



I am writing this on 12th April 1966, the anniversary of the day we left Plymouth with our first batch of boys to start 'Meet the Royal Navy', and it has certainly been a crowded year. During it we have visited 54 different places, which is quite a fair record for one frigate in 365 days. Slow starters catch up in the end ! I think we can now consider ourselves the greatest living naval experts on the ports and pubs of our own land, on the countries of West Africa, and on the South Atlantic islands (I don't mention Recife). We have graced the Flagship Line at a Royal Review, and looked splendid, if a trifle out of scale, behind *Maidstone* and *Centaur*. We have taken probably the most numerous, if not the largest fleet of recent years to sea, when we went with the R.N.R. minesweepers to Oporto.

We have had our bad moments, but basically it has been a first-class, hard-working swan all the way from No 3 Basin to Simonstown, and here we are this evening, cruising off Beira, waiting to pounce on oil blockade runners. I have enjoyed it. I hope you will all be able to look back on your time in *PUMA* with happy memories, and say, 'She was a fine ship. I had a good time in her, learnt a lot, worked hard, and made plenty of friends'. I wish you the best of good fortune in the future, and hope we meet again.

Captain M. N. Lucey, D.S.C., R.N.



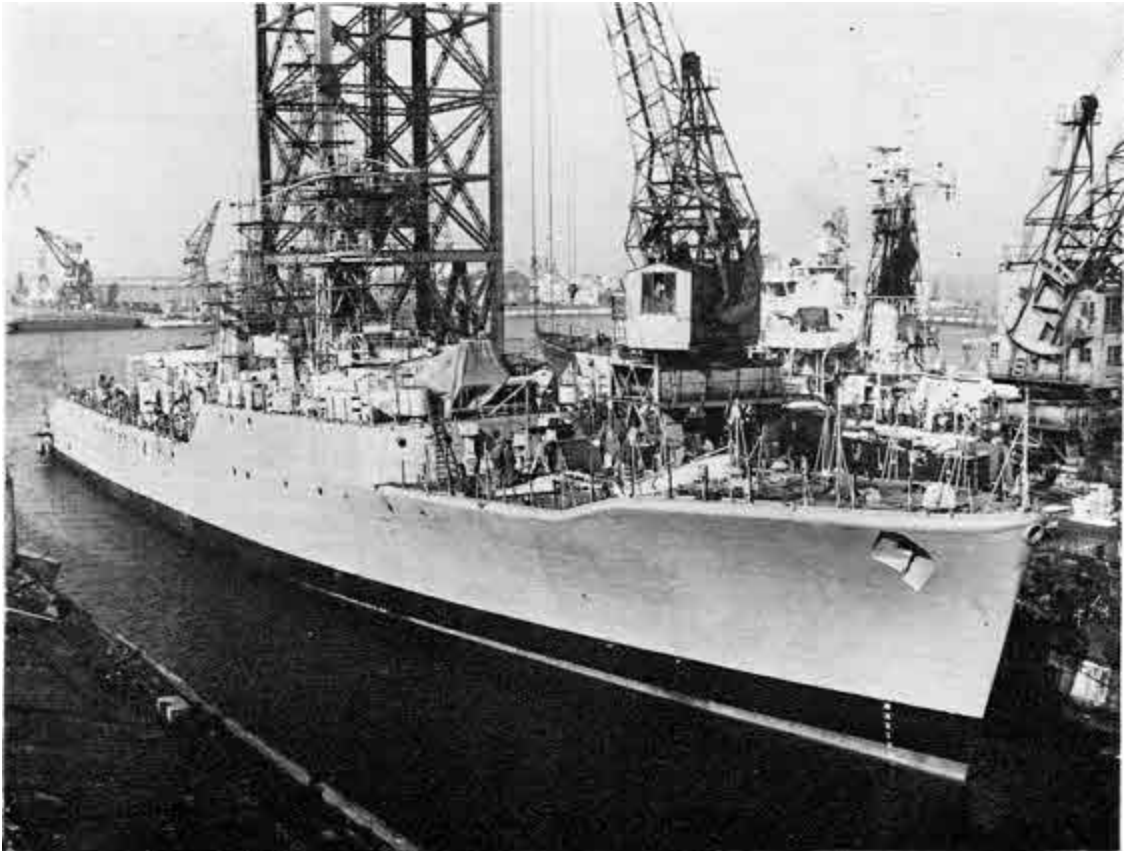
Having joined from R.F.A. *Resurgent*, in an unusual although traditional manner of the old days, it was a fine start to find myself in an operational ship on an operational job. About that time our programme was pretty uncertain and the Durban visit had temporarily gone by the board; however the air soon cleared and we had a good run in Mauritius before returning to the Mozambique Channel for our second spell - by the time we'd done our third we were beginning to feel old hands !

We've had a couple of exercises, but have not been able to talk about them, where we proved that Top Cat means what it says and we'll not easily forget that frantic night of 29/30 September which ended with us slipping at 0830 — that sort of achievement, in which everyone plays a part, really proves what a ship is worth. Finally a memorable run on the other side of the Atlantic and Brazil followed by Dakar with Gib. to come before Guzz just 347 days after the majority of you left there.

So we've done our job and had our fun — worked hard and played hard. It'll be a sad day when the old hands go and I'd like to say to them many thanks and the best of luck — and we'll decide who buys the drinks when we next meet.

Captain C. J. Cunningham, D.S.C., R.N.

H.M.S. PUMA 1964-1967



Reconditioned engines, many extras, bills available

Throughout 1963 and the first half of 1964 a small band of dedicated veterans of *Puma's* last commission had managed to see the ship through its long refit in Portsmouth, They were still battling gamely along, brewing up, attending innumerable progress meetings and chasing up equipment which either lay in dockyard stores (various), railway trucks (multitudinous) or the remote fastness of 'St. Aggies' in Conway Street.

By June the ship had been just about completely reassembled and was being set to work, albeit some of the items were ex *Leopard*, *Lynx* or *Jaguar*; but it looked very much as though *Puma* was going to make her completion date. On the 18th June the blow fell, a fierce fire wrecked the for'ard engine room and all the ship's wiring from the for'ard switchboard and this set us back six months.

As previously arranged, the ship's company arrived in August. The commissioning date had been altered to 30th October and we had badgered the dockyard into letting us move onboard on commissioning day even though we were still two months away from our sea trials. This meant of course that there was a large number of the ship's company with very little to do and to keep up the interest they were sent away on various schemes. Expeditioning was a regular activity; we had the use of an MFV for three weeks and made three trips to France and the Channel Islands in her, The juniors became extremely proficient guides of H.M.S. *Victory* and we carried out a two-day internal-security exercise in the derelict Victoria Barracks. Meanwhile our sports teams grew in prowess and the foundation of a very happy commission was laid,



"Just a touch, Whoa."

Eventually at the beginning of January 1965 we were once again ready to start sea trials. By this time the Portsmouth Dockyard personnel had become so attached to us that they were loth to see us go, but after numerous trials and calibrations followed by repeat trials and repeat calibrations we managed to shake off the yoke and considered ourselves ready to face the world. We even went to the unprecedented length of staying out all night! But even as we sailed for Portland we still had one Dockyard Officer on board trying to reduce 'X' turret's recovery time. However, at this point I feel, friends, that I must draw a veil across the saga of the accursed machinery that drives the guns of 'X' turret up and down in elevation and depression,

A short shake-down preceded a longer, sharper work-up but during the course of it we were delighted to discover that we were reasonably good kids all round. Shooting down the sleeve on our first firing gave a huge boost to the confidence of the Gunnery Department and its maintainers and similar early successes in N, B.C.D., T.A.S., Disaster exercises, etc., improved the morale of the ship's company. Thus after the inspection day we could justly claim to have enjoyed a good work-up. The trip from Portland to Devonport the same night was a rather different story. What was probably the roughest passage we have ever had reduced *Puma's* gallant lads to the sickest, greenest, saddest crew to arrive in Devonport for many years.



'Look what I've found Towns'

In December 1964 we had been told that the ship was to be sent on a recruiting tour of British ports, and in Devonport during the two weeks between the end of the work-up and the 12th April the ship's company worked hard to spruce-up the ship and prepared her for what was to be a very arduous but also a very interesting task. Guides were trained, messing arrangements for the schoolboys finalized and on the 13th April our first guests, twenty Sea Cadets and one officer, came down to Devonport from Cheltenham to join us for the passage to Newcastle-on-Tyne. Our first gunnery and squid demonstration firings were carried out off the Tyne before a large number of national press men. The firings could have been worse—but not much worse. I think, to a maintainers everlasting shame, that this was the only occasion of a deathly hush at the order 'engage'. Even the squid failed to go off. We produced the required bangs a few minutes later but it was a mortifying experience, The national papers gave us a tremendous write-up, No mention at all of a temporary shortage of bangs, it was very nearly rapturous and our reaction was one enormous 'PHEW' !

I should think that the Easter week-end spent in Newcastle was one of the best runs ashore this commission, Everyone in the ship enjoyed himself 'flat-out' and accepted the tremendous 'Geordie' welcome in the spirit it was given, What we had yet to learn was that almost every week-end and often mid-week as well for the next six months was going to be the same.

The first leg of the 'Meet The Royal Navy' programme lasted until the 12th May and during this time we called at Sunderland, Hartlepool, Whitby, Hull, Grimsby, Yarmouth, Harwich, Felixstowe and Dover. It was while the ship was anchored off Whitby that it became apparent that anchoring off the East Coast in an easterly wind was somewhat dangerous and the few libertymen we managed to land in Whitby before the weather worsened spent five days travelling up and down the coast trying to rejoin the ship, It was especially disappointing to the schoolboys who missed their sea trip in *Puma*.

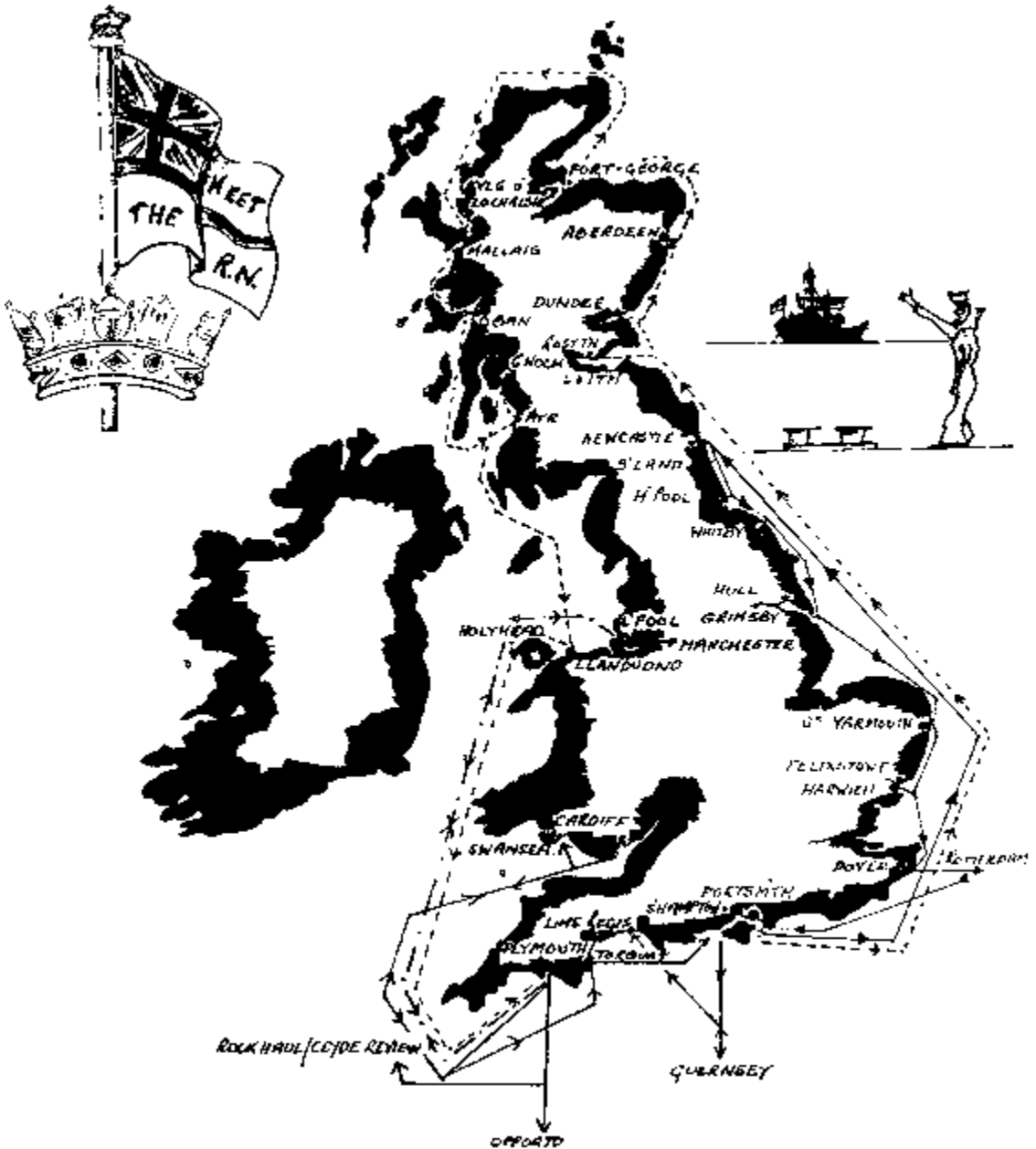
The pace was pretty hot, we were running parties of 40 boys to sea for a few hours, once or sometimes twice a day and spending some nights at sea with a party of 20 Sea Cadets from different units. The visitors were always accompanied by their teachers, youth employment officers and a number of local press men, It was during the last trip of this leg that we had had an unintentioned send-off by a foreign merchant ship. The weather was too bad and the Straits of Dover too crowded for our 4.5 firings and the schoolboys had to be content with a single squid firing set quite shallow, Out of the murk did the aforementioned merchantman appear with lamp blinking furiously, Before she disappeared we read, 'Please do not do that again, you have awoken me up'.

From Dover on the 11th of May we sailed for a quiet

four days in Rotterdam. A 'U' turn in the River Maas was found to be the seagoing version of a 'U' turn in Commercial Road, Portsmouth, at 5.00 p.m. We were surprised to see the Matchmaker squadron there before us but Rotterdam is quite a run ashore and they must have found the dives that we did not, It was an extremely relaxing visit and both watches were always on the fo'c'sle in good time in case they missed seeing any of those beautiful Dutch girls on their way to work.

After the Rotterdam visit came the eagerly awaited two-week maintenance period in Portsmouth and then on the 2nd of June we arrived in Leith Docks, landed our 20 Sea Cadets, and embarked 40 schoolboys, taking them to sea for the day, We were back in the recruiting business once again. The second leg was to take us from Leith to Rosyth for Navy Days and then on to Dundee, Aberdeen, Fort George, the Kyles of Lochalsh, Mallaig, Fort William, Oban, Ayr, Greenock, Llandudno, Holyhead and finally into Plymouth for a maintenance week. It was in Plymouth during this first week of July that the fore-topmast was cut down to give us clearance under the bridges of the Manchester Ship Canal.

The third leg was to be the shortest and certainly the most eagerly looked forward to by everyone. We spent a week day-running from Liverpool with schoolboys taking one of our overnight parties to the Isle of Man for a run ashore. On our final trip from Liverpool we had the honour of having Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Cazalet, the Chairman of the Navy League, on board; he also stayed for the trip up the Manchester Ship Canal. This was a most unusual and interesting trip, the people of Runcorn and Warrington are unused to seeing a shiny frigate passing up the canal and they turned out in large numbers. One man on his way to work couldn't take his eyes off the ship and consequently drove his motor-cycle off the road to the accompaniment of raucous cheering from the fo'c'sle and quarterdeck hands. There is no doubt that Manchester was the highlight of the tour. We are the largest warship to have been there since 1920 and we were made tremendously welcome, Unfortunately on the way down the canal we unexpectedly met another ship coming up, a 28,000 ton freighter, We squeezed by her but touched the bottom with our starboard screw, Now instead of going to Loch Ewe to the Sea Cadet camp we found ourselves in Plymouth where the foretop mast was replaced and then round to Portsmouth to dock for the propeller change. One evening in early August Rear-Admiral Carew-Hunt embarked and for the next two weeks *Puma* was ACR's flagship. We sailed for the Clyde, collecting RNR minesweepers at different rendezvous around the coast and on arrival at Greenock took up our position in the flagship line of the Home Fleet, Three days later Her Majesty The Queen reviewed the assembled fleet and immediately on completion all our minesweepers got under way and *Puma* led them to the delights of



Portugal as represented in the beautiful port of Oporto. The wine, the food, the fado and the sun are just pleasant memories of a very happy visit.

However we had to get back to work and the final leg of 'Meet The Royal Navy'. August 23rd found us in Cardiff receiving again a very hearty welcome. It was here that the main store, Howells, decorated each of its display windows with a *Puma* motif, life-belts, life-size cartoons, *Puma* crests and sailor dolls. Cardiff was followed by visits to Swansea, Torbay

where the Captain took a team of officers and ratings to Paignton Zoo to see Flora our live mascot. Then on to Southampton, St Peter Port and back to Lyme Regis for the final visit of the cruise.

A short visit to Penzance to take part in the Madron ceremony rounded off the year and then it was time for our intermediate docking period and December was spent in Devonport making ready for the long awaited foreign leg of the commission.

3.C.

THE FOREIGN LEG

In an absolute fever of work the ship was made ready for sailing on the 3rd January, as we had come out of the docking and maintenance period we were storing, fuelling, planning. etc., and at the same time trying to put the ship back together. I remember in particular the awful week when British Railways managed to lose X' turrets elevating cylinder and ram in the Christmas mail, However, it was removed from someone's mantle-piece in Carlisle and eventually that 'accursed machine' was set to work.

After all this the actual sailing was an anticlimax but by 1600 we were outside the breakwater and on our way to Gibraltar for a final clean up and for some a visit to that well known Spanish border town of La Lina, in some cases quite a protracted visit.

Our first visit was to Sao Vincente in the Cape Verde Islands. These barren islands stick up out of the Atlantic Ocean looking somewhat like a huge clinker, which in fact it is. How anyone manages to live there we found difficult to imagine. The next port made this point quite obvious, in Recife we found that all Brazilians live on Cuba Livres and Whisky Branca. The Recife visit was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone, in particular the landlord of the Moulin Rouge who probably for the first time in his career was faced with a very large number of men who had come out from England for the sole purpose of giving him all their money. What a wonderful run it was. Having 'relaxed' for three days it was time to say goodbye to Brazil and head back across the Atlantic for the blessings of the land in West Africa. The first stop was for fuel in Freetown and a few hours later we were on our way to Cotonou in Dahomey and swinging into full ceremonial with a guard and salute for General Soglo the President, the very impressive bearded colour guard was given its first airing and very well they looked too. The Dahomey Army replied with full ceremonial at the football match, they provided a guard and band, flag raising and national anthems and Captain Lucey kicked off for *Puma*. The *Puma's* were magnificent though defeated 7-2. This was to be the pattern in all our African football matches, hard play to the final whistle against the superb teams put against us.

It was in Cotonou that we gave an alongside demonstration for the President, firing break-up shot across the harbour, this created a stir of interest among the dockworkers who were feeling a little listless now that they couldn't divert frozen fish from the Russian factory ship over the wire fence to their families. The Russians who were leaving at the time never turned a hair, I think they were still a little shell-shocked from the night before when they gathered on the jetty to watch the quarterdeck showing of 'Taggart'.

After Cotonou came Lome in Togoland and a very enjoyable visit it was, another football match, lots of swimming and the marvellous picnic on the beach with unlimited beer provided by the Ambassador. The night life was a little limited but there were always the dusky hostesses in Le Club de Nuit with their hoarse-cracked invitation, 'First we drink whisky then we dance'. Lome is remarkable in that we had to be lifted by crane seat from the surfboats to the jetty.

From the somewhat rural conditions of Lome a short trip ended with *Puma* berthed very close to the centre of Abidjan, 'The Paris of West Africa. The Ivory Coast is a much more bustling country' than the previous two and this was reflected in the fantastic prices charged 16/- for the laundering of a white suit is pretty steep anywhere. Our visit coincided with the visit of the French frigate *Commandant Bury* and lots of sports fixtures were arranged between the *Puma's*, *Bury*, and the Ivory Coast Navy.

Abidjan was followed by a full week in Bathurst this was a much looked forward to visit and the prospect of a whole week in one place instead of the two and three day visits we had been experiencing meant that the ship's company could really relax for the first time. The climate was hot and dry, full use was made of the glorious empty beaches, several parties went banyaning with overnight stops in African villages. The trips to Bintang and Breffet were ostensibly for crocodile hunting on the River Gambia and game shooting, not one wild creature was shot but there were nearly two *Puma* massacres when opposing teams of hunters met in the dark. The evenings in the villages were enlivened by traditional dancing and the hospitality of the Africans who were delighted to have large parties of British sailors staying with them. There is a moral somewhere in this.

The real purpose of our visit to Bathurst was to provide a British backdrop for the celebration of the first anniversary of Gambian independence so there were of course formal occasions to be attended. On Independence Day (18th February) there were two parades. One in the forenoon by all the local schoolchildren and in the evening the band of the Field Force beat the retreat in great style. Those of the ship's company who went to the Independence Ball had a marvellous time and left as expert performers of the High Life.

The British Community as a whole set out to make our stay as enjoyable as possible and they certainly succeeded. We are all very grateful to them.

February was now drawing to a close with one more visit to make on the West Coast and we arrived in Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia. On 23rd February.