

OPERATION "APPENDIX"

It was a cool day for the time of year, that tenth of August, 1954. The sky was overcast, the seas were choppy, the wind was strong from the nor'west. The sharp cold of the icebergs in the Strait could be felt on deck although there were none in sight. Radar picked up a few growlers at eight miles and two big ones at ten but they were not in dangerous positions and reports on them were discontinued.

The three ships steamed on at eighteen knots in position line astern. In number one position H.M.S. BRITANNIA looked every bit the Royal Yacht with the Standard flying from her main mast to show that the Duke was aboard. The royal blue of her hull was so shiny that the white crests of the waves were reflected in her sides. One thousand yards behind her the light cruiser H.M.C.S. QUEBEC, heavily armed, sliced through the rough seas and in his foamy wake the speedy destroyer H.M.C.S. MICMAC pitched and rolled trying to keep in station with the two heavier ships. Both warships looked drab in their grey paint. Slowly the sleek destroyer escort increased speed, eased to starboard, passed QUEBEC and moved to a position abeam the Yacht. The Duke appeared on deck; he waved to MICMAC and a rousing "three cheers" broke forth from the MICMAC'S crew. This was the naval farewell. The two captains waved goodbye and MICMAC veered hard to starboard at twenty-eight knots, shivering under the strain of her engines and rolling to a heavy sea, she made a giant circle to the eastward and came up alongside QUEBEC. A jackstay was passed, mail was exchanged and a stretcher case was transferred from QUEBEC to MICMAC. The QUEBEC'S doctor had decided to send the man to Halifax on the MICMAC since he was suffering from a mild attack of appendicitis. It was a bit dangerous to keep him aboard ship on a long cruise and this way he would be in a hospital in a day or two so it seemed the best thing to do. The jackstay was taken down, both ships piped their farewells and MICMAC fell back to port to a true course of 210 degrees for the trip home at twenty-five knots.

During the afternoon the sea began to get rougher, the wind increased and the destroyer pitched and rolled more violently, so speed had to be decreased. The patient, lying in sick bay, became steadily sicker, vomiting and suffering sharp pains in his abdomen. There was no doctor aboard, just

a medical assistant who could only give him pills and sedatives to kill the pain. The poor seaman grew worse; he was getting white as a ghost and a rupture was feared. The medical assistant might have to operate. This was a big risk to take and a man's life was involved. The Captain and the Navigator looked over the charts for a nearby port with a hospital. Cornerbrook was about twelve hours away even at top speed and St. John's was out of the question. They noticed that there was a mission hospital in an outpost on S. Anthony's Bay on the north western tip of Newfoundland. The decision was made and at 1800 MICMAC altered course for St. Anthony's Bay, about eighty miles away. The entire ship's company from the Captain to the Ordinary Seamen took on a tense air of nervousness; the sick seaman became delirious from the pain-killing drugs and rambled on wildly in his speech.

At 2300 on that moonless night the headlands of the bay appeared. The Captain decreased speed and guided only by the beacons atop two radio towers on a hill brought his ship as far inshore as he dared. A single anchor was dropped. The patient, now white as chalk, was placed in a stretcher in the motor cutter which was lowered over the side and sent ashore. The cutter secured alongside a fishing wharf, four seamen lifted the stretcher ashore and headed up the rocky hill to find the hospital. The going was rough and the patient was jarred but it was the only way. Passing him over shrubs, stones and bushes, they reached the hospital. The doctor from the outpost was summoned; he made his diagnosis and prepared to operate.

Wearily, the tired seamen took the stretcher and cutter back to the ship where they were hoisted aboard and where everything was secured for sea. At 0400 all hands had turned in except the fo'c's'le party who stood by to weigh anchor. In the forward upper mess the tired seamen lay on their backs in their hammocks listening to the steel anchor cable crashing down on the dock as it was being hove home, and though it sounded like rumblings of thunder, it was a pleasant sound. Deep down in their hearts they felt relieved, for back there on the hill a man's life had been saved, and they were all going home - - - alive.

—RICHARD A. WEDGE '55

The remedy for wrongs is to forget them—Syrus.