as the flotilla held on its north-easterly course all afternoon. On the bridge we had little to do other than make an occasional alteration

of a degree or two in course or a few revolutions in the engine revolutions to keep the ship in station. From the exceptional height of the open navigating bridge the ship seemed to be moving slower than was actually the case. Round the bridge protective steel mattressing reached chest-high; the mattressing consisted of steel springs and shavings covered with heavily painted canvas, and acted as a useful protection from shrapnel or shell splinters.

At four o'clock we were relieved by the gunner, and some hours later the formation of the flotilla was altered to "line ahead". It was dusk by shortly after nine o'clock; then from the horizon fine on the port bow came the "blink... blink...." of the North Dogger Bank Lightvessel. Although she was a neutral it was just as well not to pass her in full daylight and give her the chance of reporting our presence. We soon had her abeam and then "altered course as requisite for laying position". By 10.45 we were entering an area where enemy ships might be expected, and the ship's company went to a modified form of Action Stations.

It was now quite dark and the ships were steaming close up without lights; only the faint greenish phosphorescence of the wake of the next ahead made it possible for the ships to keep together. ~~The~~

Our laying had to be done as near high tide as possible, as this reduced the chances of our coming to grief on a minefield ourselves, but we also tried to avoid laying when the moon was up, or in the early light of dawn.

The form of Action Stations which we adopted on entering enemy waters was known as "Second Degree of Vigilance" (as far as I know it was only used in the Vehement) and on this occasion I had settled down in the Sick-bay, which was alongside the Transmitting Station. Sitting on a chest I tried to read, but the faint drone of the turbines encouraged drowsiness and I soon found it hard to keep awake. Two hours went by and I paced up and down; it would be another two hours before we were due to go to Minelaying Stations; time seemed to be going slower now and my wrist watch showed it to be five minutes past one. Suddenly the alarm gongs sounded.

Next moment I had opened the steel doors of the transmitting station; the lights switched off as the door opened and went on again when it closed. Two ratings were seated at a narrow table, one stationed at the "clocks" and the other at the range indicators; a voice from the bridge was giving an order — "ALL GUNS — Bearing - Green Two-O; Range - One-Six-Double-O; Rate - Five Hundred. Open Closing." The dials of the instruments were set and the "clocks" started. The captain had evidently

just arrived on the bridge for the voice of the Officer of the Watch could be heard reporting that two lights were just visible low down fine on the starboard bow. Next moment the voice went on "ALL GUNS — Load with lyddite"; the faint 'clink' of a breech-block closing on shell and cartridge could be heard. The rating at the range indicator turned a handle at intervals as the "clocks" showed how the range was falling and the deflection altering. Simultaneously at the guns the sight-setters altered the dials to correspond with the change in the illuminated figures in front of them. We were soon almost at point-blank range, but our orders were strict; with our mines still on board we must not take the initiative and open fire, but if the other fellow let off a gun in a fit of pride or rashness then we could pay him back at once.

There was a long pause and the minutes went by; the range had ceased to close and was now opening ~~rapidly~~, so we must have left the ships astern. Someone on the bridge remarked that they were probably German outpost craft — possibly guides for returning submarines. Only a few weeks before, the flotilla had sunk three such ships and brought home 70 prisoners from a point close in to the enemy's coast. Another five minutes passed and then — "ALL GUNS — Unload. Second Degree of Vigilance".

On leaving the transmitting station the darkness outside seemed intense, but soon I could pick out the faint glint of two lights now some distance away on our starboard quarter. It seemed unlikely that the outposts had seen us go by. We hoped not; as it was better to enter these waters unannounced.

Nearly an hour later a signal was passed down the line from the "Abdiel". This was the only signal given during the night and was flashed from a shielded lamp or in the form of a group of shaded coloured lights. The lights were not strong enough to be seen from more than a short distance away, and the signal was so timed that it was given at an exact interval of time (generally an hour) before the rear ship of the line was due to swing on to her laying course and start laying mines.

At three o'clock we went to Minelaying Stations. The speed of the flotilla had dropped to 12 knots and the ships astern of us one by one had laid their mines and hauled out of the line. The Legion (our next astern) was still laying, continuing the single line of mines which would eventually stretch for more than twelve miles. On some nights we laid in a series of obtuse-angled Vs, each ship laying half her egg on the original course and the remainder on a new course, thus spreading the minefield over an area. Tonight it was a single line.

The time for us to start laying had almost arrived as the minelaying party stationed aft took up their positions and waited for the signal from the bridge. Suddenly a light went on inside a shielded metal case close to one of the hauling-aft machines – it shone through a yellow disc of glass bearing the words STAND BY. Next moment the black shape of our next astern could be seen altering course. One of the Subs, picked up a navyphone and spoke to the captain on the bridge – "Legion hauling out, Sir". The yellow disc disappeared and a green one shone in its place carrying the words LAY MINES. The hauling-aft machines were set going. Someone was holding a watch so as to catch the rays of the green light and was saying "Drop one. .. drop two .. drop three .. drop four ..... " at intervals of five seconds, with gaps of fifteen seconds after each group of four. The mines trundled slowly aft and slid overboard, first from one side and then from the other.

"..drop forty-four ..... drop forty-five .. drop-forty-six". As the last mine went over the side a switch was turned and a light on the bridge showed the words HAVE STOPPED. Astern of us, in the white line of our wake, two mines lay on the surface like discarded plum puddings; then, with a slight 'plop', they took their final plunge. But the ship was heeling over now. the curved track astern showing that we had swung on to our new course.

For a moment we caught a glimpse of the Venturous on our starboard bow – she had started laying. Then we lost sight of her as we left the flotilla and proceeded on an independent course.

But the most difficult operation was still to come. As soon as each ship had hauled out of the line she had to proceed at a certain speed and on a certain course which would eventually bring the whole flotilla together at a previously arranged rendezvous. When visibility was poor – as it often was – it was difficult to separate thus and then join up in correct order at a definite meeting place; so in misty weather we had to risk burning our navigation lights on low power during the few minutes in which the flotilla was reforming in line-ahead.

On this occasion we were soon heading for home, and by four o'clock in the afternoon the lighthouse on Spurn Point was visible on the horizon. When we reached the Humber I went down from the bridge to the wheelhouse where the coxswain – a C.P.O. – was at the wheel with a rating alongside, whose job it was to operate the engine-room telegraph and revolution indicator. We had slowed down on entering the river and were now making about 15 knots. I was rather vaguely watching a leading signalman stow away some flags in the lockers on the port signal platform when the coxswain turned with a whispered query to know whether I would like to take the wheel.

The business of keeping a destroyer's head steady at slow speed (we were doing 10-12 knots now) turned out to be more difficult than it looked, and when I let her yaw heavily there were some blistering remarks hurled from the bridge, but these were cleverly parried by the coxswain. No doubt the latter felt that a future officer-of the watch should learn a little of the trials of a quartermaster, and sympathize.

A short time later we secured alongside an oil jetty, and in less than hour had taken in about a hundred tons of oil fuel. At nine oclock we passed in through the lock-gates, and before it was quite dark moved stern first into our berth alongside No1 Quay.

Early next morning we took on board a fresh load of mines.

* * * * *

There had been some trouble about our R.N.R. Snotty. He had had symptoms which suggested appendicitis, and arrangements had been made for him to leave the ship and have the matter attended to. A new snotty had been appointed in his place — and here I was. But the pains in the R.N.R. intestine had disappeared, and the snotty remained. What was more, he would obviously have to wait now until he received a new appointment

As it happened, one of the smaller ships in the flotilla, the Sandfly, was temporarily without a midshipman — a fact which was pointed out rather forcibly by her skipper when talking to ours. It thus came about that I was lent unofficially to the smaller ship until such time as the situation took to clear. The move proved to be more important to me than it looked, for before the time came for my return, there was no longer any ship to return to. She was then lying on on the seabed with half her ship's company somewhere between the Dogger Bank and Horns Reef.

She had, in fact, fought an action against German
destroyers in Heligoland Bight early in the War.

The Sandfly was a little ship, and maybe she wasn't much to look at when you compared her with the Vs, for she had no superimposed guns, she was 60 feet shorter, she had only two-thirds the displacement, she was rather slow, and she had precious little in the way of guns or torpedoes. In fact, one was apt to feel at first that she had neither the weapons to fight with nor the speed to run away. But the little ships of her class had seen plenty of service and had been through much worse times than their overgrown younger brothers. She carried 40 mines — the same number as all except the Abdiel and the Vs — and was very seaworthy. A few weeks before I joined her she had been rammed and nearly cut in half when 300 miles from our own coast and well inside enemy waters; but she had got back, and was now looking none the worse for her adventure.

Insert opposite page 4

Her captain was an Commander in the Royal Indian Marine with a temporary commission as Lt-Comdr. R.N., and his handling of the ship was a sight to be enjoyed. Her No1. had been a Sub, in the Broke on the occasion of her great action, and her Sub, had received a special promotion ~~transfer~~ from Midshipman R.N.R. to Sub-Lieut. R.N. for gallantry at the time of the sinking of the armed

merchant cruiser Alcantara. Her "Chief" was a temporary Engineer-Lieut. and she also had a torpedo-gunner and a Surgeon-Probationer. The other inhabitants of the wardroom were an Airedale called Brip and a rough haired fox-terrier called Sally. The latter was the only lady on board.

It was into this throng that I was projected one night in July just as we were preparing to leave for a minelaying operation. I had had my gear sent on ahead of me from the Vehement and this was soon stowed under my hammock which was slung in the narrow space outside the cabins. After spending an hour in the wardroom I turned in, and was woken about six o'clock next morning by the sounds of activity on deck.

By eight o'clock we had left the basin and were proceeding down the Humber, but we were without the Ardiel which had remained in port to complete a boiler-clean. Captain (D) had chosen to lead the flotilla in the Venturous.

It was a fresh morning with a clear blue sky. So the Chief, the Doc. and I decided to spend our time on the "quarterdeck". By some trouble more the Doc. got there first and lay full length on the deck, thus considerably hampering the Chief who wanted exercise and walked feverishly up and down the four yards or so of available room. I found it

best to sit on the mines, so I borrowed a couple of cushions from the wardroom and propped them on top of a mine, then climbing up myself and bracing my feet against two of the horns of the mines next to the one on which I was sitting. There was no doubt that I was getting blasé about the mines by this time!

I took the afternoon watch with 'No.1'. The flotilla was proceeding in Submarine Screen with the Venturous this time in the centre and we of the Slow Division well over to the port wing. The course was the same as on the previous stunt, as we were again bound for the northern entrance to the Bight. The bridge on the Sandfly was low and enclosed with glass screens in front but open at the sides. It contained the wheel and engineroom controls, and was in fact rather similar to the bridge of the P20. Darkness crept in slowly and we laid mines just after midnight at a spot not far from the Danish coast.

Little happened of excitement on this stunt and we reached the Humber again in the early part of the next evening. There followed the usual business of taking in oil followed by a long wait before we could pen in through the lockgates. Being one of the junior ships in the flotilla we often had to wait some hours before our turn came, as the 'pen' only held

four, or at the most five, ships at a time. Sometimes we waited as long as eight hours and on this occasion it was half past two in the morning before we reached our berth at No1 buoy.

We spent the next four days in harbour, the first of which was occupied in loading mines and testing circuits. The detonators were not attached till much later, and so the mines were quite harmless during the time we remained in port. They actually did not become "live" until 20 minutes or so after they had been laid (so as avoid the risk of misadventure while our own ships were in the vicinity); this was brought about by the melting of a soluble plug in the electric detonating circuit.

These days in harbour were spent mainly on board ship, but most of us paid an occasional afternoon visit to Grimsby. The flotilla was generally at four hours notice to put to sea, and in emergencies officers and men could be recalled by naval pickets in the town. The mornings were spent on odd jobs — I had sometimes chart corrections to make and now and then confidential books to burn. But most of the time was given to reading and talking — and more often arguing. The question of our vulnerability often arose and we speculated on what would happen

if we were chased out of the Bight. It was unfortunate that not one of our guns could be trained right astern, and in the event of a running fight we could hardly hope to bring more than one 12-pounder to bear on the enemy. The Chief, however, was confident that he could raise our speed to 29 knots with only a slight risk of the engines falling through the ship's bottom! This was a consoling thought, and really not too bad considering that we were only designed to do 26-27 knots.

At four o'clock "tea" was served in an atmosphere of unrelieved gloom. Through the tiny scuttles, only four or five inches in diameter, the grey hulls of the destroyers on either side showed up a few feet away, and the little light they reflected had a leaden hue. Most of us had just woken up, and groped our way to the table where we consumed cocoa and toast in silence.

On the fourth evening in harbour I was sent over to the Abdiel to make a copy of the Z.Z.Z. . This was a secret document giving the main details of the next minelaying operation — courses and speeds, organization and disposition of the flotilla, type of "coloured signal" to be used, position of the rendezvous, height of the tide, depth at which the mines were to be laid, names of the ships told off to look out on the various wireless waves, and information about the movement of

any of our submarines or surface craft which we might possibly meet.

When I entered the Abdiel's wardroom I found the flotilla navigator sitting on a seat by the stove talking to the torpedo lieutenant, while the snotty lay on the settee trying to read. Subs, or snotties had soon arrived from all the ships and the Abdiel's No.1 came in and dictated the Z.Z.Z. It was to be a longer stunt this time – as far as Jutland Bank – and we were to leave the base at 4.30 next morning.

It was just getting light as the flotilla passed down the Humber, the low sun casting a band of yellow light across the sea immediately ahead of us. All day long we held on our course towards the Skager Rak and by nightfall we were nearing our destination. In the early hours of the morning we laid mines, and it was already light before the flotilla had reassembled, when the Abdiel, at the head of the line, swung on to her new course the slight haze and dim light of dawn made her appear to be several miles ahead of us in the Sandfly, though her distance could not have been more than two thousand yards.

During the forenoon watch, while proceeding in Submarine Screen, the Velement, on the starboard wing, suddenly hauled out of the line and dropped

Swung off her course

two depth charges. Next moment her semaphore arms spelt out a signal to the Abdiel submitting that she had spotted the periscope of a submarine quite close to the flotilla. There was nothing more to be done as we had now left the submarine well astern — if indeed the submarine had not been merely an illusion in the overheated brain of the Velement's snotty, who was on watch at the time. But the flotilla was not interested in the matter as it considered that it had more important things to do that to go submarine chasing. That sort of thing was all very well for the G.F. destroyers, or for the various patrols and escorts round the coast — it was the day's excitement for them. Our job was to get back and load up with mines as quickly as possible, so we made the journey at fairly high speed and arrived off Immingham late in the evening. After the usual delay we entered the basin and secured up about 4 am..

On the evening of the next day - July the 27th. - we had another flotilla Concert, but the atmosphere soon became heavy with forebodings as the disquietening news spread from ship to ship that the Abdiel's black cat had vanished. It had just deserted the ship.

Early next morning I went over to the Abdiel for the Z.Z.Z. and by noon we were proceeding down the river

to carry out an operation in the Southern part of the Bight. Our course was laid two points further east than on the previous operations and all afternoon, under a cloudy sky, we sped eastward with the flotilla fanned out in Submarine Screen. Darkness descended and by ten o'clock we had picked up the beam of the South Dogger Bank Lightvessel. With the shadow of Abdiel's black cat across our course there was a feeling abroad that something dire might happen at any moment, and well it might, but our luck held and at one o'clock in the morning we laid our mines and turned homewards. All night long summer lightning flickered, showing for an instant the rim of the horizon encircling the line of darkened ships, which seemed fixed on a black cloth at the centre of a great dome of glass. Summer night gave way to dawn and soon after midday the low line of the Lincolnshire coast rose above the horizon. By three o'clock we had entered the Humber and by nine had penned into Immingham basin and berthed alongside No. 1 Quay.

I had now been in Sandfly for a fortnight and was enjoying the life on board well enough, as I was more likely to be given responsibility there than would have been my lot had I remained in a V-class destroyer. Over in Velement Lt-Cdr Nott had returned from his gunnery course at Whale Island and Lt-Cdr Knotty had not yet received a fresh appointment. I felt no great urge to return.

Two days after we had ~~returned~~ got back from the operation in the

Southern part of the Bight another Z.Z.Z. told us that we would proceed next time by the northern entry, but would then turn South and lay mines at a spot some 40 miles inside the Bight. By five o'clock next morning, August 1st, the whole flotilla, barring Venturous and Legion who were due for a refit, had penned out of the basin and were heading for the mouth of the Humber. Having cleared Spurn Point the usual course was set for the North Dogger Bank Lightvessel. The sky was slightly overcast and the sea calm as we altered our formation from flotilla in line ahead to divisions in line ahead with leaders disposed on the port and starboard quarters of Abdiel, and later to Submarine Screen.

At four o'clock I went on the bridge to take the first dog watch with No.1 and for two hours watched the now familiar scene — the two rows of ships keeping station in quarterline, their bow-waves mounting in white plumes over a placid sea. Six o'clock came round and the gunner arrived to take the last dog watch, but there was little to report other than Speed and Course, and we had soon handed over. Below in the wardroom I settled down to read till dinner was served and then went on deck for a short time. The flotilla was now in line ahead and darkness was closing in rapidly. Shortly after nine o'clock the blink of the North Dogger Bank Lightvessel could be seen first on our port bow and by 9.30 we had it abeam. It looked like being a dark night, as the moon was not due to rise till after midnight,

so I decided to have a "caulk" before turning out for the middle watch.

The only occupant of the wardroom was the Chief, who had drawn a chair up to the stove and was reading. I chose the settee and lay listening drowsily to the hum of the turbines and the thrust of the propellor shafts. At about ten minutes to midnight I would be wakened, but in the meantime I had two hours of grateful sleep. Up on the bridge the Captain had joined the Sub, on watch, and at 11.35 the "Colours Signal" passed down the line to indicate that in one hour's time we would have reached our keying position. The hands of the deck-watch moved on till they pointed to eleven minutes to midnight when the explosion occurred, a sheet of orange-red flame leaping upwards from one of the ships close ahead of us.

Down in the wardroom I found myself on my feet, wondering what had woken me so suddenly and why the Chief was dashing through the doorway, but at the next moment the alarm gongs sounded and I had reached the bottom of the ladder before the Chief had got to the top. On deck the darkness was intense, but it was obvious that we were swinging heavily to port under full starboard helm, while an unusual silence on board was accounted for by the fact that our engines were stopped. Running the length of the upper deck I mounted the ladder leading to the foc'sle and, in doing so, looked

over my right shoulder where the dark outline of a destroyer was just visible with a pillar of smoke streteled high above her. From the direction of the ship came a great roar of escaping steam. Next moment I was on the bridge, where No.1 had already taken over from the Sub, who had gone to his action station, and the coxswain was just relieving the quartermaster at the wheel.

There were two alternatives to account for the explosion — either we had run foul of a minefield, or an enemy ship, concealed in the darkness, had fired a torpedo hitting the fifth in the line of incoming destroyers. The captains or officers of the watch of all the ships of the flotilla, except possibly of the rear ship Ariel, had decided on the instant that it was a minefield and had hauled their ships out of the line and stopped engines. We were now lying with little way on, wondering who had been struck and pitying the poor blokes on board (and also also those whose voices could be faintly heard crying from the sea into which they had been cast by the force of the explosion. Boats were being lowered from the nearest ships and rescue was in progress. The stricken ship was obviously one of the Vs and, by her position in the line, probably Velement, but we were not sure.

Knowing almost for certain that we were in the middle of a minefield we wondered uneasily whether it was to be our turn next to touch a fatal horn, hoping that if the explosion

came it would be below us on the bridge rather than beneath our cargo of forty mines and four depth-charges carried aft. But it was better not to let the imagination wander to explore the dark waters below, where the mines strained upwards on their mooring wires and swayed gently as the hull of a ship slid by; or stray over to Velement where the whole of the foc'sle was torn off, the mess decks a shambles, and the bodies of stokers lay on the upper deck parboiled in the blast of steam which had blown up with them from the shattered stokehold. boilerroom

Shortly after midnight, about twenty minutes after the explosion had occurred, I was standing on the starboard side of the bridge looking towards Velement, where oil from her damaged fuel tanks had ignited on the surface of the sea forming a beacon which advertised our presence in enemy waters only too well. From time to time flashes occurred on board as cartridges or shells from the disrupted magazine burned or exploded. Then the second disaster occurred — a great burst of flame and shower of wreckage rising from the sea about four cables on our starboard quarter, with a picture in the centre of a small destroyer, her forepart almost demolished; a couple of seconds later came a dull thud, like the beat of a distant drum. We knew, from that momentary glimpse, and from her position, that it was Ariel, the last ship in our line. Poor old Ariel, she had

been the first British destroyer to sink a submarine in the war and now she had served her last commission. In that explosion, which had detonated her forward magazine and burst her boilers, there had perished her Captain, No.1, Sub, Sub, RNVR, and 31 men. As last ship of the line she had had her depth-charges set to "Fire", but the keys locking the firing mechanism were on the bridge and consequently unavailable for the purpose of setting them to "Safe" and thus avoiding a violent explosion when the ship sank. The end came at three minutes past one when, by the light of the blazing wreckage on Velement, the remains of Ariel were seen to settle down and sink. A moment later a heavy underwater explosion shook the remaining ships of the flotilla as her depth-charges exploded.

Unpleasant as it was on the bridge, where we could see each stage of the tragedy as it unfolded, the strain on those whose duties kept them below must have been far more severe. In the engine-rooms and stokeholes there were long silences with engines stopped, punctuated by the three underwater shocks each of which gave increasing cause for speculation on the final fate of the flotilla. In one ship, only a few minutes after Ariel had struck, a sound was heard ~~aboard the ship~~ that caused her crew to hold their breath — a hollow scraping on the side of their ship, starting near the bow and grinding slowly aft; then silence, as the mine swung clear of the stern without exploding.

Grim as those moments were there were otters of light relief. as when a stokehole hatch on Abdiel was flung open and a grining head appeared. Surveying the scene of Velement's fiery beacon lighting the wreck of Ariel he addressed his mate below with the words "Blimey Bill, you'd almost think it was the Fifth of November!".

As the moments wore on there was little for us to do on the bridge of Sandfly other than watch the dim shapes of destroyers as they stood motionless on the dark sea, reflecting faintly on their grey hulls the glow of the fires on Velement. Then a bright shaft of light appeared towards the east, but before we could see in it a sign of some further misfortune the beam broadened and rode clear of the horizon in the shape of the moon. a few days advanced in her last quarter. The silver rod of light she cast across the sea followed us throughout the rest of the night and possibly saved us a little later from a fate similar to that of Velement and Ariel. We were then close enough to Vanoc to give her a hail and enquire whether her Captain knew what our next move was to be. A laconic reply informed us that it was likely to be upwards unless we went astern pretty quickly as there was a floating mine just visible in the moonis track only a few yards from our bows.

In contrast to the discreet avoidance of movement practised by ourselves and the ships surrounding us was the

activity at the head of the line where, ever since a few minutes after the first explosion, efforts had been made to take Velement in tow. The captain of Telemachus had taken his ship close enough to Velement to pass a line, and a rope had been secured, but towing would have to be stern-first as Velement's bows were missing and the whole of her forepart was submerged. This operation, hampered by the dark, took some time to complete, and the rescue boats had to continue their search till the last survivors had been picked up. Consequently it was not until about two o'clock that a signal was passed from ship to ship and the flotilla reformed in line ahead and steamed slowly from the scene of the disasters. It was a hesitant and wavering passage that I recorded in the deck-log, for towing was a slow and difficult job. This was, perhaps, the worst part of the night's experience, for we were now under way again and it was not for another hour or more that we could feel tolerably sure that we were clear of the minefield.

Dawn found us still inside enemy waters and the flotilla was now open to attack under adverse conditions with a crippled member to protect. Wireless signals, picked up during the past hour or two, indicated that enemy ships were searching for us, and it appeared that a scouting airship had spotted us about this time. Towing

became increasingly difficult as Velement's bulkheads showed signs of weakening and the decision to sink her was inevitable if the rest of the flotilla was to be preserved. So, shortly after dawn had broken, we stopped once more while Telemachus towed Velement to a point four or five cables clear on the port side; then she let slip her towing wire.

It was only then that I knew for certain that the stricken ship was Velement, the tall white letters H2A painted round her stern dispelling all doubt. She was now heavily down by the bow with her bridge superstructure — where I had spent my first night at sea in her — awash. Her foremast and forward funnel badly damaged, and her stern well clear of the water. Lying some distance off her Telemachus and Vanquisher fired three salvoes each, the shells bursting along her hull and deck and sending up showers of splinters. But Velement was made of sturdy stuff and a more rapid and drastic method of attack had to be devised. This time Telemachus approached her at speed and, when close to, put her helm hard-a-starboard and dropped a depth-charge; from the bridge of Sandfly it seemed as if the stern of Telemachus passed almost under that of Velement. Next moment a column of water shot up from the spot over which Telemachus had just passed and for the fourth time in less than five hours we felt a heavy underwater shock.

Perhaps ten seconds elapsed before the effect of the



(Sandy)

HODGE, ALEXANDER MITCHELL (S.), June 1916; son of J. M. Hodge, Blairgowrie; b. of J. D. 1924, G. M. 1926; VA; left July 1933. Edin. Univ. M.A. 1936; LL.B. 1938; 1939-45 War; Comdr. R.N.V.R.; **G.C.** 1940: 'H.M. ship in which Sub.-Lieut. Hodge was serving was badly damaged by an explosion in a bomb-room. The bomb-room was in darkness, full of heat and fumes, and smoke rising to the main deck suggested fire below. When the explosion occurred, Sub.-Lieut. Hodge at once left the main deck and went into the bomb-room. He examined this and was able to rescue and send up several badly injured men. He found one of the wounded men crushed under two heavy bombs, which could not be moved single-handed. Obtaining help, he dragged the wounded man clear and sent him up. Sub.-Lieut. Hodge did not go on deck until he had satisfied himself that no one was left alive below. Throughout he showed outstanding courage, enterprise and resource without any thought for himself. He saved all the lives he could, though, for all he knew, further fatal explosions might have occurred at any moment'; desp.; V.R.D.; Senior partner Cowan & Stewart, W.S.; C.O. Forth Div. R.N.V.R. 1953. Springbank, Barnton, Midlothian. M.

the explosion became evident, HMS Velement began to move, her stern rising slowly until her full length seemed to rest on her submerged and shattered bows. Thus she remained for a moment, and then with gathering speed slid swiftly downwards. With three-quarters of her length below the surface her stern must have struck the sea bed for her last movement was to roll over on her side, showing for a moment her after deck with the ensign carrying her ensign. Then the sea close over her in a cap of white foam.

Turning to the chart table I wrote in the deck log:

4.10 Telemachus dropped depth charge

4.11 Velement Sank.

Ten minutes later we were heading towards England at 25 knots, seven ships only now, in a heaving sea with a grey sky overhead. By five we had received Birmingham and shortly afterwards berthed at our usual place in the basin.

A little later in the evening I took a stroll along No 1 Quay in the direction of our depot ship Leander. Glancing upwards towards her quarterdeck I noticed her No 1 staring hatter hard in my direction and next moment I was hailed with the words "Hi, snotty. What are you doing alive? I have got you down in the Casualty List". It turned out that my transfer to Sandfly had never reached official ears, and the fact that I had not been reported amongst Velement's

survivors had been taken as presumptive evidence that I had been lost at the time of the explosion. So it came about that my name was removed from the casualty list sent to the Admiralty. Though I learnt later that it had already appeared in the first list circulated in the Grand Fleet.

A hushed and subdued atmosphere lay over the flotilla that evening and, as night closed in, accounts of the events on board each of the two sunken ships filtered through to the wardrooms from survivors. The tale unfolded was as follows:

In Velement the captain had joined his No. 1 on the open navigating platform. The ship, which was fifth in the line, must have yawed slightly from her course for her to strike the mine, unless the wash of her next ahead had carried it towards her. Her Captain – the youngest officer in command of a V-class destroyer – was standing close to the bridge-screen watching the luminous green patch of the wake set up by the ship immediately ahead when the explosion occurred. At his next conscious moment he found himself in the sea, badly bruised, some distance from his ship, but by inflating a life-saving jacket which he was wearing managed to keep himself afloat and even succeeded in saving one of his crew whom he supported until a boat came to their rescue. He was picked up at a spot a quarter of a mile from where Velement lay

drifting and was later taken on board Vanoc where, it was stated, he promptly tried to go up on the bridge under the impression that he was back in his own ship. His action in rescuing one of his crew while badly hurt himself was recognized some weeks later when the Royal Humane Society awarded him its medal for saving life at sea.

Vehement's No 1 was less fortunate than his skipper, for the force of the explosion hurled him over the high foremost funnel so that he fell on the upper deck, fracturing his skull. Despite the Surgeon-Probationer's valiant effort to trephine the No.1 died shortly afterwards.

In contrast to his ill-fortune was the experience of the junior Sub. The latter had his cabin forward under the wheelhouse, and it was customary for him to be called shortly before midnight when he was due to take the middle watch. On this occasion he was called a few minutes earlier than usual and decided to "double" aft to the wardroom for a cup of cocoa before going on the bridge. He had just passed the after funnel when the explosion occurred, wrecking the whole of the bridge superstructure behind him, and he thus escaped unhurt.

The command of Vehement, after she had blown up forward, devolved on the Senior Sub, who had to see to the safety of the ship and her crew and make arrangements to have her taken in tow by the stern. This he did, but later had to abandon her under the conditions described previously, and finally see her sunk in order to prevent her own capture and the endangerment of the rest of the flotilla. In all one officer and 61 of her crew lost their lives that night. Thinking about them I remembered, in particular, the coxwain who had, unknown to the captain, let me steer her up the Humber on my one trip in her a fortnight before.

In April the force of the explosion was still greater, almost severing the ship at a point abaft the foremast. The only officers aft at the time she struck were the gunner, the engineer and the surgeon probationer, and the first of these had to make hurried preparations to save such of the crew as had survived, as there was no chance of keeping the ship afloat for more than a very short time. Most of the ships boats had been destroyed and the men were eventually accommodated in rafts and Carley floats. The gunner was well aware of the necessity of paddling the rafts well clear of the ship before she sank, for he knew that the depth-charges in the chutes would detonate on submerging and that such an explosion would hurl rafts and floats high out of the water unless they were well clear of the danger zone and would kill any men in the water nearby. The explosion

came, but by that time all the men were in a position of safety.

* * * * *

On Sunday, August 4th, two days after our return, and the fourth anniversary of the outbreak of the war, a memorial service was held in the hut where, only a week before, we had had our Flotilla Concert. The same evening signals were received from Admiral Sir David Beatty, Commander-in-Chief, Grand Fleet and from Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, First Sea Lord. They read as follows:

From C. in C., G.F. to Capt.(D)20.

"Deeply regret to hear of disaster which has befallen gallant ships under your command..... Please convey my sympathy to all"

From Admiralty, 1st Sea Lord to Capt.(D)20

"I regret very much the misfortune that has fallen on your flotilla and trust the wounded men are doing well. The work which your flotilla has carried out during the last six months has been perfect and of great assistance, and I fully realize the risks which have been taken in order to perform this work. That this is the first loss incurred during this long period of dangerous and difficult work is a testimony to the excellent seamanship and navigation displayed"

And in the daily papers a few mornings after the event

the public read a bold announcement as they cracked their breakfast eggs —

"The Secretary of the Admiralty announces that on August 2nd two of His Majesty's torpedo-boat-destroyers were sunk by enemy mines with the loss of five officers and ninety-two ratings. All next-of-kin have been informed"

And so the incident closed

* * * * *

Five days after our return to the base the Slow Division took part in a new type of minelaying operation near our own coast, while the Fast Division headed Southwards to carry out the first "M" mine stunt in Belgian waters near Zeebrugge.

Our new stunt was known officially as a "W.P. operation" and consisted in laying deeply moored mines alongside our East Coast War Channel with the object of catching enemy submarines. In this work we were operating in company with two large permanent minelayers — Welsh and Paris.

On the evening of August 7th we left the Basin and anchored in the stream off Grimsby. Early next morning the large dazzle-painted hulls of the two liners-turned-minelayers could be seen emerging from the river mist and in a short time we had closed them and taken station on the starboard bow of Welsh. Only ourselves.

and Ferret were left in the Slow Division, Legion being still in dockyard hands for a boiler clean, so we borrowed a couple of T.B.s from the 7th flotilla to complete the escort over which we in the Sandfly were very consciously in command.

On the bridge the skipper gave orders to keep a good lookout for periscopes — "You stand over there on the port side, Snotty, and keep your eyes skinned". Above the bridge house a look-out was audibly humming a tune and gazing into the light mist that was now rapidly clearing. Patches of blue sky appeared overhead and the surface of the sea danced gently to the movement of short steep wavelets raised by a light north-westerly breeze. As we approach Spurn Point the deeper swell of the sea, joining the high-stepping action of the river waves tossed up multitudinous white caps which glistened in the morning sunlight.

On our port quarter the two minelayers stood out sharply in their harsh lines of their dazzle-painting costume, a good target for a submarine whose periscope could lie concealed in the sparkle of confused waters to the eastward. Over on our starboard bow the sea was alive with floating wreckage, where a timber ship out from Norway

had been torpedoed and sunk a day or two before. Planks by the hundred, mingled with other flotsam, were there rising and falling to the motion of the swell and, by way of comic relief, an office chair swinging to and fro in rhythmic idleness.

Up top the lookout, who had started to beat an irritating tattoo as an accompaniment to his song, stopped short in the middle of a bar "Beerin' Red, Two O, Sir – Hobjeck like a periscope". In a moment the skipper was at the bridge-rail while the Sub. moved over to stand by the alarm gongs. But the only object to be seen was our old friend the large spherical red and white striped buoy marking the outer end of the river channel where it floated placidly like an immense Christmas balloon.*

Turning northwards along the East Coast War Channel we soon left Spurn Point astern and then passed one by one the small red War Channel buoys with their distinguishing letters. F-L-A-M-B-O-R-O-U-G-H they spelt out as we approach Flamborough Head A short time later we altered course eight points ~~to starboard~~ by Compass pennant, keeping station on Wahine, the manoeuvre being executed by a highly delighted Knotty. In a few minutes from seeing the signal

hoisted we had increased speed and were sweeping round on the long outer arc. On completing the evolution Wakiva and Paris laid their mines and before long we turned homewards and reached Immingham in time for tea.

Five days later we left for the second "W.P." operation, only this time we took a load of mines ourselves and did not act only as escort. The sea had risen by the time we had all laid, and the two little torpedo-boats, + who had again accompanied us, + made heavy weather of it. They had been built in the dim past and pressed into four years of war service at an age when they would otherwise have been broken up. Only for a few moments did one of them falter, and that was at the signal to increase speed from 22 to 25 knots. "Have been steaming full speed for half-an-hour" she complained; but she gained station again before long in spite of her disabilities.

The work of laying the Dover Channel mines being still incomplete it was decided to use the full flotilla on the next operation, but the permanent minelayers did not join us three days later when we put to sea, and the stunt seemed all the stranger through the fact that the full flotilla were laying mines so blatantly in full daylight instead of gropingly under cover of darkness. There was

no need for "coloured signals" on shaded lights, Abdiel merely hoisting the signal "Preparative Q.A." when approaching the laying position and giving the executive command by hauling it down when the time came for the rear ship to lay mines. Each ship in turn hoisted a red bunyee close up while laying. So the day passed uneventfully and by the early evening we were off Immingham jetty again.

While the Slow Division had been engaged on these "W.P." Operations the rest of the flotilla had been laying magnetically controlled mines on the sea bed off the Belgian Coast and, but for the premature detonation of some of these, might have enticed an inquisitive enemy cruiser (out from Zeebrugge) over the newly-laid field. Two 'M' mine operations were staged in August by the Fast Division and it was after the second of these that a 'buzz' became current in the Slow Division that the ships returning from the second stunt at high speed in a light fog had run foul of an outgoing convoy in the Edinburgh Channel at the mouth of the Thames Estuary. It was also stated a particular destroyer had removed the paintwork from the bows of a merchantman!

The 'M' mine was a new idea which was eventually hushed up in case the enemy might get wind of it and use it against us, and the British Public knew nothing of it till

it reappeared in a slightly different guise in the autumn of 1939 as "Hitler's New Weapon".

The fourth "W.P" stunt took place two days after the third. The Slow Division again escorting the two permanent minelayers and laying their own eggs as well. The day passed without incident and we secured up in the basin before dark. That evening I received an unpleasant shock when a signal was received that another Snotty had been appointed to Landfly and consequently I would have to go. The appointment had been approved some weeks earlier and, though my Skipper had tried to have it cancelled, he had not been successful. I was sorry to leave, as the Ship was a happy one and I was proud of the way the Skipper handled her. There was a genial, piratical touch about the costume we wore at sea - grey flannel bags, white sweater and scarf with monkey-jacket and cap, and there was a refreshing happy-go-lucky air in the wardroom which went well with the efficiency with which the Ship was handled.

Next day I showed a rather puzzled new Snotty around the ship. He had been at the Crystal Palace with me and the cause of his puzzlement was in finding me alive. He showed me a letter from a Snotty in the Grand Fleet at Scapa which stated "Have you heard Adam has been lost in Vekement?" and went on to the tune of "the good 'uns die young". All that was left for me to do was to pack up and report in the depot-ship Leander in the hope that I would be appointed permanently to one of the other ships in the flotilla. So I left Landfly for Leander —

took eight paces up the gangway, turned right to salute the ensign, asked the quartermaster for the Officer of the Day, and reported myself on board.

Things were very different on board the depot-ship which seemed a quiet backwater inhabited by officers of appalling seniority. At dinner in the wardroom two-and-a-half and three stripes flashed at me from most of the arms on the other side of the table, but even a Snotty has his uses and I was promptly given the job of Officer of the Day so as to relieve some harassed two-striper and let him get ashore. The calm made a strange contrast to those in the destroyers — in place of the thin steel plating on the ship's side, to which I had become accustomed, were heavy wooden beams with scuttles set deep in them. The atmosphere was redolent of the 'eighties', when the ship had been built — a gallant cruiser with two yellow funnels and tall masts to carry sails as an aid to the not very powerful engines with which the ship was fitted.

My visit to 'Leander' lasted only five days. I then learnt that an R.N.V.R. lieutenant was due to leave Ventnor and, although an R.N.V.R. Sub. had been appointed in his place, there would be room for a Snotty as well. So, on August 24th I joined the ship which was to be my home until I left the flotilla for my final leave prior to demobilization.



The Author - as Midshipman on
H.M.S. Venturous
Oct. 1918

XE

If I felt sorry at leaving Sandfly there was some consolation in joining a V-class destroyer again. Venturous had been built by Denny's of Fairfield on the Slips alongside her sister-ship Vehement and had been commissioned at the end of November 1917. It was not so easy to settle down in the wardroom of this bigger ship, where I was very much a junior Snotty, but after being some weeks on trial to see that my behaviour was seemly I was accepted and made welcome. I occupied a double cabin with the Sub/ R.N.V.R. whom I had known at the Crystal Palace – and who joined the ship two days after me. It was a pleasant cabin and was fitted with two small desks with yellow silk-shaded lamps.

On 26th August the whole flotilla with Wakeful and Paris made an uneventful minelaying operation, the destroyers returning independently, and this gave Tarpon and Telemachus the chance of a race in which the Skipper of Tarpon reckoned his ship had touched 36 knots – which was quite possible, as these were fast little ships. This was my tenth minelaying operation.

After two days in port the Fast Division put to sea again for an operation in the northern part of the Heligoland Bight. As we cleared Spurn Point a grey sky closed down on us while an easterly wind blew strongly over the surface of an oily sea. A heavy groundswell, extending offshore for many miles, undulated steadily across our course and made

the ship twist heavily in a combined pitch and roll. As the wind increased in force this "corkscrew-dot-and-carry-one" motion became more pronounced and the mines bumped and strained uneasily on their rails. But they were not the only uneasy things on board that morning, as the greenish complexion of most of the ship's company advertised. The junior Sub, and I took the forenoon watch and for a short time the Captain was on the bridge, but eventually he decided that he disliked the flavour of his pipe and went below. The Sub, (later Read-Admiral Sir William Jamieson) was quite cheerfully sick into a canvas bucket, thoughtfully provided by the boatswain's mate. As for me — I felt not too bad, for the moment.

At noon the Sub and I left the bridge and I entered the chartHouse to copy the details from the navigation note book into the ship's log and to check our position on the chart. The motion was much more obvious there and the chart table kept swinging about before the eyes in a most disturbing manner. I felt relieved when I left the wheelhouse a few moments later and slid down the ladders from the signal platform to the focsitle and from there to the wet and heaving upper deck along which I went with one hand on the lifeline. Down below in the wardroom the atmosphere was potted and stank of food, and nobody looked happy except the Chief, who seemed vulgarly fit. Dinner was in progress and I lay on the settee alongside the table and announced that all I wanted was ship's biscuit and water, but I had hardly wedged myself in position and opened a book

when the Chief turned round and presented a dish of hot baked beans in front of my nose and asked me if I would not change my mind. That was too much, and I retired defeated.

A little later I went up top to get some fresh air and found the wardroom cook busy in the galley. He was talking to one of the stewards when a ~~heavy~~ steep sea caused him to sit back rather heavily on the stove. He got off again before much damage was done but his language was expressive and his final remarks very much to the point. "Talk about 'Brittania rules the Waves'" he shouted "I wish she'd bleedin' well rule them straight"!

As the mines were dancing more too gently by this time we were not surprised when "Blue 16" appeared at Ahdiel's masthead and we made a 16-point turn to starboard and headed for home.

By the following morning the wind had eased somewhat though the groundswell persisted, and we succeeded this time in completing the operation. Passing the North Dogger Bank LightVessel in the dusk we laid mines only a few miles from the spot where Vehement and Ariel had been blown up four weeks earlier. It was fortunate that nothing unpleasant happened on this occasion as a fairly heavy sea was running and the night was as black as pitch. Later we found that we had quite possibly passed over the edge of a minefield – it would not have been the first time – as Tarpon reported that she had seen a mine

in her wake, either a floater of one cut adrift by her screws.

At the end of this 'stunt' Venturous was due for a refit and I found myself granted a fortnight's leave. This was spent in London where Helen and Alf were both on leave at the same time - Alf only for 48 hours. It was the first occasion that three of the family had been together for over three years. Most of the leave was spent in 'doing shows' but I also paid a visit to the Crystal Palace and was flattered to find the staff eager for suggestions how to improve the training courses and not above seeking the advice of a junior Snotty. The leave was soon over, however, and I was back on board Venturous as she was reloading ammunition. She had been fitted with director gear and paravanes while in dry dock.

Next day I went to the Magnetic Hut on the jetty to take the bearings as Venturous "swung" to test her compasses out in the stream. We were ready then for the next operation which consisted of a "W.P." stunt with the whole flotilla present, including Gabriel, the new leader of the Slow Division. Two days later we left for an operation in Heligoland Bight, but had to return owing to bad weather, and the same happened the following day. These false starts were rather annoying but we got away successfully on the third attempt. We used the southern entrance to the Bight and laid mines under rather unpleasant conditions, the night being inky black and the seas rather steep and broken. On the way home, while taking the morning watch

with the junior Sub, I saw Abdiel hoist 'Green flag', indicating that a submarine had been sighted to starboard, and the flotilla immediately formed line abreast and went to Action Stations, but no more was seen of the periscope.

After we had returned to base and had loaded up and tested mines we found that a small group of dredgers had a job to do in our corner of the basin so we penned out and moored in the stream. This proved to be a fortunate move, for we were able to get under way in half an hour when an urgent signal came from the Admiralty. It was hardly the kind of night we would have chosen for setting out on a minelaying operation but apparently risks had to be taken to get this particular job done. The flotilla slipped and proceeded down the Humber in the early evening and it was dark by the time we altered course to starboard along the War Channel. It was then that the full force of the wind struck the ships and made them keel over. In the darkness of our bridge I coned first make out the line of our foremast as it swept in a great arc over a sky studded with stars and racing ~~driven~~ ~~windswept~~ clouds. Down below in the wardroom there was no chance of ~~chairs~~ rest, with chairs adrift and sliding to and fro, and with the sound of the mines as they bumped and strained noisily overhead. Our course lay a little east of south and dawn saw us within sight of the island of [the] Texel. The scene might have been a seascape by Van Ruisdael — steep seas in the foreground with a hailstorm

driving towards the coast and a patch of brighter light on the island showing quiet farmsteads and the moving sails of windmills. We laid our minefield so that it just reached Dutch territorial waters and then set course for home. An underwater detonation shortly afterwards led us to hope, in our innocence, that we had accounted for a U-boat, but had no confirmation of this hope. In the growing light of day we passed close to the Terschelling and Haaks Lightvessels and by the early afternoon had entered the East Coast War Channel near to Lowestoft, along which we made a quick passage to the Humber.

On arriving in harbour about 11.30pm I went over to Admiral to hand in our mine reports, only to be told to return for a Z.Z.Z. in Halfan Hours. All that night we loaded and tested mines, and by 7.30 am were off again on another operation with our destination close to the German coast well to the east of the Texel. We had been told in the Z.Z.Z. to keep close up in line ahead during the night as we would probably meet the enemy. This was a heartening thought, but proved to be but an empty hope. Nerves in the flotilla were a little tense, however. and a 'buzz' later circulated that one ship had very nearly fired on her next astern who had yawed rather wildly off her course. On the return journey the already dirty weather worsened and the glass dropped Halfan inch while I was on the bridge during the afternoon watch. The sky turned a muddy green and the seas rose steeply. The onset was

so sudden that Tarpon and Telemachus were taken by surprise when seas smashed into their bridge superstructures and carried away their boats and some of their deck gear. We suffered no damage as our own bows rose steeply and then slipped downwards to strike the oncoming seas. At each impact two plumes of water shot up through the Lawsepipes and cascaded over the foc'sle. Far over to port Sandfly and Ferret were driving straight into the waves and taking the seas green over their decks. Speed had to be reduced and Telemachus dropped astern, but we reached port without further mishap.

On arrival we had two signals awaiting us, the first from the Vice Admiral Commanding East Coast to Captain (D) with reference to the previous operation and the second from the Board of Admiralty. They read:

V.A.E.C to Capt (D) 4th

"The Chief of the Naval Staff wishes his congratulations conveyed to the 20th Flotilla on its smart performance. In this I heartily concur."

and: Admiralty to V.A.E.C (for information)

"The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty desire to express to the Captain(D), Captains, Officers and Men of the 20th Destroyer Flotilla their high appreciation of the zeal, energy and ability shown in the flotilla, at short notice, carrying out quickly and successfully two important operations. There is already good reason to believe that material damage has been caused to the enemy."

The same week a question was asked in the House of Commons whether any action had been taken to intercept the German destroyers and submarines attempting to escape from Ostend and Zeebrugge, to which the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty replied that every possible step had been taken. So now we knew.

On the morning of 6th October, my 19th birthday, I was busy working in the wardroom on the complicated task of straightening out the wire accounts prior to the inspection of the ship by Captain (D). We were secured alongside the jetty at the Eastern side of the entrance to Immingham docks, and through the starboard scuttles I could see the foc'sle of Vanquisher occupying the outer berth. An old C-class submarine was leaving the lock-gates and entering the river when her main engines failed and she was swept downstream in a 5-knot ebb tide colliding with Vanquisher's bow and our stern. The steel wire securing the two ships together immediately parted and ~~Vanquisher~~ Vanquisher's bow swung away from our stern. Next moment the submarine had sunk and her crew were struggling in the water between the two ships which were now swinging together again, but excellent work on the part of both ship's companies resulted in all the men being rescued. The upshot of the accident was that a diver, sent down to examine our stern, reported it as badly damaged and we had to proceed up the river to Hull where we dry-docked. It appeared, however, that the diver's imagination had been too vivid, for the damage was

found to be quite negligible and we returned to Immingham immediately. Next day another signal was received from the Admiralty and this confirmed a suspicion that we were, for the moment, the 'blue eyed boys' of the First Lord and of his colleagues on the Board of Admiralty. It read:

"THEIR LORDSHIPS desire to seize this occasion to express their gratification at the good work done by the 20th flotilla, which has carried out 59 minelaying operations since its formation early in March, of which 42 were in waters where enemy interference was to be anticipated.

They consider that the low casualties to the flotilla and the excellent results achieved by the mines laid are due to the seamanlike skill with which the technical work connected with the mines has been attended to.

The zeal and ability shown by the rapid preparation of the ships for service reflects great credit on the Captain(D), officers and men engaged."

Another 'W.P.' operation took place a few days later and immediately it was finished the Slow Division detached themselves and proceeded to Newcastle where they were to be based for a short time. There was a momentary pause in our activities during which Abdiel dry-docked for a refit and all the rest of the Fast Division, except Ventnor, laid themselves up for a boiler clean or for attention to engineering ailments, such as 'condenseritis'. We gave three days' leave to most of the crew and I went to Edinburgh where

I paid a visit to Feltes and saw a number of old friends. After a day spent in Glasgow and a second trip to Feltes I set out on the night journey back to Immingham, with three 'changes' at one of which I had a brief nap on a bench in a Y.M.C.A. canteen. About six o'clock we arrived at the tiny railway junction of Barnetby and I went for a walk along a quiet country road and over fields of stubble. There was a light ground mist through which the sun shone as it rose and I was content to sit for quite a while on a five-bar gate and pass the time of day with farm labourers as they led their horses down a farm lane. Down on the railway platform again I found the station-master busy tidying some trim little flower beds and decided that it was a pleasant occupation - though not perhaps so good as being at sea. Another enviable pastime, I felt, would be to throw crumbs to the birds after breakfast - an unattainable desire while at sea.

At the base I found that the ships of the Fast Division were not yet ready to put to sea, and as the officers of Venturous felt like a little mild entertainment they decided that the time had now come to accept me fully into the fraternity of the Navy by the time-honoured custom of 'christening'. A high throne was erected in the wardroom on which the junior Sub, took his seat, and I was then led into the arena blindfolded and was commanded to kneel before the throne. No one could remember the words of the song which the victim was required to sing — except that

it began with the words "I am a miserable wonk"— so the audience was content that I should sing two verses of "Onward, Christian Soldiers" to the accompaniment of a popular music hall tune on a gramophone. At the end of the second verse the Sub, repeated the mystic words and let fall a large soup plate which shattered on my head. The ceremony was over and the rest of the evening was given over to a good deal of merriment. It must have been unusual for an R.N.V.R. subaltey to go through this ritual which was generally reserved only for R.N. subalterns.

In the meantime great events had been happening in France where the German Army were now in full retreat and the civilian population behind the army were demoralized by the long strain of the blockade. Only one possibility of saving the situation seemed open to the German High Command, and even of turning probable defeat into possible victory. This was the destruction of the British Fleet at the eleventh hour. Details of this intention were not made public till 1925, when Admiral von Scheer's plan was made known. The High Seas Fleet was to make a two-pronged attack on the Flanders coast and the Thames Estuary and the Grand Fleet was to be crippled by mines and submarines as it swept southwards to intercept. It was an excellent plan, but was not put into effect on account of the poor morale of the German seamen when faced with a desperate fleet action; so the two fleets

did not engage in a final decisive battle. The main engagement was to have been off the island of Terschelling, and the date fixed was ~~tentatively~~ 28th October 1918.

It is improbable that the action would have proceeded smoothly according to plan, as the German preparations were known to the British Admiralty, so it is not surprising that these days were full of urgent signals at British naval bases. On the evening of 24th October, when the R.N.V.R. Jack and I were the only officers on board Venturous, a "most urgent" signal reached V.A.E.C.'s office that the flotilla should make ready to put to sea at once. Abdiel was still in dry dock, but she loaded mines and ammunition as she was being floated and was ready to proceed in an incredibly short time. The momentary panic died down. However, when a second signal reported the situation more normal, and three days elapsed before a Z.Z.Z. gave us the plan of the next operation. We were warned to expect interference from the enemy and to keep a keen look out. Somewhere astern and to the east of us would be units of the Grand Fleet and it seemed as if a fleet action might take place. It was a black night with little sea running as we proceeded into the Bight, but no enemy ships were seen during the hours of darkness or when dawn came on a day which might have been historic. It was 28th October — and we were waiting for an enemy fleet that never came.

We set course for home with the usual sense of

disappointment, tempered with curiosity why the Grand Fleet should be in the vicinity. The Sul, and I took the morning watch and, soon after dawn, the flotilla formed "Submarine Screen". As we were steadying in our new formation I mounted the navigation platform and took the bearing and distance of Abdiel and was just about to step down when I caught sight of a floating mine, just awash, and disappearing beneath our bows on the port side. It was too late to alter course to starboard – which might have been fatal by swinging our stern on to the mine – and the only thing to do was to trust that the bow wave would carry the mine clear of the ship. This it fortunately did, but I was a little disappointed at the cold reception given to the news when I conveyed it by voicepipe to the captain.

Later in the day we engaged in "P.Z. Exercises" – a kind of "parade ground" drill for the flotilla in which we rapidly altered our formation – line ahead, line abreast, quarterline etc. – in divisions and subdivisions, in response to signal hoists from Abdiel. I found it good practice in reading signals and in exploring the intricacies of the General Signal Book. Finally we separated into two divisions and practiced torpedo-running, one division acting as targets while the other division, a mile or two away, fired torpedoes. The latter, with practice-heads in place of warheads, finally broke surface and were recovered, but at one moment we found it difficult to avoid one of the torpedoes – the track passing under our forefoot – as destroyers are painfully sluggish on the helm when proceeding at slow speed.

On returning to base we found that the tension had not yet relaxed and, with the minimum of delay for oiling and loading mines, we set out on our next operation. There was still a feeling of confidence that we might meet the enemy, as we knew that our big ships continued to patrol the seas to the north and east of Holland. That evening in my cabin I entered in my diary the prions and fervent hope that a hitherto unenterprizing enemy might see fit to come out at last and "try a slap at us", as the monotony of life in a destroyer with "no duns, no mines (except the one that just missed us yesterday), no torpedoes, and no bombs" was quite intolerable. But the night wore on undisturbed and all next day the skyline remained unbroken till we sighted the English coast at sunset. As darkness descended the ships, in line ahead, proceeded up the Humber, churning up white wakes in the muddy waters of the river, and by midnight we had penned into the basin and were safely secured to the quayside in our usual corner. It was 31st October, and on the following day, open mutiny broke out in the German navy. Unknown to any of us at the time we had completed our last minelaying operation of the war.

A week later the flotilla put to sea for firing practice and we conducted a very creditable shoot with 4-inch director salvoes. On returning to base we secured up to the Eastern Jetty where we remained for some days while life on board became filled with office duties connected with mine books, confidential books

chart corrections and the arrangement of ship's games. In the mornings I got up between seven and eight to see the ensign hoisted, and it was on one such occasion that I was accosted by 'No 1' as I climbed out of the cabin hatch and told firmly that I was to stop fighting. It was 11th November and a signal had just arrived which contained the news that an armistice had been signed at 5 am. Things got pretty hectic for the rest of the day, particularly at eleven o'clock, when a rather hilarious and unconventional parade was addressed by V.A.E.C., but, in the midst of all these rejoicings there was a sense of disappointment in having finished the war without a fleet action and a 'buzz' in the flotilla reported that Captain (D) had expressed himself very freely on this subject.

By next day all was quiet again — quieter than usual in fact, as the dockyard mateys had not turned up to work — and in the morning V.A.E.C. called a parade of the Captains (D), officers and men of the two flotillas based on Immingham. The object of the parade was to hear a message from the King to the Royal Navies on the occasion of the defeat of Germany. This was read by Captain (D) VII and was followed by a valiant but rather inadequate rendering of the National Anthem by Nanquisker's 'tin-whistle' band.

The end of hostilities meant a complete alteration of my duties in harbour, the mornings being occupied with minor tasks on the ship's books and the afternoons in

games of rugger or walkes in the country and it was not until a few days after the signing of the armistice that we had a reminder of war when the silence of the port was broken by the shrill blast of ship's syrens as a gaily dressed liner passed by in the morning mist on her way to Hull with some hundreds of repatriated prisoners of war on board.

Little else of interest happened until the 18th, when a signal was received from the C-in-C ordering the flotilla to join the Grand Fleet on the day when the German Fleet was to surrender. Our place had always been with the G.F. in the event of a fleet action and it was presumably for this reason that we were to be given the privilege of joining the big ships and their escorts on this historic occasion — a privilege not shared by any other complete force of ships normally detached from the Battle Fleet or Battle Cruiser ~~Fleet~~ Force. Within a few hours of receiving the news most of the ships in the flotilla had offered hospitality to several shore-based officers who wished to see the Surrender. We ourselves had invited the Paymaster-Commander (D) and No 1. of Leander, and also an R.A.F. officer and a Canadian army officer who were visiting the depot ship.

It was with a bright air of expectation that I stepped out of the cabin hatch next morning and looked across the river from our berth at the Eastern Jetty. Out in the stream a trawler was making towards the jetty with the obvious intention of tying up astern of us. When the

Skipper miscalculated the force of the ebb-tide and allowed his ship to collide with our stern, causing our after port compartment to be holed and flooded to a depth of several feet. No great damage was done but, for the moment, it looked as if we might be left behind to effect repairs while the rest of the flotilla made their rendez-vous with the German fleet. It was a bleak and bitter thought, but before I had time to beg a passage on one of the other ships — or, failing that, to stow away — our Chief had reported to the Skipper that he considered the ship to be seaworthy, so it was with a light heart that I went across to Ambril in the early afternoon to take down the Z.Z.Z. for our final operation. About two hours later the flotilla had put to sea, and by nightfall we had cleared Spurn Point and set course for the Firth of Forth.

XI

A few weeks before the end of the war we had been fitted with paravanes, the new mine-protecting gear, but most of us had become so used to the thought of passing through minefields that we viewed the new contraption with mixed feelings. The two paravanes were ~~fitted~~ attached by wires to a fitting low down on the forefoot, and were towed several feet below the surface about level with the after funnel and some little distance from the ship's side. The gear sometimes gave trouble and was always awkward when the ship was under helm at low speed, but we developed a pride in being the handiest ship in the flotilla at dropping paravanes and getting them towing at their right level. We eventually reached such a state of efficiency that, on receipt of the executive signal "Out P.Vs" from Admiral, we were able to hoist "One Pennant" (Evolution Completed) eight seconds later. On one occasion when there was some trouble with the paravanes towing unevenly I was sent to lie along the forecastle-head and hang over the bows, the Bosun's mate guarding my heels being down, to watch the movement of the wires supporting the fitting in the forefoot. Actually I was more interested in the rise and fall of the bows and the tiny plume of spray that unaccountably curved forward from our stem like a perpetual and self-renewing note of interrogation.

On the night of 19th-20th November, as we prepared to turn north at Spurn Point, Vanquisher, ahead of us, had trouble with her paravanes and this caused us to reduce speed so that we overrode our own paravanes as we swung slowly to port. As the

disintangling of the wires would have been a most tedious operation we promptly discarded the whole gear and proceeded unencumbered to our destination.

By nine o'clock next morning we were off May Island and two hours later had anchored at Craigbraugh near the island of Inchkeith. All around us lay the destroyers of the Grand Fleet, amongst the nearest being the flotilla leaders Shakespeare, Spenser and Saumarez. Further up the river, behind the spans of the Bridge with its suspended submarine nettings, lay the Battle Fleet and Battle Cruiser Force with their attendant cruisers, light cruisers and destroyers. There was little movement in the fleet, except where one small destroyer, lighter in colour than the rest and with tall heavily raked masts, passed through the lines of ships wearing the Royal Standard at her forepeak. She was the "Oak", with the King on board making a tour of inspection of his fleet before they put to sea to accept the surrender of the German fleet.

In the afternoon a fresh breeze sprang up and all the ships in the flotilla lowered whalers for a race. I joined the crew of ours and, although we got away with a bad start, we soon picked up rapidly as we sped along the course round the flotilla to an exciting finish, where we were just beaten for second place. Most of us were tired that evening and, as we were to put to sea early next morning, we turned in betimes.

* * * * *

At about 3.30 am next day. 21st November, we weighed anchor and proceeded slowly towards the mouth of the Forth in company with the squadrons and flotillas of the Grand Fleet. Bright moonlight shone through a sea mist and lit up the dark shapes of ships moving to take up their stations as they headed eastwards at ten knots, but as I was not on watch I soon turned in and did not come on deck again until shortly after seven. It was hardly more than twilight when I mounted the after gunplatform and looked at the long lines of destroyers disposed ahead and to Starboard of us, and watched the numbers increasing as the horizon receded in the gathering light of day. All the ships in the 4th flotilla were dressed in battle array with two white ensigns at their mastheads — one worn at the peak of the foremast and one on the mainmast. Admiral, at the head of the column, looked impressive with a great white ensign flying from her mainmast and astern of her came the full strength of the 20th flotilla, consisting of Vanoc, Vanquisher, Venturous, Tarpon and Telemachus, with Gabriel, Legion, Prince (just joined us from the Grand Fleet), Sandfly and Ferret in the rear. Ahead was the 11th flotilla, with the three other Battle Fleet flotillas all in line ahead disposed abreast of one another to Starboard, and units of the 3rd & 21st flotillas in a similar position on the Starboard side of the formation to that occupied by the 20th on the port side. A gap of nearly two miles between the central columns left a lane through which the German fleet would pass.

The light November haze, which persisted throughout the day, made it impossible to see what lay beyond the destroyer escort of the Battle fleet, but somewhere in the mist ahead was

the 13th Flotilla – the destroyer escort of the Battle Cruiser Force spread out in line abreast across the van, with the light cruiser Castor flying the broad pennant of Commodore Tyrwhitt in command. Astern of us I could just see the shapes of cruisers and light cruisers, while astern of them, but invisible in the mist, came the massed squadrons of the Grand Fleet with "Queen Elizabeth" flying Admiral Beatty's flag as Commander-in-Chief.

It was an impressive sight, but it was also time for breakfast, so I went down to the wardroom where all was in a bustle to get the meal over in time to see the two fleets make contact. This event was not long delayed, for, at about 7.50 a.m. a messenger slid down the ladder in the wardroom hatch, tucked his cap under his left arm, and addressed the First Lieutenant with the words "Message from the Captain, Sir – Enemy in Sight". The mere words had an odd ring about them, and conjured up the prospect of a long-delayed meeting, but we gave little thought to this as we hurriedly finished or left our breakfasts and went up top.

On the horizon some distance ahead of the Grand Battle Fleet destroyers was a smudge of smoke out of which the slim lines of the British light cruiser Cardiff soon took shape. Astern and towering above her were the heavy superworks and control towers of the German battlecruisers, and at eight o'clock the head of the German line entered the gap at the centre of the British columns of British destroyers immediately ahead of us. We were then about 60 miles to the east of May Island at the mouth of the Forth.

Leading the German fleet was the battlecruiser Seydlitz, flagship of the First Scouting Group and astern of her came Hindenburg, Derfflinger and Von der Tann. All the ships wore the German ensign and Seydlitz flew the broad pennant of Commodore Hoffke. Tägert at the peak of her foremast. It was the first time that Hindenburg had been seen by the men of our fleet and she looked a more powerful ship than any in our own Battle Cruiser Force, but all the rest were old enemies and had fought gallantly on various occasions against our own ships. Von der Tann covered herself in a heavy pall of smoke as she entered the lines of British destroyers and we saw little of her.

About half a mile astern of the battlecruisers came the 3rd + 4th Battle Squadrons comprising most of the larger battleships of the German fleet and led by Friedrich der Grösse flying the flag of the German Commander-in-Chief, Admiral von Reuter. One by one they appeared out of the mist and followed their flagship through the gap in the columns of British ships — König Albrecht, Kaiser, Kaiserin, Prinzregent Luitpold, Kronprinz Wilhelm, Grosser Kurfürst, Bayern and Markgraf. It was a melancholy procession — like the captives of a Roman army forced to pass beneath the yoke.

The next ships in the German line were the light cruisers — and "light" they were only in name — Emden, Frankfurt, Brummer, Bremse, Köln and Dresden. Brummer and Bremse, two heavily armed ships, reputed to be the fastest cruisers afloat, had made sorties through the Sound from their Baltic base on several occasions and attacked our convoys in the Skagerrak

It was in these northern waters that we had expected to meet them when we were about our job of minelaying. but they had failed to find us, and it was too late now.

As the last of the cruisers entered our lines we could see the columns of enemy destroyers, 49 ships in all in five lines disposed abreast, keeping fairly good station and looking different from our own in being lower in the freeboard. Shortly before we came abreast of them a signal hoist appeared at Abdiel's masthead and in a few minutes the flotilla had altered course in succession 16 points to starboard. As Abdiel passed about two cables distant on our starboard side she was flying "H20.G12" – a signal for the flotilla to alter speed to 12 knots. Signals for alteration of course and speed flew from the masthead of other flotilla leaders and from the flagships of the squadrons which had been following astern of us, and in a short time the entire fleet was proceeding westwards astride the line of German ships. On completing this manoeuvre we took station on the starboard side of the 11th Flotilla and closed in on the light cruiser squadron ahead. The whole of the sea in the semicircular arc to port was now studded with ships moving slowly towards the North within an horizon limited by a typical North Sea haze to little more than ~~two~~ four sea miles.

At noon I went on the bridge to take the afternoon watch with the gunner, and about one o'clock we had May Island abeam. Far ahead of us – perhaps 15 miles distant – leading the combined fleets were our battle cruiser squadrons with their escort of light cruisers in the van, and between us and them were the squadrons of

the Battle Fleet. As we entered the constricted waters of the Firth the flotilla was ordered to break away from the main formation of destroyers and follow astern of the battlecruisers. So we altered course and, proceeding round the rear of the fleet and skirting close to the shores of May Island, we increased speed and stood towards the battlecruisers at the head of the port columns. In making this manoeuvre we sighted ships of all types. We had a glimpse for a few moments of the lattice masts of a squadron of American battleships, looking strangely foreign in the midst of this great array of British ships. More familar were the shapes of the two 15-inch gun heavy cruisers of the First Cruiser Squadron — Courageous and Glorious. I was glad to see Courageous again, as she reminded me of an early morning adventure on Southsea Common when I had lain in wait for her to leave Portsmouth Harbour for her trials, and had illicitly noted the details of her armament and sketched her outline. Further over to starboard was the strange shape of the newly-converted aircraft carrier Furious, conspicuous with her flat flight deck and her harshly dazzle-painted hull, and the seaplane ship Vindictive astern of her, while ahead of us was the Second Battle Cruiser Squadron consisting of Australia, New Zealand, Indomitable and Inflexible all easily recognizable with their tall tripod masts.

In our new station we steamed slowly westwards, where, low down on the horizon the sun shone red through the mist, until about 3.30 pm, when we left the battlecruisers to seek our own anchorage off Granton. In doing so we passed close

to the ships of the combined fleets now anchored near Inchkeith. A few minutes later, at sunset, the German ships, obeying an order from the British Commander-in-Chief, hauled down their ensigns for the last time. ~~Next day they were to hoist them below the White Ensign~~.

Life on board Venturous that evening must have been much the same as that on most of the other British destroyers anchored in the Forth. At dinner in the wardroom the Captain presided, and, after the toast of "The King" had been honoured, we drank another to "Der Tag". Then came rowdy games and a good deal of laughter which grew noisier as the evening wore on and more childish in proportion to the seniority of the officers joining in. Some of us found a good deal of innocent amusement in satisfying the curiosity of one very inexperienced officer who happened to be present and wanted to know the names of the German ships. He failed to spot anything incongruous as he noted down the time-honoured variants on the names of the two most famous battlecruisers — Tidelights and Dirtflinger — but smelled a rat when we solemnly suggested that two of the battleships were called Fredrick the Grocer and Grocer Care-first!

Towards midnight I went on deck and looked over the dark waters of the Forth to where the combined fleets lay at anchor. Never before had such a great force been assembled under one command and probably never again would so many ships be under the orders of a single admiral. Out there in the stream lay about 60 battleships and battlecruisers, about an equal number of cruisers and



Tarpon



From X-gun platform



Sandfly. Tarpon Telemachus



Group at Surrender



Abdiel during Surrender



Author

light cruisers and upwards of 200 destroyers, besides auxiliary ships of various sorts. The surrendered fleet were wanting one ship short in each class, their most modern battlecruiser Hackensack. The battleship König, the light cruiser Karlsruhe and one destroyer being absent for various reasons. As far as the destroyer was concerned it was said that she had set out with the rest of the fleet but had run foul of a mine off Horns Reef. Few in the 20th flotilla smiled when we heard this news and wondered who could have been so inconsiderate as to lay mines there!

Looking towards the southern shore of the Firth, where the towers of Fettes would have been visible in daylight about three miles away, I felt that it would have been pleasant to have called in at Glencorse, but we were at two hours' notice to sail, and no shore leave was granted. The determination which I had expressed while at Fettes to be present when the British and German fleets met for the next time after Jutland had been realized, though not in the way I had hoped and it would have been good to have let my friends know that I had been at the final meeting. It had been an historic day, but few of us felt much satisfaction at seeing a once-proud fleet submit to the humiliation of surrender.

By early next morning we were under way and were soon clear of the defences at the mouth of the Forth and heading southward towards the Thames. The surrender was over and the curtain rung down on the last act of the naval war. There were no outwards signs of triumph — no bloom at the

mast like Tromp or whip at the mast like Blake. If such thoughts had not crossed our minds as we shaped course for our base they came to us as we approached the bell-mouth of the jetty at Immingham and saw the outline of the masts of the destroyer Nimrod silhouetted against the sunset. An odd shape about the trunk of her foremast puzzled us for a moment until we recognized what it was.

There, tied to the masthead, was a broom!

* * * * *

The war was over, and it remained only for the actors to make their bows, to leave the stage, and in due course to read their press notices. Our own trickled out slowly, the first in January 1919, being from the First Lord (Sir Eric Geddes) who said:

"As the German Navy would not come out in force our submarines and minelaying boats had, day after day and night after night, entered Bugh German minefields off Heligoland and blocked the channels through which some German boats left and returned. These trap mines led to over 100 German craft being caught during the first Six months of 1918"

A year later, when the flotilla was being disbanded, the naval correspondent of the Times, in a long article on

its work wrote:

"By its many achievements the 20th Flotilla created a record for gallantry, coolness and daring which was unsurpassed. With the 6th Flotilla at Dover – the incomparable Sixth as Sir Reginal Bacon called them – the vessels of the 20th Flotilla had the distinction of being perhaps the best known of all the destroyer flotillas of the Navy, although the 3rd Flotilla at Harwich, composed of the "L" class, came into prominence in the early days of hostilities. In other cases it was generally individual boats, or small groups, which earned distinctions. But the 20th Flotilla stood apart from all the rest, and its own special task, as the First Lord once explained, was to go through the enemy minefields and mine inside them."

This was more than our fair share of praise, as the Flotilla had merely done the job it was set to do. In the eight months of its activity the eleven destroyers which composed it may have crippled or destroyed close on 200 German craft. The exact number of enemy ships forced by the flotilla to keep company with Velement and Ariel on the bed of the North Sea is unknown, but it must represent a fair-sized fleet.

× × × ×

For us the curtain descended on 22nd. November as we penned into Immingham Basin on our return from the Surrender of the German fleet. Though the flotilla was to see active service and lose one of its numbers in action against the Russian fleet in the Baltic in 1919. On our return from the Forth there was little left for the Snotties to do, for lectures on navigation previously given by the Lieutenant (N) in Ardrid had been cancelled. Attention to Confidential books, correction of charts, filing of notices to mariners, work on the wine accounts, and on demobilization papers occupied our mornings. In the afternoons we played rugger or walked through the bare lanes and flat countryside of north-east Lincolnshire. Following the custom of their Captains the midshipmen addressed one another by the names of their respective ships: Lucas 'Venturous' and my friends 'Tarpon', 'Sandfly', 'Ferret' or 'Prince'.

For a brief moment the monotony was relieved by a ceremonial parade, but the high hope that we might be provided with Swords for the occasion came to nothing and it was a disappointing day for the Snotties. Christmas came along and with it leave in London. Then New Year's Eve when we indulged in celebrations while awaiting for the signal giving the Honours list and half-yearly promotions for the Navy. Captain (D) was awarded a C.B. and the captain of Vanquisher promoted to Commander. It was at least an acknowledgement.

Early in the new year my Skipper told me that he had intended to apply for my special promotion to Sub-lieutenant if the Armistice had not come along, and suggested that I might consider transferring to the R.N., but life in the peacetime navy did not appeal to me at the time. So the days moved on and for a short time flags were flown at half mast for the death of Prince John; then, on 21st January all R.N.V.R. officers were given indefinite leave. On the morning of 25th January I said my goodbyes and left the flotilla; two days later, on 27th January, I was demobilized.

* * * *

For the next few weeks I explored London in uniform, and it was quite by accident that I found myself on the Mall on the day of the opening of Parliament. The road was lined with soldiers spaced a few yards apart, but the crowds had dispersed after seeing the State procession on its way to Westminster, and so I had a good view of the return journey. Standing in the same line as the troops. The procession appeared from under the Admiralty Arch, the Sovereign's escort passed in a clatter of hooves, the troops came to the 'Present', and the King and Queen drove by in an open State landau, but not before the King had acknowledged a midshipman's salute and the Queen had bowed. The next carriage contained the heads of the fighting services and, on a prod from the C.I.G.S.,

(Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson) my salute was returned by the First Sea Lord (Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss). The rest of the carriages, containing heads of state departments and other estimable people of high rank, were first so much chicken feed to me, but I gave them each a salute all the same. A few days later I wore my uniform for the last time.

In March, dressed as a civilian once more, I paid my first visit to Cambridge, armed with introductions from an obliging and influential friend and determined to find out whether this strange and peaceful place would accept me as an undergraduate. Alfred had gone to Queens' in January, where he was reading for the Mechanical Sciences Tripos, and I eventually chose that college also and was accepted for entrance in the May term. The weeks sped by and it was on St George's Day (or the first anniversary of the raid on Zeebrugge by my way of counting) that I entered Queens' College as an undergraduate.

Although my only attainment, and that a very modest one, was a fair working knowledge of the mathematics I had decided to read for the Natural Sciences Tripos, taking chemistry and physics as two of my subjects and (contrary to the advice of my tutor) geology as my third. For a moment I had toyed with the notion of sitting for the first part of the Mathematical Tripos in a month's time, but feared

that I might disgrace myself led me to avoid an examination which I later found would have presented no great difficulties.

And so to the laboratories, the greatest of which was the Cavendish, presided over by J. J. Thomson, and Rutherford; but it is in the newest – the geological laboratory – that this brief story can most fittingly be brought to its close.

It was on a lovely spring morning that I first entered the long lecture room in the eastern bay of the Sidgwick Museum. The place was crowded with undergraduates awaiting the arrival of the lecturer who soon entered the room and mounted the rostrum. He was a tall, gaunt man, with drooping moustaches and an expression of deep melancholy which his long black gown served to accentuate, and as he stood there sipping from a glass of water he scrutinized us without any sign of enthusiasm. Then, having cleared his throat and, totally ignoring the Newnhamites and Girtonites who occupied the front two benches, he leant forward and addressed us with a single word, "Gentlemen". Whether he was shocked at the solitary laugh that this word evoked was hard to judge, but he had taken me completely by surprise. For a year I had been a dogsbody and now, apparently, I was a gentleman. What a change in status from Smoothy to undergraduate!

The discourse which followed was more than most of us could stomach, for petrology can be a deadly dull

subject, and it was not long before Leeds drooped on to arms and finally rested not too comfortably on bench tops. My own notes really never got started, although my pencil strayed across the paper in front of me. Instead there appeared a long line of destroyers, the leader with four funnels and low bridge superstructure, the next three with tall foremost funnels and superimposed guns, then two "Admiralty R's" trim and symmetrical, and finally three smaller ships. High bow-waves indicated that the flotilla was making speed and a heavy grey background showed that night was approaching or dawn just breaking

The window curtains had now been drawn and illustrations showing the structure of minerals appeared on a screen. What odd names the minerals had — diorite and peridotite and dolerite and syenite — like tribes in the Old Testament. Through a chink in the curtain I could catch a glimpse of the court outside, where the birds sang and the sun shone and banks of white cumulus drifted across a blue sky, while over the recumbent heads in the darkened room the lecturer's voice droned drearily and the flotilla sped on towards its unknown destination. Looking at that line of urgent ships I was reminded, not so much of the major events of those few months I had spent at sea, as of the routine which I would experience no longer — of leaning on

the bridge-rail in the middle watch with eyes fixed on the green glow of the wake of the next ahead, of the flicker of summer lightning as it lit up the rim of the horizon, of the aurora waving its red streamers in the northern sky, and of grey dawn breaking over the North Sea.

The minute hand of the clock on the wall crept round to the hour, the lecturer ceased his discourse, the curtains were drawn, the sleepers awoke, and the assembly dissolved and vanished. As I crumpled the paper in front of me and tossed the idle sketch into the basket I knew that the naval interlude was ended. For a year I had tried to be a sailor, but at the end was still raw and inexperienced. Had I had another year at sea I might have known better how well suited I was to the life, but things had changed and from now on I must try to become a scientist and forget the smell and sound of the sea and the hard foot of a destroyer's system. There was no better place to achieve this object than at Cambridge, though whether my efforts in the laboratory and lecture room would lead to success in this field was a matter that only time could reveal.

Greenhill,
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Tel: Blockley (0386) 700293

12th January 1983

Miss Marion Stewart,
Churchill College Archives Centre,
Churchill College,
Cambridge.
CB3 0D5

Dear Miss Stewart,

About six months ago a friend of mine, Mr. F.W. Mottershead, C.B., -who was a Senior Civil Servant and held a post at the Admiralty during the Second World War - read an account which I had written many years ago of my experiences as a midshipman R.N.V.R. during the last year of the First World War which I called "Naval Interlude". He was sufficiently impressed with my effort that he wrote of the late Captain Stephen Roskill R.N. (whom he knew) giving him a resumé of the contents and asking whether he could suggest a permanent repository for it. Captain Roskill suggested that I should send it to you, as it might find a place in the Churchill College Archives Centre, and I enclose it with this letter (although I am not sure whether I ought not to have addressed it to Mr. Correlli Barnett).

When I first decided to describe my experiences in the Navy I did so as a means of finding relief from having to write scientific and technical papers, but I also wished to recapture some of the intense enthusiasm I had as a schoolboy for naval affairs. The first chapter, therefore, dealt with my childhood in Dublin and schooldays in Edinburgh, and also with holidays spent in Southsea during wartime. I then went on to describe my naval training at the R.N. Depot, Crystal Palace and at Whale Island gunnery school. This was followed by sea-going experience in a P-boat on Channel Escort and finally service in minelaying destroyers of the 20th Flotilla, finishing with the surrender of the German Fleet. The last chapter concerned the business of demobilization and my arrival in Cambridge as an undergraduate in April 1919. It was essentially a personal account and was not intended for publication.

Two quite distinguished literary critics to whom I chanced to show the account said flattering things about it (which I did not believe) but its chief merit (if it has any at all) must be that it depicts the feelings and reactions of an enthusiastic schoolboy who was given the privilege of serving in the Navy for about a year and in a destroyer flotilla which gained considerable distinction.

Unlike most of the documents which you must have in the Archives this one was written from the viewpoint of one who was at the bottom of the ladder, looking upwards, rather than from the exalted heights of a V.I.P.

I have delayed sending you my "Naval Interlude", partly because several of my friends have asked to see it, but chiefly because I have been hesitant about ascribing exceptional merit to it.

If it is not suitable for retention in the Churchill College Archives Centre perhaps I might save it from oblivion by sending it to the library of the Imperial War Museum, or to the National Maritime Museum or the Navy Records Society.

I shall greatly value your comments if you care to let me have them.

Yours sincerely,

W.B. Adam (O.B.E., M.A., F.R.S.C., F.I.F.S.T.)

P.S. I attach a few comments of my own which are merely an expansion on some of the points mentioned in my letter.

SOME COMMENTS ON NAVAL INTERLUDE BY THE AUTHOR

The chapters dealing with my schooldays in Edinburgh are, I think, relevant to what follows, if only because of the three holidays I spent in Southsea when I occupied my time sketching the naval ships in Spithead, noting the flags and pennants they were wearing, and speculating on their mysterious duties as they passed in and out of the gates of the boom defence.

One of the two "quite distinguished literary critics' to whom I referred was Mr. Anthony Chenevix-Trench, M.A., F.R.S.E. who had been headmaster of Eton from 1963 to 1970 and was headmaster of Fettes from 1971 until his lamented death in 1979. In 1973 I lent him the manuscript of "Naval Interlude" and part of his letter returning it reads as follows:

> "I am now returning to you, having read twice with the utmost fascination, your manuscript called Naval Interlude. I hope that at least you will one day bequeath it to Fettes. I tell the simple truth when I say that it is fascinatingly written and that I found it quite absorbing. I should indeed have returned it sooner had I not wished to read it through again and show it to one or two of my senior masters whose opinion is the same as mine".

And again:

> "... many thanks for one of the most interesting personal records it has been my privilege to read".

As regards the second literary critic he is a personal friend of mine who gained the Chancellor's Medal in English literature when he was up at Oxford and interspersed his subsequent academic career with reviews of incredibly erudite books on BBC radio programmes. He borrowed Naval Interlude on three occasions and wanted to know which writers on naval affairs had attracted me most. I had read Kipling's 'Fringes on the Fleet' as a boy but was very conscious that he was not a sailor; I had delighted in the novels of "Bartimeus" but had found some of them to be too nostalgic which was not suprising in view of his loss of sight and of his prospective career; and I had found "Taffrail" readable, reliable and good fun (I was later to see him frequently as he was captain of"H.M.S. Telemachus" which was a ship in my destroyer flotilla.)

But the man who influenced me most was anonymous. He must have been a senior press officer at the Admiralty, his accounts of naval actions and encounters being so realistic that one was always on board the ship in the episode involved. His were always "gallant ships" (an expression still in common use in my time) and it was he who must have given me the inoculation which produced the "sea fever" from which I was to suffer for many years to come.

TELEPHONE 0223-61200

From: The Archivist

CHURCHILL COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE
CB3 0DS

W B Adam Esq.OBE, MA, FRSC, FIFST,
Greenhill,
Blockley,
Moreton-in-Marsh,
Gloucestershire.

20th January 1983

Dear Mr Adam,

I have delayed writing to thank you for sending us your fascinating Naval Interlude until I had a chance to read it all. This I have just finished doing and I wanted to tell you how enormously I enjoyed it! We are fortunate in being given here from time to time memoirs that are full of interest and information but I can think of very few that also provide as gripping a read as your volume. There is such a wealth of detail that one can really share your experiences on gunnery training at Whale Island or on anti-submarine patrol in the busy waters of the Channel; on mine-laying operations or, perhaps most poignantly, watching the humbled German fleet pass into captivity. As for your school days, I found this part of your Memoir particularly evocative because I once owned a flat at the top of a house in Comely Bank Road in Edinburgh and looked out every day onto the almost unreal bulk of Fettes. It must have been quite a wrench for you to part with it and we are very grateful indeed to you for bestowing it upon our Archives Centre. It will certainly be appreciated by the many scholars who use our collections. What a great shame that Captain Roskill never had the opportunity to read it.

I am passing the volume on to the Keeper, Correlli Barnett, so I am sure he will write to you also himself as soon as he has read it.

Yours sincerely

Marion M-Stewart

Miss Marion M Stewart
Archivist

Greenhill,
Blockley,
Moreton-in-Marsh,
Gloucestershire. GL56 9HB

Tel: Blockley (0386) 700293

24th January 1983

Miss Marion Stewart,
Churchill College Archives Centre,
Churchill College,
Cambridge.
CB3 0DS

Dear Miss Stewart,

Your letter of 20th January, with its generous appreciation of my Naval Interlude, came as a welcome surprise to me. Most of it was written about 50 years ago at odd moments and even after some revision and extension 20 years later it still seemed to me to be scrappy and lacking in power to conjure up an old enthusiasm. I am all the more delighted that your opinion seems to be more favourable than mine and I shall look forward to hearing from Correlli Barnett when he has had the time to read it.

Shades of Comely Bank! Fettes must certainly have seemed rather overpowering when viewed from so close. I have always admired the Classical Style of most of the New Town of Edinburgh - particularly the work of my namesake - but I'd like to know what John Betjeman would make of Fettes as a piece of Scottish Victoriana! Still, it has its points (too many some would say!).

Again many thanks for your kind appreciation of my modest effort.

Yours sincerely,

W.K. Allan

CORRELLI BARNETT, M.A.
KEEPER OF THE ARCHIVES
61200

CHURCHILL COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE
CB3 0DS

W B Adam Esq OBE MA FRSC FIFST
Greenhill
Blockley
Moreton-in-Marsh
Gloucestershire

15th February 1983

Dear Mr Adam

I write to thank you very much indeed for your kindness in giving us the volume of your memoirs as a Midshipman during the Great War. It really does bring alive most vividly the life, work and comradeship of the Royal Navy of that time. It also conveys the special atmosphere of war in the misty North Sea. I was moved by the description of the German High Sea Fleet surrounded by the Grand Fleet at its moment of surrender.

Yours sincerely

Correlli Barnett

Correlli Barnett

Greenhill,
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Gloucestershire. GL56 9HB

Tel: Blockley (0386) 700293

Correlli Barnett, Esq., M.A.,
Keeper of the Archives,
Churchill College,
Cambridge,
CB3 ODS

Dear Mr. Barnett,

Many thanks for your letter of 15th February and you kind comments on my memoirs as a Midshipman RNVR during the 'Great War'. My happiest memory of those days is the warm welcome given by the "real sailors" of the R.N. to a very insignificant, but enthusiastic temporary "snotty".

Yours sincerely,

W.B. Adam