

ACTION STATIONS!



THE
NEW
SHIPS
COME
TO
REPLACE
THOSE
LOST.

Vivid True Stories of

THE SINKING OF THE BISMARCK

THE SINKING OF AN ATLANTIC RAIDER

THE LOSS OF H.M.S. "DORSETSHIRE"

Etc.

Proceeds
for the
Funds
of the
H.M.S.

'Dorsetshire'
Replacement
Campaign.

PRICE

6^d

EDITED BY JOHN CREASEY

Illustrated

Capt. Agar's Tribute.

Captain A. W. S. Agar, V.C., R.N., who was in command of the 'Dorsetshire' in her final action, writes :—

A superb example of duty and unselfish courage was set by the officers and men of the *Dorsetshire*. With no weapons except the last machine-gun manned by a Marine Bugler who continued firing as the ship went down everyone calmly set about his duty in helping others, and thus upheld the great traditions of the service to which we belong.

Some day another *Dorsetshire* will surely take the sea, and avenge, I hope, the memory of her previous namesake. I know that she will have the same courageous spirit in her men, and earn honour and fame for the County of Dorset. Dorset people, I am confident, will be stirred by the courage, fortitude and endurance of the crew of the late ship, and save, no matter how great the sacrifice, to provide a ship worthy of those who gave their lives in her, and those others who survived and live to fight again.

The Editor is most grateful to Lord Shaftesbury, Vice-Admiral L. MacKinnon, Captain A. W. S. Agar, V.C., R.N., Commander H. T. Powell, R.N., and to many others who have assisted so generously in the preparations for this book, and to Walter Hutchinson, Esq., and F. A. Cowling, thanks to whom it is more widely available than was first thought possible.

Acknowledgements to some correspondents whose stories have helped so much are made throughout the book, but warm thanks are also due to the many who sent details and information. Only pressure on space because of wartime difficulty in obtaining paper prevents the Editor from mentioning by name his several hundred correspondents.

Action Stations!

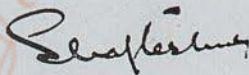
An account of H.M.S. Dorsetshire and her earlier namesakes.

FOREWORD

*by the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Shaftesbury,
K.P., P.C., G.C.V.O.*

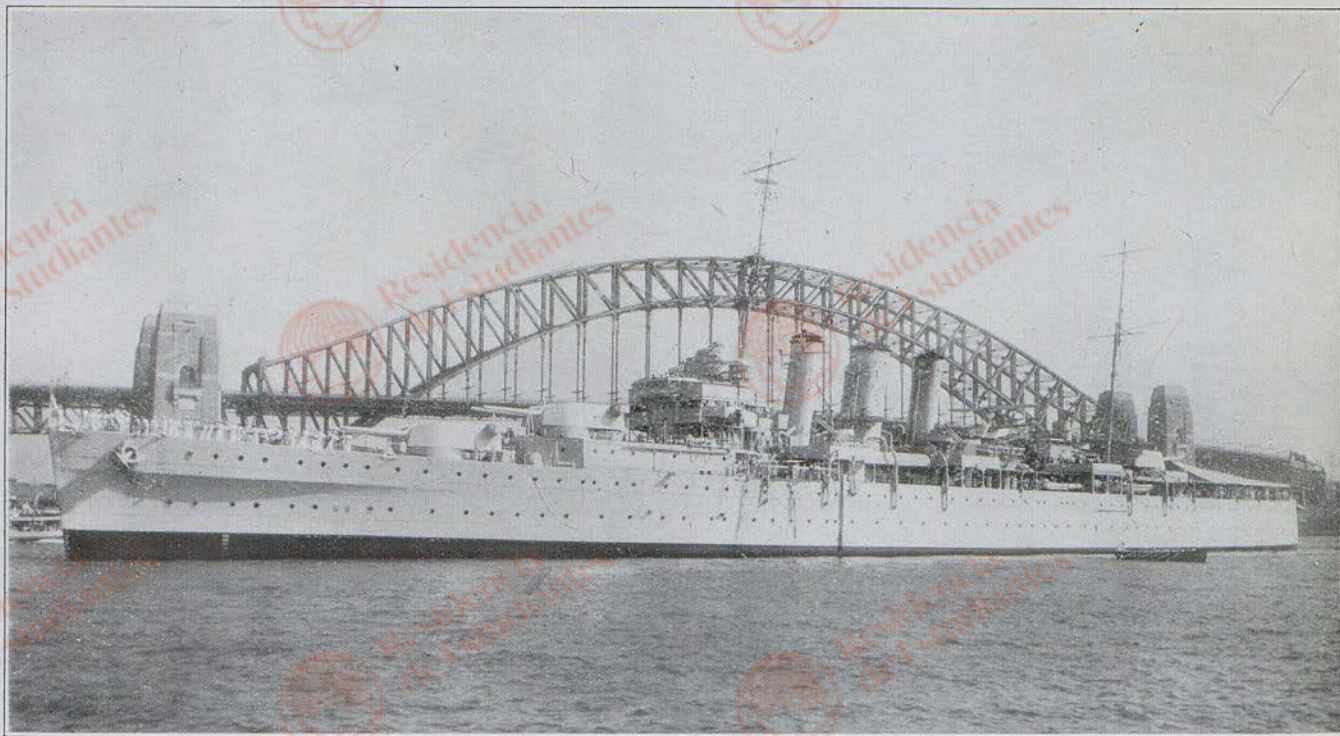
I hope that some day a fuller history of the *H.M.S. Dorsetshire* which was lost in the Indian Ocean on April 5th, 1942, will be forthcoming. Now, while her loss is still in the minds of those who loved her, and whilst her name finds a warm place in the hearts of Dorset folk the world over, this record of the ship and her predecessors is presented in sincerity and with deep gratitude to all who served on board, and to all who helped to build her.

The people of Dorset, when they have read the book, will be spurred on, I hope, to add substantially to their savings in the Campaign now in full swing, in recognition of the self-sacrifice and heroism connected with the ship's contribution to the war at sea, with an added hope of replacement in time to come.



Compiled and Edited by JOHN CREASEY

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*Photograph by courtesy of Lieut. T. V. Stopford,
Stoker H. S. Winter, Leading Cook J. Greaves.*

H.M.S. Dorsetshire at Sydney. Sydney Bridge in background.

Action Stations!

CHAPTER I.

THE SINKING OF THE 'UNSinkable'

The news of the loss of the *Hood* came as a sudden severe shock, depressing all Britain and the Empire.

There was gloom, too, on board His Majesty's ships, large or small, but there was also a remorseless determination to get revenge. The Navy knew the difficulties, but there was a gleam of hope; the *Bismarck*, proudest ship in the German Navy, subject of Hitler's hysterical boasting, the 'unsinkable' man-o'-war, and Germany's so-called answer to British sea-power, was at sea.

The *Bismarck* became an obsession in the minds of most who were within a reasonable distance of her, and amongst them was the crew of the *Dorsetshire*, steaming in convoy at an agonisingly slow rate. The German battleship, though far away, was moving towards the *Dorsetshire*, and it was touch and go whether the enemy could reach Brest or Bordeaux safely. The air was filled with signals from ships searching for the pride of the German Navy, and an electric tension ran through the ship when a report came through on the 26th May that a Coastal Command aircraft had sighted her.

Immediately Captain B. C. S. Martin, D.S.O., R.N., made a signal to the Admiralty, asking permission to steam fast to a likely point of interception. At 11 a.m. the *Dorsetshire* had just completed an exercise clear of the convoy when the engine-room telegraph rang, and immediately the ship forged ahead; excitement rose high amongst the ship's company. The convoy faded from sight, the *Dorsetshire* was rattling and shaking at 29 knots. There was no announcement, but not a man on board doubted the reason for the feverish burst of speed. All hands waited tensely, and those off watch were preparing the ship for action. Cabins were stripped, everything possible was made fast, boats were swung inboard. The magazines were brought up to the highest pitch of readiness, the gun-crews waited eagerly. The ship's bows ploughed through the waves, creating a great spume of water, every minute dragged in tense expectancy. There was a wind howling and roaring up to 50 m.p.h.

Then through the ship ran the alarm:

"Action Stations!"

In a matter of seconds each man was at his post, but it proved a sorry disappointment; a Portugese drifter, tiny and forlorn in the enormous seas, hurriedly answered the cruiser's signals. Without reducing speed the *Dorsetshire* went past her and away.

By arrangement with the Commander the Chaplain* had a short service of prayers with voluntary attendance, and there was a good muster.

The night passed with few sleeping well because of the rattling and shaking of the ship; the engine-room staff was making tremendous efforts to get a little extra speed through the heavy seas. At dawn there was the usual "Action Stations" call, but it did not last long; then soon after breakfast the call came again.

A rating appeared below deck unexpectedly, and officers and men waiting there heard his terse: "*The enemy is in sight straight ahead!*" The stiffening of the tension was almost visible, for the *Bismarck* was steaming straight towards the cruiser. Below deck no one knew whether the British battleships were in a position to engage her, and the *Dorsetshire* on her own would be helplessly outgunned.

*"There was a silence deep as death,
And the boldest held his breath
for a time"*

Afterwards it was learned that the *Revenge* was steaming about 1,000 miles away from U.S.A., heading for Brest. *Ramillies* was steaming from Canada, the *Renown*, *Ark Royal* and destroyers were steaming N.W. off the Spanish coast. *Dorsetshire* was about 60 miles to the west, and the *King George V* and *Rodney*, with *Victorious* and more destroyers, were steaming the same course as the *Bismarck*, but about 120 miles astern of her. The *Prince of Wales* had been slightly damaged when first in action in company with the *Hood*; neither she nor the *Victorious* had been long in commission, and were not properly worked up.

Afterwards, also, it was known that aircraft from the *Ark Royal* had attacked the *Bismarck* the previous evening with 18in. torpedoes, making two hits, one under the bows and one aft, the latter causing the real damage. The *Bismarck* described a couple of circles, and then was only able to steam at 12 knots; the *Dorsetshire* was steaming towards her at nearly thirty, and the other ships were striving desperately to close up. It was learned, too, that the *Sheffield* had shadowed the enemy during the night, and that destroyers had also made torpedo attacks.

The destroyer *Cossack*, in sight and making heavy weather, signalled the *Dorsetshire* the bearing of the enemy, and an officer on the bridge first thought she was *King George V* for the spray was thick and

* The Rev. E. B. D. Laborde, who was lost when the *Dorsetshire* was sunk. Much of this account of the sinking of the *Bismarck* was made possible only by the courtesy of his father, Dr. E. D. Laborde, who lent the Editor a letter vividly describing the action. Other details equally vivid were obtained from the American magazine *Time* from articles contributed by Lt. Commander Geoffrey Carver, R.N., Torpedo Officer on board *H.M.S. "Dorsetshire,"* and Midshipman Joe Brooks. Lieut. (E). P. D. Pinsent also supplied details, and Mr. Percy Audin gave an interesting account told to him by Chief Stoker Wm. P. Craven.

it was difficult to see through the spindrift and blue haze. Then scanning her through his glasses he saw that she was the *Bismarck*. No other British ships were in sight, except the *Cossack*.

The silk Battle Ensign was hoisted, and a few moments later the *Dorsetshire* opened fire at extreme range. Heavily out-gunned by the *Bismarck*, it was an attack of supreme courage. For a few breathless minutes it was possible that all the guns of the *Bismarck* would be brought to bear on the cruiser, whose first salvoes had fallen short, but whose next had gone much nearer. Anxiously yet eagerly the Captain watched through his binoculars. He used a different pair every few seconds, a rating drying them swiftly, while the range finders had difficulty in using their instruments because of the spray. As the cruiser moved in, she stopped firing once when the *Cossack* crossed her line of fire.

Then the Bismarck altered course right about.

Bursts from other ships had been seen near the enemy, and thinking the *Dorsetshire* a much larger ship, the *Bismarck* had turned to answer fire from the battleship *Rodney* which had opened up at extreme range. The *Rodney's* shooting was staggering; she straddled the enemy with her first salvo and then repeatedly hit her with 16in. shells, doing terrific damage.

From the control tower of the *Dorsetshire* a Lieutenant was keeping up a running commentary, thus:—

"There's a good straddle from one of the battle wagons," or
"Got her that time!" "Battleships are hitting her," and
"There are some whacking great fires on her now."

From the *Dorsetshire* the bursts were only just visible, so little smoke was seen that the blast must have gone inwards. For a while the *Bismarck's* guns roared their answer, while the *Dorsetshire* kept firing, getting much closer and putting the gunnery control tower out of action with a salvo. Then abruptly the *Bismarck* turned the after turret of her main 15in. armament towards the cruiser, and a salvo of big shells whistled overhead. Had the *Bismarck* concentrated first on the smaller British ship, she must have claimed a victim before going down, but as it was the *Dorsetshire* kept closing in, and, when the smaller guns were turned on her, put them out of action one by one.

Constantly the *Dorsetshire* and the *Rodney* attacked; the cruiser fired 255 shells from her 8in. turrets, and scored 50 hits. The *Rodney* was only lightly damaged, and the *Dorsetshire* escaped completely.

After a little more than half-an-hour the *Bismarck* stopped answering, and the 'cease fire' order came. By then most of the German ship's crew was in the water. She was on fire from stem to stern, a blazing mass of metal rolling helplessly in the heavy seas, her stern obscured by a great pall of black smoke. Then the *Dorsetshire* had orders to finish her off; Captain Martin gave the order, and two torpedoes were fired into her starboard side from a range of 2,400

yards. There was a long pause ; one torpedo broke surface early, and then went on to crash and make a dull red explosion. Soon the cruiser steamed round the enemy's bows to fire another torpedo into the port side. The mighty ship, painted grey, gave a great lurch as the last torpedo struck home, then rolled right over to show her red-painted bottom and sink in a matter of seconds.

Some men remained aboard her, and they slithered down into the water, bobbing up and down in the chill, heavy seas. Little more than 15 seconds passed from the time the last torpedo struck home to the time the ship disappeared.

The *Dorsetshire* stopped in the middle of about 400 men. It was too rough to lower boats, and the Germans were too weak to climb the rope ladders. Ropes were lowered, but men's hands were almost too numbed to catch into the bowlines. A midshipman, stung to pity, jumped in fully-clad to help them, and narrowly escaped being left behind. Dripping, shivering men, many of them little more than cadets, came on board. Amongst them was the Chief Gunnery Officer of the *Bismarck* and another officer who had been a Naval attaché in London just before the outbreak of war.

In the middle of the work of rescue there came a submarine alarm. Immediately the *Dorsetshire* left, after dropping some rafts into the water. One man caught a rope and was hauled up at the last moment, but many hanging on to the ropes were forced to drop back into the sea as the cruiser gathered speed. There was no chance to wait, for air attacks were expected at any moment, and the submarines were getting closer.

Amongst the survivors was, somewhat surprisingly, a great number of stokers, who had no idea how they had reached the water ; probably they had been blown there by the blast of a torpedo. The blast from the *Dorsetshire's* guns had smashed some of her own small boats, and there was a great deal of cleaning-up to do, but a sense of grim satisfaction, even of elation, was felt throughout the ship.

There was tragedy and humour in the day which followed. A German who had been operated upon died the following day, and there was no Nazi flag with which to bury him. Permission to use an old Imperial German flag was asked from the other survivors and it was granted ; the body was consigned to the depths with full naval honours. Earlier attempts were made to learn the dead man's religion ; it was impossible, for the German Navy permits no worship except of Hitler.

Most of the survivors were meek and mild enough, especially when they first came round from the stinging cold. The *Dorsetshire's* crew treated them generously and well ; Nazis they might be, but the *Bismarck* had fought to the bitter end, taken an enormous amount of punishment, and not surrendered. Yet the Nazi insolence remained strong in some, for when next day an officer, stark naked, was handed a clean shirt, he drew himself up, coldly gave the Nazi salute—and then



"The Dorsetshire raked her with a sweeping broadside."



Photo by courtesy of Leading Cook J. Greaves.
Regatta at Wei-hai-wei.



Photo by courtesy of Leading Cook J. Greaves.
The Yokohamo Bowl, and other trophies won by H.M.S. Dorsetshire.



Photo by courtesy of Leading Cook J. Greaves.
Massed Bands of the China Squadron.
Half-time at the Football Shield Final.

his bare heels slipped on the wet soapy floor, and he toppled backwards.

Ridiculous? Yes. The Nazi regime is ridiculous, but its menace remains great, there must be no slackening in the fight against it.

The *Bismarck* action was one which helped to make the *Dorsetshire* famous. There have been other actions in the past and in this war, and, in peace and war, there is much that is worthy of the telling.

CHAPTER II.

OUT OF THE PAST

Bravery of the highest order, constant, unceasing vigilance and attention to duty, comradeship on board ship and ashore, pride in the traditions of the Royal Navy—all these are common to every ship sailing under the white ensign. This volume deals primarily with *H.M.S. Dorsetshire* and her predecessors, but the heroism and endurance revealed are the rule, not the exception, in the silent service.

Some actions of the *Dorsetshire* have already carved their niche in history, and others have made history during this war.

Epics of the sea, examples of great endurance and of fierce, short-lived actions, some are told fully for the first time in these pages; most will be related eagerly for decades to come.

Dorset, with its rugged coastline abutting the bleak waters of the English Channel, often within sight of the enemy, frequently visited by enemy aircraft, has suffered much. Over it were fought many of the vital combats in the Battle of Britain while its people stared up at white vapour trails and silvery specks, and cheered the mighty few. The same spirit was shown when Dorset folk faced the threat of the Spanish Armada, and Dorset beacons were lighted to give warning.

From Dorset anxious yet confident watch was kept when Napoleon threatened, just as the people watch to-day for a greater tyrant. They are proud of the ships which have borne their name; they are peaceful, friendly, slow-speaking folk, unhurried and unflurried, but they are people of the sea, and about many a hearth on a winter's night stirring tales are told of earlier *Dorsetshires*.

Dorset men often declare that Gibraltar, that great bastion of the Empire, was captured by the first *Dorsetshire*, built at Southampton in 1694, and which did good service with the Fleet in the war against the French and Spaniards. When an attack on Gibraltar was made by the English and the Dutch, with the English Fleet in command of Rear-Admiral George Byng, Capt. Edward Whitaker of the *Dorsetshire* was ordered to man boats and attack a French frigate of 12 guns laying in the Old Mole. Marines from other vessels had landed on the shore by then, but had not attacked the fortress, and from the *Dorsetshire* a 70-gun ship, trim and magnificent in sail, the boats went out. So fierce was the English attack that in a few minutes the struggle was over, the boarding party was in control, and the frigate set on fire. Under cover of the smoke and flames, Whitaker took his men off without a single casualty.

Meanwhile the Fleet had fired a few shots into the Town, and the inhabitants took fright and ran up to the Rock. The garrison was small, but sprung a mine beneath the first landing-party from the Allied ships. The explosion was devastating, dozens of men were killed and others severely injured. Disheartened by the shock of this catastrophe, there was a risk that the survivors would not carry the rock. Then Whitaker landed with his men from the *Dorsetshire*, rallied the others, and enabled them to go into the attack. Historians say that :—

“ The bravery of the seamen who made the attack must have been almost beyond example. The reduction of Gibraltar was made with the loss of only 2 lieutenants, one master, and 60 men killed, with 225 men injured.”

The English fleet moved away, to make ready for French and Spanish attempt to retake Gibraltar. With a powerful fleet of ships better built and better armed than the English and the Dutch, the French attacked the centre of the British Fleet, under Admiral Sir George Rooke. The battle lasted until the ammunition of the British ships was exhausted. The Dutch ships, fighting with dauntless valour, kept blazing away. The sea was filled with smoke and the roar of the guns, with the *Dorsetshire* playing a valiant part. There was neither victory nor defeat at this, the battle of Velez Malaga, but the French withdrew and spent the rest of the year licking its wounds in Toulon. But for the courage of a smaller fleet, Gibraltar might have been lost ; certainly the honours were with the Allies.

The *Dorsetshire*, rebuilt in 1712, was in action again against the Spanish in the battle off Cape Passaro, when four Spanish ships of the line, an ammunition ship, and several smaller craft, were sunk with the devastating broadsides of the British men-o'-war. The *Dorsetshire*, still a 70-gun ship, was then the flagship of Rear-Admiral George Delaval.

In 1749 she was taken to pieces, and eight years later another 70-gun ship, built at Portsmouth, was ready. A year afterwards, under the command of Capt. Peter Denis, the new *Dorsetshire* was detached with the *Achilles* off the French coast, to chase an unidentified ship. She proved to be the French 64-gun *Raisonnable*, and the *Dorsetshire* began the action at extreme range. Rapidly overtaking the enemy, and with the *Achilles* well behind, the *Dorsetshire* attacked fiercely. One mast after another of the French ship crashed on to the burning deck, guns were never silent until, with a quarter of her crew killed or wounded, the *Raisonnable* stopped firing. The *Achilles* came up with the *Dorsetshire* then, and the ship was taken as a prize.

In the following year, after blockading Brest for some months, the British Fleet, including the *Dorsetshire* still under the command of Captain Denis, attacked a powerful French fleet off Quiberon Bay in the teeth of a gale. The French fleet made every effort to get away, but by superb seamanship the *Dorsetshire* was taken near enough to begin the action. She went round the nearest Frenchman and raked her with a sweeping broadside, then went on to attack again. It was a fierce run-

ning battle, until nightfall and the increasing wind prevented the British fleet from destroying every-one of the enemy's vessels, although the enemy fleet was severely mauled. Quiberon Bay ranks high in the annals of British Naval victories.

After sixteen years of constant service the second ship was broken up, but the history of *Dorsetshires* tells of the East Indiaman sailing without escort in a convoy of 28 ships. The merchant-men were armed, but not heavily, and should have been easy prey for the powerful French ships which drew near. Captain Dance, in charge of the convoy, deceived the Frenchmen into believing it included men-o'-war, attacked and drove the enemy off, and sailed away under their noses to reach England with cargoes worth some £8,000,000.

For a long time afterwards there was no *Dorsetshire* in the Navy, but in 1929 a county class cruiser was launched at Portsmouth by the Countess of Shaftesbury. At the launching there was a detachment of sixty officers and men from the Dorset Regiment, unusual on such an occasion. The County Regiment presented the ship with a set of bugles, and a silver statuette of a bugler, and the ladies of the county presented her with a silk ensign. The association between the County and the ship was always very close, and was strengthened when a model of the first *Dorsetshire*, in full sail, silver cups, and other things greatly treasured, were presented to the ship by Lord Shaftesbury. Whenever the ship was able to anchor in Dorset waters, crowds visited her daily; her lines were familiar to thousands in Weymouth and Lyme Regis, as well as other Dorset coast towns.

A 9,900-ton cruiser, with eight 8in. guns, eight 4in. A.A. guns, 20 smaller guns and eight torpedo tubes, the *Dorsetshire* commissioned in 1930 for the 2nd Cruiser Squadron, Atlantic Fleet, and was the flagship of the Rear-Admiral commanding the 2nd Cruiser Squadron.

One of the main features of the cruiser, and others of her class, were the internal bulges. Designed by Sir William Berry, and built under the limitations of the Washington Treaty, the ship's high freeboard allowed for 8ft. high decks and excellent accommodation and equipment. The low metacentric height made her incline to roll, but she could ship a great deal of water without capsizing. She carried about 650 officers and men.*

During the first cruise in 1930 the cruiser, with the *Norfolk*, represented England at the Centenary celebrations of Latvia. There were races between boats' crews of many nationalities, and at the start of the 12-oared Naval Boat Race the English crews were warned that the Germans, who entered three boats, planned to sandwich ours between theirs, or, in emergency, ram our boats. Forewarned, the English crews pulled away at the start, established a good lead in the first half-mile, and ran out easy winners. The crews of the two British ships, and all the others present were given small gold flags as mementos of the occasion.

* For some of these details the Editor is indebted to Stoker H. S. Winter.

The *Dorsetshire*, still with the *Norfolk*, went on to Stockholm, and entertained a great deal, and then to Kiel, where the crew was made welcome by the German Navy, taking part in a sailing race conducted in the best of spirits ; few dreamed of what was to come.

From 1933 until 1935 the *Dorsetshire* was on the Africa Station, where she quickly became popular with South Africans, forging a link between the ship and the Union which can never be broken. She was then the flagship of the Commander-in-Chief, Africa Station. From 1935 to 1939, during which period she was re-commissioned, she was on the China Station, where the drums of war already sounded, distant but drawing nearer.

CHAPTER III. PEACE AND WAR ON THE CHINA STATION

There are many who think that peace-time life on board a man-o'-war is dull and monotonous. The truth is that while there are periods of monotony, activities are numerous and varied, although there is no under-current of excitement at a rumour, spread by a change of course or a sudden increase in speed, that action is possible.

The commission of the *Dorsetshire* between April, 1935 and March, 1937 was full of interest, and there is a full account of it in "*H.M.S. Dorsetshire, 1935-37*" an attractive narrative edited by (now) Lieut.-Commander R. P. Clarke, and published for private circulation. It makes it clear that the *Dorsetshire* was a happy ship ; most ships of the Navy are. And it provides an intimate picture of life on board and ashore ; unashamedly I am going to accept Lieut.-Commander Clarke's generous permission, and use much material from his account.

The third commission marched out of the barracks on April 2nd, 1935 to join the ship, was addressed by Capt. A. J. L. Murray, D.S.O., O.B.E., R.N., received the good wishes of the Commander-in-Chief, China, and began the task of sorting out gear and finding their way about the ship. Days passed before all officers and men were familiar with the lay-out of the vessel, but soon there was general agreement that she was a ship worthy of traditions.

It was the 13th May before the ship slipped from the wharf and sailed down the Hamoaze. There was a breathless moment once when an enthusiast polished the lifebuoy gong so vigorously that the sentry guarding the buoys thought a man was overboard, and let both go !

At Gibraltar the ship stopped for a short while, and then Malta welcomed the visitor with a strong wind. Tugs' wires parted like harp strings as the ship tried to berth, and there was danger of collision, narrowly averted.

For three days the crew had Malta almost to themselves, for the main part of the Fleet was at sea. Many took the opportunity of a picnic at Ghain Tuffheihia ; it was hot enough to roast the unwary, and for days afterwards there was a regular attendance in the Sick Bay for sun-burn treatment.

At Ismailia everyone was made royally welcome and it was soon afterwards, when the ship had passed out of the Suez Canal (where some members of the crew took delight in swimming from one Continent to another in a matter of a few minutes) that the crew was roused by the commissions first call to—

“Action Stations!”

Quickly and quietly the call was obeyed; peace was gone for a while, the man-o'-war was ready to fight, if need be. Ready at all times, unflustered, unperturbed, the crew was preparing for war clouds gathering on the horizon.

In the Red Sea, deserving its name because of the huge quantities of reddish brown seaweed which comes to the surface in the summer months, it was very hot. Two days' sailing from the Gulf of Suez took the ship to Aden, a city built all round an extinct volcano. The rocks are reputed to contain the bones of Cain. There, as in many places in the East, the natives expected a large gratuity for posing for photographs.*

After oiling at Aden, in increasing heat and with everyone on board in tropical kit, the cruise continued until, beyond Socotra, it ran into the South West Monsoon. A rough sea is a rough sea in peace or war, and that next few days were no picnic.

Colombo, with its grass and trees, was a welcome sight after much arid desert land, while at closer quarters the crew saw for the first time the dark-skinned natives, rickshaws, and slow-moving bullock carts; and of course there was the all pervading smell. At Colombo the ship berthed near the *Norddeutscher-Lloyd M.V. Scharnhorst*; in German vessels there was always something fascinating.

Off Penang, when the *Dorsetshire* met the *Suffolk*, the guns were fired for the first time, booming and roaring and shaking the ship. Soon afterwards the engines increased the speed to 21 knots, for a seaman was sick and needed hospital treatment at Singapore. Instead of spending a few days at Singapore, the ship hurried to Hong Kong. There two nineteenth-century vintage cruisers of the Cantonese Navy had mutinied and there was the possibility of trouble in British waters. Armed guards were kept in constant readiness, and there was much excitement and speculation. But the mutineers and the Nanking Naval Authorities reached a working agreement after much argument.

At Hong Kong the ship was cleaned and painted, stores were discharged and taken on, while the crew cursed the constant sticky heat. Soon after arrival the officers were besieged by ‘sampan candidates’ who wanted to contract with the ship for sampans (small boats to take them to and from the shore) much as deck-chairs owners compete for sites in English public parks. There were hoards of Chinese traders too, seeking the privilege of dealing with the crew, insistent, smooth-voiced men all speaking pidgin English.

* For many details the Editor is indebted to Lieut. Terence Stopford, R.N.

There was a stir throughout the ship when she reached Weihaiwei, the summer base of the China Squadron, for the Commander-in-Chief sent congratulations on the appearance of the ship. Word of that gratified every man on board ; they were proud of the *Dorsetshire*, there was no other ship like her.

Strenuous weeks followed ; the main fleet sailed for the mid-summer cruise after a fortnight of feverish activity, and the *Dorsetshire* was left in comparative peace—and heat, drills, landing parties, and sport. Football, hockey, cricket, rifle-shooting all had devotees. Visits ashore brought a small army of rickshaw boys, devastating in their attention. A boy to every two yards seemed the average, expansive smiles and bland refusal to take 'no' for an answer were alike inevitable. No amount of rebuffs effected the 'boys,' or hawkers with peanuts, radishes, apples, plums, and every variety of fruit and knick-knacks.

Officers and men learned to deal with the importunities skilfully, and until the Fleet returned there was an easy if energetic time. Then competitions in sports started in earnest between the ships, the 'drink' echoed to the booming of big guns on exercises. There was a constant round of engagements, football matches, a marathon, aquabatics, and athletics ; there was the China Fleet Rifle Meeting, Concert Parties, Church services, the radio, letters from home, or a mail to be caught.

In September there was an efficiency test ; the whole fleet went out, and the *Dorsetshire* prepared for action, with all hands at action stations. The big guns roared again, the torpedo-men worked like automats, the A.A. guns belched into action. The C-in-C. made signals to engage targets, ordered breakdown and action repairs, sent cypher signals, and for one tremendous hour the ship was engaged in a mock-war which left the crews weary but satisfied.

Soon afterwards part of the fleet sailed with little warning, and the *Dorsetshire* also expected a call. Some ships had gone to Alexandria, some to Aden, some to Signapore, all precautionary measures because of the Italo-Abyssinian war ; but the *Dorsetshire* remained at Weihaiwei with the *Kent*. Soon afterwards Admiral Dreyer went on board to inspect the Divisions and the Upper deck, store rooms and deck-spaces. On the second day came another call to 'Action stations!' and mock-war was on again. Vast numbers of 'casualties' were imposed, and finally there were orders to abandon ship. Each man was intent on doing his particular job efficiently, preparing for a day when the casualties might not be imaginary, when the ship might go down beneath them.

Soon afterwards came the Autumn cruise, which meant visits to several ports in Japan. There were calls at Beppu, Miyajima, Etajima, Yokohama and Kagoshima, and one day some who were on board will visit those places again, to carry this war into Japan. Then there was little thought of war, except that unofficial one between the Japs and the Chinese. Most sympathies were with the Chinese, fighting so bravely and tenaciously, with no thought of surrender.

At Beppu the crew was besieged by match-vendors whose boxes bore advertisements for the 'best clubs'—always night-clubs and

always much alike. Men were waited on by little *waitress-sans* or *geishas* in cafés and clubs, swift, sure, silent, efficient. Some had hot Japanese baths, some visited the surprising New Zealand Colony, where N.Z. grass had been grown and N.Z. sheep were reared; it was a little colony of the Empire in Japan itself. Many saw the famous hot springs, where the smell of sulphur was over-powering and spoiled the sight of the green, red, and brown mud-holes from which the steam rose. Some were incautious enough to indulge in sandbaths, taken by sitting on a part of the shore, and being 'dug in' by an old-woman; the hot spring underneath boiled the body to beetroot-red until it grew too hot to bear. Everyone enjoyed that week, but it will be different when those who can get there again.

Miyajima, the 'Shrine Island' is one of the most renowned scenic places in Japan, with the Shrine Gateway built over the water; the man who first christened it the 'Father of all Goal Posts' was irreverent but apt. Some climbed to the summit of Mount Misen, from where there is:—

"An awe-inspiring view, a scene of breath-taking beauty, where one was made to think of its creator.

The sun was setting in a russet glow behind mountainous islands whose contours were etched in stark relief against the skyline. Over all hung a gentle pall of quietude while a thousand lights marked the hamlets in the surrounding islands."

The ship went on to Etajima to make contact with the Japanese Naval college, and there it was that a Japanese expressed the bleak Nippon view of a ship-of-war, by saying:—

"Some of the sailors messes had photographs, particularly the soldiers' deck, of women—presumably their wives. I like it not."

The Navy and the Army in Japan is a grim business, whether in peace or war.

The ship went on through some of the finest scenery in Japan, to Yokohama, where there were more match-boxes and taxis at absurdly cheap rates. Thanks to the exertions and trouble of the paymaster, most of the crew was able to take full advantage of a general leave, some going as far as Tokyo, disappointing to most of them, and giving the impression of being built of re-inforced concrete. That is a thought for those who say that one heavy raid of incendiaries on Tokyo will destroy the city. The ship went on to Kagoshima, also disappointing, while there was a current scare that an active volcano, Mt. Sakurahima, was about to erupt. Consequently there was a wholesale evacuation of civilians, for once the entire town was wiped out by boiling lava coming down the sides of the mountain.

A party of 90 officers and men was organised to climb the mountain, but by night-fall twelve had failed to return. An alarm was raised and search-parties went out; the party was found before too long.

Later came the never-to-be-forgotten sight of Shanghai, where the earth is flat for miles around the city, and in the middle rise the skyscrapers, built on rafts on what were once mud-flats. In Shanghai there was the first taste of lying in a swift running river, the Wampoo. There were orders that none must go to the rescue should anyone fall overboard, for the swift current meant almost certain death. Boats' crews were kept in lifebelts, and there were sentries on the forecastle. Ashore there were sports again in infinite variety, and the ship's representatives lost a boxing match to the Russians of the Shanghai Volunteers after a keen struggle with sporting opponents.

On again the ship went at full power for a while, but was forced to slow down by a typhoon ahead, a howling roaring, rushing maelstrom of wind and water.

At Hong Kong there passed five months, uneventful but full of incident. At Christmas the ship was decorated in the traditional manner, for many it was the first Christmas out of England. Soon afterwards were examples of the remarkable sales amongst the Chinese, whose New Year fell on January 23rd. The Chinese do not make resolutions, but they believe that they must be out of debt by the end of their year. Frantic efforts are made to raise money, huge sales or 'markets' are organised, vast distances covered.

While these sales were at their height the crew heard the news that King George V. had died; there was great sadness on board, for he was much-loved. The passing was marked by the half-masting of the colours, the firing of 70-minute guns (guns fired at 1 minute intervals to mark each year of the late King's life, and all sporting fixtures were cancelled, all places of entertainment closed.

It was not long afterwards that the German Cruiser *Karlsruhe* on a tour round the world (and an errand of sinister inquiry it proved) and there was plenty of fraternising between officers and men. Not for the first time it was shown that Germans and English can get on well together; please God the day will come when it will be the general rule.

Exercises with the fleet followed soon after the ship left Hong Kong, northward bound, and the guiding thought in everyone's mind was the coming Fleet Regatta at Weihaiwei.

Every available opportunity for boat practice was taken, even in drab Keelung harbour, Formosa, where it rains nearly every day in the year. Some took time off from practice to go into the island to see descendants of the original savages, reputed to be head-hunters. The adventurous ones retained their heads, then went on to Woosung, where the *Kent* caught up with the *Dorsetshire*. Friendship between ships' companies of different ships is frequent and firm, and meeting with other ships of the fleet always brings a great deal of pleasure.

Then up the Yangste River, with its crowds of fishermen sitting on the banks and lowering their nets into the water, many rafts floating up and down—the rafts were floating villages, huge things always over-

crowded. So were the Chinese sampans ; whole families lived on board these small craft, and it was nothing to lift up a board and see two or three children slumbering peacefully. Then on to Hankow, and afterwards on the way to Weihaiwei, more exercises, more gunnery and mock battles, attack by air and by submarine, a rehearsal for the grim business getting daily nearer.

Reaching Weihaiwei for the second time on the evening of May 27th, the whole ship plunged into a round of furious and sometimes feverish activity, with drills, exercises and practice for the regatta—the great event of the China Fleet, in which crews from all the ships available took part. The *Dorsetshire* was hopeful of winning the Yokohama Bowl and the championship, but when the day came was beaten by *Hermes* (having the satisfaction of knowing that she was the only other West Country ship in the competition) although carrying off five cups.

There followed another short cruise soon afterwards, then a return to Weihaiwei for Special Training. Guns were hoisted up cliffs, the skiff hoisted out to the breakwater, boat drill was intensified. Later, from Chinwangtao, some of the crew went on horse back along stretches of the Great Wall of China, others visited Peking, city of the ancient world. The Wall, 1,500 miles long, 12 to 24 feet high, with fortresses and towers at intervals along its entire length, and which took five years to build, is as marvellous as the reports of it declare.

Most of the tragedy came in news from Home, in the deaths of King George V., of Admiral Jellicoe and Admiral Beatty, and, one of the greatest shocks of all time, the Abdication of King Edward. The effect of the news from home was always marked, and there was something approaching consternation at that almost incredible sensation. None had dreamed of it.

Throughout the commission the ship's concert party, one of the best in the fleet, entertained the crew admirably. It also gave shows for charity ashore, and the standard was always high. Its members were almost professional, smart, topical and witty. And the 'ten-a-penny' or rag-time band was more than a feature ; often it was a riot.

For everyone the *Dorsetshire* was home ; the home town, the village, the very four walls of the house itself. The church services would have been the envy of many a village rector.

And soon it was again, for only a few months later, in August, 1937, under the command of Capt. F. R. Barry, the ship left on her Fourth Commission, knowing that the China Station was likely to be different since the Japanese bombing of Shanghai, and other outrages. The cruise out was uneventful, although on arrival at Weihaiwei, 'Tomato Face,' sometimes known as 'Tomorrow Fish,' the Number 1 Sampan Boy of the previous commission, let off fireworks and crackers to welcome the return of the 'Dawsessa.' The crew was somewhat apprehensive at the thought of wintering in the north for the first time, but there was a regular round of amusements and activities, although it was bitterly cold.

There came further Japanese trouble, and the ship was ordered to Tsingtao to stand by with U.S.S. *Marblehead* to evacuate Europeans and Americans in the event of a Japanese attack. Shortly before her arrival there were violent scenes of looting, and fighting between the looters and Chinese military, but when the *Dorsetshire* arrived the town was practically deserted except for packs of ravenous dogs.

In January the Japs entered the harbour with a large force of war-ships and transports, but as the Chinese troops had evacuated there was no fighting, although the Japanese had dropped leaflets telling the Europeans and Americans to congregate in a large hotel.

Shortly afterwards the ship left Tsingtao and a temperature of 14 degrees F., for Singapore with a temperature of 85-90 degrees F, a change of atmosphere experienced in 12 days. From Singapore, where the graving dock at the Naval Base was opened then, there was a cruise via Batavia and Port Darwin to Sydney, for the 150th Anniversary Celebrations—150 years after the first settlement of the British in Australia. Staying at Darwin longer than expected, a telegram was received from the Premier of Australia, asking whether there was any special significance, since few ships liked to stay too long at Darwin! Actually it was not so dull a place as reputation suggested, and the *Dorsetshire* was able to entertain Clouston, the New Zealand flier, who arrived there on his attempt to break the England to Sydney record; thanks to Clouston, London papers were available only two days old.

There was a visit to Thursday Island, and then a journey inside the Great Barrier Reef, giving some indication of Australia's enormous coastline. At Sydney the ship received a great welcome, and was feted for four weeks; from then onwards the ship's mail to Australia was always very heavy, a reflection of the number of firm friendships established.

Then came the Munich crisis, and the *Dorsetshire* was ordered North to watch an Italian cruiser stationed at Shanghai. The Italian was gone before the English ship reached there, but contact was soon made. When a settlement was reached in Europe there was a refit at Hong Kong followed by a second Christmas at Weihaiwei, where the ladies' ranks were swollen by refugees from other parts of China, and life was consequently gayer. Another visit to Shanghai, the Paris of the East, made serious inroads into the crew's savings, but revels ashore were cut short by the notorious Kulangsu Incident, when the Japanese 'took over' the settlement, opposite Amoy. England, America and France all landed the same number of marines as the Japs, who pretended to be friendly and pleasant, but made themselves a thorough nuisance.

Meanwhile the Fleet Regatta drew near, and excitement rose. Held annually at Weihaiwei, every boat's crew was trained to the minute, and all eyes were turned towards the Yokohama Bowl, which the *Dorsetshire* this time won by three points. Enthusiasm on board was tremendous, and even greater when the Football Shield was also won the next day. The marine band, on top of one of the 8in. gun turrets, excelled itself, while voices were hoarse for days afterwards.

About that time the ship felt the tail end of a typhoon, and in some parts of the Japanese islands the wind velocity reached 100 m.p.h., doing a great deal of damage. A little later, at Shanghai, there was an outbreak of small-pox, and the British ships left quickly; there were over 11,000 cases ashore, many of them fatal.

After assisting in the partial evacuation of Weihaiwei, the ship took on provisions at Hong Kong and sailed north to patrol the routes converging on the Yangste. On September 3rd war was declared and there was a hope that the German motor vessels *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* would make a dash from the Japanese ports where they were sheltering; they did not.

During this period Captain Barry was relieved by Captain B. C. S. Martin, and soon after he had taken command there was hope that the ship would at last see action, for the *Graf Spee* appeared in the Mozambique Channel. The *Dorsetshire* went south in a hurry, calling at Mauritius and Simonstown before going on to join Commodore Harwood's squadron off the Plate. Rounding the Cape, news of the magnificent victory came in.

Diverted to the Falkland Islands, the ship joined *Exeter*, *Ajax* and *Achilles*, for Christmas. The weather was bad, but the *Dorsetshire* sent over a cutter-load of men on Christmas Day, to cheer the crew of the *Exeter* for her grand work. There was a rush of excitement next day, when an oiler dragged anchor and narrowly missed the *Dorsetshire*, one of whose boats was beached after going to assist; but there were no casualties.

Keeping watch for the numerous German ships in South American harbours for some weeks, the crew kept hoping for action but had no lucky break. Then, steaming up the Plate River, the ship cruised round the wreck of the *Graf Spee*, and had some vicarious excitement before going on to Buenos Aires for 24 all-too-short hours, being made royally welcome by the English community. At Buenos Aires, the first mail for four months was received.

Early in March, taking on board the wounded from the *Exeter*, the ship sailed for the Cape for a refit, and reached Simonstown in the middle of the month. There followed six thoroughly enjoyable weeks, and a welcome and much-needed rest for the crew. Several men left their hearts behind them there, and many more decided that South Africa was to be their home after the war.

Shortly before Dunkirk there followed a brief visit home, the ship berthing at Devonport in bad weather but with the crew very cheerful. In June she was off again to Gibraltar, and reinforced a convoy said to have carried the first contingent of Australians to the United Kingdom; there were six or seven large liners, including the *Queen Mary* and the

For much of the information about the fourth Commission the Editor is indebted to Paymaster Commander F. A. Haines, and to Mr. R. G. Tomkins of Hanbury C.E. Modern School, Market Harboro', one of whose pupils, Leading Cook J. Greaves, sent him many interesting letters.

Empress of Britain. Relieved by the *Hood* and the *Ark Royal*, the *Dorsetshire* turned back for Gib., and, a few hours later, was roused by the call to action stations.

The officer of the watch sighted a U-boat which was promptly attacked and bombed by the catapult aircraft, in the air in double-quick minutes. If not sunk, the U-Boat was badly shaken, but the crew's chief thought was of the good fortune that the enemy had reached that particular spot just too late for the convoy.

The catapult aircraft did invaluable work, and there was gloom on board when she was missing for some time. A weak radio call from her was picked up, however, and the aircraft and the exhausted crew rescued.

Then came trouble at Dakar, where the authorities would not give satisfactory answers to pertinent questions about the French battleship *Richlieu*. Consequently the battleship was damaged by aerial torpedo and depth charges. The motor-boat which made the breath-taking and dangerous run was the envy of all on board the *Dorsetshire*, from whom the suggestion of running in close was first made. Instead of taking part, the *Dorsetshire* stood by. The next day some French aircraft dropped bombs which fell harmlessly, and then the cruiser sailed with the *Hermes* to Freetown. On the journey the *Hermes* was in collision with a ship which was escorting a north-bound convoy, and only by some smart work on the bridge was another collision averted. It was a filthy night, and visibility was almost *nil*.

The constant watchfulness, frequent emergencies, and the inevitable monotony of convoy work, went on in the South Atlantic, with several visits to Freetown, never a particularly gay place. Visits there soon became known as the time to 'oil, toil, yam and scam,' because of the complete absence of potatoes, and the use of yams to take their place. There followed a convoy half-way up the Red Sea, and then a bombardment of the port of Dante, on the Italian Somaliland Coast. This promised excitement, but the only opposition encountered was from a single machine-gun, which scored a lucky hit on the aircraft's petrol tank. The pier and shore installations were badly knocked about.

Another visit to Freetown preceded fifteen weeks afloat, with only five days not on the move. Little or nothing happened, except a fourth Christmas at sea near the Equator, where it was hotter on board than it had been cold the previous three years ! There remained the constant hope of running against a surface raider, but still the ship had no luck. A number of convoys were escorted until there was another surge of excitement at news that the German battleship *Von Scheer* had been sighted by the aircraft of the *Glasgow*, but the battleship made off and was not caught. It was while the *Dorsetshire's* aircraft was searching for the *Von Scheer*, that it crashed, and all the crew and passengers were killed. The observer and the machine-gunner had recently won the D.S.C. and D.S.M., and the pilot had been mentioned in despatches ; the loss was keenly felt.

After a visit to Seychelles the ship went to glorious Durban, one of the most popular ports of call, the more welcome because there were some 86 officers and men from the Union on board. A few glorious days were spent there before more convoying duty, and a journey escorting the *Illustrious* after her pounding in the Mediterranean. On the return journey the crew of a torpedoed British ship was picked up, and although the work of rescue was carried out with much wise-cracking, there was a deep satisfaction on board.

Then came instructions, joyously received, to return to England, and it was while escorting an extremely slow convoy that the news of the *Bismarck's* venture on to the high seas was received, and the *Dorsetshire* jumped at a chance of serious action.

CHAPTER IV.*

‘ROUTINE DUTY’

After the sinking of the *Bismarck* there was a period of refitting and a spell of humdrum duty, until, fully re-commissioned and under the command of Captain A. W. S. Agar, V.C., D.S.O., R.N., the *Dorsetshire* escorted many convoys in the South Atlantic, and hunted for surface raiders. There were constant drills and the daily call to ‘*Action Stations*’ at dawn; dawn is the most likely time for a lurking submarine, aircraft, or surface ship to strike. There were welcome calls to port, when the whole crew was able to relax. In burning sunshine, it was good to be able to walk at ease, and to have all manner of strange fruits offered at absurdly low prices by insistent natives.

The antics of the ship’s cats helped to relieve any tedium on board. In the wardroom was a lanky black-and-white who rejoiced in the name of ‘*Oil-Fuel*’ and roamed as near to the engine room as watchful ratings would allow, while there were two blue-eyed Siamese kittens, not at first popular because of their odd appearance.

But as the days passed they become friends of everyone and there was genuine sorrow when one of them died, despite the ministrations of the Surgeon-Commander and two Surgeon-Lieutenants; its little burial at sea was pathetic.

There were frequent cinema shows on board, usually on a Sunday, with some of the best and most popular films; the keenness with which they were anticipated, followed, and discussed afterwards, was second only to the interest in the radio—particularly in news of home—and the great days when ‘mail’ came on board.

This was usually in port, when the cypher officer and others were kept tremendously busy censoring letters, as well as for some time afterwards, for the rush to write letters home was enormous. The importance of receiving letters can not be over-estimated; the disappointment of individual ratings and officers when none was waiting for them was sharp and keen.

*For many of the details in this chapter, the Editor is grateful to Mrs. S. Evan Paul, whose son Eric, Cypher Officer and 3rd Accountant Officer on board, was amongst those missing after the loss of the ship.

In November, at sea again, a tramp was sighted. Orders were given to board her, and make sure that the tramp's cargo, papers, and passengers were in order. There were high seas running, and it was the Cypher Officer's first boarding-party. Here is a description in his own words:—

" At four o'clock in the morning I was given a shake and told that we would be boarding at the crack o' dawn. It was not exactly a game for elderly spinster ladies. First we manned the cutter, and were lowered to a certain distance above the water (this distance, great or small, always depends on whether the Officer on Watch 'has it in' for the Boarding Officer). At the command of '*slip*,' with the dear old *Dorsetshire* still forging ahead, we operated the Robinson's Patent Disengaging Gear, praying fervently that the O.O.W. had *not* got it in for the Boarding Officer, and hoping that when we disengaged we would land on the crest of a wave, and not in a trough; this requires great skill. We successfully 'patently disengaged' and then thought of our quarry, the tramp. We could just see her above rollers which looked as big as houses, and set off in her general direction. When the crew seemed almost worn-out with pulling, and we appeared to be making no progress, we looked round and found that we had fetched up against some sort of cliff.

On closer inspection, this proved to be the side of the tramp, but how it got there nobody knew! From some miles up, or so it seemed, a kindly soul lowered rope ladders and some of us managed, after frantic efforts, to climb up, with the rope ladders swaying like pendulums. Eventually we found ourselves on deck, very dirty and dishevelled, and made sure that we had not lost our guns, ammunition, lifebelts, and any other odds and ends festooning us. Re-assured, we remembered our manners, shook hands with the Captain and others nearby, and got down to business. We examined packets of documents and asked endless questions, generally satisfied ourselves that the owners, Captain and crew would not murder their grandmothers except under extreme provocation, and decided that they were jolly good fellows. We flashed the news back to the ship, and then returned to the Captain's cabin for brandy. The signal 'boat recall' came soon afterwards, we renewed our acquaintance with the rope ladders, learning by bitter experience to drop when the boat alongside was on the crest of a wave. (If it isn't, it either comes up and smacks you harder than you like, or as fast as you fall towards it, it drops away, so that it seems that you have essayed a jump of a couple hundred feet or so).

Eventually we all got on board, and this time the *Dorsetshire* stopped for us. Above us several hundred jack tars were hauling in the falls, and we returned 'home' for a bath, breakfast, and the day's work."

The breezy good humour of the letter is typical of the officers and men on board.

Chess, draughts, cards, all manner of indoor and deck games were played with enthusiasm, a constant ripple of laughter and wit came from the officers' and men's quarters. Most of the crew were regular and eager patrons of the library; a good library on board ship is a vital necessity, and the voluntary appeals for books, although responded to well, are not answered well enough. A shortage of books on board any ship is a tragedy.

Here are some extracts from a letter written by the Cypher Officer a little more than a month later, just after arriving at a large port :—

"We've been in Heaven, or, at least, in the most beautifully situated city in the world. And she seemed to have nothing to do but welcome us. Have you ever been to a party which lasted seven days, with hosts, hostesses and partners changing every twenty-four hours, with an hour or two of sleep between each session? It's grand! We all fell painfully in love with the city, which must be nameless.

It has done a world of good, and given us an inexhaustible topic of conversation. It was amusing to see the way the Sick-Bay lost its chronic patients as we drew near port! We were made honorary members of all the clubs, there was a marvellous dance every evening, the daytime was spent exploring a most exciting countryside. We ended one on a hill with what must be an unrivalled view. None of us are untravelled now, but we really were struck dumb."

The zest and enthusiasm reflected in the letter was felt by everyone on board; it gives an idea of the importance, in England, of making Allied Forces welcome, an importance which cannot be over-rated.

Here is another extract from the same letter :—

"I made a point of contacting officers of the U.S. Navy while we were in, and of getting them to join my party. In fact it was once a party of eight Americans and me, and I had to find partners for the lot! It was intensely interesting hearing their views, and far from talking 'big' they were very sober about the whole affair, and kicking themselves for not having come in sooner. I must have been one of the first in X when the news that Germany and Italy had declared war on the U.S.A. came in, and so little did it seem to alter the position that I was amazed when an American said that the news had shaken them a bit. I simply hadn't realised that it was of any importance to them.

The Loss of the *Prince of Wales*, *Repulse*, *Sydney*, and *Dunedin* had shaken us up a bit, but we'll survive.

I have completed my 100,000 miles of sea time since the war began, so I am a proud man. I shall enjoy telling you something of the places I've seen this last few months; it has all been so wonderful."

It was in this month of December that a ship was sighted, and the call to 'Action Stations' roused the crew. Everyone seemed to move at once, and in a few seconds every one was ready. The ship's reconnaissance air-craft had sighted an enemy raider, lying stopped with five small boats nearby.

Word came from the crow's nest that the ship (which was not identified) had been sighted, and she immediately made off. There was ample evidence that a U-Boat was in the vicinity, and that the raider, of some 10,000 tons, had been refuelling and revictualling her, for a power-boat was seen pulling smaller ships all laden with stores.

The booming of two warning shots, fired across the raiders bows, had an immediate effect. Tense and ready, expecting a fight, there was sharp disappointment when it was seen that the enemy was abandoning ship. Fire broke out immediately afterwards, and the raider was scuttled effectively, sinking just an hour and eighteen minutes after she had been sighted.

There was a calm sea that day, and visibility was good, the weather was perfect. There were no other British ships in the vicinity, and the *Dorsetshire* was in mid-ocean, with St. Helens 1,740 miles away, Tristan da Cunha 1,710 miles to the south-west, Walvis Bay 1,060 miles to the east. On that peaceful day, with that vast expanse of water about them, the two ships met and another drama of the seas was played out.

The *Dorsetshire* could not stop to pick up the 500 survivors because of the presence of an enemy submarine, and gradually the bobbing heads, small boats, and rafts, faded from sight.*

Afterwards, it was said that the sinking of the raider destroyed German plans for a concentrated U-boat attack on Cape convoy route in the winter of 1941. Small wonder the South Africans were devoted to the *Dorsetshire* and to other ships which played an important part in maintaining regular transport to and from the Union. According to unofficial reports, the five U-Boats nearby were all short of fuel at the time of the sinking; three of them were scuttled, the others, each towing some twelve boats with survivors, separated at once. One went towards the Brazilian coast, the other towards West Africa; the same unconfirmed account says that one party reached land, the other was lost.

At that time the *Dorsetshire* had been at sea for 100 days out of four months, and steamed 33,000 miles, making a war-time total of 200,000 miles without a single mishap. There could be no greater tribute to the engine-room staff, the men who work out of sight, who know so little of what is going on in battle, but are always there, always efficient, always ready to pull out the 'little extra' which can mean the difference between defeat and victory. If they are often forgotten, much more so are the cooks and their staff, preparing hot food often under enormous difficulties, cheerful, capable, ready with soup, tea, sandwiches and pies in the midst of feverish action.

* Acknowledgements are due to the Editor of the "Times" who placed at my disposal an article from one of that paper's issues.

From December, 1941 to March, 1942, the *Dorsetshire* was employed on hazardous convoy work in the Indian Ocean. The strain on the Navy, always great, was enormously increased by the entry of Japan into the war. The last convoy from Singapore, and the last from Rangoon, were brought safely away by the *Dorsetshire* and other ships.

There was to have been a spell of leave, but in fact the ship spent only a few days in port before joining the Eastern Fleet under Admiral Sir James Somerville. Those few days were precious ; some of the crew managed to travel inland, through glorious mountain country, before being recalled ; they did not know that it was for the ship's last gallant action.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST ACTION.

Sailing steadily through the warm, calm ocean, in company with the *Cornwall*, the *Dorsetshire* was hunting for surface raiders and an enemy Fleet. Reconnaissance aircraft from Japanese aircraft carriers of an unlocated force, including cruisers and battleships, were searching for them. British aircraft carriers were too far away to afford fighter escort.

Three hundred miles west of Colombo, at dawn on the 5th of April, the bugle call calling the crew to ' *Action Stations!* ' rang out through the ship's loudspeakers.

It was usual at dawn of course, but the minutes passed slowly, and the stations were maintained. Gradually a feeling of excitement spread throughout the ship. It was Easter Sunday, but there was little thought of the day, only an increasing tension in which all shared.

One of the most vivid narratives of any action at sea was told by the Chief Naafi Canteen Manager, A. G. Elsegood to Carl Olsson ; it appeared in " *Illustrated* " on September 12th, 1942, and part of the breathtaking story was broadcast in the " *Into Battle* " series of the B.B.C. a few days afterwards.* And this is his story :—

" My action station was in the main sick bay amidships, where I was in charge of a medical party. I went along there and reported to the Surgeon-Commander, and saw that instruments, bandages and lint were laid out in proper array ; Neil-Robson stretchers (cane and canvas folding contraptions which can carry a wounded man through the narrow confined spaces of a ship) were all stacked neatly in the sick bay.

Then we sat down to wait. Seven a.m. came, the time when we open the canteen till 8.30 for the first morning sales, cigarettes, soft drinks, toothpaste, chocolate and hundreds of other things.

We waited there through the morning, cooped up under the electric lights. The waiting, the suspense is the worst part of it all. Conversation palled after a while, and some of us played cards or ludo.

*Acknowledgements and thanks are due to Mr. Elsegood, Mr. Olsson, and the Editor of ' *Illustrated* ' for their permission to use the article in part or whole.

There were the usual reliefs for food and a drink of tea or coffee. I went on deck once or twice and saw the gun crews, wearing their flash hoods, tensely alert at their pom-poms, waiting like us.

About mid-morning we had word from a rating passing through the sick bay that a Jap scout plane had been sighted; then about 1 p.m. we heard that more enemy planes were near.

At 1.40 p.m. we heard the muffled roll of our pom-pom and other A.A. fire. We looked at each other and I thought: "This is it."

A tough Cockney rating whom I knew well, one of the repair parties on an inspection round, grinned at us cheerfully as he passed through and said: "Blimy, there's the 'split-eyes' at last, bringing us a nice packet of Easter eggs."

He had no sooner gone through the doorway at the end of the sick bay than there were two terrific explosions from somewhere aft.

Gunfire ceased, then started again in slow individual gun bursts. The lamp bulbs flickered twice off and on, and then dimmed. The explosions felt exactly as if some giant hand had seized the ship and shaken her bodily. In the pause which followed I felt the even vibration of the engines falter and slow down.

I learned afterwards that Jap bombers, from carriers, had come at us in waves of seven, out of the sun. Some actually tried to crash themselves on our decks.

The guns had not much chance; they were just overwhelmed, and we got two direct hits.*

These waves of bombers were followed by fighters which dived, machine-gunning the decks and gun stations and shattering most of the lifeboats with explosive bullets.

It all happened in a few minutes. As the first wounded came in they were attended at once by the Surgeon-Commander and two other doctors—my party still had nothing to do—a bomb came clean through the deck and passed through the dispensary at the end of the sick bay and exploded in the marines' mess deck.

It came in diagonally and I only saw the flash. The next moment I found myself on my back outside the sick bay door, where I had been flung by the blast. All the lights went out because our power was hit, and the place was full of fumes, smoke and dust.

The emergency lighting, however (two single lights) came on immediately. I picked myself up and we got to work again. Some men in the sick bay had been killed by blast, and others wounded. Working in the semi-darkness I wished I was on deck with the guns.

But now we could all feel the ship listing heavily. The engines had stopped, and the deck seemed to be falling away from beneath our feet.

*Just before the first bomb burst, Captain Agar gave instructions to hoist the silk Battle Ensign. Great efforts were made to do this, and although the Ensign did not reach the top of the mast, it was flying when the ship sank.



Photo by courtesy of Lieut. T. V. Stopford, R.N.
Peace. 'Hands to Bathe.'



Photo : Fox.
War. "After the Japs had gone."



Photo : Keystone.

Elation ! Torpedo crew which sank the *Bismarck*.



Photo : Fox.

Rescued ! Survivors alongside rescuing destroyer
after 33 hours in the water.

Since the power system had been cut off we could not get any orders through the loudspeakers. The first thing I heard was some men calling from the gangway "She's going." Quite unhurriedly the Surgeon-Commander gave orders to get the wounded up and clear the sick bay. We got them up.

Boats hung shattered and burning from the davits. Through the smoke clouds which drifted far across the water I could see stabbing flashes of flame from the distant guns of *H.M.S. Cornwall*.

The Japs had left us and were making a concentrated attack on her, and she was going down fighting.

Against the smoke, among the gun flashes, there were long streaks of flame as Jap aircraft went plummeting into the sea.

The thing that struck me was the coolness of everyone. I don't know what I expected, but I know they helped me a lot. There we were, one side listing almost into the water, and you might have thought they were cheerfully waiting for liberty boat and shore leave. No panic, no pushing and shoving, less rush and excitement than at a normal "Action Stations."

The order came to 'abandon ship' and the men began throwing Carley floats, Denton rafts and any floatable wreckage overboard.

Except for two whalers and a skiff the boats were useless. We got the wounded into those. I saw Cammander Byas on the upper deck. Severely wounded and holding his hand to his side, he was calmly giving orders through his chief boatswain's mate, and getting the men away.

All I thought was how very warm the water felt and a vague regret about the canteen I was leaving behind, newly stocked and as good as anything in the Navy. That's the effect of other men's coolness and courage on you when you are all together.

We got to rafts and wreckage, pushing and swimming to get away from the suction as the ship went down.

I saw her go. She slid under easily, only half-an-hour since I had first heard her guns in the sick bay. She was a grand ship with a great record.

The smoke had lifted a bit, and as I clung to the edge of a raft there was a mass of bobbing heads, and clusters of men perched on rafts and wreckage.

There was murmur of men's voices over the water calling to each other and talking. Men were shouting from raft to raft after their pals. "Has anybody seen so and so?" "Is so and so with you?" and similar queries. One crowd started singing "Roll out the barrel," and other voices took it up till the singing echoed over the water. Those of the Jap aircraft which survived had gone. We were alone, except for *H.M.S. Cornwall's* survivors, also in the water some miles away.

We got ourselves organised, as far as men swimming and floating in the ocean can do. Captain Agar was going round in one of the whalers

with the wounded, rounding-up swimming stragglers and others clinging to wreckage, and towing them in till we were all together in one big bunch. That was a good move. Men could help each other, and it would be easier for rescue vessels to find us.

When that was done he came in among us and spoke to us, his voice coming clearly across the water as calmly as if he was on his own bridge. He told us, among other things, that Commander Byas, though badly wounded, was alive, at which everybody cheered.

He told us that help was coming. He told us also to take shirts and underwear or other garments off and drape them turbanwise on our heads as protection against the broiling sun. (It was mid-afternoon and we were only a few degrees above the Equator). That wise advice saved a lot of us from sunstroke or worse.

With our faces blackened with the oil fuel* floating everywhere, and our turbaned heads, we looked a funny sight. There was plenty of wise-cracking, and one bunch of wags on a raft started a nasal Eastern singing, chanting and hand-clapping.

We took turn about on the rafts and in the water, just clinging to them. When each man's turn came for a rest on a raft, he handed his Mae West over to a man who had to swim (some of the men hadn't been able to get their Mae Wests before our ship went down).

Once or twice I thought about sharks (the Indian Ocean is full of them) but I don't think any of us saw one. At any rate there were no alarms. One of the men said, I don't know with what truth, that oil fuel keeps them away.

Night came with everybody still cheerful and keeping together. I heard parties singing comic songs on some of the rafts. How they kept it up I don't know, because I was beginning to suffer a bit from thirst. They found some water and condensed milk, but that was for the wounded. We did have a biscuit each, though, the next morning, and though mine was flavoured with fuel oil and salt water, it tasted good.

During the night we kept watches to look out for rescue ships and the brilliant stars of the tropics started several false calls.

Fortunately the night did not last long, and then came that biscuit breakfast.

I didn't feel too good but, believe it nor not, some of the men were still so fresh that they were swimming races from raft to raft! One crowd of young stokers actually started a sort of water polo match, using a rolled-up vest for a ball!

That second day dragged a lot. I had gone over from my raft handhold to a floating wooden spar from the *Dorsetshire*. It was 4 p.m. and I was just making myself comfortable when I heard a shout of "Plane!"

* Several survivors have written to say that the oil on the water undoubtedly enabled many to keep afloat and substantially reduced the casualties.

We eyed the tiny speck very tensely for a moment, wondering if it were a Jap. But in the next few seconds there was a yell : "String bag !" the Navy slang for the Swordfish, torpedo reconnaissance plane of the Fleet Air Arm.

In no time it seemed it was sweeping low over our heads. I could see the pilot waving, within an hour there was more cheering as smoke from two destroyers and a cruiser showed on the horizon. Within an hour I was being hauled on to the deck of a destroyer and being given a sip of barley water.

While our destroyer searched for any other straggling survivors we were led to hot baths and our oil coating removed by some special solution. Those who could not walk were carried. The destroyer's crew did everything for us, including giving up their own bedding.

The officers gave up their cabins to the wounded, and turned the wardroom into a sick-bay.

It was dark by then, and after the bath and a rest there were buckets of hot sweet tea to wash away the taste of oil fuel and the Indian Ocean, and a huge meal which they called breakfast. I found myself professionally wondering where they had got all the food ; but the Navy can always manage everything."

Other accounts revealed that, in the shell-room the crew had not fully realised what had happened as the ship lurched and shuddered. Fumes choked everyone, and a Corporal of the Marines scrambled up to the deck, helped by an electric torch. He found the ship almost deserted, with hundreds of men already in the water. Near him Lieut. Geoffrey Berlyn, of East London, S. Africa, calmly lit a cigarette and took a few puffs before jumping ; his coolness and courage was an example to all. The Corporal had only to 'step' into the water, quite calmly, and start swimming, for the ship was already well down. He had lost his life-belt, but found a piece of wood to help him keep afloat. He had no thought of fear then, but there was a spasm of fear when the Japs flew very low in formation, spitting machine-gun bullets towards the helpless men. The Corporal 'beat the record for a surface dive,' but when he broke water again the planes were gone ; two officers and a stoker petty officer were killed in this wanton attack."

Thence-forward his story follows the lines of that already told, and of the general relief at being picked up, the rescue-ship whose crew could not do enough for the survivors, the battleship to which many were transferred and treated in the same warm generous way, until they were transferred again to a troopship, and then left for an unknown destination.

The first request from practically every survivor was for word of his safety to be cabled 'home.' In dozens of letters sent as soon as the transport reached port there was the same casual attitude towards the ordeal, and the same heartfelt regret that 'all my gifts for you went down.' Practically nothing was saved, but some items, including most

of the ship's silver, plate, etc., had been landed before the final cruise. In every man too, there was a fierce desire to get another ship and to have another go at the Japanese.

Many of them will succeed, many, perhaps, will remain in the Navy to serve on board the new ship, when she is ready. Whether or no, some facts emerge, unalterable, inflexible and of glorious memory, a challenge to those who have been in England safe from the terrors of the sea. No man on board the *Dorsetshire*, no man on board any ship in the Navy, ever failed in his duty. No effort, no sacrifice, is too great to ensure that more and more ships are launched and fitted.

Workers in the shipyards, in the steel furnaces, in the thousand-and-one small factories making equipment, guns and instruments for ships, cannot work too swiftly nor too surely. The Navy must have ships worthy of the men who will serve on them, ships in such number that they can sweep the seas of Germans, Italians and Japanese, ships to join in the work to come, with the U.S.A. and Russia and the other Allies, of keeping the seas clear, of policing the oceans of the world until the horror of enemy aggression is a fading memory, and the world is freed of the madness of war.

Will any English man or woman fail the men who go down to the sea in ships?

Acknowledgements and thanks are due to Lieut.-Commander R. B. East, Lieut. H. H. Langton, Miss M. Keagh, who placed at the Editor's disposal a vivid account from which much of this is taken, and to Mrs. M. Sugden of Sheffield, whose only son went down with the ship, but who placed newspaper cuttings and letters at the Editor's disposal. There were several Sheffield men on board. Other vivid stories were sent by Miss Pamela Deal, a native of East London, South Africa and Wren K. Trenear. Some 86 South Africans were on board at the time of sinking.

AWARDS TO OFFICERS AND MEN OF H.M.S. "DORSETSHIRE" IN THE PRESENT WAR.

Temporary Surgeon Lieutenant C. H. F. WOOD, M.B., B. Ch., R.N.V.R.—D.S.O.

Captain B. C. S. MARTIN, R.N.—D.S.O.

Lieutenant O. M. CHEEKE,—D.S.C.

Acting Leading Airman G. MITCHELL—D.S.M.

Chief Petty Officer Telegraphist F. J. J. COOK—B.E.M.

MENTIONED IN DISPATCHES.

Captain A. W. S. AGAR, V. C., D. S. O., R.N.

Captain B. C. S. MARTIN, R.N.

Lieutenant-Commander B. C. DURANT, R. N.

Lieutenant J. K. LYON, R.N.

Lieutenant F. A. BOOTH, R.N.

Lieutenant G. M. BERLYN, R.N.V.T. (S.A.)

Lieutenant (A), R. S. ILLINGWORTH, R.N.

Chief Petty Officer A. J. YEOMAN, D/J.97889.

Chief Petty Officer Telegraphist C. H.

SHADDICK, D/J. 41389.

Master-at-Arms C. C. J. PIPPETT, D/M. 39775.

Petty Officer J. W. SCHOLLITT, D/J. 106858.

Leading Seaman W. T. JOHNSTON, D/JX.

131583.

Able Seaman C. T. TOWNSEND, D/JX. 15673.

Boy 1st Class L. STRANGE, P/JX. 194801.

The H.M.S. 'Dorsetshire' Replacement Campaign.

(To raise £2,750,000 by War Savings in the six-months ending December 31st, 1942.)

At conferences convened by the Earl of Shaftesbury, the civic representatives of all the urban and rural areas in Dorset, and representatives of all the National Savings Committees in the county, it was unanimously agreed to embark upon a Replacement Campaign to raise the cost of a new Cruiser by war savings in the six months ending December 31st, 1942. This meant doubling the savings throughout the county, and the workers in the movement applied themselves to it with great enthusiasm.

Within a month reports came from tiny village groups, from street groups in the towns, from factories, farms, business-houses, fishing villages and seaside resorts, of increasing savings, while bankers reported greater sales of Defence and War Bonds.

But more is wanted. Savings group workers and members must redouble their efforts, and everyone with an interest in Dorset or the "Dorsetshire" is invited to subscribe by investments purchased in the County, or specifically directed to help the Campaign.

The people in the county are working and fighting hard to ensure that this great project, so clear and proud in its conception, does not fail. There could be no greater incentive to saving and lending than the story of gallantry and devotion which you have read, for failure would betray the memory of those who have fought and died, and the courage of those who have lived to fight again.

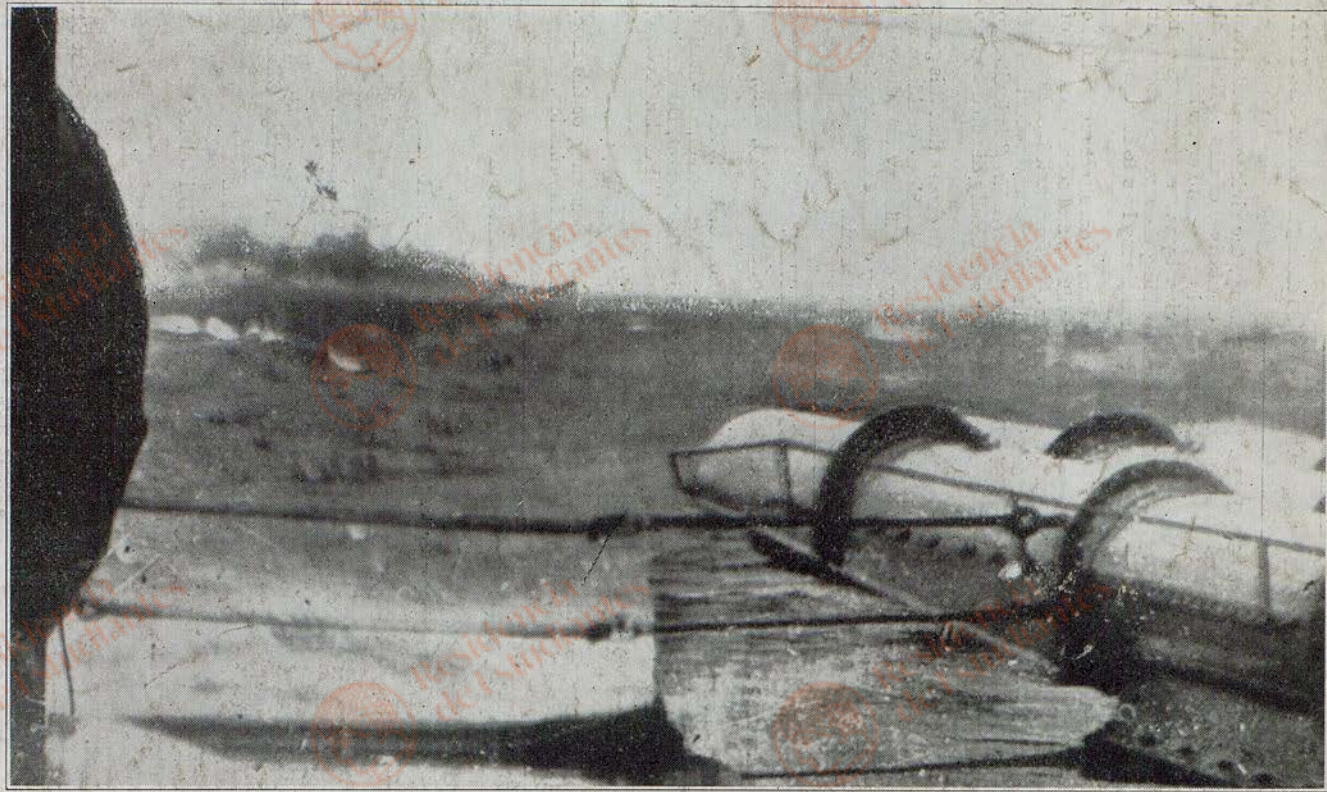
CAMPAIGN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

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Vice-Chairman :	Vice-Admiral L. MacKinnon, C.B., C.V.O.
Hon. Secretary :	A. M. Willats, Esq., 6 High West Street, Dorchester.
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Hon. Publicity Secretary :	John Creasey, Esq., "Cattistock," Fernlea Avenue, Ferndown, Wimborne, Dorset.
with	T. F. E. Jakeman, Esq., Weymouth.

Correspondence will be welcome by either the Hon. Secretary or the Hon. Publicity Secretary, who will gladly give fuller particulars and information.

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Wimborne.	Miss Beatrice Lay, Boys' Council School. John Creasey, Esq., National Savings Bureau, 27, East St.
Weymouth.	T. F. E. Jakeman, Esq., 14, St. Thomas Street.



The 'Unsinkable' sinks. *Bismarck* going down.

Photo : Keystone.