

August 1943.

ABIJAN-FRENCH IVORY COAST.

After a quick trip from Takoradi, we arrived at a small Surf Port called Sassandra to screen a ship unloading Cargo. 296 was certainly very pleased to see us, as they had been awaiting a relief for several days, and 'Breck' (Lt. Breckenridge) her C.O. had been a sick man for a few days. Unfortunately I did not get ashore as the C.O. had received various invitations which were difficult to refuse, but I can give a description from his own words-"As a town, Sassandra is negative. It just consists of a few houses, all of which are exceedingly bare and devoid of any luxuries and decoration. The French traders there must be pretty wealthy, but are of a very modest nature, and poo-poo any elaborations of any kind."

The Ivory Coast struck us immediately as being totally different from any of the British Colonies, e.g. the Gold Coast, in that it is not largely developed and settled. The French people tend to settle in one or two towns and leave the rest to the individual, whereas in the Gold Coast, although there are the few large settled towns Europeans are still scattered about the country in various Gold-mining and other groups. Then again in the Gold Coast one has to go at least 400 miles up-country to get into dense jungle for Elephants and Lions, whereas at Sassandra for example one has only to go about 100 Kilometres or apprx. 50 miles to get to the same thing! *Very much wilder!*

After several days we escorted the 'Fort D'Vaux' down to Port Bouet which is the Port for Abijan. Like all Surf Ports, the ships cannot approach closer than about a mile from the shore as the Surf makes unloading and manoeuvring of ships not only dangerous but almost impossible. It was an interesting experience to jump from my ship into the steam packet which came alongside-one had to be very nippy, if one did not wish one's legs to be crushed!-and upon visiting the Officers on the 'F.D.V.' to be hoisted on board by a cradle chair such as is used at the Fun Fair. Again to go ashore one would be lowered into a Surfboat manned by at least 14 husky Africans and be paddled to the Jetty and hoisted onto the Jetty in the same manner. I had been introduced to Le Commandante de Marine, who was a very charming chap, and he had promised to drive me to Abijan in his car-which was about 7 miles away. However I had to look up some people by the name of Capitaine et Mme Maurel, both of whom I found to be great fun. As is the hospitality of the French people, I had to stay for lunch, which went down very well with Le Vin Rouge.

Abijan at last, and the first thing to do was to

find a Hotel and book a room for the night. L'Hotel du Parc was the only hotel in town, and a very nice one at that. The first thing which caught my eye were the large number of attractive French women (C'est naturel, n'est-ce pas!!) and the great difference in their clothing attire and complexion to those of their British counterparts in the Colonies. I later found that there were three Hairdresser in the Town all with the latest equipment. I have never heard of one in ours, even in Lagos. And the place was choc-a-bloc with perfumes, powders and lipsticks. After meeting various people and seeing the fine modern Buildings, one can finally decide that whereas the British temperament is to come out to West Africa, ~~xxx~~ make the money, and spend six months in every three years on holiday in England, the French temperament is quite the reverse—with its exceptions of course. They come out here not only to make their living but to settle here for the rest of their lives if necessary, and rear their children here—which is never done by British people, as they always go home or to the Cape for the birth. And the kiddies born here are not exactly unhealthy, although they would naturally lack the normal healthy glow of a European Climate. Abijan has probably a European population of over a 1000, which is sufficient to give the place the atmosphere of a small French town. What is sadly lacking however is the delicious Brioche! The populace have to live upon Blackbread owing to the lack of white flour. I had my Dinner at the Belle Vue, which was highly recommended to me by some friends. A scrumptious meal was devoured and I crawled back to ~~ma~~ chambre to recuperate!!

When I first went ashore I found that even with a piece of swotting up out of a traveller's Handbook, I could only just muster the remnants of my school French—'Ma plume est sur la table—sort of thing'—but after having to converse with the ~~peix~~ people themselves, I found that I had picked up a terrific amount of conversation, which made up for the very embarrassing moments I had experienced whilst spluttering and stammering out my "grammar"—usually all in the wrong tenses!! I must say that the folk never tried to make me feel uncomfortable and were always sympathetic, even though we would all laugh at the faux pas' etc passed on both sides.

In Abijan, and other French colonies locally, the native is not allowed to live inside the European compound, and in general is not allowed to mix freely with the Whites as in a British Colony. This probably is one of the reasons which accounts for the natives' greater respect for the White man here, whereas elsewhere the attitude is inclined to be rather cheeky. M. Louis, one of my very kind Hosts (And Mme. Louis of course

was making extensive plans to go up-country for another of his Elephant trips. The trip would last two weeks, and he always anticipated killing at least two Elephants. I asked him for some details of the trip and the disposal of the corpses etc. Apparently the license required for hunting the animals runs into 5000 francs (Appr. £25). He is allowed to shoot up to four Elephants, and any extra ones belong to the Government. Presumably the hunter gets half the value. The money for his license is amply repaid by the sale of the corpse to the local Bushman, who believe it or not boil and eat the skin as well! Cannot imagine that ever getting tender at all!!! I was promised a trip with him if I could ever get a week's leave. Can't see that ever coming off either, but one never knows. ~~IX~~ I'm certainly terrifically thrilled at the thought of such grand sport. A .303 rifle is sufficient, to kill him if caught between the eyes or between the eye and the Ear.

What a terrific sensation the 'fort D'Vaux' caused ~~when~~ when she arrived at Port Bouet. The local inhabitants were relying upon her for their supplies of Wine, Licquers, Soap and many other wartime luxuries. Due to the Blockade of course, the Vichy colonies had been cut off from all supplies from France and had to look to Algiers for their supplies of Wines etc, which had been sent over from Marseilles. The general feeling towards Great Britain was one of great discussion. For one thing many French people still feel that we let them down at the fall of France, and some may even be very bitter about it. Excellent Nazi propoganda. On the other hand, due to the fall of France and the blockade, the colony has been forced to become more or less self-supporting which has helped considerably the finances of the local Traders. Now-at this date-with the obvious turn of the tide in the Allies' favour, and the possible ending of the blockade from France, the people foresee ~~an~~ end to their dream of 100% self-support. Thus they do not seem to know whether to cheer or just keep grimly silent when a news-reel is shown depicting anything British!! I think there is no doubt however, that underneath it all there is the urge to cheer or nod approval, but whatever it is there is always an anti-deGaulle feeling. He is still acclaimed a traitor by a large number of X typical Vichy types, despite all the good work that he has done for the French lost prestige or pride. There are certain service types of ours who are doing a fine job of work in the 'Entente Cordiale' line.

At the moment of typing I am back on board ship, rolling my innards out and wishing that I were back on that very comfortable bed à l'Hotel du Parc instead of having to sleep in the wheelhouse tonight where I can be handy for some expected trouble. That was the first time I had slept in a bed for 9 months!

It was whilst in Freetown during April that a rather exciting and interesting job came along. It appeared that a third attempt was nearly completed at getting a large Floating Dock into Freetown from the USA-the previous two having been sunk. So several M.L.s and Corvettes were sent out to rendezvous with the Dock and her Escorts. She was being towed by three Large Ocean Tugs and was making quite a good speed. She was an enormous piece of construction and towered above the horizon. Altogether there were about 17 Escorts, including Destroyers, and the excitement as far as we were concerned commenced when one got into station and zig-zagged! For the rest of the trip ~~back~~ back our full time was spent in dodging other ships, as either they got a contact or else appeared to be rather tired of their particular ~~station~~ station. The Dock was safely brought into Port.

Our proudest job came in August whilst just about to turn in for the night-for a change!-in Lagos. It was at 2400 that we were told that we had to return to Tak. with full speed for 'a special job'. So as soon as we got back to Tak we fuelled and were off, on the job within two hours. This time it appeared that we were going to screen two Battleships whilst the Destroyer escort fuelled at Sea. We were going to protect Units of the Fleet, they with 15in Guns and us with our main armament of One 3 pounder Q.F.!!! The two ships concerned were probably the Revenge and the Resolution, but we never actually found out although they were ships of that class. Very proudly we each picked out a Destroyer and going up to it stood by like a tame Dog waiting for it's Master's instructions! Our job of work only lasted a few hours as the ships had managed to get most of the fuelling done before we set off, but the Battleships did send us some very nice messages of thanks which were greatly appreciated by us all. We then shot off back on our 200 mile trip to Base. The prize signal sent to one of the M.L.s when she informed the ship she was relieving that she had no Asdic and could only make 12 Knots was, "You are psychologically useless"-which kept the Flotilla amused for the next few days! It was quite true too!

As this is written in August we are all hoping that we can get to a new place apart from Lagos. Even Lagos palls on one after the eighth visit, and we have not been around nearly as much as most of the other ships. There are a lot of ports one can visit on this Coast and my hope is to have been to practically everyone from Dakar to Duala or Pointe Noire before I leave the wretched hole.

Several new Girls arrived for the RAF Hospital about two months ago, most of whom are very good fun, and not snobbish and so independent as the others. I met Kay DeGaris the day she

arrived and with Edna Lewis and Jane Gaunt has since been a frequent visitor to the ships for Chop and drinks.

At the end of July we had to draft the Coxswain of the ship ashore in disgrace. He was a young Leading Seaman who had passed for P.O.-Active Service-and only a lad of 21. But in the last month he had cracked up and had been a defaulter on several occasions for drunkenness. On this particular occasion he went beyond the limit and not only got abusive but refused to carry out orders whilst on duty. The silly chump, we had talked to him so many times, and he only had two months to do out here! Well he was exceedingly lucky, due only to Don putting in a good word for him, and just 'Dipped a Bage-his only one' instead of the usual punishment of being disgraced down to A.B. He was an excellent seaman and had every opportunity ahead of him in the Navy-very few men are P.O.s at 21. But the one fault I found with him was his inability to chase the crew around which of course is the main job of a Coxswain. On a different type of ship I believe he could have done that alright, but on these small ships the Coxswain tends to become too pally with the crew-they eat together and sleep in a cabin next to the Messdeck. However the next time I saw him ashore he had a very soft number and was perfectly happy! He is not the type of fellow who will be contented on a shore job for long though!

It was a few weeks after this incident that small trouble arose with the crew, who complained among other things that they were being worked too hard, having to work in the afternoons for two or three days a week. The complaint was logical as ships do not work in the afternoons in the Tropics unless absolutely necessary. Having pointed out to them many times that there would be no need to work in the afternoons if they completed their work in the mornings and not having taken things easy it was therefore necessary to work extra time. However adjustments were made, and with our new Coxswain who could make the men work more enthusiastically than the previous one, the whole problem was solved in one day!! God help them if they start slacking again!! One cannot blame them in many ways I suppose. Their time is up in a few weeks and this Coast is enough to make anyone fed-up after 11 months. I am pretty chokker myself already, and have lost a certain amount of interest in the ship and things generally. If only there were people on the Base staff with a certain amount of consideration for those sailors who 'go to Sea in Ships', forms of recreation could be improvised which would break the monotony and keep ones mind active. For example, there should be at least two Tennis Courts handy, at least two Football pitches instead of one overcrowded and scruffy one, Squash Courts, Table Tennis etc. There is plenty

of cheap labour and eager builders among the Wogs, and the
space is available. But as is usual there are always the '~~spoilers~~
~~the~~ 'Spoilers' ashore who will protest against anything which
will be of no special gain to themselves. What have the ratings
to do with themselves when they come into Port? There are about
two canteens where they can buy a very limited amount of Beer ~~and~~
only. Nowhere ashore where they can buy any food except Wog
places which are not only out of bounds but are very doubtful.
Apart from that there is nothing else. Is it to be wondered at
then that they wander into the Native Compounds and drink Congo
Beer or worse still Palm Wine (which is extracted juice from the
Palm tree, and when fermented after four hours becomes deadly,
and drives men practically insane) or seek diseased Native
Women? The number of fights ~~these~~ these lads get into is amazing,
chiefly with the natives.

After a delay of several months, I am going to try and catch up with these notes, but fear that they will not be complete by any means.

I suppose the most notable event which stands out in my mind's eye is the night that Italy was beaten out of the War. We were lying alongside the Jetty at Takoradi. The Signaller from the M.L. Office came rushing down to the ship with a huge, almost triumphant, grin on his face, and carrying a signal in his hand. It was very brief, just 'Italy has declared peace! Splice the Mainbrace! Needless to say, the latter part caused a great deal of excitement down forward. The extra Tots were duly handed out, and after a careful scrutiny of K.R.&A.I. we, down Aft, had our tot too! That same night the Padre from Komenda came and had Dinner with Don and I. The whole evening was one continuous stream of drunkenness, with the Duty Officer of the Patrol ashore bringing back carloads of Drunks all the time. Never have I seen so many drunks at one time!

A few days later came a dreadful spell of inactivity, and the monotony was simply terrific. Someone ashore had a bright idea of sending us out on 'Piddle Patrol', which had two results after a few weeks A) We all became even more fed-up and B) Our engines starting cracking up. The whole thing was so utterly useless and soul destroying, that it was a crime to the war effort to waste the Fuel. Imagine patrolling outside a Harbour, going ~~four miles out and four miles back~~

four miles one way and then four miles back for about a week, with just an hour in Port each day sufficient to get stores and have a shower!

A little later than this we were off to Port Bouet again. This time we were to be under the orders of the Copinsay, a Trawler. The Officers and crew were almost completely ex-fishermen, and a tough bunch too. Mac the Skipper was a real hardened seaman, but with a heart of Gold - except to the men under him, to whom his name was slightly altered in tone! Had a great time ashore, with a bit of flirting here and there! Would like to have spent a week's leave there - could have had a splendid time all round. We were extremely annoyed when we were ordered to return to Tak. on the very day that a great Fete and Dance had been arranged ashore for Armistice Day (1918). We had been promised lots of things that day, and with heavy hearts we had to sail. 256 with Hudson and Blenkinsop relieved us, the lucky so-and-so's. But we had some little consolation, for we knew that we had been recalled so that we should be ready to sail for Freetown once more after an absence of over eight months. We had become rather tired of Tak by this time and although the thought of Freetown

itself was not too good, we knew that when the time came for our relief that we should have a slightly better chance of getting relieved. And then too, there was the chance of a trip to Dakar and other places. On the way down we had to stop at Marshall for a few days to screen a Yankee ship. I thought I would go ashore for a stretch and also to feel that I had been ashore in Liberia. So having become friendly with an American Sergeant who had got us some stores for the ship, Bill Griggs (from 302) and I decided that we would pay a visit to the U.S. Army and see the life from the Ranks' point of view—that was after an invitation from the Sergeant of course. We realised that it was quite against tradition etc, and that a very poor view could be taken of it, but the fact that the Camp was so isolated and no Britishers around, made us decide to try it out. I'm afraid we had no feeling for any of the Officers, of whom we did not contact any anyway!

I was extremely disappointed in many ways, although all round it was certainly a better show than our chaps would have put up in similar circumstances. Firstly the N.C.O.s did not sleep or mess separately but shared a Hut with Privates and junior ranks. If I should have been a Sergeant I should most certainly have desired a mess where I could have a few privileges. This fact did not seem to worry the Americans, no doubt due to the fact that they were not used to it any other way. The food was as could be expected for the U.S. Army—excellent. That night for Supper we had Hamburgers with all the trimmings etc. And what is more the messing is run on Buffet style, in other words the troops just walk along the counter and take as much as they want from each dish! The Camp had a Cinema, which showed a different film every other night.

There were a large number of coloured troops in the place with separate quarters apart from the White troops. There were two Official Brothels put aside for these lads, with the rather imaginative names of 'Paradise' and 'Shangri-La'. These places were kept medically inspected after the French style, but the type of inhabitant could not be altered. As with the self-styled Americo-Liberians who run the country (descendants of the freed slaves from America) the American coloured troops considered themselves on a very superior basis to the local inhabitants—and quite rightly so in most cases.

It was at Marshall that I contracted my first 'illness' on the Coast. Shortly after getting ashore I contracted some severe Tummy 'Palaver', which gradually increased until by the time I returned to the ship I was doubled up in agony. It was rather a peculiar sort of pain, being a thousandfold (made worse) by violent contractions every 30 seconds, from which there was no relief in any position. This had to be endured for two days until

we arrived in Freetown. I had packed my case ready to get to Hospital, but the usual Sick Bay procedure was in force, and the M.O. not being available I had to wait until the morning. Pride prevented me from saying that I felt 'like Death', and because I had no temperature the S.B.A. had had instructions that a man could not therefore be sick!! However I saw the Doc later that evening as he had come to the Base for the W.R. Party, and he packed me off to Kissy to the uncompleted R.N. Hospital for observation. After several tests he could not determine the trouble, and to avoid him sending me to Hospital (Still wishing to keep my record clean if at all possible!) I asked to remain there for another day. On the second day, not having eaten for four days I began to feel better and was eventually 'let out'. It was then that I put the disturbance down to a cold in the Tummy, similar to one I had contracted in Bathurst back in 1941. It was not surprising, as I would turn in at nights covered in a heavy sweat, and my bunk being opposite a scuttle, would receive a draught on my body all night. All was well again within a couple of weeks, without feeling the sensitive at any sign of a draught.

Freetown had the usual depressing atmosphere, possibly even worse now as there was such little sea time to do. We spent the first three weeks swinging round a Buoy, and nearly every day was spent in collecting stores from a dozen different places all over an area the size of North London with transport at an extreme minimum. Whereas eight months ago one had to go to three different places in order to be able to get one article, one now had to go to five!! During November and December we did two four day Sweeps and two days exercises.

Four more of the crew were relieved at the end of November, leaving three more to be relieved. The real task now began of training the new lads, and a real task it was too. Drills every day, more drills for the Gun's Crew who had never seen a gun before. We were all very pleased at the excellent shot during the exercises - so was the Gunlayer, because he knew that his drilling would begin again if he did not do so well!!!

Xmas 1943 was about the most miserable I have ever had, and came about this way. Although the liquor supply was so small that it prohibited heavy drinking, we had reserved as much as we could to make a merry time of things. Xmas Eve started well and the crowd gathered around 302 who was tied up alongside us. The Bay echoed with the strains of the Gramophone which Don had given permission to be played over the Loud Hailer, with its amusing announcements by members of the crew. At 2330 feeling in the mood for anything I went ashore with Paddy O'Shea, Paddy Hannant, another Irishman, and 'Digger' Mitchell. I did not realise that they were going to Midnight Mass at the P.C. Church in Freetown, but having gone

ashore with them I decided to go with them to Church as a matter of interest. It proved to be extremely interesting, although I was not by any means converted at the conclusion! The Black choir singing Hymns in Latin was most soothing and melodious.

After the Service 'Bigger', Paddy and I went into town to see if we could crash into some Wog Dance-being dressed in civvies. But it was rather late, and so we made our way back towards Kline Bay. By God we were thirsty and passing by a house, we watched a drunken crowd of Wogs coming out after celebrating somebody's 76th Birthday. We could not help but accept their greetings and found ourselves singing hymns with them. When the offer came to go back with them and have a drink our Eyes lit up! So for the fun of it, and knowing what sort of a hovel to expect we joined the party. God, what a shocking dive it was too-dark, dirty and smelly. But we felt in good spirits, and with a brand new bottle of Haig Gold Label to empty we were ready for anything. However after a half hour, the smell was just a little too strong, and so by adding a few choice words to 'Digger' mixed up with a Hymn we decided to leave them 'to it'. We got back to the Base at 0430 and were told to be ready for sea at 0600. And we were looking forward so much to a lie-in until noon!! So off to Sea we went and Xmas Day was simply a procession of ratings to the ship's side giving offerings to Father Neptune!! Rarely have I seen so many fat heads all at once. Don and I were the only ones who were not sick, but my head was still as fat as anything. *we made up*

for all this when we returned to Port on New years Eve by getting really tipsy & merry! Kayde G. married Kennedy Dec 6 or 26 January.

Don heard that his wife would have to go into a Plaster cast for a few months to attempt a cure after arthritis. He was very upset, though tried hard not to show it.

One or two more sweeps, which crushed my chances, temporarily, of getting a few days leave - which I badly needed. I had got to the stage where I was feeling even more "bloody-minded" than the older hands on board who were five months overdue without signs of relief. However my reasons were totally different - I didn't mind how hard I worked - in fact I always prided myself (no-one else agreed!!) that I worked harder than anyone on board - but I had.

reached. the stage where, being nagged & worrying over petty things a board ship was making me extremely irritable. The whole fault lay in a useless Coxswain - a man who had served 15 years in the Mary and was still as useless as when he first joined. On numerous occasions he had let Dan & I down, and we had no confidence in him when flitting about inside the Harbour (which, in disastrous under the circumstances) Flaming made some blunder he would try & skull - his way out of it, which usually ended in Dan & myself "tearing him into small pieces" - Dan was an expert at that. But the Coxswain had a slide like an elephant. When told to see that the Hands carried out their work I always had to chase the Coxswain around, as he appeared to be scared of the three remaining Hands on board, who had been teaching the Sprays the ropes. There was absolutely nothing to be scared about as a rating will always knuckle down to someone who ~~says~~ ^{means} what he says. I can see the time coming when the Coxswain will no longer be a Coxswain. He is 37 yrs old & a Leading Hand, so it's up to him.

On the 23rd January I managed to get up to Leicester Peake which is the Naval Rest Home situated on one of the hills overlooking the town. The vessel previously we had been fitted with new engines, the 3rd shifted aft & an Osolben

littered forward. The ship looked a fearful mess, and when I hinted to a near-future repainting of the ship, the crew would give a good natured groan!

The Deck is actually a messian, West House kindly loaned to the Navy for use as a Convalescent Home. There were 5 Officers & about 12 ratings up there at the time. How I delighted in breathing in the fresh cool air which blew gently around one's body. The food was pretty good & a ration of 1 Bottle Beer & $\frac{1}{3}$ tot of Gin & Whiskey each day. One had to save up for 3 days for a drink of Gin or Whiskey, otherwise $\frac{1}{3}$ tot would have evaporated before being able to drink it!! Got plenty of exercise through the bush nearby & saw quite a few Baboons scampering about amongst the trees. There were rumoured to be Leopards & Panthers just a little up the Hill, but it was doubtful. Bob McMullan was up there on two weeks sick leave, & having laid off booze for most of the time was looking very much better. The leave had to be cut short as the ship was due to sail on a trip to Portuguese Guinea at the end of the week. Had left the Corsican & Fox very detailed instructions as to what wants to do on the ship.

Very few of the natives in West Africa ever touch European food-somehow it does not seem to agree with them. And of course, Europeans cannot stand the Native diet of Yams, Plantains, old pieces of Fish and God knows what else. Fish is immensely popular with these people, and a delicacy is a stale fishes head! Most of H.M. ships stationed out here employ an African as a Cook or Wardroom Steward, and on several ships I have heard the story of frightful smells on board being traced to Fishes' Heads being stowed away in the Bilges (all unbeknown to the C.O. of course!) to ripen up into a delicacy!! Need it be stated that they were soon removed--

However, every country-even West Africa-has its own speciality, and here it is either a 'Ground Nut Stew'-or 'Curry'. These are compromises between the two types of foods. And to the 'Old Coaster' and Europeans living here, Saturday is the day to have a Ground Nut stew-reason will soon be obvious. Lets take 'Palm Oil' as an example, and although this is not the formula, it is a typical one:-

- (1) A main stew made up from Chicken, Red Pepper, Boiled Eggs, Rice and various vegetable added to make the best out of the mixture. All cooked in Palm Oil.
- (2) Numerous 'Gages' or plates dotted around the table, and each containing such foods as-French and fried Onions, boiled and fried tomatoes, grated Coconut, pieces of Orange, Pineapple, Paw-Paw or Banana, Ginger, Ground Nuts, Okru (difficult to describe, but looking like a sticky Gherkin) and other native vegetables.

The idea is to take a helping of (1) and add the other ingredients as desired, in order to heap the plate right up to the top, and more! When this has been consumed, the partaker then retires very stealthily to a nice comfortable armchair in the Lounge, and hopelessly 'flakes out' for the rest of the day!! Thus Saturday-or even Sunday-is the ideal day! It really does make a glorious meal.

There is a sufficient growth of Fruit along the Coast to make an excellent commercial proposition. But unfortunately the place has never been exploited from that point of view. I should say that the Gold Coast and Nigeria are the best spots, whilst Sierra Leone and Gambia are exceedingly poor. Let us take my experience of the Gold Coast fruit:-Grapefruit-I have tasted much better here than have ever come from California or the Cape. But they all vary in size, and very often there will be different tastes to the fruit. The best, however, are just like a great big juicy Orange, with just that slightest bit of sharpness which makes a Grapefruit.

Here-then, there is need to standardise the Fruit into (1) Size (2) Quality.

Oranges to look at are not very appetising after the gloriously coloured ones from Palestine or South Africa. They are green in colour, and are usually smoothed skinned. But on opening them the majority are exceedingly juicy and very sweet. However, they still do not nearly compare with the very fleshy Oranges from the World's best sources. But they could be properly cultivated so that they would be a commercial proposition for export.

Bananas are variable, and occasionally excellent ones may be obtained. Otherwise they are very ordinary. Pineapples are superb, and can be bought very cheaply. Again there are very enormous and one may find the sharp type or the very sweet ones. The chief exports of the Gold Coast are Cocoa Beans, Palm Oil, Ground Nuts, and Limes. The three biggest concerns who more or less monopolise these products are Cadbury's, Lever Bros, and Rose's Lime Juice, - in that order. Off Accra (pronounced Ak-rar) may be seen the famous Surf Boats, so often pictured in Cadbury's advertisements. As with most of this Coast, there is a terrific surf and ground swell off the Port, and it is very unsafe for ships to come within three miles of the shore. Consequently the Cocoa Beans etc have to be loaded into these Surf Boats, and furiously paddled through the treacherous Surf out to the ships. A very slow and painstaking job. It is a glorious sight to see the graceful rhythm, and hear the chanting of a first-class crew. Contrary to popular belief, Cadbury's do not own vast tracts of land out here. This would be against the Government policy. The Cocoa Beans are obtained from hundreds of small landowners who are under contract to the firm concerned.

Marriage out here is quite interesting. Amongst the lower classes of Africans, a man's wealth may be judged by the number of Wives he has! A man may take a fancy to a girl, and by mutual consent they wish to be married. But first the budding groom must have palava with her parents, and between them they debate as to how much money she is worth. A man may get a good bargain if he pays about £15 to £20 to the parents. If she turns out to be a nuisance, then he gets a portion of his money back, and returns the wife!! Any children belong to him. I remember once, on Lagos, I was offered a 'Wife' for £10 - a girl of 14!! But when I saw the Girl, I changed my mind - Ha, Ha! (Don't take this too seriously--!!!)

had been on the Coast a month less than myself. I asked B.N.I. to signal Freetown for confirmation, and the reply came back to confirmed it alright but also added that I would be relieved 'very shortly'-Hooray! Fox who had been 2nd Lt on board was ship to 274 as No. 1. and his place was taken by a ~~Kiddie~~ Midshipman Williams.

Characters on the Coast.

1. 'Breck' (Breckenridge), Canadian, C.O. of 296. Had a short goatee beard all the time I knew him. He'l of a booze artist, and could drink all night long ~~without~~ without batting an eyelid. Just sat down on his chair at the 'sessions' and stayed in the same position all the time, speaking and making wise-cracks in a strong dour Canadian accent. A great seaman, and very popular with his men. The favourite story told about Breck is the time when he was in the R.A.P. Hospital at Takoradi having only just got over the crucial point in Blackwater fever. The Sister on Duty happened to catch him one night taking a drink from a bottle of Gin. Being a very conscientious Girl she gave him a terrific 'bottling', and on looking into his cupboard found another six bottles of Gin -!!!!. I reckon that he go away from the Coast not an hour too late.
2. Ian Forcett, English, C.O. of 302. Very tall with an imposing beard which gave him a terrific amount of self-confidence.

At the beginning of February we sailed for Bissao, taking with us as Passengers Rusty Rouse and Captain Rodda of the Freetown Police. They had both been in need of a holiday and naturally both jumped at the chance to come with us. So under ideal circumstances we left Freetown for the trip we had been looking forward to ever since we had arrived at ~~Freetown~~ Freetown. For this was a special 'Diplomatic' trip to neutral territory-Portugues Guinea- and as International Laws say we could only be there for 24 hours. After a day's journey with a dead calm Sea and glorious Sunshine. The entrance to Cayo River is treacherous, since it is full of sandbanks many of which are unmarked on the Chart. However we duly arrived and found someone waiting to take our moorings out to the Buoy, which was very helpful indeed. No sooner had we tied up than the British Consul-Mr Graham-came aboard to do the necessary receptions etc. Several other Portuguese also came aboard, but the Governor was unable to attend as he was up-country. Mr Goldsmith, his assistant-who comes from Palmers Green-helped us to do our shopping ashore which consisted chiefly in getting in a supply of Wines and Ports for various people in Freetown-and ourselves of course. I managed to get a couple of bottles of Champagne and Port, but supplies were not too good as no ship had been in from Portugal for over six weeks. Between us we bought all the remaining Silk stockings in the Town, of which there were not too many.

In the evening there was a small Dance and party for us given at the Consulate, to which were invited several of the local Men and Women. Drinks flowed, thus saving some of the awkward moment caused through lack of talk between the Portugues and ourselves. However the dancing helped a lot, and we learnt one or two Dances similar to our Lambeth Walk! By the time the party broke up we- The Britishers were feeling quite frisky, and so we had our usual songs which are not exactly etiquette in front of Women. I remember on the way back to the ship relieving the Q.M. of the Oars, intending to row the Gang back to the ship myself, and making about four attempts to get alongside with quite a tide running, which caused great amusement not to say the least of a lot of p--taking by the other drunks! The Consul had amazed us during the evening, as he proved to be quite proficient with his songs and could scrape a neat tune on his Violin. An exceedingly fine 24 hours, and after a few drinks on board the next day which the Belgian Consul also attended we sailed juts after dropping them ashore. As an appreciation of our good time we fire off three rounds with the 3pdr, which by Don's juggling at the Wheel, nearly blew a Lighthouse out of the Water! Rusty and Rodda were ver sorry indeed to leave the ship at Freetown. As soon as we had tied up Don heard that he was at last relieved and that 'Digger' Mitchell who had been No. 1 287 was the new C.O. Although Don had come out with me

he had been sent home earlier as his wife was pretty sick. After one or two minor incidents in Freetown we finally heard that we were off to Dakar and duly arrived there about the 8th of April. The first thing that struck us was the 'low' temperature-round about 70 degrees F. But it was enough to make me shiver with the cold all day long, and for the first time since being on the Coast I felt that I had to wear full uniform all day! However, that being a minor detail, we'll shift to another subject-FOOD! There are several places ashore in Dakar where one can get an excellent meal, and the restaurants most frequented by us were

'Marie Louise'-a very pretty place, with good food but most expensive.-'Palais'-a shockingly miserable place for eating, it having been a former Dance Hall, and which had been left in its previous bare and unappetising state. 'Metropole'-a dullish sort of place although superior to the Palais, probably the best meal of all at a comparatively reasonable price. The average meal in the Metropole would cost appr. 11/- for which one could get Soup, Small piece of Fish, Omelet, Chicken and Coffee. What a feed though! The town boasts of four cinemas, all showing very old, xx French films or fairly old American films with French dialogue. Within a few days of arrival, I went along to a reception given by the Governor's Wife. Peter Burns accompanied me. As there was only one other R.N. Officer there our presence was greatly appreciated, and the Governor's Wife, Madame Courparle was very decent indeed. It was here that I first came into contact with the members of the British Economic Mission, among whom were Frank Wright, K. Trot, Hewey, and Frantingham. A very good crowd of lads, gets a fun and good sports. Through Frank, I met Mr. et Mme Phillippe and their four kiddies. It came about this way: I was very keen to learn French, and he was also keen to learn English, and so it was thought an ideal combination to converse with each other in both languages. So I would go along to their house for an hour or so every other night if I was in Port, and at times would stay there for supper. A grand couple and very good friends.

Our jobs in Dakar consisted for the most part in runs along the 'Peanut route', which was so-called because of the big traffic in Ground nuts from the Guinea Coast. A very tame job very short and monotonous. My work on board grew very slack as the crew were now pretty well up to scratch, so most of my time was spent reading writing letters, going ashore to the market to buy some fresh vegetables, or playing an occasional sport ashore. At the end of March Digger heard that his relief was on the Coast and that his place would be taken by Bob Bennet, who had been No 1 on 263. I was naturally furious at this for the two obvious reasons that he was six months junior to me and

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