

# 1908

## HMS Challenger

December 19<sup>th</sup> 1907 to January 16<sup>th</sup> 1908

**Auckland.**

January 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>

**Passage to Wellington**

January 17<sup>th</sup> to February 1<sup>st</sup>

**At Wellington**

January 30<sup>th</sup>

**Inspection.** The Admiral inspected the ship today. Before leaving he called the ship's company aft and expressed his satisfaction with the smartness and the state of the ship. He also addressed the officers and said how pleased he was at the way in which the training had been carried out. We also subsequently received a very excellent inspection report.

February 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>

**At sea for wireless trials**

February 6<sup>th</sup>

**Wireless.** We have orders to try to establish wireless communications with Australia. We keep touch with the 'Powerful' on her way across, following her as necessary. On Sunday morning we proceeded to sea as the 'Powerful's' messages were becoming indistinct. During the next two days we steamed about 500 miles out and finally got a message from Lord Plunkett to Lord Northcote (Governor General of Australia) congratulating the Commonwealth on establishing communications with the Dominion by this means, to which a similar reply was returned. At this stage the 'Powerful' was about 500 to 600 hundred miles off, so that it was not our best achievement. The whole thing seems a farce, and I should say it is quite the most expensive telegram ever sent if the amount of coal expended by us in the other ships was taken into account.

February 7<sup>th</sup> of 11<sup>th</sup>

**At Wellington**

## February 11th to 15th

### Passage to Hobart

## February 15th to March 18th

### At Hobart

## March 2nd

**Dance.** Preparing for a dance all afternoon which was held at 8:30 PM and was a huge success. About 200 guests came, including the Admiral. It was considered quite the best of the Hobart season. The quarterdeck and after part of the upper deck made a fine 'ball room' which looked very pretty lit up by numbers of red and white electric lights and Japanese lanterns, besides floral decorations etc, which set off the brass works of the guns etc. The supper was in the Wardrobe and Captain's cabin and there were many cunningly devised sitting out places.

## March 12th to 13th

### Fleet Regatta

## March 13th

**Results.** In the forenoon I pulled in the officer's race (6 oared galleys) incapacity of 'bow'. Although we had not the least idea of winning, by dint of going hard and getting a lead, we managed to keep it and finally won by half a length. The flagship's boats came 2nd and 3rd and they were much disappointed and everyone thought they would win as one of their boats was named by young lieutenants who ought to be in best condition. We received a great ovation on our return to the ship. Altogether in the regatta, the 'Challenger' has been singularly successful, and we are far and away ahead of any other ship. Out of a total of 20 races, 15 only of which we entered, we won eight first prizes, 2 second and 2 thirds and in only three we were not placed.

## March 18th to 19th

### Passage to Melbourne

## March 19th to 30th

### At Melbourne

## March 30th to April 3rd

### At sea for battle practice

## April 2nd

**Results of battle practice.** The counting officers gave us 43 hits (out of 84 rounds) but when the sail was examined on board the flagship, they reduced our hits to 35, which was a very good result. The admiral made a signal “Your practice was excellent” which was very gratifying. On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, our sister ship the ‘Encounter’ carried out her BP and scored 21 hits. It was thus a source of joy to us to find ourselves by a long way leading the ships of the fleet, an end which we have been striving for all the commission.

## April 3rd to 5th

### Passage to Sydney

## April 5th to 22nd

### At Sydney

## April 16th

**Farewell dinner.** In the evening the WR Officers gave a farewell dinner to Captain and Mrs Bridson. The Captain in the course of a speech summed up our successes during the commission and complimented all upon having achieved such good results. He seemed very sorry to leave and has had the interest of the ship at heart, although he had a peculiar way of doing things, and by suppressing people's ideas and stifling zeal by sarcasm, he has not being conducive to bringing about the results he mentioned, which have been attained in spite of obstacles we have had to continuously contend with. Upon his leaving the ship, some of the officers manned the steamboat, of which I took coxswain, and we ran him across to Rushcutter's Bay with Mrs Bridson, a compliment that he seemed to keenly appreciate.

## April 18th

**New Captain.** Captain Hubert C.C. de Costa joined the ship, having arrived this morning by the Orient mail steamer ‘Oruba’, and took command. He was received by Captain Bridson and the officers on coming over the side.

## April 20th

**Departure of Captain Bridson.** Captain Bridson took his departure in the forenoon. Although we part the best of friends, I hope never to have to serve under him again. His want of decision, cooperation and vacillating propensities have caused me many a pang and have been a constant restraint upon progress and resulted in my endeavouring to leave the ship at the beginning of last year, and being on the verge of being so several other times. It is as well that I stuck to it as everything has turned out well in the long run. From my point of view therefore, I am satisfied that I did right in

accepting his offer of the Challenger just two years ago, although it has been such an uphill game to carry things through successfully.

## April 22nd to 24th

### Passage to Melbourne

## April 22nd

**Orders.** According to our present orders we go to Adelaide after Melbourne, thence to Fremantle and Colombo to meet our reliefs who are to leave England on the 26th May to recommission the ship there. As we are 'homeward bound', we flew the paying off pendant and the flagship and our band played 'Rolling Home', 'Home Sweet Home', etc.

## April 24th to May 11th

### At Melbourne

## April 24th

**The new Captain.** Already my work is much easier under the new regime. Things go a great deal more smoothly, without fuss and bother and I already feel years younger.

## May 11th to 13th

### Passage to Adelaide

## May 13th to June 1st

### At Adelaide

## June 1st

**New orders.** We heard to our great disappointment, that our reliefs do not leave England until the end of July, instead of May, as previously arranged. We therefore have to return to Sydney and there appears little likelihood of our reaching home before December.

## June 1st to 7th

### Passage to Sydney

## June 7th to July 25th

### At Sydney

## June 19th

**My birthday.** My 36th birthday, which I celebrated in usual naval manner by putting up champagne to my messmates.

## June 29th

**German Consul General.** Lunched at Admiralty House, where I met the German Consul General, who went to great pains to explain to me how much the German Emperor loved the British Navy, and assured me that his only object in making his powerful Navy was to help Great Britain in emergency! *[note - the following was added by the author on September 14th, 1918]* (This is astonishing reading in the fifth year of the Great War!!)

## July 20th

**Coaling ship.** In this we succeeded in making a record. The collier came alongside at 7:45 AM and hoisted in first bag at 9:00 AM and last bag at 6:15 PM. Total received 1055. Working hours 8. Averaged 131.17 tons. The ship's company worked splendidly and when we were washing down, the band appeared on the scene, black as they were, and gave us a few lively tunes which was very sporting of them, more especially as it rained hard.

## July 25th to 27th

**Passage to Brisbane**

## July 27th to August 15th

**At Brisbane**

## July 28th

**Mooring ship.** Secured the ship off the Botanical Gardens in the forenoon. When secured, we had our two bower anchors down ahead, a steam anchor off the port quarter, kedge off starboard quarter and a hawser to the mooring buoy astern and so there ought to be no bother this year about dragging moorings etc.

## August 15th to 16th

**Passage to Sydney**

## August 16th to 26th

**At Sydney**

## August 20th

**Arrival of the US battleship fleet.** From the earliest hours this morning people have been making their way to the South Head and to other points of vantage to witness the arrival of the American Fleet, over whose visit the people of Australia seem to have gone quite frantic. Mrs Macquarie's chair, just opposite us, was black with people, and a continuous procession of steamers and small craft of extraordinary shapes and sizes have been proceeding out of the entrance all morning. The whole of the coastline, almost to Botany Bay, was lined with thousands of spectators and the Americans have good reason to be satisfied with the enthusiastic welcome they have received. The fleet consists of 16 Battleships, most of them of recent design, under the command of Rear Admiral Sperry, whose flagship is the 'Connecticut'. There are also some auxiliaries. Owing to the peculiar nature of Sydney Harbour, the ships had to be billeted in various positions, which somewhat spoilt the effect, but it is certainly a very formidable array of strength.



## August 24th

**Review in Centennial Park.** Landed in the forenoon and went to the Centennial Park to witness the grand review of British and American troops. Our naval battalion consisting of about 800 bluejackets and marines, was drawn up on the extreme right and next to them the Commonwealth naval forces. In the centre, the Americans (2600) and on the left the Commonwealth military forces consisting of Light Horse, Infantry and cadets, (9480). In all there were 13,228 men and 2069 horses and 44 guns and waggons making very goodly show. Then [*not - after the inspection*] followed the march past, our men according to custom going first, followed by the marines. They met with a great ovation and I must say that their marching was excellent and they looked by far the finest body of men there and this was the general opinion. After the Commonwealth naval forces came the Americans, who look very smart and were well received. They were followed by the Artillery, Light horse, Infantry and cadets. It speaks well for the country in being

able to assemble such fine lot of men as the latter and the number of cadets (nearly 3000) shows that the youth of Australia have military spirit fostering in them for the protection of their country. Altogether it was a very fine spectacle.



August 26th to 28th

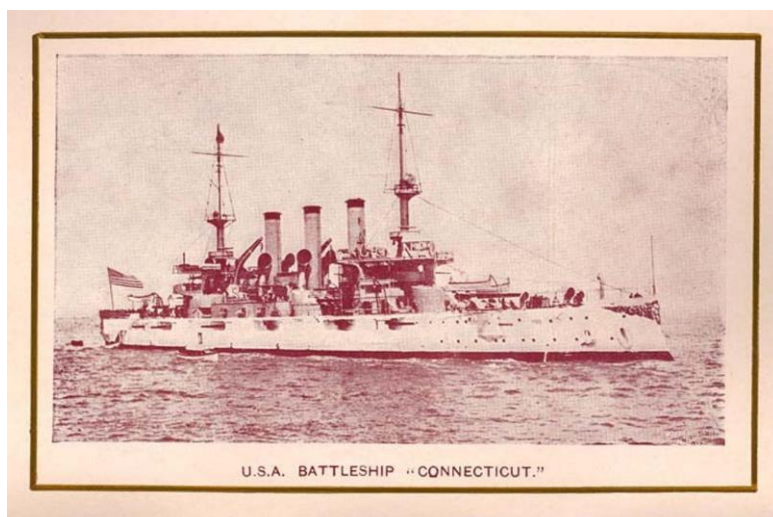
**Passage to Melbourne**

August 28<sup>th</sup> to September 5<sup>th</sup>

**At Melbourne**

September 1st

**U.S. Navy.** Attended an 'at home' given by the Admiral and Officers of the 'Connecticut'. I was rather unfavourably struck with the want of respect shown by the men to officers, and disciplines seemed rather lax to our ideas, men lolling about and smoking anywhere. The officers not being allowed wines or spirits in the wardroom, each keep a private store in their cabins, a curios arrangement. The 'Connecticut' is a fine ship, about on a par with the 'King Edward VII' class.





## September 4th

**Mismanagement.** A public dinner was given to 2000 American seamen and marines at the exhibition hall. Through some misunderstanding, only one turned up! He was besieged by 70 or 80 waiters and had a great time. Eventually they had to requisition people from the highways and byways to dispose of the food. Today also, 150 of our men were invited to lunch at the same place to meet another party Americans, and there was no lunch! This we heard was in consequence of the previous fiasco, but no one was informed. The Victorian ministers also were to have had a reception on board the 'Connecticut' but turned up with their wives on the wrong day and had to return. They went again the following day and found the Admiral and staff ashore and were treated with rather scant ceremony which caused some annoyance.

## September 5th to 8th

### Passage to Sydney

## September 8th to October 12th

### In Sydney

## September 10th

**Family connections.** A few weeks ago, I received a letter from Mrs James Barry of 'Berida', a sheep station some 340 miles from Sydney in the northwest district of NSW, saying that she had seen my name in the papers and her maiden name being Tibbits, she was wondering whether I was a relation. In course of correspondence, I found that she was one of the seven daughters and three sons, children of the late Doctor Walter Hugh Tibbits, who was the son of James Tibbits of Myton, Warwick. He was therefore a cousin of my father's. He came out to Australia in the fifties *[note - with his brother Charles]*, and for some time was, I believe, attached to the army as a surgeon, for he was at Port Arthur, Tasmania, as a doctor to the convict prison *[note by CST - I investigated this in January '96 but there is no record of a Dr Tibbits at Port Arthur at that time]* when the Imperial troops were there. He afterwards practised in Manly, Sydney, where he achieved a considerable reputation, but owing to reasons of fortune he went to Dubbo, where his brother Charles had preceded him some years before, and there he is buried, having died about six years ago *[note - 1902]*. Mr Charles Tibbits is still alive, but very old. He has also a considerable family who have married and have children in and around Dubbo. *[note by CST - the two brothers married two sisters, (Purvis) and had a total of 27 children between them. I visited Dubbo in March 1996 and met Mrs Wilfred (Ida) Tibbits (nee Tibbits - they were first cousins) who lives in Gilgandra, NSW. Ida subsequently visited my sister Pamela Jones at the Tower of London in May 1996. Dr Walter Hugh Tibbits is commemorated in Dubbo as he was the founder and first doctor of the Dubbo Hospital.]*



## September 11th to 19th

**Visit to Gilgandra and Berida sheep station.** Mrs Barry, having asked me to spend a few days at 'Berida' and this being an excellent opportunity to see station life, I obtained 10 days leave and left Sydney by the night mail. I eventually arrived at Curban about 2:00 PM *[note - the following day]* and found Mrs Barry and her niece Jean (or 'Bosh') on the platform waiting for me. I found Mrs Barry very charming and full of animation and we soon felt quite at home. It appears that Berida is run by McKenzie and James Barry, brothers who married two sisters, May and Nancy Tibbits, Jean being the daughter of the latter, and they all lived together. On my arrival at the woolshed I met Mackenzie Barry who took me around seeing the shearers at work. This is the busiest time of year and they are expecting to shear 35,000 sheep, which they expect to yield 830 bales at about 27 pounds per bale, at present price or over 22,000 pounds! *[Note there follows a very long and detailed description of the Homestead, the Station, and all manner of work associated with it.]*

## September 19th

**Departure.** Much to my regret I had to leave today after a most happy 10 days. There is something about bush life which is a great fascination, and I felt at parting as if I could have settled there forever. After a fairly comfortable journey, arrived at Sydney at 6:00 AM and returned on board feeling much benefited by the change. My newly discovered relations were certainly exceptionally kind to me, and I am particularly pleased at not leaving Australia without having seen what life on a station is like. One does not get a true idea of the country or its people unless one has this pleasure.

*[note – there is a handwritten note inserted by CST with the following written, presumably from his research whilst in Australia:*

*James Ch Tibbits 1830-198*

*Son? The Cottage, Macquarie St, Dubbo*

*Walter James Hugh Tibbits*

*First Dr of Dubbo 1858, 1873*

*Elwood Arnold Tibbits*

*d. 1878. The Cedars, Dubbo]*

## September 28th

**Dinner.** In the evening the colonial men of the 'Challenger' gave a social to the Imperials, to which the officers were invited. I went with several others, and they got me out for a song. After the concert, supper was announced and accompanied with copious libations of beer. I made a speech in which I remarked on the happy

commission we had had in 'Challenger', and the excellent relations which always existed between the bodies of men. This has certainly been the case was very gratifying to me. The other officers had to speak, and the greatest entente prevailed.

## September 30th

**Leave HMS Challenger.** Today we sever our connection with 'Challenger' in which taking it on the whole, we have had such a happy and successful commission. In the wardroom we never had a row the whole time and it would be difficult to find another ship from the service where anyone 'hit it off' so well together, so that we all feel sorry to leave. For myself, I have few regrets but it has been a worrying billet, and I am anxious to get home again. It is with great satisfaction I review the past commission however, for everything has turned out well by results, and I feel now that I did the right thing in accepting the billet when offered to me by Captain Bridson, for I think my service in her will do me more good than if I had stayed in destroyers. It is curious to think how the last two years and perhaps my whole career hung in the balance on the 11th of April 06, when I happened to meet Heaton Ellis and threw a telegram form to a porter at Mutley Station. Captain da Costa gave me an excellent certificate, which, together with Captain Bridson, ought to do me a good turn in future.

## HMS Gibraltar

### October 1st

#### **Joined HMS Gibraltar.**

When I last knew this ship in commission she was Flag Ship on the Cape Station. Now she is looked upon as hopelessly antiquated, the guns especially being very out of date. She steams well though and is very good for trooping work.



## October 12th to 20th

### Passage to Fremantle

## October 19th

**HMS Challenger.** In the afternoon, the 'Challenger' came up with us and passed us about 5:30. They had the old band on the fo'cle and the ship's company were up there too. She looked very trim and smart and seemed to glide through the water, although going at about 16 knots.

## October 20th to 22nd

### At Fremantle

## October 22nd

**Goodbye to Challenger.** In the forenoon I visited the 'Challenger' to say goodbye and stayed for lunch. They were busy coaling and it seems strange to find a new lot of officers in the old familiar quarters. I was very sorry to see the last of Captain da Costa, whom I liked so much and whom with whom I 'hit it off' so well. The colonial men were, I know, very sorry to lose their old officers, for they understood our ways from the very first, and always worked splendidly with us.

## October 22nd to December 9th

**Passage to India.** *[Note - the ship called at Colombo (3rd to 6th November), Aden (13th to 15th November), Suez (20th to 24th November), Suez Canal (25th November), Malta (29th November to 1st of December), and Gibraltar (5th to 6th December), arriving off Plymouth on 9th of December.]*

## December 9th

**Arrived Plymouth.** In the forenoon the Eddystone was sighted and we entered the Sound at 12:15 PM and proceeded up harbour. It is a curious coincidence that is exactly 30 months by the calendar since I left Plymouth in the 'Argonaut' for Australia. We all remarked how wonderfully green the grass looked which is a common impression to those who have been abroad for some time. Otherwise, everything looked much the same as old as of old.

## December 19th

**Leave HMS Gibraltar**

## December 19th to February 9th

**On leave in Warwick and London**

## December 31st

**New Year's Eve.** Bert gave a dinner in the evening to John and Harriet, Emily, Walter and myself and Lucy, after which we sang songs and heard the midnight peel ring in the New Year 1909, a very pleasant termination to the year that has passed.